Innovative Practice Toolkit
How to profile, monitor and evaluate innovative practice
Innovative Practice Toolkit

How to profile, monitor and evaluate innovative practice

This toolkit will help you understand how to…

» Develop a Program Logic

» Identify practice outcomes or indicators

» Profile the effectiveness of your practice

» Develop a monitoring system

» Conduct an evaluation
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Introduction

As part of everyday practice, the child and family welfare sector has conducted various forms of monitoring, profiling and evaluation to assist in the planning and delivery of services. Therefore it is essential this document begins by recognising the significant work already in existence.

This leads to the question, why create a toolkit of this nature?

Essentially, this toolkit aims to highlight the key strategies in conducting effective and innovative monitoring, profiling and evaluation processes so that organisations of any capacity can conduct these processes in a way that is consistent with current ‘good practice’.

By doing so, the data collected should demonstrate the difference programs have made to clients in a way that is quantifiable and therefore acts as evidence of effectiveness.

Operating as a guide, the step-by-step information and help sheet functions of this toolkit can be used to understand what contributes to an effective monitoring system and how it contributes to both the information you need to profile your practice and how to conduct an effective evaluation.

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare is pleased to offer this resource as part of our commitment to promoting evidence-informed practice to enhance outcomes for clients by encouraging services and workers to improve the quality of care provided.

The Centre would like to acknowledge the funding provided by the Telstra Foundation and the William Buckland Foundation and the support and evaluation brief of Professor Cathy Humphreys, Alfred Felton Chair in Child and Family Welfare, University of Melbourne and Dr Jenny Higgins, Knowledge Broker at The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (2008-2009), who wrote this toolkit.

Dr Lynette Buoy
Chief Executive Officer
The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
What is the difference between a program and a practice?

Making the distinction between a program and a practice will help you focus on exactly what you want to profile, monitor or evaluate.

A program is a broad set of activities that:

- includes management, financial and human resourcing;
- is targeted towards clients;
- contributes to the goals of the organisation; and
- may be complex and involve a range of different practices or it can involve one key practice.

A practice is a way of working that:

- helps to achieve a project’s or program’s objectives;
- is more than a task, action or program element;
- includes an explanation of the key ingredients or critical elements that make an action work;
- has clearly defined parameters that can be assessed and compared against similar practices; and
- includes organisational and programmatic aspects that contribute to effective service delivery and project outcomes.

(Soriano, Clark & Wise, 2008).

This document is directed at assessing practice, but in some situations a broader program focus is necessary. For example, clarifying the program logic in order to effectively determine what your practice outcomes should be.
Profiling, monitoring and evaluation

Profiling is a way of demonstrating a practice or program by examining components to understand how and why they are effective.

Monitoring is an ongoing task involving routine data collection. Most monitoring is built into the program and is done internally as part of the project management.

Evaluation is concerned with making an assessment. This is judging the merit of an activity or plan and measuring specific criteria. It is concerned with an assessment of the effects or outcomes of an activity, and compares these with the goals which the activity was intended to achieve (Anne Connor 1994).

Why do it?

Some reasons are:

• To demonstrate the effectiveness of a pilot program or existing service;
• To inform and improve practice;
• To help clarify program and practice outcomes;
• To identify perceived changes for service users;
• To identify the range of services being delivered and the service gaps;
• To embed evaluation processes and systems into a new or existing service; and
• To make a case for funding.

Profiling, monitoring and evaluation can:

• Help you understand, verify or increase the impact of programs or services;
• Improve delivery mechanisms to be more efficient and less costly;
• Identify program or practice strengths and weaknesses;
• Verify that you’re doing what you think you’re doing;
• Produce data that can also be used for public relations and promotional activities; and
• Produce valid comparisons between programs or practices.
**Profiling, Monitoring and Evaluation Helpful Hints**

- Evaluation can act as a warning and indicate if a program is off the mark. This can lead to some quite direct program changes.
- Evaluation can help guide directions for program improvement. This can similarly lead to changes in program direction or implementation.
- Evaluation helps re-conceptualisation, new approaches to familiar issues.
- Evaluation can encourage support for a program.
- Evaluation can provide information that supports negotiation and/or advocacy of a program.

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**Developing a Program Logic**

A common barrier when attempting to profile, monitor or evaluate is the lack of clarity regarding the logic that underpins the program or practice. This includes the original aims and goals, how they link to the activities performed by staff, and how the activities link to the intended outcomes of the program or practice. Understanding the program logic is fundamental to effective profiling, monitoring or evaluation.


The diagram below (based on Sue Funnell’s work 1997) indicates a simple program logic model. However, in reality it is not a linear or sequential process, but fluid and interactive.
Steps in developing a Program Logic

Step one… Clarify and detail your program’s aims and goals

- Prepare a detailed statement outlining the core purpose of the program and how it contributes to the broader social goals (such as reducing child maltreatment) and the organisation’s mission.
- If you are evaluating a practice, which is a component of your program (such as a parenting skills course within a broader program to improve family cohesiveness) also prepare a statement outlining the core purpose of the practice, and how it links to the broader goals of the program.

Step two… Identify the program’s outcomes and indicators of success

- Prepare a detailed outcome statement for all program outcomes and how they link to the program’s aims and goals.
- Include the program’s intermediate goals or achievements and how they relate to each outcome.
- If possible, include measurable outcomes or indicators, such as ‘50% of participants will...’
- Where quantification is not possible, use indicators such as ‘increased use of...’
- Describe the consequences of the intermediate goals and outcomes for example, ‘the behaviours look like...’

Step three… List the activities or interventions you undertook or plan to undertake to meet your outcomes

- Prepare a detailed statement of the activities or intervention you conducted.
- Link each activity or intervention to a program outcome, and explain how the activities lead to the outcome.

Step four… Clarify the evidence on which the program justification is based

- What are the underlying assumptions about the program?
• What are the expectations about how the program would work?
• What evidence exists to support the underlying assumptions?

