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10 things to think about when…

Selecting interventions and organisations for replication

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Introduction

This document is aimed at those interested in commissioning and/or funding the replication of social interventions.

Replication means taking an existing intervention that has proven to work in one context and implementing it elsewhere, either with different target groups, in a different location, or in a new organisational setting.

This might imply implementation is easy, but the learning from one of the UK's first and largest replication programmes, Big Lottery Fund's Realising Ambition programme, is that successful replication requires careful consideration of the nature of the intervention, organisational needs and preconditions, and the context into which the intervention is replicated.

This document therefore aims to help commissioners and funders make the best decisions about selecting interventions or organisations for replication.

A second document "10 things to think about when supporting interventions for replication" is designed to support commissioners and funders to think about support they may need to offer to those funded to replicate an intervention.

A note on terminology:

We have used the term 'intervention' to mean a service or project that has been designed to achieve a particular aim.

The term 'organisation' refers to the entire organisation that wants to replicate that intervention. For example, an organisation may wish to replicate an intervention that has been designed and delivered elsewhere (and by a different organisation).

Some databases of evidence-based social interventions

The **What Works Network** is made up of seven independent What Works Centres covering health and social care, educational achievement, crime reduction, early intervention, local economic growth, improved quality of life for older people and wellbeing. The centres: collate existing evidence on how effective policy programmes and practices are; produce high quality synthesis reports and systematic reviews; and assess how effective policies and practices are against an agreed set of outcomes.
https://www.gov.uk/what-works-network#the-what-works-network

NICE publishes evidence assessments to support decision making.
http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance

The **Campbell Collaboration** is an international research network that produces systematic reviews of the effects of social interventions in Crime & Justice, Education, International Development, and Social Welfare.
http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/about_us/index.php

The **Allen Review** examines the benefits of early intervention and identifies the most effective programmes by applying rigorous standards of evidence to assessing their effectiveness. The report includes an evidence-based practice database.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/284086/early-intervention-next-steps2.pdf

10 things to think about when identifying interventions and organisations suitable for replication

1. Why replicate?

A number of drivers can motivate replication, such as achieving scale, financial gains, and learning (for service or organisational development). **Being clear about why the investment is made will help with deciding what kind of intervention to choose.**

If the motivation is **scale**, it will pay to invest in interventions that are implemented in institutional settings such as schools, universities or other places where a large number of beneficiaries can be reached with relative ease.

If the motivation is **financial gain**, availability of cost benefit data of an intervention should drive the decision making process.

If the motivation is **learning** about whether replication is a good strategy for service delivery, then funding a diverse set of interventions with different strengths of evidence behind them would be appropriate.

It is of course possible to aim at achieving all three aims. Ultimately, however, the investment decision will face a trade-off between scale (beneficiary reach) and learning. Management arrangements, potential support to replicating organisations and evaluations will need to be shaped differently depending on where emphasis is placed.

2. How many interventions should be funded?

The motivation for replicating will determine the number and kind of interventions that are funded.

If the aim is mostly scale, then it might be prudent to fund a smaller number of projects that have a 'fit-for-purpose' evidence base on impact (i.e. that deliver best quality evidence given the nature of the intervention and the subject area they address) and organisational conditions supportive of replication (further details on 'fit-for-purpose' evidence are in section 4 of this document). Particular attention will also have to be paid to the setting of the intervention and timing issues attached to those. For instance, replicating interventions in schools can achieve scale but to succeed it needs to be planned carefully so that it matches curriculum development activities.

If there is a strong learning objective for replicating, then investing in interventions with a less well-developed evidence base and model will generate insights into their replicability. This, however, is likely to require supporting interventions and organisations around logic modelling, manualisation, fidelity tools, monitoring and evaluation.

3. What interventions to fund for replication?

Simple interventions are easier to replicate than complicated ones. A straightforward design, clearly explained, with an articulation of the logic model underpinning it and a manual explaining how it should be delivered helps those replicating the intervention understand it and implement it in the way it was intended.

An intervention that is more complex (for example, because it has several activity strands), or where the model is not clearly articulated and no manual exists, **can still be replicated**. However, it may need some additional effort to get ready for replication (for instance developing a logic model, a manual or training deliverers).

The Realising Ambition programme has developed a number of accessible tools to improve replicability of an intervention:

- The webinar on [Developing a logic model] explains why logic models or theories of change are important and how to go about developing one.
- The webinar on [Developing intervention manuals] covers why projects need manuals; the challenges in using manuals; how programme manuals can be adapted; and how manuals should be written.
- The webinar on [Defining intervention activities] explains the importance of specifying and distinguishing between core and flexible components of an intervention.

