

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 funds 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 approach.



1 COLLABORATION WITHIN NETWORKS

The EU funded REPOPA project operates in 6 European Union countries and Canada, and aims to incorporate evidence and expert insight 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 lens for Consortium reflection and project assessment.

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

3 FINDINGS



Process evaluation engaged Consortium members in selecting evaluation indicators, the real-time interpretation of data, and development of action strategies to optimize Consortium's use of resources;



Social network analysis of internal and external project networks provided Consortium with unique insights to address team vulnerabilities;



An external evaluation team that included members who were part of the process evaluation brought a nuanced understanding of project context to the outcome evaluation.



Annual internal monitoring reports for Consortium consumption effectively highlighted emerging project issues and novel learnings. This strengthened project work planning and decision-making.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Participatory, utilization-oriented process evaluation takes time but can strengthen project implementation and science. It can increase utility, uptake, and ownership of findings 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 tailoring interventions and developing targeted dissemination strategies 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 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

This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 281532.