**Step five… Identify the theories of change that underpin your intervention**

• Identifying the theories of change that underpin your practice. This will help you link your aims to your intended outcomes and ensure they are consistent. Diagram 1 illustrates three broad Potential Theories of Change.

**Diagram 1: Potential Theories of Change**

- **Empowerment**
  ...or social capital model of change; uses a participatory, capacity building style where there is no ‘expert’ and everyone is learning together

- **Persuasion**
  ...assumes that people will voluntarily change their behaviour when they are provided with the right skills and knowledge, which is delivered by experts

- **Carrot & Stick**
  ...urges compliance through highlighting the benefits of a new behaviour, which is intended to lead to attitudinal change

**Step six… Consider factors that influence or compromise whether you achieved your outcomes**

• For each level of the logic model, examine the relationship between activities and outcome.
• What factors are within the control of the program? What factors can you not control?
• What are the factors that can support you in achieving your outcomes?
• What could go wrong? How could you counteract things that may go wrong?
Help Sheet – One

Developing a Program Logic

Step one – Program aims and goals
Detailed statement on the core program purpose. Includes link to broad social goal and organisation’s mission

Example:
The Happy Families program aims to strengthen family relationships and increase family time spent together by developing positive parenting skills and child parent relationship building activities.

The program addresses the need identified in public consultations conducted by Families Australia 2006 showing “that the majority of people think that time spent together and good communication are key strengths of functional families…” the consultations found that “many families want to spend more time together but find that increased consumerism and the demands on time and money to make ends meet and to support lifestyles to which they aspire, prevent this from becoming a reality.

Happy Families is supported by the organisation’s strategic goal “to enhance the range of parenting services to effectively respond to the changing needs of children and their families”.

OR – Practice aims and goals
Detailed statement on the core practice purpose. Includes link to program aims and goals

Example:
The purpose of developing child parent relationship building activities is to help foster awareness of the needs of the family and to reinforce commitment to the families shared interests and time for togetherness.

The child parent relationship building activities will engage families using asset-based strategies that develop the shared skills and interests already present in the family. An asset-based approach will highlight the accessibility of family time spent together further enhancing the unity and mutual behaviours of the family. These activities will strengthen family relationships by increasing the family’s resilience and capacity to deal with changes.

Step two – Program outcomes
Detailed statement on program outcome for all outcomes. Includes link to program aims and goals

Example:
Stronger family relationships will be indicated by:
» A 30% increase in family time spent together in the first 6 months following completion of the program;
» A further 50% increase in family time spent together in the first 12 months following completion of the program.

A common understanding that time spent together increases family capacity will be demonstrated by a self-reported increase in mutual respect, openness, understanding and empathy.

Priority placed on time spent together will be demonstrated by a focus on family togetherness as the basis for parental decision making when determining family social and recreational activities.

An increase in communication skills will be demonstrated by a self-reported increase in enjoyment during time spent together.
## Indicators of success

List all program outcomes and how they link /achieve the program’s aims and goals

| Example: Increase in family time spent together | ▶ Stronger feeling of family connectedness  
▶ Stronger use of shared interests and skills  
▶ Increase in family functioning |
| Example: Common understanding that time together increases capacity | ▶ Willingness to spend time together  
▶ Family time spent together becomes a ‘norm’  
▶ Increase in mutual behaviours amongst family members |
| Example: Parents prioritise family time spent together | ▶ Increase in family time spent together  
▶ Parental decision making that increases family unity becomes a ‘norm’ |
| Example: Increase communication skills in the family | ▶ Collaborative / consultative family decision making  
▶ Increase in family problem solving |

### Step three – Activities or interventions used to meet outcomes

Detail each activity or intervention used, link it to a program outcome and explain how it will achieve its organisation’s mission.

| Example: Family time | ▶ Asset-based family development  
▶ Family time planning |
| Example: Parents prioritise capacity | ▶ Parent education  
▶ Positive parenting workshops |
| Example: Communication Skills | ▶ Positive parenting workshops  
▶ Facilitated family support sessions in family time planning |
**Step four – Evidence on program justification**

List underlying assumptions and any evidence that supports them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families who spend time together will increase in capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research shows that “time together is not just about doing things and going places. The quality of relationships and interactions is crucial to the health and development of children” (How Australians Use their Time, 1997)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families want to spend time together but feel they are unable to; and Parents can struggle with meeting competing demands on the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a recent survey “about half the parents reported feeling that they had too little time with their child” (Galinsky 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent social trends indicate “trying to achieve a balance between work and family is one of the main reasons parents who are working feel rushed or pressed for time” (Work, Life and Family Balance, 2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents are the key decision makers in family time spent together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents are responsible for “working together as parents in caring for children” (Relationships Australia, 2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Step five – Underpinning theories of change**

Description of change theory which underpins practice

Example:

Overall, an empowerment approach to change underpins the Happy Families program. The program uses a participatory model of change which encourages parent/s, children and professionals to work together to identify shared family interests and skills that can be incorporated into a family driven and managed Family Time Plan.

The practice of positive parenting skill development uses a persuasion approach to change. The positive parenting workshops are delivered by specialised professionals who provide education and guidance on positive parenting strategies. It is assumed that program participants are willing and prepared to change behaviours to maximise family time spent together and are expecting that positive parenting strategies will show them how to do this as the key decision makers in the family.
## Step six – Factors that influence outcomes

Description of factors which influence or compromise how outcomes are achieved

| Factors within control of the program (see examples) | » Criteria and number of participants  
» Cost, venue and staffing of the program  
» Program timeframes  
» Program promotion, referral and intake |
|---|---|
| Factors not within control of the program (see examples) | » Post program management of Family Time Plans  
» Post program family decision making / priorities  
» Pre program waiting lists  
» Emerging Family Time or Work Life Balance research  
» Funding for next year’s program |
| Factors which support outcomes to be achieved (see examples) | » Appropriate and accessible venue  
» Family friendly program times  
» Adult & child friendly program materials  
» Recruitment of specialised professionals |
| Descriptions of what could go wrong (see examples) | » Family management of Family Time Plans create additional stress for families  
» Child participants require additional education / support  
» Parents require additional education / support |
| Descriptions of how to counteract what could go wrong (see examples) | » Family Time Plan reviews could be part of the program  
» Child decision making and participation workshops could be held in conjunction with positive parenting workshops  
» One-on-one support can be offered to parents |
Identifying Practice Outcomes or Indicators

Outcomes, or indicators, are ways of measuring whether your program or practice has achieved its aims.

