Effective funders, thriving communities

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PROJECT GROUP MEETING

21.11.13 at London Funders

Participants

Alice	**Dabrowska**	The Cranfield Trust
Premila	**Gilligan**	Peabody
Caroline	**Howe**	Big Lottery Fund
Ross	**Neilson**	Cabinet Office **(Presenter)**
Dorothy	**Newton**	Richard Cloudesley's Charity
Thelfa	**Quick**	London Community Foundation
Nissa	**Ramsay**	Comic Relief
Gurmej	**Rihal**	London Borough of Hackney
Kate	**Smith**	Safer London Foundation
Jane	**Steele**	Paul Hamlyn Foundation **(Presenter)**
Anya	**Stern**	London Community Foundation
Gemma	**Tighe**	Mind
Craig	**Tomlinson**	BBC Children in Need **(Chair)**
Alex	**Van Vilet**	New Philanthropy Capital
Tim	**Wilson**	The City Bridge Trust

In attendance

Becky	**Green**	London Funders
David	**Warner**	London Funders

Apology for absence was received from Kiran Patel, London Borough of Camden.

Notes of the previous meeting on 17 September 2013 were accepted as an accurate record. Craig welcomed everyone to the meeting. Participants introduced themselves and their organisations.

The What Works Network: using and generating evidence to inform decisions

Ross Neilson, Cabinet Office

Ross' slides are available here.

Ross began with a brief outline of the What Works Network, a network of independent evidence centres which specialise in synthesizing data in different areas. The What Works centres will summarise and share research with local decision makers and engage with central government to inform national decision making and support evidence-based policy making. Ross outlined the background to the network by highlighting the work produced by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). NICE routinely uses evidence to inform decisions in health spending, and the guidelines produced are widely respected and internationally used. The What Works Network would like to emulate and use the NICE model in other areas of society to review what works and what doesn't work. There is a demand for clear summaries of evidence that are well presented and widely shared to inform public services. This would involve encouraging the sharing of information and improving the availability and accessibility of existing research and raising the quality of research literature.

The Network was launched by ministers in March and the first findings are expected to be released in early 2014. Each What Works evidence centre will be responsible for distilling and sharing the evidence in each thematic area by generating a summary of evidence synthesis, translating the evidence into a common set of standards, sharing the evidence in a format that can be understood and also promoting good evidence.

Ross outlined four of the six evidence centres:
What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth – This centre aims to significantly improve the use of evidence in the design and delivery of policies for local economic growth and employment. This will look at local issues and areas which can have a tangible impact on informing local investors
What Works Centre for Crime Reduction – This is hosted by the College of Policing, which is also independent. The centre's role will be to identify the best available evidence on approaches to reducing crime and potential savings. Its focus will be on mapping and assessing the quality of the evidence base, ranking interventions and getting the results into the hands of decision makers, including Police and Crime Commissioners.
What Works Centre for Early Intervention – This centre was created following one of the key recommendations of Graham Allen's Early Intervention report and works with 20 local areas, where they collate, synthesise, rank and disseminate the evidence on what works in early intervention.
What Works Centre for Ageing – This is due to launch in 2014 in partnership with the Big Lottery Fund to test different initiatives on the basis of evidencing.

Ross noted how there is a need to reflect and build on the evidence base and the government is trying to practice this. The evidence will be generated from these centres and the information transmitted. Historically, the government has been somewhat protective of data sets and there is a significant agenda happening that requires greater transparency. A focus on evidence can be seen in the Educational Endowment Foundation, a £120million grant to test how to decrease educational inequality, where spending initially went to reviewing the evidence base prior to investing. The toolkit on their website demonstrates a systematic review where evidence was drawn together in a simple framework using the University of Maryland skills, to look at different interventions. An intelligent evidence based approach will then look at how strong the evidence base is and open up dialogue to analyse the results. Prior to this, there was little discussion of the evidence base in making decisions on school funding.

Each What Works Network centre is tasked with actively involving the evidence user and working with them in a very outward facing approach. Where there are gaps in evidence, universities and the academic community can be encouraged to be involved and fill the gap. Ross emphasized the importance of the funder input into this evidence base and focused on two main questions of how funders can be able to contribute to the collection of evidence and also how the outputs can help funding decisions. The What Works Network would welcome discussion and input and Ross would be happy for subsequent comments.

Q & A

How will each centre decide what will and won't be examined and how will the evidence be used by decision makers?
The National Advisor of the What Works Network is David Halpern, who links the centres to the government and helps them to work together on cross cutting issues, for example the Educational Endowment Foundation could also measure other outcomes such as crime and the council involvement gives the opportunity for multiple stakeholders.

An important aspect of the network is that they will work with the users to determine the key issues, for example the Centre for Crime will speak to the police and the crime commissioners to determine what they would like to find out. Each centre will determine its own specific focus. The results should then align to the decision makers.

