Recommendations for Identifying Optimal Evaluation Processes for Funded Research Projects

REPOPA PROJECT EVIDENCE BRIEF no. 4
A document for directors and managers of funding agencies concerned with optimizing evaluation processes for funded research projects

PROBLEM STATEMENT
Research funding agencies need to demonstrate the health and policy impact of their research builds using optimally-designed evaluation processes. Some controversy and debate exist about the value of external project evaluations, and expectations and requirements for project teams for process evaluations. Our experience evaluating a multi-country research project offers one effective

1. COLLABORATION WITHIN NETWORKS
The EU funded REPOPA project operates in 6 European Union countries and Canada, and aims to incorporate evidence and expert insights into the development of health promoting policies.

We conducted an evaluation of the EC-funded REPOPA research project. There were two components: a formative process evaluation and an outcome-evaluation (summative process evaluation).

2. THE PARTICIPANTS
The evaluation team was integrated into the consortium over the life of the project. We provided both an internal and external view for constructive reflection and project assessment.

Evaluation participants where all members of the Project over its five-year duration.

3. FINDINGS
Process evaluation engaged Consortium members in prioritizing evaluation indicators, the real-time interpretation of data, and development of action statements to optimize Consortium’s use of resources.

Social network analysis of internal and external project networks provided a complex, interlinked, and unique insights to address team vulnerabilities.

Annual internal monitoring reports for consortium members highlighted emerging project issues and novel learnings. A strengthened project work planning and decision-making.

An external evaluation team that included critical review partners part of the process evaluation brought a new level of understanding of project context to the outcome evaluation.

4. CONCLUSIONS
Participatory, utilization-oriented process evaluation tax time but can strengthen project implementation and science. It can increase utility, uptake, and ownership of evaluations and recommendations.

Projects that deliberately bring together multiple countries, contexts, and interventions may deliver outputs with stronger scientific and policy relevance. They also face particular challenges in facilitation and developing targeted recommendations for a variety of policy stakeholders.

An optimal evaluation design may need to involve a mix of formative and summative approaches. Participatory process evaluation that supports iterative planning and decision-making can be combined with an outcome evaluation that build on the same to assess impact and the added value of synergies.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?
The full report can be found on the REPOPA website at www.repopa.eu

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