Specifying outcomes will give you opportunities to measure the success of the program. You can break down the outcomes into indicators which will also enable you to track how the program is progressing.

What are the desired practice outcomes?

One way of helping you determine desired outcomes of your practice is to identify the kind of change you would like to see as a result of the intervention.

*Ask yourself... ‘In six months, a year’s time, what would your target group be doing differently as a result of the intervention?’*

Give your best effort to identifying outcomes, but they may evolve as you develop your outcomes evaluation plan.

Steps in identifying outcomes or indicators

*Step one... Create a detailed summary statement outlining all the outcomes you would like to achieve*

- Link your outcomes to the original aims of the project or practice. Include all the changes you would like to see as a result of the intervention.
- Record what has been observed that indicates an outcome has progressed.
Step two… Link short-term, with intermediate and long-term outcomes

- Start with short term outcomes, 0-6 months – what knowledge and skills would you expect to see?
- For intermediate outcomes, 3-9 months – what behaviours would you expect to see?
- For long term outcomes, 6-12 months – what values etc. would you expect to see?
- Link the short, medium and long term outcomes by asking what short term outcomes need to occur for the intermediate outcomes to occur, and what intermediate outcomes need to occur for the long term outcomes to occur?

Step three… Pursue SMART outcomes

The acronym SMART (George T. Doran, 1981) can be used to provide a comprehensive definition for outcomes.

Step four… Pursue meaningful outcomes

- Encourage excellence so your outcomes inspire and motivate people. Relate outcomes to what people value and consider important.
- Focus on the destination so people can see what they need to aim towards (rather than how they get there).

Step five… Have your outcomes and indicators reviewed by others

- Check with your team to confirm they will measure what you want them to measure.
Program Logic and Outcomes hierarchy

Use this hierarchy format to help you identify your program outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Outcomes, outputs and activities</strong></th>
<th><strong>Level</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You may skip a level depending on your program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Broader social goals that your program contributes to…</strong></th>
<th><strong>Social consequences.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example = Happier, healthier safer children in Victoria.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Program outcomes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Final result of the program.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the program’s…</td>
<td>Example = Parents applying positive parenting strategies resulting in a decrease in the level and degree of child maltreatment in Victoria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ direct responsibilities?</td>
<td><strong>TIPS:</strong> Results may occur years after implementation. A program must show how it contributed to outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ unique contribution to broader goals?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ long-term results?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Intermediate outcomes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Results of the outputs.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Include…</td>
<td>Example = Parents demonstrate sustained positive parenting behaviour after six months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Stepping stones towards outcomes</td>
<td>» Self-assessment of being less frustrated with child, able to manage child’s difficult behaviours without hitting. Describe examples of using positive parenting skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Measure demonstrable progress towards goals</td>
<td>» More positive engagement with children, e.g. stories, play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Measure where progress is being made and where it is not</td>
<td>» Fewer notifications to statutory child protection services re: child maltreatment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | **TIPS:** What else contributes to the achievement of program outcomes, e.g. practice and policy changes? Outcomes can be longer term depending on duration of program.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immediate changes</th>
<th>Changes that are a direct result of the activity or intervention.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outputs</td>
<td>Example =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Parents attend training sessions regularly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Parents demonstrate knowledge of child development during sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Parents demonstrate skills in positive parenting in sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program activities</td>
<td>Program activities that bring about change like training, dissemination of findings, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities that influence your outcomes</td>
<td>Example =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Advertise/promote/refer to training course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Hold 10 training sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Deliver training on child development and positive parenting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Planning activities**

*Tip: Start here*

Preliminary activities that occur before any activities associated with changing behaviour.

Example =

» Design program, recruit staff.
» Develop program strategy and incorporate change theory.
» Obtain funding for program.
» Develop Project plan.
Profiling programs or practices

How can a profile demonstrate evidence of effective practice?

Profiles provide valuable summaries on effective programs and practices that contribute to the evidence base in a specific field.

Profiles break down the program or practice into its component parts and draw on existing evidence of effectiveness and an analysis of the practice’s own outcomes to demonstrate how and why the program works.

Organisations such as the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) at the Australian Institute of Family Studies provide profiles of Promising Practices that have been peer reviewed and assessed as effective.

Combined, these programs provide a significant body of evidence-informed effective practices on which other programs can draw.

Steps in profiling your practice

Step one… Write a statement outlining the broader program goals
  • Link this with the practice’s goals.

Step two… Include in the statement the practice’s intended outcomes
  • How do they contribute to the broader program goals and practice aims.

Step three… Break down the practice into its component parts. The program logic can help with this
  • What is it about the practice that has the most impact?
  • Are there specific activities, tools or processes that make it work?
Step four… Justify why you chose the intervention you did

• Cite the theoretical research that informed your choice of intervention.

Step five… Determine under what circumstances the practice works

• For whom does the practice work and why?
• What are the characteristics of the people the practice works for and how is the practice appropriate for them?

Step six… Describe the evidence you have collected on your practice

• Demonstrate how and why your program has achieved its outcomes.

Step seven… Describe why the evidence of the outcomes being achieved is convincing

• Does it link to theory, is it methodologically sound?