The What Works Centres are rigorous and impartial and aim to provide guidelines that, like NICE, will be widely respected and followed. Evidence does form only one part of the decision making process, but if this can increase the use of evidence then that is a positive move.

Is there a gateway for including learning that may not be seen as robust?
Ross encouraged the use of research and evaluation on all levels and of starting a journey to improve evidencing. Project Oracle can help organisation to audit the quality of their evidence.

How can we encourage people to use the evidence?
There are many layers to access, for example, in education while not making the decisions, the teacher can use the evidence. Ross reflected on a future change of culture to encourage everyone to add to the evidence base. There is an opportunity to learn in every classroom and there should be a better understanding of how to support that by looking at the use of evaluation. The cabinet office is looking at other areas to support this and what can be done about the evidence gap.

How can evidence be contributed?
Each centre is responsible for linking into users and communicating with the relevant people in each local authority, communicating to the senior level and cutting across the electoral. For funders to contribute with their own evidence, there are hopes that in future these can be uploaded and submitted on the website, but currently you can contribute by contacting Ross or looking on the What Works Network website.

Seeking feedback: The Paul Hamlyn Foundation
Jane Steele, The Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Jane's slides are available here.

Jane outlined the background to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's decision to use a survey of grantees and applicants as feedback. These surveys were carried out by an independent agency, the Center for Effective Philanthropy, early in 2013 and involved a survey of grantees (a repetition of the same exercise conducted in 2009) and also a survey of unsuccessful applicants to the Foundation. The exercise has provided the Paul Hamlyn Foundation with rich data about their grantees' and applicants' experiences of working with them, about processes and the support provided. The results were benchmarked against their own earlier performance and also against 12 other comparable Foundations. As more foundations join the Centre and undertake surveys, then the data set improves.

A selection of responses to the survey questions are set out on the slides and the full findings are published on the Paul Hamlyn Foundation website. The results are presented on a scale from 0-7 whilst also showing the place within the cohort. How to interpret the results is explained on this handout.

The grantee perception report survey covered four areas: the impact on fields and organisations; funder-grantee relationships; grant processes and assistance beyond the grant. This measured the strength of the relationship and where the relationship was stronger. Respondents who received other 'non-monetary assistance' on top of their funding, reported a greater level of satisfaction overall. Working closely with applicants does add value. The time spent per application rose during the period 2009-13, however, the average grant size also increased, and the ratio of funds granted to hours spent applying has remained constant.

The applicant perception report survey covered four areas: understanding of declined applicants; interactions and communications; application process and feedback and future implications. These responses broadly showed that the further an applicant progresses, the more beneficial they find the application processes. Unsurprisingly, grantees rate them higher than unsuccessful applicants, but perhaps less predictably, those that are unsuccessful at the second stage of our process rate them more highly than those whose applications are declined at the first stage. This would suggest that stronger feedback is required for unsuccessful applicants, particularly those who are turned down early in the process.

The Center for Effective Philanthropy have observed key points that are important to drive change and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation have made time for discussions in order to drive change effectively. The survey was carried out in February/ March 2013 with the results available at the end of June 2013. At this point, presentations are being carried out to the board and to staff with internal discussion on its implications. Results have been fed back to respondents and the findings published, and the next step will be to consider the priorities of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. An initial improvement of the way that feedback is given is one change that can be made fairly quickly. They are working on compiling a set of clear common reasons for rejection to make the standard email more helpful to rejected applicants, and will also make this available at the application stage to support them in the process. A strategic review will also feed into how to improve the relationship with grantees and increase interaction.

Q&A

What is the process involved in developing the survey?
Jane was positive about the process of using the Center for Effective Philanthropy as an independent agency to carry out the survey. The process was relatively cost-effective, costing $32,000 for the grantees survey and $10,000 for the applicants survey.

Creating the survey involved providing a set of contact details, which the Center for Effective Philanthropy then reviewed and ensured there were no duplications. Together they could then work on some customised questions and refinements of the questions. After an initial email from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to introduce and prepare people for the survey, the survey was emailed out directly from the agency and the results collected. The survey took about 20minutes to be completed. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Center for Effective Philanthropy worked together in order to interpret the results and provide the context. The results are both qualitative and quantitative and the data can also be broken down further to represent reactive grant making, strategic or even per individual member of staff if requested.

How useful was the comparison to the cohort?
The cohort to be compared to was not the most useful part, as despite efforts to find the most relevant organisations, there is a way to go before there will be a very strong similar group. Historic data of previous surveys though was very useful as a benchmark.

Jane emphasized that the Paul Hamlyn Foundation intend to use this information very thoroughly to influence decisions and strategy. The more UK funders that are encouraged to conduct similar activities then a more useful benchmark group can be developed to increase learning. The group widely agreed to the value of anonymous surveys in being a truer refection of opinion.

More information about the Paul Hamlyn Foundation surveys can be found here.

Next meetings

The next meeting will take place on 27th February, 2013