



## RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PROJECT GROUP MEETING

5.06.14 at Paul Hamlyn Foundation

### Participants

Nicola	Bristow	Oak Philanthropy (UK) Limited
Sioned	Churchill	Trust for London
Jessica	Farrand	London Borough of Camden
Premila	Gilligan	Peabody
Mary	Locke	Charity Bank
Robert	Mee	London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Elizabeth	Prescott	Imperial College Healthcare Charity
Nissa	Ramsay	Comic Relief
Nicole	Schmiedefeld	BBC Children in Need
Craig	Tomlinson	BBC Children in Need <b>(Chair)</b>
Ann	Wynne	London Borough of Camden

### In attendance

Becky	<b>Green</b>	London Funders
David	Warner	London Funders

**Apologies for absence** were received from Gurmej Rihal, London Community Foundation, Jemma Grieve Combes, City Bridge Trust, Ellie Francis-Brophy, London Borough of Hounslow, Angela Hall, London Borough of Waltham Forest, Emma Blackwell, Sported, Chris Wignall, Sported, Hamid Vaghefian, Sported, Peter Argall, Comic Relief.

**Notes of the previous meeting** on 27 February 2014 were accepted as an accurate record.

Craig welcomed everyone to the meeting, and explained a last minute change to the agenda. Sported were unable to attend this meeting and will present at a future date. This session would give an opportunity to look at emerging developments in the world of evaluation, learning & research that we'd like to learn more about.

### Plan, do, assess, review

The group introduced themselves and engaged in an open discussion about their experiences, learning and challenges, both strategic and practical:

### General comments and discussion points

- The possibility of creating a space where people can give honest feedback about what hasn't worked for them and about how the funder has performed. There may be work to be done to encourage a VCS conversation to tell an honest story to funders in a way which feels safer.
- The language used in the sector in creating certain frameworks can raise the bar unnecessarily and can have a negative impact on commissioning by creating a negative mood.
- It is difficult to make the decision as to whether to invest in those who are doing it well or in helping others improve.
- The difficulty of dealing with many streams of funding and the challenges that this can present to evaluating them appropriately.
- Discussion on shared measurements and also shared definitions.

### **Considerations when designing a programme or evaluation plan**

- What makes a good evaluation, research and dissemination plan? You need top level knowledge to know what you want to change and how. It is challenging to create a whole system of learning and evaluation.
- Who should be involved in the planning stage of the programme? The cycle is very important so that decisions are informing and being informed by evidence.
- It's challenging to find the impact and evaluation methods that best fit the programme, and also to design programmes which are more evaluative, and for others to take that into account.
- Common language has to be taken into account during the planning stage, and having a great flexibility to accept existing delivery processes and monitoring.
- The group discussed considering how research companies deal with their data and coding, and whether this information would help
- Summarising and sharing learning. Identifying why you are doing this, and who for
- The importance of being realistic in the difference you are likely to make. The problem can sometimes be greater than the resources you have available.

### **The importance of organisational infrastructure**

- Establishing what the organisation wants and going through a theory of change to challenge their assumptions and build an internal framework can help to plan an appropriate evaluation process.
- It's difficult to be able to understand the impact type level, and what you want to say is different for every level and every part of an organisation.
- Looking at the infrastructure and how the information threads through all departments.
- Increasingly, there has to be greater transparency in organisations. This, and political influences in public sector organisations, can mean evaluation is being tested in new ways, and this takes planning.

### **Data collection**

- Not all good organisations will have good evidence. It may be more about the system than the data they have and maybe all you need to know is that the organisation is a learning one and is evolving and planning. For some, it may be better to sit down and to discuss how they learn and what is happening.
- Improving data collection is a challenge, and the use of online monitoring forms.
- The pros and cons of qualitative reports and conversations.
- The language used to talk to grantees is very important, as they can be very hesitant to talk about their 'failures'. A question phrased 'what didn't work so well' can be better to encourage honesty, yet the answers are still direct.
- Asking the right questions
- Online reporting and the use of evaluation forms. The focus on quantitative and qualitative data and where each is most useful. Many grantees appreciate using their own language both in the evaluation and also to code themselves, but there are obvious challenges in this.
- It is challenging to know when to look for robust data and evidence or when it's ok to settle for 'okay' data and evidence. It's important to monitor expectations and to make sure that data isn't wasted.
- It's hard to know how to choose the 'right' data, ensuring that it is sizeable and of good quality for spotting and assessing trends.

### **Reviewing programmes and evaluation**

- There's an interest in methods to spot trends within data and influence both internal and external strategy.
- It's challenging to ensure that evaluation is used to feed into strategy, planning and programmes going forward, rather than just being used to find good PR stories.
- Everyone in the organisation has a different understanding of what the programmes should achieve and what the evaluation will show. Evaluation can flag up when the organisational system

- isn't working.
- How to use the evaluation and share with others to make it meaningful. Working out what approaches are replicable and scaleable.

Craig thanked everyone for their contributions and suggestions, which will help London Funders to target future speakers and topics based on the thoughts and interests of people and organisations supported by this forum.

### **Next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014