Step eight… Describe how your practice may contribute to the evidence base

• Does it contribute to an emerging evidence base or does it do something different, e.g. draw on a new way of working or work with a new client group?

Step nine… Describe how your practice may be replicable

• Can it be replicated in another context? Describe how it is innovative, uses a new approach or is sustainable so that the effects will carry on after the project team has withdrawn.
# Effective Practice Profile Framework

Use this framework to help you profile your effective practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential qualities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Practice</td>
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## Towards effective practice

- **This section is very important.** The ‘program logic’ on which you have built your program or practice, outlined briefly here, will underpin the rationale of every other category.

- **Here you demonstrate how and why your program does what it claims to do.** Demonstrating effectiveness is essential to show that your program is making a difference.

- **This section describes why your program was needed in the first place (i.e. research or practice experience has identified a need for this type of program) and why you’re doing it the way you are.**

- **Here you describe the effect the program or practice has had on your client group. What change have you observed in your clients, their families, etc.?**

- **In this section you provide data you have collected that supports the change you describe in the previous column. Give evidence to demonstrate the outcomes (short term effects) and impact (longer term effects) of your program.**

## Describe…

- the program / practice’s goals
- client group
- general activities
- issues the practice is addressing

- the main components of program / practice
- how and why program / practice works

- describe how the practice draws on existing research that supports your choice of intervention

- give examples of ways in which the practice has been successful in creating change for the client group

- present evidence that demonstrates program effectiveness

- link this evidence to the aims of the project
### Additional qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Practice is replicable</th>
<th>Practice is innovative</th>
<th>Practice is sustainable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributes to evidence base</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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### Towards effective practice

- **Your program may build on the existing evidence base because it adds to an under-researched area; you are working with a new client group, at a new location (e.g. rural) or in a new way that has not been described in the literature before.**
- **Your program will have essential core elements. Other elements may be particular to your specific location or client group. Can the core components be replicated elsewhere?**
- **If your practice takes a new approach in working with the client group or other partner organisations, your practice is innovative because you will have incorporated new components into the practice.**
- **Your program may have ongoing effects on the community or client group, for example, if you used capacity building strategies such as training local people to deliver aspects of the program.**

- **Describe how your program adds to the existing evidence base**
- **Describe how your program may be replicated in another context**
- **Describe how your practice offers new insights into the issue you are addressing**
- **Describe the effects the program will have on the community once the funding ends**

---

Developing a monitoring system

Monitoring enables you to continually check the progress of your program or practice against your intended outcomes by collecting information on a routine basis.

Monitoring systems won't provide you with the depth of information that you would get from an evaluation, but they do provide you with ongoing information about whether your program or practice is meeting shorter-term aims.

Steps to develop a monitoring system

**Step one… Clarify the purpose and scope of your monitoring system**

- Who is the monitoring system for?
- What do you need to know and how will you use the information?
- What is the timeframe of the monitoring system? Ongoing? 5 years?
- What programs or aspects of the program will you need to include in the monitoring process?
- Determine what information you need to collect to tell you what you need to know, indicators, targets, milestones, etc.

**Step two… Plan how the monitoring process will be embedded and implemented**

- Develop monitoring questions.
- Identify and list all existing data.
- Determine what new evidence is needed to fill gaps.
- Determine how it will be collected.
- Consider how it will be synthesised.
Step three… Develop indicators or measures of success

- Focus on program team’s information needs first. The findings are more likely to be found useful and taken up by the team.
- Use questions as well as indicators to monitor results as they provide different types of information.
- Identify some medium-term indicators, or outcomes, that can show you are on course. These will enable you to track how your program is doing at certain points in the program’s life cycle and make adjustments along the way.
- Set indicators that relate to what you want to achieve (where you want to be) rather than what you need to do or fix.
- Where possible use data you are already collecting. This will save time and resources, and will provide you with a rich source of data.
- Ensure measures are SMART: Specific, measureable, achievable, realistic & timely.

Step four… Implement and refine the monitoring process

- After you have implemented the monitoring process you can review how well it is gathering the information you need.
- Make adjustments to refine the process if you need to.

Step five… Use findings for team reflection and learnings

- You will be collecting information that will give you evidence of your program’s effectiveness. Feed this back to the team through team meetings, to the organisation through emails or presentations, and to other stakeholders through sources such as your organisation’s newsletters.
- The information will enable you to make a determination about how the program is doing and feed it back into program decisions.
Conducting an evaluation

Evaluations provide you with an opportunity to gather information that will give you insights into:

✓ the effectiveness of the program for the client group;
✓ what’s working well and what isn’t working so well; and
✓ whether the gains of the program have been sustained over time.

Broadly, there are three different types of evaluations (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010).

**Process**
- Evaluate the way in which a program is implemented or conducted. Process evaluations investigate the program’s integrity and explore whether it is doing what it is intended to do in a consistent way. They do not look at whether the program is effective. Process evaluations can tell you whether changes in the way the program is conducted will enhance the delivery of the project.

**Impact**
- Impact evaluations measure the immediate and direct effect of the program on its participants. Impact evaluations explore whether the short term aims of the program were met, such as whether participants demonstrate enhanced knowledge and skills by the end of the course.

**Outcome**
- Outcome evaluations look at whether the program meets its underlying goals. Outcome evaluations focus on sustained, longer term change such as whether the immediate aims of the project (enhanced knowledge and skills) led to a reduction in incidents of child maltreatment.
Evaluations should inform the people who work on the project, as well as those who benefit. The needs of funders and other organisations that have a stake in the project should be incorporated.

Steps in conducting an in-house evaluation

Step one… Identify the purpose of your evaluation

Reaching clarity about the purpose of the evaluation is crucial and underpins planning, question formation, what information you collect, and ultimately the quality of the evaluation.

- Narrow the purpose of the evaluation down until it is focused, simple, specific and achievable. This will ensure the evaluation is successful and yields usable results.

