EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS:
a guide

The Health Foundation

There are two different types of evaluation relevant to communications in health care improvement:

1 Process evaluation: how effective are our project's communications?

2 Impact evaluation: how effective has our project been in meeting its objectives and how can we demonstrate this to secure further funding/spread?

Used well, process evaluation should keep your communications activity on track and ensure that you are using your resources to the best effect.

Impact evaluation relates to your project as a whole, but it becomes vital to your communications when your project reaches the 'spread' phase (ie when you wish to secure recommissioning or further funding) and you will need to clearly demonstrate the project's impact.

Deciding how you will measure and communicate that impact at the beginning of a project will ensure that you gather the right materials as you go along, and make the spread process easier at the end.

See the full Communications in health care improvement toolkit at www.health.org.uk/commskit

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Process evaluation

Use this process to check that your communications activities are on track and delivering the desired results. Activity can include the following:

MEASUREMENT EXAMPLE	METHOD OF EVALUATION
Setting clear objectives with measurable targets against them.	Set baseline targets and review progress at agreed intervals. This could include measurements such as: number of events held and attendees secured, media articles generated, twitter followers gained and number of re-tweets, e-news subscribers signed up, etc.
Are your agreed communications activities on track and on time?	Use the communications plan to plan activities and set a time against their delivery. Review at agreed intervals.
Are your messages being delivered and understood in the way you planned?	Research with your target audience.
Are materials that you have produced being used and in the way you anticipated? Were they read/used/passed to others?	Research with your target audience.

The purpose of process evaluation is to improve your communications. So the measurement and evaluation takes place over the course of the project and any learning is fed back into your communications to make them more effective.

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Impact evaluation

Impact evaluation determines to what extent your project has been effective. It is not purely a communications activity and is likely to be covered in your overall project management.

The following two principles should help ensure that what is measured and evaluated is suitable for communications use.

Can you answer and show evidence, in a clear way, for the following:

- What change(s) happened?

- How, when and in which groups did changes happen?

- What aspects of the intervention contributed to these changes?

- What aspects of the intervention could be changed to improve management of similar future programmes?

- How cost-efficient was the intervention?

Do you have a range of ways to demonstrate impact?

Some of the people you want to engage will respond to quantitative data (statistics, numerical measurements, etc). However, some will respond to more anecdotal evidence. Real human stories that demonstrate a key objective or outcome of your project can be very powerful in a health care improvement setting.

Previous project leaders report that something as simple as before and after interviews with patients and carers can be powerful tools for demonstrating a project's impact.

From the outset, think about how you will identify and gather different ways of demonstrating your impact. You will then be able to communicate these at crucial times in the project's life – right through to applications for additional funding or project extension.

Writing into your communications strategy

Decide on what you are going to measure and how, for both process and impact evaluation, and summarise in the communications strategy.

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