More resources are available here: http://www.catch-22.org.uk/programmes-services/realising-ambition/resources/

It is also helpful to look out for 'unusual' components in the intervention. Is the target group very narrow or very difficult to reach? Do those delivering the intervention need a combination of skills that is difficult to find in the labour market, such as combining expertise of working with a particular target group together with a knowledge of the systems and structures in the replication area and networking ability? Unusual components can mean challenges when preparing for replication, for example finding beneficiaries or the right delivery staff. They can also lead to pauses or stoppages in delivery in case of deliverers' sickness or other absences or if referral of beneficiaries is proving difficult. Mitigating strategies may include a pilot phase with lower beneficiary targets to identify and hence better plan for difficulties that may arise. Flexibility in the replication schedule will also be important.

4. What is the nature of the evidence base?

Interventions considered for replication should come with a good evidence base of impact. 'Standards of evidence' are one methodology often used to assess the strength of evidence of an intervention. However, it is as important to understand what the evidence rating of an intervention means (each 'standard of evidence' is – sometimes subtly – different), as it is to understand what is a fit-for-purpose evidence base for your replication intention. There may not be many interventions that have developed in the UK in your sector that have been evaluated with an experimental method. It may also not be methodologically sound to do so because the nature of the intervention does not lend itself to experimental evaluations. **Understanding the quality of the evidence that does exist helps not only with selecting projects that are effective but also with formulating appropriate evaluation strategies to improve that evidence.**

Key questions that can be used to assess fit for purpose evidence when selecting projects for replication include:

- Were suitable methods used and rigorously applied to understand outcomes and impacts?
- Is there an awareness of the 'objective' limitations to the evidence that can be generated given the nature of the intervention?
- Is the evaluation quality suitable for the funder or commissioner's organisation and professional context to justify investment in replication?

Standards of evidence tools

Social Research Unit 'What works' evidence standards
http://dartington.org.uk/projects/what-works-evidence-standards/

NESTA Standards of evidence:
http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/nesta-standards-evidence

NESTA Standards of evidence for impact investing
http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/standards-evidence-impact-investing

5. What is the core of the intervention?

Replication is not simply about copying an effective practice. Rather, **replication always requires adaptations of the original intervention to make it work elsewhere.**

For instance, it may be necessary to change individual words in manuals to make them culturally relevant if an intervention has its origins abroad. But depending on where the intervention is replicated, more significant changes may be needed. For instance, interventions that have never been delivered in schools will need sessions adapting to school hours. And delivery techniques may need to be modified to respond to the characteristics of the individuals or groups who are participating in it.

There is a risk that changing aspects of an evidence-based intervention affects its effectiveness. **It is therefore important to know what the core unchangeable components are**: those parts of the intervention responsible for producing the measured results. And which elements of the intervention can be modified without impact on outcomes.

Ideally, an evidence-based intervention already comes with a clear message about the elements that cannot be modified. However, in many instances this will not be the case, and an understanding of the core components will need to be generated as part of the replication effort. Combining rigorous logic modelling with delivery and evaluation activities to monitor impacts will successively improve an understanding of the core and adaptable components.

6. What business model will be used to replicate?

Interventions are replicated via a particular business model: licensing, franchising or wholly owned. Each of these models requires a specific set of issues to be considered. For instance:

- Licensing means adaptations to the intervention need to be negotiated and agreed with the intervention owner. So developing a good relationship is valuable, as is an awareness that not all desired modifications may be permitted.

- A key consideration for a social franchising model is the time it can take to finalise a number of franchising agreements with franchisees. Working with organisations that are part of the franchiser's formal network can reduce the risk of delays in this contracting process.

Further reading

The Social Franchising Manual includes definitions of the replication business models. http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/uploads/files/2011/11/social_franchising_manual.pdf

- If an organisation that owns an intervention is funded to replicate this (wholly owned model), the challenge can be to simultaneously deliver for replication and developing an understanding of what the core components of the intervention are. A longer preparation phase may be needed to refine the understanding of the core. Ongoing monitoring and of evaluation during replication will need to be used to test and further refine this understanding.

7. How will the replication project be implemented?

The replication process itself can be organised in a number of ways, independent of the business model used.