- There may be more than one purpose for the evaluation. Different agendas can be built into the one evaluation.

- Ideally, ongoing monitoring and evaluation should be included in the program design and ‘embedded’ in practice. This is important because asking people about what may have occurred in the past may be problematic, retrospective data can be unreliable.

Step two… Plan your evaluation

The quality and thoroughness of your planning will determine how well you are able to implement the following stages, and ultimately determine the quality of your evaluation. Most people find planning the most difficult and tedious part of the process.

Prepare an evaluation plan or framework that includes a detailed breakdown of what each stage of your evaluation should involve. It should provide specific information including budget, timelines, tasks and roles. It should also include a statement about the program goals, interventions and intended outcomes, so you can determine whether the outcomes are being met.

Revisit the ‘Developing a Program Logic’ section of this toolkit for information about how to plan your evaluation.
It should also include the kind of information you need and how you are going to collect this information, but don’t decide on collection methods too soon, as these should be informed by information needs and the questions you need to ask to gather information you don’t have, rather than by ideas or values about particular types of methodology.

Don’t underestimate the time and effort needed to plan your evaluation properly. Determine how much time you will need to invest in getting the evaluation done, and build this time into your work plan. Roughly, the time allocation for your evaluation should be...

- 40% Planning
- 40% Collecting data
- 20% Reporting findings

Information needed for your evaluation plan...

- Detailed aims and goals of the evaluation.
- Detailed program goals, the interventions and the intended outcomes (program logic).
- Clear statements on the audience of the evaluation and who it is for.
- Clarification on what you, the target audience, and other stakeholders need to know from the evaluation.
- Simple, clear statements, pare the evaluation down to only what you need to know.
- Details on the budget and how can it best be allocated.
- The timelines for the evaluation.
- The tasks that need to be done and who will do them.
- The style of the evaluation that will best serve your purposes. For example, one that is formal and objective or participatory and empowering.
- The type of evaluation you need. For example, one that provides regular feedback to promote practice improvement or a final report at the end.
- A record of new information to the plan as needed, such as the collection of information you do not already have and the method you used to obtain the information.
- A process to review the evaluation plan which includes timeframes of when this will occur.
Step three… Identify resources to conduct an in-house evaluation

Most organisations have limited resources to conduct a complex or large-scale evaluation, yet they can do most of the evaluation work in-house. Outside assistance should be directed at identifying the appropriate data collection methods and the data analysis. Most organisations do have the capacity to conduct a small scale, in-house evaluation, which can be useful and valuable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of an in-house evaluation...</th>
<th>Disadvantages of an in-house evaluation...</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You have ownership and can ask the questions that are important to you.</td>
<td>Evaluators can’t be independent due to their close proximity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have an insider view and you understand the program, the people and the systems that you will be drawing on.</td>
<td>The strengths and weaknesses of a program may not be accurately reflected due to staff’s pre-existing views and concerns about on-going funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house evaluations do not require substantial additional funding other than costs in time and energy.</td>
<td>Staff are not as experienced in the more technical aspects of designing and implementing an evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The evaluation team acquires evaluation skills and experience that can inform ongoing program monitoring processes.</td>
<td>Staff have limited time and evaluation time is often added onto current work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The evaluation team may develop an appreciation for the importance of evaluation and monitoring.</td>
<td>Internal evaluations will need to be small scale as there is limited capacity for complex evaluations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being involved in each stage of the evaluation provides an ongoing opportunity to reflect on practice and enhance existing programs, services and systems through ongoing feedback.</td>
<td>Small-scale evaluations can’t provide comprehensive or in-depth information about how a program is working.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Identifying resources for an in-house evaluation

Once you’ve made the decision to conduct the evaluation in-house, you need to consider how you will identify and rally your resources to implement the evaluation.

Be clear and specific as to what resources you need, and how you will obtain them in the planning stage. Don’t do it all yourself – identify who else can help and include them in the planning stages. Call on enablers such as senior staff to facilitate the process and encourage cooperation across the organisation.

Information needed for conducting an in-house evaluation

- Who will lead, manage and coordinate the evaluation work?
- Who will comprise the evaluation team?
- How much time can you and your team afford to spend on conducting the evaluation?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation team?
- What skills do others have, such as administration or IT expertise that can be accessed?
- How will you collect, sort and analyse the information and who will do this?
- Are there managers or other senior people who can facilitate the availability of resources or provide access to the people you need to interview or obtain data from?
- Are there other agencies or organisations that can provide strategic assistance?
- Decide how often and when you will review the progress of the evaluation and who will be involved.
- Who will analyse the data and produce the findings, i.e. write the report?
- How will you disseminate the findings - report; newsletter article; website – and who will do this?
- Online and other resources can help you and avoid wasting time on unnecessary groundwork.
- Don’t conduct an evaluation when other important events are happening in the organisation such as an audit or restructure.
- Hold a workshop with the evaluation team to develop or discuss the evaluation plan.
Step four… Identify your stakeholders

An important step in your evaluation is identifying all of your stakeholders, and categorizing them according to their different roles and functions in relation to the evaluation.

For example, you may have stakeholders …
- who need information for funding purposes;
- who are the recipients of the intervention and whose behaviour you are aiming to change; and
- who will help you achieve the aims of your program such as partners, staff, etc.

Include them in workshops or planning meetings where practicable. This gives people a sense of ownership over the evaluation and they are more likely to want to contribute and have an investment in the findings.

Draw up a list of stakeholders to help you identify whose perspectives should be included in the evaluation. These can include anyone associated with the program, or for whom the findings of the evaluation may be relevant.

