Scottish Government – Evaluation for a small planet: The 5-step Approach to Designing and Evaluating Interventions

“I am delighted to introduce this easy-to-use 5-step evaluation guidance which is grounded in tried and tested methods. Not only should it help evaluate services of any size, but also to design more effective services from the outset. This practical guide provides links to the key evidence on ‘what works’ and is packed with examples making it a valuable resource for anyone who wants to assess their contribution to outcomes including funders, planning partnerships, service providers and service staff”.

Nicola Edge, Head of Justice Analytical Services
Scottish Government

Rational: Our criminal justice service landscape is peppered with voluntary organisations, public sector bodies, partnerships and individuals, and almost as many funding organisations. If we want to improve services and accountability in a world of ever decreasing budgets, funders need robust evaluations that can discriminate between strong and poor services when an RCT cannot be done.

We wanted an evaluation approach that fits Scotland’s landscape, is rigorous, transparent, doable and most of all useful for those who are investing in and delivering these services. We needed to bridge the attributability gap and measure how services contribute to achieving longer-term outcomes.

Solution – the 5 step approach: The 5-step approach to evaluating criminal justice interventions aims to embed quality concerns right from the start. Policy makers and service providers identify the problem the policy or service is trying to fix, develop a logic model based on the evidence and use this to identify evaluation questions and indicators.

Impact:

- Accessibility is key here, and to date we have achieved approx. 1000 downloads of the e-book version of the 5-step guidance alone. It differs from standard evaluation guides in that it is tailored to criminal justice interventions and includes a summary of the ‘what works’ evidence and examples.
- Government funded projects have been designed and evaluated using this approach, yielding more meaningful data that can better inform future decision making.
- Major funders including the Robertson Trust, The Big Lottery and the Scottish Prison Service are changing the way they commission and evaluate projects in accordance with the 5 steps.
- The approach is now included in a national performance framework.
- Third sector partners have embraced the approach by adapting or completely changing the way they collect outcomes data.
- The rhetoric of contribution rather than attribution which underpins the 5 steps has become the norm. This concept fits with the reality that sustainable social change only being possible as a result of a long term collaborative effort across all justice players and communities.

Link: http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/03/7005
The 5-step Approach to Designing and Evaluating Interventions

The Scottish Government
What is the 5-Step Approach?

The 5-step approach is a guide that has been created by the Scottish Government to assist service providers and funders with designing and planning an evaluation. Whilst predominately aimed at commissioners, service providers and funders with a focus on crime and reducing reoffending, it can easily be adapted to suit other projects or interests.
Measuring Impact: A Tricky Business

• Why was the 5-step approach needed?
  o We needed to improve the quality and rigour of evaluations in Scotland
  o We needed a consistent methodology that even small services and interventions could use
  o We needed an approach to improving quality of services that combined evidence-based service planning and evaluation
  o We needed accessible, relevant guidance tailored to behaviour change and criminal justice interventions

• What was it wanting to achieve?
  o To put evaluation at the heart of interventions
  o To show what a good evaluation looks like
  o An approach that was embraced by funders as well as service providers
  o That a service could demonstrate contribution to achieving high level outcomes rather than struggle with attribution
What is an Evaluation?

• An evaluation is used to identify whether a programme, project or intervention has worked as planned and/or resulted in change.
• Evaluations are conducted in different ways but usually involve either talking to people involved in the programme to identify how it was run and what they thought of it; analysing data to look for any change; or a combination of both.
• The overall purpose of an evaluation is to help (re)design services, ask questions, gather and interpret evidence, communicate important information about your service and take informed decisions.
The 5 Steps

1. Identify the Problem
2. Review the Evidence
3. Draw a Logic Model
4. Identify Indicators and Monitor your Model
5. Evaluate Logic Model
1. Identify the Problem

Before it is possible to design an effective service, it is essential that you are clear what attitudes, emotions or behaviours you are trying to change and why this should be a priority in the context you’re intending to work.

**WHAT is the problem?**

- Research studies show that improving the quality of family relationships for female prisoners can prevent reoffending AND reduce the risk of their children becoming involved in crime. However, there are no specialist family interventions in X prison for short term female prisoners.

**WHY is this a problem?**

- Poor family relationships decrease the likelihood of desistance from crime which is not only costly to society but can also increase the likelihood that the children of female prisoners develop mental health problems, drop out of school and get involved in crime.

**What is your ULTIMATE AIM?**

- Help to reduce the frequency of reconvictions of short term female prisoners by improving their family relationships and reduce the risk of their children becoming involved in crime.
2. Review the Evidence

• A well-designed project will be based on the available evidence about ‘what works,’ and what doesn’t, in relation to your aims. Reviewing the evidence base as part of the planning process will give you the best chance of achieving change in your users.

