

Claiming an evidence-base for services and interventions

Funders often seek to fund programmes and interventions that are evidence-based. Evidence-based programmes encourage accountability to stakeholders and any other supporters and assist in the reviewing of activities and strategies.

So, what does it mean if a programme is evidence-based?

A programme can be evidenced-based in various ways:

- **Our evidence:** We have run this programme before and collected evidence to show that it worked for this group. For example, expanding a project that has already been run and evaluated to a new geographical location.
- **Similar organisation evidence:** Another organisation like us has run this programme before and collected evidence to show it would work (although not experimentally tested it), e.g. adopting a specific model or approach that has already been implemented and evaluated to some degree by another similar charity or organisation.
- **Broad research evidence:** We've reviewed the research base and found strong evidence from research that the approach we are taking can work for the client group we are working with, e.g. a project may conduct a literature and concept review in order to build up the best possible fit for the specific needs of their programme beneficiaries and locales.
- **'What works' evidence:** This approach has been subject to randomised control trials (RCT) where it has been tested with a control group (e.g. Triple P), usually in another setting, and we believe that our client group and context are similar enough for the same approach to work here. This can include a rollout of a programme model.
- **Innovation in the evidence-gap:** Where there is no clear and appropriate evidence of what works for a particular client group, a programme can contribute to the evidence by experimenting with an approach that looks like it might work (from the available evidence). In these cases, piloting, collecting evidence and reviewing an intervention can count as evidence-based working, as long a clear picture of the gap in evidence is set out. Through these practices, even new and innovative projects can be 'evidence-based' by laying the foundations for future research.

This briefing is based on findings from a meta-analysis of project reports by voluntary sector organisations in the Early Years Early Action fund, carried out by the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships and Evaluation Support Scotland on behalf of Inspiring Scotland.

If the methods for collecting, assessing or reporting data (either by projects or in the research) lack transparency, verifiability, or clarity, the reporting of outcomes and impact may be compromised and not robust enough to claim an evidence-base from. This can be helped by following the following guidelines:

In the early stages

- DO**
- think carefully about how to incorporate data collection and analysis and evaluation tools into the programme from day one
 - research into the tools of measurement you plan to use to ensure they fit with your project and client group

When reporting on project implementation and outcomes

- DO**
- provide a clear explanation and layout of the programme's structure and services
 - disclose from where all data was gathered (e.g. a breakdown of children's behavioural changes should state how such information about their behaviour was obtained)
 - attach copies of data collection forms (questionnaires, surveys, etc.) as appendices if possible
 - use quotes from stakeholders that clearly link to and support the project outcome being discussed
 - explain any gaps in data
 - include the numbers of completed forms (feedback forms, baseline surveys, service completion questionnaires)
 - list the sample size when using graphs and charts, and make sure the numbers are all accurate
 - only use percentages when they aid comparison and always give numerical values for all percentages (e.g. 'of the 40 respondents, 20% (8) agreed ...')
 - give identification for every quote, even when anonymous (e.g. 'parent of participant' or 'education professional')
 - include all attachments and appendices referenced in the body of the report

- DON'T**
- leave out methodological details: data collection and analysis, scaling techniques and measurement tools, and feedback processes need to be fully explained
 - use graphs or charts that do not contain numbers UNLESS the goal is to demonstrate how different elements relate to each other proportionately (e.g. the relative distribution of reasons for referrals to a programme)
 - mention a theory, approach, or model without explaining, at least briefly, what it entails
 - gesture towards research that supports or informs the programme's approach and interventions without giving at least one reference
 - state that an outcome or indicator was 'achieved' or 'improved' without explaining how this is defined by the programme
 - confuse 'target achievement' with 'outcome achievement', e.g. the number of clients participating in the programme rather than the numbers achieving the desired outcomes
 - ignore or hide evidence of when programme was less successful as this gives you valuable information about what you might need to change in referral arrangements or programme design. Including what did not work in your report can give your positive evidence more credibility
 - use jargon and unexplained abbreviations