



ukactive Research Institute top tips on evaluation and evidence

The ukactive Research Institute aims to bridge the evidence gap between traditional laboratory-based 'exercise is medicine' research and real-world interventions.

This is achieved by conducting research assessing the effectiveness of interventions on directly measured physical activity levels, clinically relevant markers of cardiovascular and metabolic health, and other core variables in real world interventions.

The core aim of the research team is to generate academic publications and conduct research which will contribute to answering fundamental questions related to how to get 'more people, more active, more often'.

[6] Top tips to engage with the health system

Top tips:

- 1 Make sure that you are completely aware of the outcomes of your funding partner in addition to other individuals or organisations that may be interested in the outcomes.** It is important that you don't embark on an evaluation without thinking about the information that your funding partner is interested in. Thinking about wider stakeholders should also be a consideration. A lot of the work in the industry has, in the past, been evaluated on very specific outcomes that aren't able to be incorporated into wider agendas and utilised more widely as they are too specific.
- 2 It is important to embed data collection early.** Historically in many instances organisations have conducted the project then looked back and thought how we can evaluate. You must understand what you are looking to measure as early as possible rather than working backwards.
- 3 Wherever possible use valid and reliable measures.** Scientifically backed questionnaires that have been through reliability and validity tests will hold far more credence with public health stakeholders. Asking someone how well they feel is one thing but using The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale adds more authority as it is a recognised and validated scale.
- 4 At an early stage engage external experts.** In the event you are not sure what evaluation methods, scales and questions to use it is always advisable to seek guidance from experts. Even if you aren't willing or able to pay the expert organisation, commission them to conduct a full scale evaluation – you should still endeavour to get their views. Many academics would be happy to lend their views on such projects.
- 5 Evaluation should never greatly impact the service delivery.** Design an evaluation that can be embedded into service delivery. Evaluation can be undone by over onerous data collection that puts participants off. If you are engaging elderly participants in a programme that seeks to increase their physical activity levels, barriers would be around self-efficacy and confidence, the last thing you would want to do is to put them through a 45 min physical activity assessment that may put them off.
- 6 Utilise control groups.** Control groups are often associated with randomised control trials and rigorous academic studies. This can be simpler and easier to undertake than it seems. Comparing your findings with a comparative intervention or against available national statistics allows you to start isolating on the impact you are having.
- 7 Regular assessment of your data should be common practice** as it enables you to start tweaking and refining your programme. Evaluation is often confused with academic research studies, which are not designed to fluctuate and adjust during the process. If you are constantly monitoring and assessing your data you can make the necessary adjustments needed to improve your overall programme – with these decisions steered by the data itself.
- 8 Ensure that your final report is relevant for the intended audience.** Organisations should not seek to produce a final report that is intended to sit on the shelf. Cost permitting it may be wise to produce two final reports instead of one. The first being more scientific/academic in nature which is intended for funding bodies, Government bodies and deeply engaged stakeholders – followed by a far smaller document with key snapshots, statistics and learnings that can go to participants, deliverers and other stakeholders.
- 9 Dissemination of your data is useful in improving evaluation standards across the board.** You should always be willing to learn from best practice examples and share your own success and challenges faced. Take your findings to events/conferences; share within your networks and amongst your partners. You should also seek to utilise representative bodies in your sector e.g. ukactive, the Sport and Recreation Alliance and Public Health England to ensure information is spread as far as possible.
- 10 Context is key in reporting effectively.** For the final report to give a complete picture it is important to include an extra layer of context e.g. providing information about the socio-economic conditions of the region where the evaluation has taken place. The final report is also strengthened by including qualitative information such as case studies and personal journeys to support quantitative data and bring it to life.