

# Evaluation Community of Practice

February 2023

## Introduction

The Evaluation Community of Practice has been formed to bring together evidence practitioners (those who have evaluation and research responsibilities (or interests) in the child and family service sector) from within the Outcomes Practice and Evidence Network (OPEN) to support professional learning and self-development through collaboration and sharing of expertise, insights, tools, best practice and opportunities for improvement.

## Purpose

The purpose of the Evaluation Community of Practice is to provide a forum for sector evidence practitioners to:

### Learn and support

- Meet other practitioners to build a network of peers who can provide technical support and advice and provide a 'critical friend' role
- Share knowledge, tools, expertise and experience – learning and teaching
- Support and encourage the development and extension of specialist knowledge
- Contribute to the general knowledge of organisations represented and the broader sector

### Build shared knowledge and understanding

- Increase access to presentations, webinars, training, demonstrations in the use of quality resources and tools - from CoP members and from external experts
- Through discussion and engagement (inside and outside the CoP), build common understanding and terminology to strengthen evidence that meets the sector's multiple needs.

### Encourage effective collaboration

- Identify strategic partnership and collaborative opportunities and projects which address issues and provide joint benefit to strengthening the evidence practices in the sector
- Receive updates and provide feedback to DHHS or other sector decision makers on evidence reform, common sector needs, challenges and opportunities to build common understanding and effective collaboration for our joint work of strengthening evidence practice.

The Evaluation CoP Program logic is provided as Attachment 1.

## Principles

The Evaluation CoP is a learning forum which take a strengths-based, inquiry approach where members teach and learn from each other irrespective of position. Our differences of expertise and experience are a strength, there to explore and learn from.

The Evaluation Community of Practice provides a safe, confidential space for members to share issues they may be having and to access a 'brains trust' to benefit from the experiences of others. Many evidence practitioners work alone or in small groups, so the Evaluation CoP will provide valuable encouragement,

support, development, a sounding board and an opportunity as a group to gain access to external experts to support professional development and improved organisational practice that would not be possible as individuals.

## Membership

The Evaluation Community of Practice is made up of those who have data collection, evaluation or research responsibilities (or interests) in organisations which support children and families. Members will be from diverse organisations, regions and with varied backgrounds so as to encourage robust discussions and knowledge sharing.

Membership numbers will be limited initially to 25 members, with this to be reviewed by foundational members following 6 months of group operation.

### **OPEN will:**

- Provide initial facilitation/chair and preparation of workplan and activities under direction from the CoP. To be reviewed going forward with the view to moving towards a rotating Chair
- Provide timely secretariat services (e.g. meeting agenda, meeting notes and actions)
- Maintain contact list of members and provide this on request to members for the purpose of collaboration.
- Maintain a mechanism to support member communication and resource sharing.
- Support CoP Working Groups to progress specific topics as they arise

### **Participant members will**

- Contribute to meetings, freely share insights and tools, showcase projects,
- Contribute and/or lead topics of discussion and identify potential guest speakers or training of interest
- Provide feedback about the activities of the Evaluation CoP to their organisations as opportunity presents and/or seek input from their organisations about issues, challenges or opportunities of interest to the Eval CoP.
- Participate in working group on topics of interest as they arise.

## Meetings

### Frequency

- Meetings of 1.5 hours will be held every two months, with meetings being scheduled at different times to cater for member's needs.
- Meetings will be scheduled for a 6-month period in advance.

### Format

- Meeting format will include a combination of:
  - unstructured networking and informal sharing and problem solving discussions and
  - structured presentations/tips/training from members on areas of their expertise and/or external presentations/training from our external networks or guests.
- A six month workplan will be developed to include 2-3 priority presentation topics (as nominated by members). The Workplan will be established in the July and February meetings by the group. OPEN will coordinate the formal component of the workplan with input from members.
- Members may coordinate working groups on selected topics with interested officers. OPEN will provide support as required.
- A list of topics identified by Evaluation CoP members as of February 2021 are provided below.)

## Agenda

- OPEN will be responsible for preparing the agenda in a timely manner.
- Members will be encouraged to nominate items for inclusion of the agenda, including identifying areas of interest for meeting activities and or presentations. This can include request to profile or seek feedback on evidence related activities being undertaken. A request for agenda items will be sent out to members prior to the meetings.

## Communication and collaboration

- OPEN will develop a member's contact and expertise list to support out-of-session collaboration and networking and explore options to support communication, sharing of resources, feedback, questions and contacts.