Your list of stakeholders could include…

- Service users and their families
- Managers and program staff
- Professionals from other services or organisations
- People who provide support to the program (e.g. carers, volunteers)
- Potential or current funders such as philanthropic trusts or government departments
- The community or neighbourhood

Categorise stakeholders according to their role in relation to the evaluation. They will generally include…

- Clients at whom the practice is directed (expend significant resources to influence these people and evaluate change in their behaviour, e.g. clients).
• People who will help you achieve your outcomes such as partner organisations, staff, volunteers (you may also need to ‘intervene’ with these groups, e.g. by training volunteers).

• People who you want to inform about the program evaluation (e.g. funders, the community, local government, the sector).

Categorise stakeholders in a matrix according to how important their information is to the evaluation, and how probable it is that you will be able to obtain the information from them. This will help you decide on the type of data you will collect for the evaluation.

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<th>Very important</th>
<th>Not important</th>
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<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>x</td>
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</table>

### Identify Stakeholder Information Needs

Who will use the information from the evaluation? If you primarily want information to inform the program team and the organisation, for example, to check that the program is on track, then make sure the information you collect is focused on exactly what the program team needs to know.

Figure 1 demonstrates how, by focusing on the needs of one external group you may be wasting the energy of the team and not getting sufficient information to meet the needs of other groups.

Try and organise your data collection strategies so that the practice team’s needs are met first, but that they overlap with and include the needs of other stakeholders. Diagram 2 Identifying Stakeholder Needs, illustrates this.
You may also need to collect information for funding or departmental requirements. However, it might not serve the team’s interests if you focus only on what others need to know.

If you primarily focus on external needs you will collect a lot of information that is not useful to the organisation or the team. You may need to negotiate with the funder to give them relevant information you are already collecting that they can then fit into their broader information needs.

**Step five… Choose an evaluation design that will enhance the credibility of your evidence**

A primary concern when conducting evaluations in the child and family welfare sector is whether the research design will meet ‘scientific’ standards of rigour and the quality of the evidence will be seen as credible.

The more ‘rigorous’ your evaluation is, the more credible the evidence it produces will be.
The research design relates to how you conduct the research or evaluation. Elements of a research design include:

- your sample selection (people such as clients from whom you collect data);
- your choices of data collection methods (interviews, focus groups, surveys, randomized control trials); and
- the method of data analysis (thematic analysis, statistical analyses that enable the researcher to ‘control’ for variables that may influence the findings).

Rigour is increased by using a design that enables you to directly relate the cause or intervention, to the effect or impact and outcome, and controlling for any intervening variables that may influence the findings.

It is important that the evaluation is designed to measure only the effects of the program or practice.

The ideal method for determining outcomes which is widely used in the health sector is the randomized control trial (RCT).

An RCT involves the randomized assignment of participants into two groups: one that receives the intervention, and a control group that does not. The study is closely monitored to control for external variables that may influence the findings.

Randomised control trials can be expensive, impractical and can require specific expertise. Further, in the child and family welfare sector, withholding services from one group for research purposes can be considered unethical and may go against the values of many organisations.

You can strengthen the rigour of an evaluation using other designs and compare data from different sources to strengthen the credibility of the findings.
Help Sheet – Four

Evaluation tips

Use the following tips to help make your evaluation more rigorous.

**Comparison groups**
While you may not be able to use a randomised control trial design, you may be able to compare the intervention group with another group such as those on a waiting list who are not receiving the intervention and draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the program based on any differences observed or identified between groups.

**Use pre and post test designs**
Gathering evidence about attitudes, skills, and knowledge before and after the program can tell you whether any change has occurred for the people who participated in the program. While you may not know for certain whether the change is solely due to the intervention, the data can be compared with data from other methods such as comparison groups to strengthen the credibility of the evidence.

**Include impact and outcome measures**
In order to determine whether the program has met its aims and goals, you need to build in indicators and outcomes that will measure the immediate impact of the program, as well as intermediate and long-term outcomes.

*See the section in this toolkit on Identifying Practice Outcomes and Indicators for more information.*

**Use longitudinal designs**
You can enhance claims of effectiveness in achieving the goals of your program or practice by following up with clients 3, 6, or 12 months after the intervention. Their information can provide evidence of sustained change which is more persuasive than evidence of immediate change that may not be sustained.

**Use mixed methods**
By combining different design and data collection strategies, and by including the views of a range of stakeholders, your evaluation will be more rigorous and credible.

» Collect both qualitative and quantitative data.

» Collect data from a range of sources such as pre/post-test surveys, case notes and interviews.

» Gather information from a range of stakeholders such as clients, case workers and volunteers.
Help Sheet – Four

Evaluation tips

Use the following tips to help make your evaluation more rigorous.

**Use a large enough sample size to be representative**

Collect evidence from a large enough sample to be convincing and representative of the group you are generalising to. Include as many participants as practicable in a given intervention. You can use detailed case studies of a small number of clients to highlight or demonstrate aspects of the intervention. Seek expert advice on sampling where necessary.

**Draw on existing research evidence**

Draw on existing research studies to support your program intervention, evaluation design, and findings. This will enable the evaluation to contribute to building the evidence base of effective practice in the area.

See the section in this toolkit on Profiling a Program or Practice for more information.

**Consider any variables that may influence your findings**

- Could there be fundamental differences in comparison groups, such as the intervention group having more severe problems, less family or social supports, more or less motivated to change?
- Could there be other factors that influenced the participants of the program other than the intervention, such as attending another course at the same time, or receiving counselling on the same issue?

**Be systematic and transparent**

For the evaluation to be considered rigorous and credible, the evidence must be collected and processed in a systematic manner.

This means:

- Ask clear and answerable questions in the same way of each participant;
- Use the same question framework when searching records and documents;
- Document your findings in a systematic manner;
- Be transparent about how you sort or code your data;
- Give detailed information about the methods you used; and
- Describe any shortcomings of the methodological process or the data.
Step six… Collect useful information for your evaluation

If you collect information your team needs to know regarding how the project is doing, what is working well and what you need to improve or change, you will probably also be collecting information that addresses the needs of external audiences such as funders.

