

Effective Interventions Unit

Evaluation Guide 2: Planning an Evaluation

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE?: This is the second **Evaluation Guide** in the EIU Evaluation series. This Guide aims to explain the planning stage of an evaluation by describing the steps necessary in planning both an intervention and an associated evaluation, identifying some general questions to address when planning an intervention, and outlining some questions that evaluations commonly tackle. To help illustrate the main points in this Guide an example of a fictitious outreach needle exchange service is used.

WHO SHOULD READ IT?: anyone involved in planning, developing, delivering and evaluating services for drug users.

WHY IS PLANNING IMPORTANT?: The planning phase in the evaluation process is crucial. At the beginning a number of factors need to be considered to decide whether an evaluation is feasible and worthwhile. An important prerequisite for an effective evaluation is that the intervention is well planned and focussed. Good evaluation relies on an intervention having clear aims and objectives and a strong underlying rationale. The evaluation itself will also need careful consideration, such as assessing whether there are adequate resources and commitment from everyone involved.

PLANNING THE INTERVENTION

Ideally, the intervention being evaluated should have an agreed statement of:

- Clear and measurable aims and objectives.
- The target group or population covered by the intervention.
- The expected inputs, outputs and outcomes.
- A timetable for implementation with targets and milestones.

Being clear about the **aims** and **objectives** is crucial (see **Evaluation Guide 1** for definitions of these terms). An intervention usually has a principal aim (that is often broad in focus) and a number of specific objectives. Simple approaches like *SMART* can help in formulating good aims and objectives. *SMART* works by helping you focus on exactly **what** is to be achieved, **who** will be involved, **how** it will happen, and **when** it will be done.

Specific	Everyone knows exactly what is to be achieved.
Measurable	It is possible to quantify in some way what you will achieve.
Achievable	You have the resources and capacity to achieve the objective.
Realistic	Well-matched to the capacity of the target group.
Timebound	Everyone knows the timetable and the dates when targets will be met.

Example: An outreach needle exchange service

An outreach needle exchange service has the overall aim of providing clean injecting equipment to injecting drug users. The objectives are:

- To provide clean injecting equipment on a weekly basis to 100 injecting drug users resident in Area A during 2001 using 5 outreach needle exchange workers for 3 evening sessions per week.
- To provide information on safe injecting techniques using pre-designed materials to these clients at each contact.

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Before you start, it is good practice to clearly map out or describe the intervention that is to be evaluated. It is crucial to understand exactly **how and why** the intervention can be expected to achieve its aims and objectives. That is, to describe the **underlying assumptions, logic or rationale**. Resources such as a 'logic model' can help with mapping out the programme activities and the underlying rationale. One example is the logic model by Rush and Ogborne cited in the EMCDDA evaluation materials. These can be downloaded at www.who.int/substance_abuse/PDFfiles/guideevaloftreatment.pdf (pages 12-13).

Example: An outreach needle exchange service

There are two principal underlying assumptions:

1. that by providing clean injecting equipment to injecting drug users the risk of HIV and other injecting-related harm will be minimised.
2. that providing needle exchange services by 'outreach' will maximise the number of client contacts by taking the service to the user, in particular amongst hard-to-reach clients.

These underlying assumptions are key to the process of setting aims and objectives for the service.

PLANNING THE EVALUATION

You need to be clear from the outset why the evaluation is being conducted, who the evaluation is for, and whether the evaluation is feasible. Evaluation will be most practical and useful if it is an integral part of developing the intervention and if baseline information is established at the start, e.g. the level of needle sharing amongst the target group. A retrospective evaluation can increase costs and make the process more complex because all the information needed may not have been recorded from the beginning.

Evaluations can vary in their subject, purpose, timescale, design, methods and audience. Involving service providers, clients, funders and other stakeholders in the planning will help to clarify some of these variables. Each evaluation will be unique but there are a number of general principles and issues to consider:

Utility Who needs or has requested the evaluation?
What other audience(s) may have an interest in the evaluation?
What use will it have?

Feasibility What resources are available (internal and external)?
What is the time-scale?
Are there data available to support the evaluation?
What do previous evaluations suggest about the feasibility of evaluating similar interventions?

Focus Who are the key stakeholders?
What are the evaluation priorities?
What are the *specific* questions the evaluation needs to address?
Which decisions and actions should be better informed as a result?

Propriety Are there ethical issues to consider, such as parental consent?
Are there legal considerations to explore, such as data protection?
Who should conduct the evaluation (internal/external)?

Accuracy Are there (potentially) accurate data available for the evaluation?
Can these data be collected at baseline and at appropriate intervals thereafter?

Method What are the most appropriate methods to address these questions?
Are there standard assessment / evaluation / research tools that can be used?
What methodologies do previous evaluations in the field recommend?

Future EIU Evaluation Guides will address some of these issues.

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You will need to decide whether the evaluation will be undertaken internally, or by external consultants. Consider what it is you want to know, the scope of the exercise, the funders and potential final users of the evaluation results and what resources (financial and skills) are available. Some evaluations need to be conducted independently, using external contractors. Apart from the value of providing an outside 'objective' view of partnership activities, external contractors will often have particular expertise and be able to conduct the evaluation within a specified timescale.

However, there are also many simple and cost-effective ways of evaluating and improving practice that can be conducted in-house. These might include:

- holding brainstorming sessions to draw up suggestions on how to improve the service you deliver;
- systematically analysing any routine information collected to identify what it tells you about the impact of your activities; or
- getting together with other local services to exchange ideas on objective setting, data collection, evaluation methods and outcome measurement.

