TSRF

Championing the use of third sector research evidence in Scotland

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Scottish Third Sector Research Forum

Volunteer Scotland and Crisis present

DO's & DON'Ts

"Using research from elsewhere"

This resource distils learning and key messages from presentations by Volunteer Scotland and Crisis and discussions held with the Research Forum at its meeting in May 2017.

Research from other UK jurisdictions and countries can help you:

See the bigger picture:
particularly when you try to tackle social issues like homelessness, health inequalities, volunteering, etc., and identify commonalities and root causes for the issue.

Inject creativity and innovation in your work:
by collaborating with other organisations and researchers operating in different contexts you can share learning and bounce ideas off each other, inspiring you to look beyond your immediate reality.

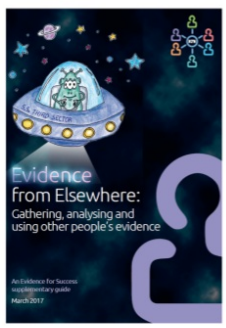
Understand what works and doesn't work across the UK and why:
it can help you understand the impact that policies have on complex social issues and track what happens across different areas as a result of different policy choices. It can also help you accelerate your learning about policy and practice developments in other areas (and how these potentially could affect the people you work with).

Benchmark your organisations against others:
learning about what happens elsewhere can help you identify opportunities for improvement and innovation.

Avoid duplication and save money:
why reinvent the wheel? Looking at what others have done in terms of research methods can be helpful to discard those methods that are unlikely to produce the evidence that you need, or might lead to less robust evidence.

Check out Carnegie UK Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation's research: "Evidence Exchange: Learning from social policy across the UK": https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk

If you are looking for practical guidance and tips on how to gather, analyse and use other people's evidence check out the Knowledge Translation Network's guide: "Evidence from Elsewhere" at: www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk



Turn the page for: Do's and don'ts of using research from elsewhere

DOs

Think about why you want to do the research and who the results are for (e.g. funders may ask how the results from your intervention compare with similar interventions in the UK).

Engage with partners in other jurisdictions, especially those who own the data. This 'gets them on board' as allies and ensures a 'no surprises' approach.

Use your organisation's contacts to 'get through the door'; choose people with existing relationships to make contact with those who need to hear what you have to say.

Collaborate with other organisations, think tanks and academics in a mix of fields - getting new inspiration can be helpful.

Be objective and critically appraise your own and others' data.

Keep it factual.

Adapt it to the local/national context and key audience(s).

Give yourself time to consult with key partners as this can be time-consuming.

And if you compare results from surveys across UK jurisdictions:

Check how the definitions of key terms and the questions you are comparing are worded.

Consider whether a direct comparison is possible, taking into account sampling and methodology. Sometimes all you can evidence is a direction of travel (assuming all parties collected data robustly).

Ensure that your data collection and analysis are as robust as possible. They have to be credible and stand up to robust scrutiny by third parties.

Ask those who are responsible for the survey results you use to check your analysis and contribute to its interpretation - they know their data better than you!

Prepare for some challenging conversations during your research analysis with others that own data.

Reach out to those responsible for the surveys and explore whether you can harmonise the research model including questions, sample and methodology, to be able to compare data in the future. If different methods have been used, could you agree on methods for future surveys?

DON'Ts

Create knowledge for knowledge sake.
DO research for a purpose – to achieve change or a specific goal/outcome.

Use others' research results without questioning how they were obtained.

Be afraid of reaching out to researchers.

Think that you have to use research from all the UK or whole jurisdictions - DO use research from areas that are similar to your context.

Compare directly your results to those of other local or regional areas, unless you can be sure the contexts are similar. For example, London is quite a distinct context from other regions in England and elsewhere in the UK.

Focus only on positive outcomes; consider missing data and think about what changes need to happen to address these.

Overuse episodic stories and case studies which focus on a single individual to illustrate key messages - systematic stories are more effective when it comes to securing the public's support for policy change.

Download this infographic from: www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk

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