EARLY
INTERVENTION
FOUNDATION

10 steps for evaluation success

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Acknowledgments

About EIF

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) is an independent charity established in 2013 to champion and support the use of effective early intervention to improve the lives of children and young people at risk of experiencing poor outcomes.

Effective early intervention works to prevent problems occurring, or to tackle them head-on when they do, before problems get worse. It also helps to foster a whole set of personal strengths and skills that prepare a child for adult life.

EIF is a research charity, focused on promoting and enabling an evidence-based approach to early intervention. Our work focuses on the developmental issues that can arise during a child's life, from birth to the age of 18, including their physical, cognitive, behavioural and social and emotional development. As a result, our work covers a wide range of policy and service areas, including health, education, families and policing.

SUMMARY

To read the full report, please visit:
https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/10-steps-for-evaluation-success

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https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/10-steps-for-evaluation-success

Summary
10 steps for evaluation success

Evaluation matters. It is important to know whether the services or interventions you provide are beneficial for the children and families who most need them. Evaluation methods often feel daunting, however, especially when they are unfamiliar or require technical expertise. It is therefore not surprising that those involved in the delivery of interventions often feel uncertain about how to evaluate them.
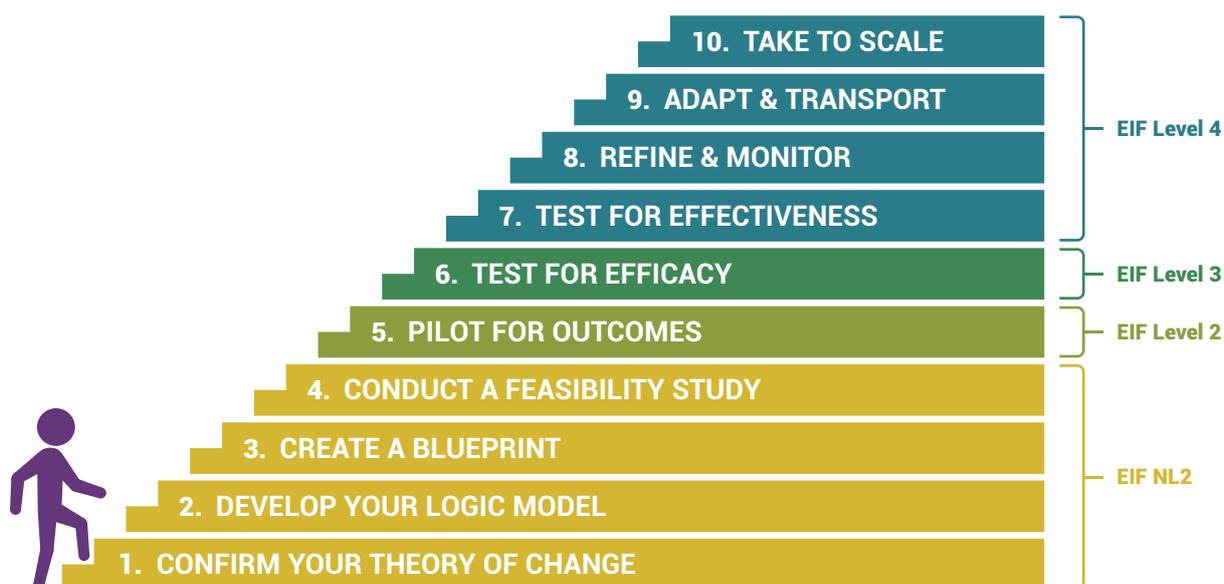
The EIF '10 steps for evaluation success' framework has been developed with these concerns in mind. Following on from the advice provided in *Evaluating early intervention programmes: Six common pitfalls, and how to avoid them*,[1] this guide describes how evaluation evidence can be used to turn a good idea into an intervention that 'works', as well as developing quality assurance systems so that interventions remain effective when offered at scale. While not all 10 of these steps are necessary or practical for every children's service, we believe they are useful for making a good intervention even better, especially when followed in the order we set out here. These steps are also useful for more established interventions to reconfirm that their model is making a positive difference as it is implemented.

We believe that this guide is not only useful for those who develop interventions and services for children and their families, but also for those who commission and deliver these interventions on the ground.

- **Steps 1 through 7** are particularly useful for understanding the potential of early intervention activities to improve meaningful child development outcomes and establishing their evidence base.

- **Steps 8 through 10** then describe how evaluation methods can be used to ensure that activities with established evidence remain effective as they are delivered in diverse contexts and populations.

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[1]   See https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/evaluating-early-intervention-programmes-six-common-pitfalls-and-how-to-avoid-them

Source: EIF

Step 1: Confirm your theory of change

The best interventions are underpinned by clear theories that can explain why they are needed and how they will work. In this first step you will learn how to:

- develop a theory of change that not only explains what your intervention will do, but *why* your intervention is important for children's development

- consult the scientific evidence base to make sure that your theory of change is rooted in what is known about children's development

- use participatory methods to confirm your intervention's theory change and involve the scientific evidence as an active 'participant' in the process.

Step 2: Develop your logic model

A logic model is a graphic representation of how an intervention's activities should support its intended child outcomes. In Step 2 you will learn how to:

- create a logic model that identifies how the intervention's resources, activities and participant outputs will support its intended child outcomes

- identify and explain the key assumptions underpinning the relationship between the intervention's resources, activities, outputs and outcomes specified in your logic model

- consider the external conditions necessary for your logic model to work.