Information for your evaluation will come from a range of sources. Case files, feedback sheets and other forms of data collected by program staff or the organisation more broadly can also provide valuable information to inform the evaluation.

Consider…

• What do you, the target audience, and other stakeholders need to know from the evaluation?
• Do you already collect the information?
• Do you need to collect more information?
• Who is best able to provide the information?
• How will you collect the information?
• Is the collection process affordable?

An important source of information about whether the program has achieved its aims and goals can be gathered from the client population. Feedback sheets can provide information about the immediate effect of the program on clients, but in order to determine whether these effects have been sustained, and to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the program, you may need to gather more information from your client group.

What kind of information do you need from your clients?

In order to determine how effective your program has been, you are going to need to get the perspectives of your clients.

There are different kinds of information that they can provide:

• Information about their reactions and feelings. These may not be sustained over time;
• Information about what they learned from the program including new attitudes, perceptions, knowledge etc.;
• Changes in skills including how they have applied the new information to change their behaviour; and
• Effectiveness such as the impact of new behaviours on wellbeing, relationships, etc.
These types of information are generally collected at different time points. The more you can demonstrate sustainability of change, the more useful the information will be.

**Are there ethical considerations in collecting information from your participants?**

It is important to ensure that any research or data gathering exercise is sensitive to the need of the participants and that the process cannot harm or exploit them in any way.

Before collecting information from groups such as clients, consider whether you need to obtain ethical clearance from your organisation. This is particularly the case for vulnerable people such as clients, children, and people from minority or disadvantaged groups. You may also need to prepare consent forms for participants to sign to ensure they understand the research process and their role in this.

Consider...

- Do you need to get ethical clearance from your organisation or consent from the participants in order to gather information from them?
- Do you need to prepare documentation such as ethics forms or consent forms?
- Are there cultural, ethical, language or gender issues that need to be considered?
- Do you need permission from your participants to record the interview or quote from transcripts?
- Do you need permission from a parent or guardian to interview a child?
- Are there any copyright issues from using existing material (e.g. photographs)?

**What type of data do you need to collect?**

For most evaluations, interviews, focus groups and questionnaires, there are standard ways of collecting information.

You need to ask the right questions and pilot your questions to ensure they are clear and gather the information you intend them to. Don’t collect more data than you will use, and use what you collect.
Broadly, there are two different types of data, qualitative and quantitative.

**Quantitative data**
- Quantitative data, collected from surveys, organisational data sets, etc., provide quantifiable information, such as how many people attended a course, whether they have been clients of your service before, etc. Quantitative data is useful for telling you ‘how much’, ‘how many’, ‘how often’, etc. Statistical data can be converted into percentages, displayed in tables and graphs, and can provide a concise summary of how aspects of the program are performing. Clinical tests or assessment data may also be aggregated particularly if there is time to do so.

**Qualitative data**
- Interviews, focus groups, feedback sheets and case notes provide qualitative data, which can reveal people’s attitudes towards the intervention and what it meant for them. Qualitative data gives in-depth explanations and gives a ‘voice’ to your participants. Qualitative data can tell you why the program worked, or didn’t work. Qualitative data can be analysed into themes that can indicate the general characteristics of a program and where relevant to the participants who are providing the data.

Both forms of information are valuable, and by collecting qualitative and quantitative data you will produce an evaluation that provides a deeper and more complex picture of how the program or practice is doing from a range of perspectives; program managers, stakeholders and clients. A mix of types of evidence will strengthen the validity of your evaluation.

Revisiting questions from time to time helps you ensure the evaluation is still on track. This can be useful when you write up the findings to ensure you are analysing and reporting on the right things.

**Developing indicators for collecting data**

To collect additional data for your evaluation, you need to identify indicators that will tell you whether you are achieving your intended outcomes.

Revisit ‘developing indicators’ in the ‘Developing a Monitoring System’ section of this toolkit for information as to how to do this.
For each outcome you developed in your program logic, think of what you need to know to assess whether the program or practice has been successful in achieving that outcome and develop an indicator or indicators to measure this.

 Quantitative indicators (how many, how often) will provide numerical data about a program, but won’t tell you why and how the program is working.

 Qualitative data obtained from well-targeted, specific open-ended questions will enable you to gather meaningful information.

**Developing evaluation questions**

Asking the right questions is essential to a successful evaluation. Identify your target audience or end users, for whom you are gathering the information. This will assist you in asking the right questions. Keep questions simple and basic as they can still yield complex findings.

- To gather quantitative data, ask ‘closed’ questions that give definitive answers, such as survey style questions that have answer categories such as ‘yes’; ‘no’; ‘sometimes’; ‘always’, ‘never’. The answers can then be totalled.

- To gather qualitative data, ask ‘open questions’ that will help you understand the issue from the interviewee’s point of view, such as “what did you find was most helpful about the program?”

Brainstorm your questions with the team, and test them out on a pilot group if necessary to make sure you are getting the information you need.

**Questions could relate to...**

- What happened?
- Were the activities successful?
- What could be done better?
- What were the lessons learned?
Tips for asking good questions...

- Narrow your questions down to what you really need to know.
- Basic questions will yield valuable results, e.g. “What was most helpful?” “Why?”
- Keep questions simple, specific and straightforward.

Once you have identified what you need to know and specified the questions you need to ask to get this information, the method for data collection should become clear. Think about how you will manage and process your data before you collect it.

Some methods of collecting data are...

- Interviews
- Questionnaires and surveys (e.g. using Survey Monkey)
- Focus Groups
- Case studies
- Feedback forms
- Complaints or suggestions slips
- Client records based on observations from professionals
- Organisational information such as data bases, budgets, etc.
- Videos and photographs
- Clinical test data (e.g. a Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire)

Select the best method for each of the information requirements listed in your evaluation plan. Make sure you are clear on why you are using a particular method, and how you will use the data it provides. Don’t make decisions about methods and data collection too soon. Choose the right tools for the job after you’ve done the planning.