Example: An outreach needle exchange service – Issues to be addressed.

- Identify the evaluation funders and users, all the relevant stakeholders (including the exchange staff and users), the resources available, the proposed timetable and any ethical and legal considerations.
- Examine previous evaluations of outreach services and needle exchange outreach specifically. What do these evaluations say about the feasibility of evaluating outreach needle exchange work? What methods have been used to collect data for the evaluation? The EMCDDA published Guidelines for the Evaluation of Drug Outreach Work that may be useful (see resources).

The key question is probably the focus of the evaluation. For example, is the evaluation going to look at 'process' measures that will provide information on how the service operates and/or the acceptability of the service among the client group? Or will the evaluation be more 'outcome' focused to examine the effect of the service on reducing levels of HIV infection and other injecting-related harm amongst the client group?

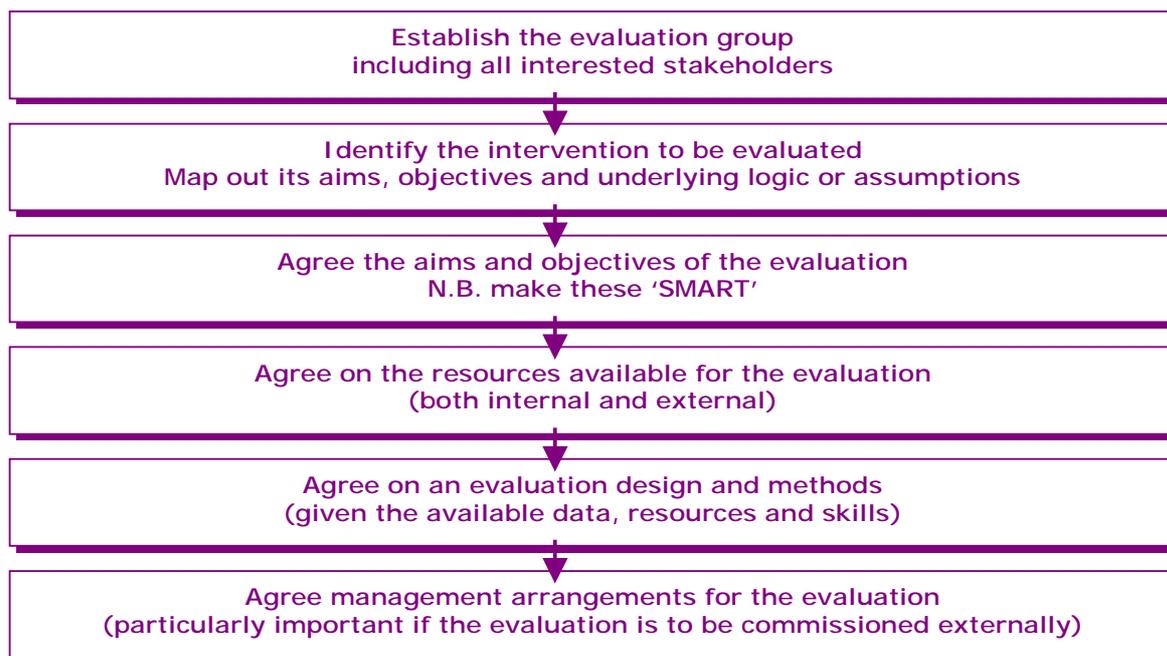
COMMON EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Evaluations commonly address questions about the effectiveness of the intervention or they explore the costs and benefits of the intervention and examine its acceptability. An evaluation will allow you to measure how much progress you have made towards achieving the aims and objectives set out for the intervention.

The specific questions an evaluation addresses will depend upon the type and scale of the intervention, the feasibility of the evaluation, the information required by the stakeholders and the resources available for evaluation. Commonly asked evaluation questions include:

- Does the intervention work?
- For whom does it work and in what circumstances?
- Why and how does it work (for example, does success depend on having highly trained staff or small caseloads)?
- What are the effects (intended, unintended, short and long term)?
- How long lasting are the effects (short, medium or long term)?
- What does it cost?
- Is the intervention cost effective?
- What do service users think about the intervention?
- Can people from all sections of the community benefit?
- Is the intervention proceeding as planned (if not, why not)?
- How can we improve the intervention?
- Should we reduce or expand the intervention?

THE EVALUATION PLANNING PROCESS



At the end of this process you should be able to answer the following questions with confidence.

- Why do you want to undertake the evaluation?
- Who are the key stakeholders?
- Who is the evaluation for?
- What is the focus of the evaluation?
- What are the aims and objectives of the evaluation?
- How is the evaluation to be funded?
- Will the evaluation be conducted internally or externally?
- Who will manage the evaluation?

If you can answer these questions you are ready to decide the most appropriate evaluation design and the data collection methods you will use. These subjects will be covered by forthcoming EIU Evaluation Guides.

RESOURCES

- EMCDDA evaluation of outreach services www.emcdda.org/responses/themes/outreach_evaluation.shtml
- WHO evaluation workbooks www.who.int/substance_abuse/pubs Psychoactive_drugs.htm
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook www.wkkf.org/Documents/WKKF/EvaluationHandbook/
- Peter Rossi, Howard Freeman and Mark Linsey, **Evaluation: a systematic approach** (1999).
- Colin Robson, **Small scale evaluation: principles and practice** (1999).

Further guidance on planning an evaluation can be found in the references in EIU Evaluation Guide 1.