## Review

- The Terms of Reference will be reviewed by members every year.
- The CoP will be assessed after 6 months to determine whether it is meeting member need, effectiveness of its format, membership composition, delivery/progress towards outputs/outcomes as identified in the workplan, and identification of what is working and what could be improved. Following this, a review of its operation/outcomes will be undertaken every 12 months.

## Summary of members key priority topics (as of Feb 2021)

### Topics of interest include those involving –

- Collating and sharing resources and insights on common challenges of evaluation practice - delivery and building greater organisational understanding
- Identifying, exploring and addressing barriers to the sector's evidence building
  - Access to comparison data
  - Building common understanding about 'evidence' sufficiency for purpose and audience
  - Supporting stronger embedding of 'everyday' evaluation into organisational culture
  - Build recognition of qualitative evidence as key to accessing and including the client voice
- Opportunities for collaborative projects (possible jointly seeking funding) across the sector, with DFFH and other key stakeholders

### Specific topics are listed below -

#### Learning from each other so we don't have to recreate the wheel for our everyday activities - some ideas

- Sharing our approach for program logic, Theory of change – what works for what type of programs
- What are the best online resources/guides for what type of programs – our go to sites when we get stuck...
- What validated tools have we found work for what type of programs
- How do we support others to understand evaluation activities and factor this in – tips to keep it simple (KISS) – tips to explain
- Navigating ethics considerations – both how everyone manages this and also at a sector level how can we make this easier as it is one of the barriers to evidence building, and one of the reasons the sector can rely on academic providers
- How to get more out of monitoring data for an evaluative purpose
- Co-design basic evaluation/skill building modules for joint use –
- Skills Bank through members (and our networks) for 'just in time' help
- Helping to recruit participants for each others' projects

#### Improving access/collection/management for useable data – some ideas

- How do we obtain an ability to create comparison groups without access to comparable data – DHHS data system provides poor quality data and it is impossible to access What can be done? =
- How to build an agreement and process with DFFH for them to share data with the sector us in relation to our clients? For example, child protection data so orgs can identify if clients in their programs have gone to OOHC since exiting the services, or there have been additional notification to child protection. This is key to demonstrating impact of these services.
- Project to = Develop matched archival comparison groups with DFFH to help meet evidence criteria and deal with counterfactuals – how can the CoP help with this ..
- What data management systems are we using to ensure meaningful and accessible data – multiple data bases are used in each organisations each for a specific purpose – can we share what we are doing –

how to manage the data we collect through evaluative activities so it does not create an additional burden

### **Embedding evidence/outcomes in organisations – for example**

- How to embed an understanding of outcomes across an organisation, and for all staff to understand their role in achieving and measuring outcomes – ‘...A number of attendees noted that staff often do not understand the purpose of collecting data, and see it as either ‘ticking the box’ or as a way to scrutinise their performance. There is a general underestimation of the value of ‘administrative/service data’
- Moving away from academic led and driven evidence – to building sector’s commitment to ‘everyday evaluation’ - Evaluations don't need to be conducted by academic experts - Empowering organisations plus the use of administrative data and/or using impact and hybrid designs to understand effectiveness and context
- Working to achieve cultural change around the importance of evaluation and outcomes with funding providers.
- How to make sector creation of evidence achievable/feasible, realistic and fit for purpose given limited resources and high workload.
- How to determine what evidence is sufficient and appropriate for what purpose – there is no one size fits all – evidence should be harnessed to the purpose and audience

### **What is considered ‘evidence’ – what is sufficient? – what is appropriate? – some ideas**

- Concerns about how sufficient evidence is characterised in this sector - (A number of attendees note that academic understandings of ‘good evidence’ (e.g. RCTs and large quantitative studies) are not possible or ethical in this sector. We need to develop a new understanding of sufficient evidence as it relates to small populations with complex needs.that the sector should be more interested in improvement than innovation
- Issues with understanding EBPs as a ‘gold standard’ when they are unachievable for many complex populations/small agencies – context and not feasible for CSOs.
- Hierarchy of evidence and genuine experience-based co-design - RCTS v client voice, which is really the "gold standard"?
- Gain understanding, clarify and challenge (?)the context in Victoria, and how the state government understands the value of evidence, and funds evaluation.

