

Guidance on Evaluating Projects

Sciencewise project funding is provided by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS). It is a condition of funding that projects are independently evaluated, and therefore proposals for funding must include a budget for independent evaluation. The Sciencewise programme evaluation lead can provide detailed advice on commissioning these evaluations, which need to meet the programme, as well as commissioning body's objectives.

This document describes the requirements for evaluating public dialogue projects co-funded by the Sciencewise programme, as well as key questions and principles for evaluation, that need to be met in all circumstances. However, the way in which any individual evaluation approaches these requirements, questions and principles is not circumscribed, and innovation and experimentation are encouraged.

1. Sciencewise programme aims and objectives for evaluating public dialogue projects

The Sciencewise programme aims to improve UK policy making involving science, technology and innovation through the use of public dialogue.

The aim of evaluating the dialogue projects co-funded through the programme is to contribute to the programme's overall aim by providing an independent assessment of the impacts and quality of the dialogue project as a whole, including the design, delivery, reporting and governance of the dialogue activities.

The objectives of these evaluations are to:

- Gather and present objective and robust evidence of the nature and quality of the impacts, achievements and activities of the project in order to come to conclusions.
- Identify lessons from the project to support the design and delivery of future public dialogue projects.

2. Six Key Questions

The following six key questions must be answered when evaluating a Sciencewise dialogue project:

- **Objectives.** Has the dialogue met its objectives? Were the objectives set the right ones?
- **Credibility.** How and why were the dialogue design, delivery and reporting appropriate to the context and objectives, and credible with those expected to use the results?
- **Quality.** Has the dialogue met standards of good practice (according to the Sciencewise Quality Framework and Guiding Principles)? What took place, how, when, where, who with and why? How successful has the governance of the project been, including the role of stakeholders, oversight groups, the commissioning body and the Sciencewise programme?
- **Impacts.** Has the dialogue achieved the expected (and any unexpected) impacts on policy and decisions, on organisational change and learning, and on all those involved? What new insights have been obtained (including on tackling potential social and ethical risks)? Who has seen the results and how have the results been used? What has been

the value of the project to those involved, including the extent to which those involved have been satisfied with the dialogue outcomes and process?

- **Costs and benefits.** What was the balance overall of the costs and benefits of the dialogue (basic costs compared to benefits including potential future costs saved)?
- **Lessons.** What are the lessons for future public dialogue projects (including from what worked well and less well)?

The evaluation should include formative and summative elements.

- **Formative:** The evaluator will be expected to use evidence gathered throughout the project to support the delivery of a high quality project.
- **Summative:** Identifying the impacts of and lessons from the governance, management, design, delivery, outputs and outcomes of the dialogue project overall. This requires analysis based on detailed evidence using the quantitative and qualitative data that will need to be collected by the evaluation. The focus should be on identifying the impacts of the project and how the design, delivery, governance and outputs contributed to these.

The evaluation is not intended to assess the personal performance of those involved.

It is expected that there will be three main stages of dialogue project evaluation:

- **Baseline assessment.** Early review of the specific policy context for the project, governance and management arrangements and the expectations of those involved about the likely achievements and impacts of the project on policy decisions.
- **Interim assessment of design and delivery.** Review of the quality of the design and delivery of dialogue activities, based on evidence from the evaluation research, including observation of events and feedback from public and other participants (e.g. specialists and other stakeholders), and the role of governance and management arrangements. This will feed into the final assessment of the project, and final evaluation reporting.
- **Final assessment of the project overall and reporting.** Final research and analysis following the dissemination of the dialogue project reports to gain further feedback from those involved (e.g. the oversight group, commissioning body and others). These new data, together with data from earlier stages, should be used to produce the final evaluation report.

The final evaluation report should address all six key questions outlined above and cover all dialogue project activities, including:

- Preliminary activities (e.g. desk research)
- Governance (e.g. oversight groups) and stakeholder engagement
- Project management (both commissioning body and dialogue delivery contractor)
- Public dialogue activities (e.g. sampling, recruitment and number of participants; number, location and design of events; the main questions addressed by the public; quality of information provided; scientists and other specialists involved)
- Any other related public engagement activities (e.g. polls or online surveys), and any other activities affecting the impacts, value and credibility of the dialogue results
- Report and reporting (including methods of analysis / recording) from the project, including to public participants
- All impacts (achieved and expected), and all dissemination and use of dialogue results

- Reflective learning, drawing out the main lessons of the evaluation and how these might inform future dialogues

The Sciencewise programme team will undertake a fourth stage of evaluation, following up the longer term impacts of and lessons from projects.

3. Principles for evaluating projects

Evaluations of Sciencewise funded projects should conform to the following principles:

- **Starting early:** and continuing throughout the detailed design and delivery of the project
- **Clarity:** of the purpose, scope, approach, levels of participation in and limits of the evaluation
- **Rigorous and fit for purpose:** using appropriate methodologies
- **Constructively critical:** seeking understanding and learning rather than apportioning blame
- **Confidential:** respecting the sensitivity of data collected, and avoiding personal or reputational harm
- **Avoiding conflicts of interest:** including privileged access to information not being used for future competitive advantage
- **Proportionate:** with sufficient resources and in sufficient depth to meet evaluation objectives
- **Transparent:** the evaluation should be explained to participants and stakeholders, and evaluation findings published
- **Practical:** evaluation data sought can be collected, assessed and reported within timescale and budget
- **Useful:** evaluation findings should be reported in accessible language and in a form that is useful for learning and to provide evidence of impacts, what works, and lessons for the future
- **Independent:** from commissioners, funders, delivery team and participants
- **Credible:** status and reputation of evaluator, and use of effective evaluation frameworks and methodology

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