• Sources of evidence:
  o **Research Evidence**—Including results of randomised control trials (RCTs), surveys and qualitative studies (e.g. interviews or focus groups). Systematic, literature or evidence reviews synthesise research evidence on a particular topic.
  o **Evidence from Prior Evaluation**—If your service (or a similar one) has already been running for a period of time, your own previous evaluations may provide evidence as to whether the approach works or not, how and for whom.
  o **Anecdotal Evidence**—Over years of working in a particular field, your own experiences and those you hear about from others can be a further source of evidence. However, whilst valuable, it is important to remember that such evidence may be particularly subject to bias since it will not have been collected systematically.

• To draw the most robust conclusions about ‘what works,’ and why, you should take account of evidence produced through a range of methods.
  o **Quantitative studies** (including the results of RCTs and impact evaluations) might help you to establish what usually works and for whom.
  o **Qualitative work** (e.g. interviews with users who ‘succeed’ and ‘fail’ and/or with practitioners) might help you to understand the processes through which interventions work or don’t work and consider why barriers may exist to achieving your aims.

• Research and/or evaluation evidence should be used where available. However, there is no a simple answer to what counts as “good evidence.” It depends on the question you are trying to answer.
3. Draw a Logic Model

A logic model is a simplified diagram which shows, step-by-step, what you’re hoping to achieve, the process through which activities can lead to these aims and the resources need to do this. The logic model forms the basis for evaluating the whole project – you are going to test whether these steps happened as you predicted.

**What Logic Models can do**

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<tr>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Co-production and partnership working</th>
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<td>• Linking policies or projects to outcomes, or outcomes to policies</td>
<td>• Developing a logic model with partners clarifies roles and responsibilities and a shared understanding around outcomes</td>
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<th>Transparency and cohesion</th>
<th>Monitoring and Performance management</th>
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<td>• Clear line of sight between activities and intended outcomes for external and internal audiences</td>
<td>• Checking progress and links</td>
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<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
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<td>• It’s a tool for identifying process and outcome measures and then collect data to see if outcomes were achieved as defined in the model.</td>
<td>• Identify outcomes that your project has direct control and influence over and complex</td>
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Situation/Priorities: What is the existing need/problem you are aiming to address?
Input: What you need to invest (e.g. money, materials, equipment)
Activities: What you do (e.g. conduct workshops, meetings)
Participation: Who you reach (e.g. users, clients, agencies, decision-makers, customers)
Short term outcomes: What change happened in the short term? (e.g. awareness, learning, knowledge, skills)
Medium term outcomes: What change happened in the medium term? (e.g. practice and demonstrate new skills, behaviour, decision making)
Long term outcomes: What is the ultimate outcome? (e.g. social change, economic change)
Assumptions: (Linked to your review of the evidence) what assumptions need to be true in order for your model to work?
External factors: What other factors will influence whether or not your outcomes are achieved? (e.g. economic conditions, local facilities, family context)
4. Identify Indicators and Monitor your Model

Using your logic model as a guide, identify a) priority evaluation questions and b) indicators that will test whether the project actually worked as the logic model predicted. You will need to collect data about your project from the start on inputs, activities, users, short, medium and long-term outcomes.

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<th>Priority Evaluation Questions</th>
<th>Indicators to Test</th>
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<td>• Devise questions to test if the model is working as planned.</td>
<td>• Identify specific measures that can answer these questions and therefore provide evidence that your model is or isn’t working as expected (e.g. reoffending rates).</td>
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<td>• All models have a theory of change stating why you think your project will lead to outcomes.</td>
<td>• Develop data collection methods (e.g. surveys or interviews) to gather data on the specific measures at each stage of the model and throughout the whole project.</td>
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<td>• You then collect data to ‘test’ whether your theories stand up.</td>
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5. Evaluate Logic Model

Analyse the data you’ve collected on your various indicators to evaluate how well your project worked for your various users. Report on whether your data suggests the logic model worked as planned.

Analysis is not just a case of describing your data. You need to address the following questions:

1. What does the data tell you?
   • The data (quantitative and qualitative) will tell you whether the service worked as the model predicted. How does the data fit with the research questions?

2. Why are you seeing these results?
   • Explain the outcomes and assess the contribution of the project. Where change is evidenced in users (both positive and negative), it is likely that there are multiple causes for this and your project will only be a part of this.
   • The extent to which the project has contributed to change can be assessed through gathering subjective stakeholder views on contribution and exploring the impact of any outside influences (e.g. other interventions, housing or employment issues).
   • It is unlikely the model will work as predicted for all users, it is vital to explain any negative or mixed outcomes.

3. What are you going do about this? How can you improve the outcomes?
   • Use your explanations of outcomes in order to improve your model.
   • What can be changed to make the model work better? How can any issues or problems be addressed?
The 5 Step Approach: Impact

Approx. 1000 downloads of the e-book version of the 5-step guidance. (May 2016)

Government funded projects have been designed and evaluated using this approach.

Embedded into a national performance framework for Community Justice.

Up-skilled and increased capacity in some Third Sector organisations to self-evaluate.

Some organisations have permanently changed how they collect unit level data.

Used by major funders including the Robertson Trust.
The full report can be found at the following link:

http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/05/3241