Step 3: Create a blueprint

An intervention blueprint identifies specific learning objectives for each of the intervention's core activities and then links them to the intervention's short-term outcomes. In Step 3, you will learn how to:

- create an intervention blueprint that links each intervention activity to a specific learning objective
- describe how each learning objective will lead to the intervention's intended short- and long-term child and family outcomes
- develop engaging intervention activities and learning materials that support a wide-range of learning styles and needs.

Step 4: Conduct a feasibility study

A feasibility study (sometimes referred to as a process evaluation) tests whether the intervention can achieve its intended outputs. These outputs include the intervention's core activities, as well as its ability to recruit and retain its intended participants. In Step 4 you will learn how to:

- specify the intervention's core activities and identify the factors that support or interfere with their successful delivery
- use qualitative research methods to understand which factors contribute to the success of the intervention from the perspective of those delivering it
- use qualitative methods to understand how those receiving the intervention perceive the intervention's benefits and whether these perceptions are consistent with the intervention's original theory of change
- understand how best to recruit and retain participants
- develop systems for monitoring participant reach and core delivery targets
- apply methods for verifying user satisfaction
- track and document intervention costs.

Step 5: Pilot for outcomes

Pilot studies are relatively inexpensive evaluations which investigate an intervention's potential for improving its intended child outcomes. Pilot studies are particularly useful for determining which measures are most appropriate for testing child outcomes, as well as how to best recruit and retain a sufficiently large and representative study sample. In Step 5, you will learn:

- the importance of validated measures and how to select and use them to measure pre- and post-intervention change
- methods for determining an adequate sample size based on the intervention's anticipated effects
- methods for recruiting and retaining participants from the intervention's target population
- analytic methods for determining whether changes in child outcomes are statistically significant
- how to interpret the findings from pilot studies and use them for designing more rigorous evaluations.

Step 6: Test for efficacy

An efficacy study is a rigorous evaluation designed to determine if an intervention works under ideal circumstances. Efficacy studies do this through research designs that systematically reduce potential sources of study bias, so that causality can confidently be attributed to the intervention model. In Step 6 you will learn:

- how to determine whether an intervention is ready for an efficacy study
- the ways in which potential sources of biases can 'threaten' the validity of a study's findings
- how a comparison group and methods such as random assignment can be used to reduce potential sources of study bias
- strategies for reducing all sources of potential bias throughout the duration of the efficacy study
- strategies for increasing the likelihood that the study will take place under ideal circumstances
- how to interpret findings from efficacy studies
- what to do when a rigorously conducted efficacy study fails to observe any positive effect on a child outcome of interest.

Step 7: Test for effectiveness

An effectiveness study is a rigorous evaluation designed to determine if the positive child outcomes observed in the efficacy study can be replicated in real-world circumstances. From the perspective of EIF, it is also useful if an effectiveness study (or previous efficacy study) can consider whether the intervention can be confidently associated with child benefits that are sustainable for a year or longer. In Step 7, we describe:

- how effectiveness studies can be conducted in real-world circumstances
- methods for measuring change for a year or longer
- how effectiveness studies can be used to understand for whom and under what circumstances the intervention has its greatest impact
- how to interpret disappointing findings observed in effectiveness studies.

Step 8: Refine & monitor

Once an intervention has confirmed that it can provide benefits for children that are meaningful from a public health perspective and are sustainable within real-world settings, further testing is required to develop quality assurance systems to ensure that these benefits remain replicable. In Step 8, you will learn:

- how evaluation methods can be incorporated into the running of an intervention to monitor its quality on an ongoing basis

- how to monitor child outcomes on an ongoing basis

- how monitoring systems can be used to determine when an intervention is appropriate for an individual child's needs or when referral to other services may be necessary

- how to rapid cycle evaluations and micro-trials can be used to test and refine an intervention's active ingredients

- evaluation methodologies for testing an intervention's workforce requirements.

Step 9: Adapt & transport

As interventions are taken to scale, the diversity of the contexts in which they will be offered will naturally increase. When interventions are 'transported' into new cultures, substantial changes are particularly necessary. In this step, you will learn how evaluation methods can be used to:

- determine the extent to which intervention contents are relevant within new cultures and countries

- determine whether the intervention's intended child outcomes are upheld through ongoing piloting

- make decisions about the extent to which interventions developed in one country are needed and will 'fit' within the context of another.

Step 10: Take to scale

While taking an intervention to scale is the last step in our 10 Steps framework, it does not mean that the intervention's evaluation journey is over. Instead, it signifies that evaluation cycles have been successfully integrated into the intervention's delivery systems to verify that it will remain effective when offered at scale. In Step 10, we describe all the quality assurance processes necessary for offering interventions at scale, including those which help local systems determine if they are ready to offer an intervention in a way that will ensure that it remains effective. In Step 10, you will learn:

- methods for assessing local system readiness

- the role of the intervention provider for informing system readiness

- the ways in which technical support can be used to inform system readiness and install interventions within local systems

- methods for offering and using technical support, including licensing, purveyors and independent intermediaries.