Direct delivery. Here, the organisation funded to replicate also delivers the intervention in the area(s) or with the target group(s) that are part of the replication process. Sometimes they may use gatekeepers to recruit beneficiaries. In this model capacity issues can occur if replication requires simultaneously delivering in new areas and 'recruiting' new sites or beneficiaries. Speedy recruitment of delivery staff or intermittent delivery may be needed to avoid potential 'stop and go' delivery in replication locations.

Indirect delivery means the funded organisation recruits the organisation where the intervention is replicated and trains the deliverers who are employees of that organisation. The funded organisation itself does not get involved in delivery. This model requires good connections in the replication areas to get replication off the ground. Good relationships with delivery organisations can reduce the risk of slow starts and stops.

Third party delivery. In this model the funded organisation retains the legal right to replicating the intervention, selects and contracts with interested delivery organisation, provides them with funding and beneficiary targets as well some support tools. This model may also involve drawing on local gatekeepers to recruit beneficiaries. This model also needs stronger management systems than the other models (for instance service level agreements and information sharing processes). Flexibility in delivery arrangements is needed to cater for the added uncertainty that relying on third parties brings for the replication venture.

Further reading

The **final report of the Realising Ambition process evaluation** includes definitions of the organisational models for replication. It also includes a discussion of learning on challenges associated with each business and organisational models. https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/research/making-the-most-of-funding/replicating-success

8. Are replicating organisations ready for the task?

Replication requires a commitment to evidence-based practice and an ability to learn from the experience of delivering across multiple sites. When selecting organisations to replicate, funders and commissioners therefore need to pay attention to the following requirements:

- **Adequate internal resources in the replicating organisation** (be this suitable technologies or sufficiently trained staff) to support data collection across multiple sites.
- **Staff with greater seniority, autonomy and line management support than is needed in other ventures.** Senior management and Board support is valuable particularly for the sustainability of the replication venture, and appropriate engagement should be sought from the beginning.
- **Establishment of communication patterns** or mechanisms with colleagues across sites and/or with partner organisations to ensure that risks are monitored and managed.

Generally, the ability to adapt and take on a replication venture requires an openness to innovation, a strong 'learning culture' and a strategic interest and buy-in into an evidenced based way of working.

9. Will the intervention work in the new context?

Commissioning or funding an intervention for replication requires consideration of how well it matches the local context. For instance, one intervention looking to improve child outcomes might do this through improving parenting skills whilst another might focus on building resilience through strengthening the child's social capital (e.g. social networks/interactions; trust; sense of belonging). The choice depends on knowing which groups are to be reached and choosing the approach that chimes with their needs.

As well as considering the nature of local need, it is important to think about how target groups will be found. Often, the referral routes differ from one locality to the next because local institutions, structures and geographies vary. Referral routes are also likely to be different if replication means targeting new beneficiary groups. Knowing who to approach and involve in the replication process is crucial for speedy replication. If interventions and organisations selected for replication have existing relationships in the replication areas, this will help them successfully reaching beneficiaries.

If the intervention is replicated in schools it pays not only to have existing relationships with them but to be able to show how the intervention supports their curriculum work.

10. What kind of application process is needed?

Giving due consideration to the application process can bring benefits to both funders and applicants. **Key learning from Realising Ambition is that**:

- It pays to **coherently follow through selection criteria into application forms and monitoring tools**. On the applicant's side, through its focus and the nature of the questions asked, an application process can prompt organisations to engage more thoroughly with the intervention, the funders' or commissioners' requirements for replication and the organisational reasons for getting involved. From the perspective of managing investment in replication, a phased approach can offer a robust framework from which to assess interventions' and organisations' strengths and weaknesses, tailor support and track progress.

- It is important to be as **careful as possible about the wording of the information requested** to ensure that misunderstandings of the meaning of key information items are avoided.

- Dedicating sufficient people and money to the selection phase is also essential. A rigorous selection process can put time pressures on those selecting and applying. When planning for a replication *programme* (which is comprised of multiple, single *projects*), key dates in the funder's or commissioner's diary and funding requirements linked to those need to be borne in mind.

Often, a phased application process will be beneficial. This may include some or all of the following stages: an information or engagement phase, an expression of interest stage, and a final selection phase. A phased application will allow a successive funnelling of applicants to ensure the most appropriate interventions and organisations for the intended replication venture are reached.

Further reading

The Realising Ambition Consortium, which is managing the Programme, is developing a series of Programme Insight series, which provide further learning on replication features.

Available at: www.catch-22.org.uk/realising-ambition/programme-insights