When you have decided on the data you need and how you will collect it, write a detailed statement specifying: what data is to be collected; who will collect it; how and when they will collect it; and how it will be used.

Step seven… Analyse your data

When analysing the information it is important to revisit your evaluation plan and review your intended outcomes and indicators in order to focus the analysis on your original knowledge needs.
does not mean overlooking other meaningful information, but rather staying focused on what you need to know.

Your evaluation will most likely also reveal unintended strands of information that can be valuable in informing you about the program or practice and may suggest how you can modify or improve your services.

• With quantitative information, tally the total responses and percentage the individual responses. Present information in a table, graph or chart.
• For more complex analysis of the quantitative data, use a statistical analysis software package such as SPSS. This requires specific skills and you may need to get external help with this.
• With qualitative information, draw out the commonly occurring themes and categorise them. Use quotes to emphasise or capture a particular theme. Make sure you have permission to use the quotation, and indicate the type of person it is from, such as ‘program worker’ or ‘father’, etc.
• Establish the majority view, and summarise the views of participants by using ‘most people’ ‘a few suggested...’ etc. so that you represent all of your participants.
• Put the information into context, for example by comparing findings to what you expected, the program goals, etc.
• Based on your findings, make recommendations about the program or practice that can help staff plan future service development.
• Link recommendations with the findings to support your conclusions.

Step eight... Disseminate your findings

• Revisit your evaluation plan to identify your target audiences. This will help you determine how to target your findings to suit different information needs;
• Make sure the findings are prepared in a style and language to suit the audience;
• Be creative about how to disseminate your findings – use notice boards, the local paper, meetings, newsletters, websites, email outs, reports, workshops, etc.;
• Feedback findings to the organisation and to staff;
• Ensure your findings are available in time to be useful.
Definitions of terms used in this toolkit

Many of the terms used in this toolkit have variable definitions depending on the context in which the term is used. The definitions used here are generally found in resources that apply to the child and family welfare sector.

**Best practice**
Best practice is a practice that has been demonstrated by an (external) evaluation to be highly effective. Best practice is usually supported by research that demonstrates that the chosen intervention is the best current approach.

**Effective practice**
An effective practice is defined as a practice that has been demonstrated by an evaluation or monitoring system to be meeting its goals and aims and achieving its intended outcomes.

**Evaluation**
An evaluation is conducted at the end of the project or at significant points throughout the project and analyses and makes ‘value’ judgements about the merit and worth of the program or practice.

**Evidence**
Findings from research such as an evaluation, a journal article or report that describes how and why a particular practice or program is effective in achieving its desired outcomes, or unintended outcomes. Evidence is drawn from transparent and systematic research design, data collection and analysis processes (the research methodology).

**Evidence-based/informed practice**
Evidence-based practice is one that draws from existing research demonstrating evidence of effectiveness. That is, the program you are citing as evidence of effectiveness has been assessed or evaluated as meeting its goals.

**Findings**
What an analysis of the data tells you about the program or practice.

**Impact**
Impacts are the medium to long-term goals of the practice or program and the behaviour change that we see in clients after the intervention has finished, such as improved child parent relationships as a result of new parenting skills.
**Impact evaluations**
Impact evaluations measure the immediate and direct effect of the program on its participants. Impact evaluations explore whether the short-term aims of the program were met, such as whether participants demonstrate enhanced knowledge and skills by the end of the course.

**Indicator**
An indicator as described in this document is an aspect of the program or practice that can be measured such as the number of people attending a course. Measuring a range of indicators can provide information about whether the program is meeting its goals.

**Inputs**
Inputs are resources and the things we do to make the practice or program happen, such as funding, hiring staff, developing materials, etc.

**Literature**
Literature is considered a body of research that you have drawn on to design your program and choose for your intervention or practice.

**Monitoring**
Monitoring provides ongoing, systematic information about components of the practice or program over time.

**Outcomes**
Outcomes are what we are trying to achieve. Outcomes are measures of effectiveness that show that the program or practice is meeting its goals.

**Outcome evaluations**
Outcome evaluations look at whether the program meets its underlying goals. They focus on sustained, longer-term change such as whether the immediate aims of the project such as enhanced knowledge and skills, has led to a reduction in incidents of child maltreatment.

**Outputs**
Outputs are what we produce or deliver, such as a training program or mentoring service.

**Practice**
A practice is an activity, or set of related activities, that directly influence client outcomes.
Process evaluation
Evaluates the way in which a program is implemented or conducted. Process evaluations investigate the program's integrity and explore whether it is doing what it is intended to do in a consistent way. They do not look at whether the program is effective.

Program aims
The aim of the program or practice usually relates to the immediate change you would like to see, such as people attending a course and demonstrating skills and knowledge.

Program goal
The goal of the program relates to the longer-term change you would like to see, such as improved relationships as a result of skills and knowledge learned in a course.

Program objectives
Measurable or quantifiable statements of what you want to achieve that collectively represent the program goal.

Program logic
Program logic refers to the underpinning premises on which your program or practice is built, and links the aims and goals of the program with its short, medium and long-term outcomes, and the choice of interventions to achieve them.

Promising practice
A promising practice is a practice that can demonstrate it is meeting its goals but has not been externally evaluated.

Profile
In the context of a program or practice, a profile is a descriptive outline and summary of a program or practice that includes the essential components of the program or practice and how and why the program works.

Program
A program incorporates business and management activities, as well as practices, that together contribute to the goals of the organisation.

Research design
The research design relates to the choices of research methods and the degree to which they will produce reliable and valid findings as to whether the program is effective. Research designs that use methods known to produce ‘credible’ findings such as randomised control trials, are considered ‘rigorous’.
Bibliography and other useful materials


How to profile, monitor and evaluate innovative practice.
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