### **Narrow notions of what is evidence – acts to discredit and silence diverse methods and therefore voices**

- Ensuring that our understanding of evidence/outcomes is culturally inclusive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and promoting self-determination in building an Aboriginal evidence base.
- Translation of evidence to advocacy. - More specifically: how to position qualitative/lived-experience research in a way that will lead to funding and policy change.-
- Ensuring that the complex needs of different groups are understood and that their voices/experiences are amplified in building the evidence. Although this can have ethics challenges which can be difficult for the sector to overcome – hence reliance on academic providers

- How to position and recognise the validity of qualitative evidence – building the understanding of the features that make qualitative data robust
- Learning from each other about the most innovative methods — Aboriginal sector is spear heading new and exciting methods -

**Possible projects/collaborative opportunities**

- Work in collaboration with DHHS to develop Research/Evaluation strategy
- Work with DHHS on a 'developmental model' – a stepped approach to supporting evidence strengthening in orgs - use as an engagement exercise to build common understanding and more realistic and fit for purpose 'goal posts' for the sector in the short-medium and long term.
- Collective change projects
- Research to strengthen business cases and improve outcomes for clients
- Increased access to external skill development opportunities – through AES or others – through group purchasing
- Rethinking how we define success in social welfare
- Better understanding and evidence about client voice – including publishing fundings. There is limited evidence published on this topic.

## Attachment 1 - OPEN Evaluation Community of Practice Logic Model

<p><b>Objective:</b></p>	<p>The Evaluation CoP will :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster sharing and learning between peers, about common challenges, tools and techniques</li> <li>• Act as 'critical friends' to one another - looking over the work of colleagues and giving feedback</li> <li>• Share insights/expertise to support the use and development of evidence within the sector.</li> <li>• Explore opportunities to produce common materials for the sector.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rationale / Problem Statement:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sector has limited resources most of which are directed to direct service delivery and, at most, may have a small (most often one) internal evaluation officer working in isolation.</li> <li>• High client demand on the sector means limited time is available for planning/measurement etc</li> <li>• Evaluation practitioners have high and complex work demands crossing preparation of evaluation reports, and data collection and the need to influence and build the understanding and skill across different levels (from Exec management – middle and program management and delivery staff) and areas of their organisations (corporate, reporting and data management systems) .</li> <li>• We have a disparate access to information, different degrees of engagement and insights about the larger sector evidence policy direction. We also as individuals have limited avenues to address this lack of clarity and can have limited voice to influence the evidence approach within our own organisations or influence or feed into the larger evidence reform agenda.</li> <li>• Each CSO in a position where they have to 'start from scratch' each time, and different organisations have varying degrees of experience and expertise (its difficult to know everything). This is despite the fact that we are pursuing common outcomes and related interventions directed towards the same cohorts.</li> <li>• Emerging areas of importance and priority such as the Building of the Aboriginal Evidence Base - might also not get the focus they should – with the potential for cross fertilisation and innovative lost. There is great interest in the Aboriginal Evidence Base but limited avenues to build networks or collaborate.</li> <li>• The way the sector is funded contributes to competition and limits cross sector sharing of expertise and insights.</li> <li>• All the above means, we are largely working in isolation with no ready access to support from others within the sector, and have limited resources to access any commercial avenues of support and advice.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assumptions</b></p>	<p>There is enough commonality across our work to make sharing of evaluative approaches, tools and techniques meaningful and helpful</p> <p>Members will be willing to freely share their expertise and experience</p> <p>Members will be allowed to share insights and organisational resources</p> <p>Collaboration and sharing of resources is possible even in a competitive funding model</p> <p>Eval CoP members will want to share new insights and skills within their organisation</p> <p>Eval CoP can use new information to influence the evaluative approach within their organisation</p>

**Attachment 1 - OPEN Evaluation Community of Practice Logic Model**

Inputs	(Implementation) Outputs		Outcomes – Impact		
	Activities- what	Delivery model – how	Short	Medium	Long
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time</li> <li>Members</li> <li>Meeting administration</li> <li>Knowledge/expertise</li> </ul>	<p><b>Building expertise through informal :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>peer mentoring,</li> <li>sharing of learning and experience</li> <li>sharing of networks</li> <li>peer led sessions on what has worked and key lessons about common issues</li> </ul> <p>Presentations/training from invited external providers and trainers as identified</p> <p>Info sharing and discussion forums on common issues</p> <p>Knowledge exchange between DHHS, related representatives and members about the evidence building agenda and common improvement projects</p> <p>Members to brief and/or consult with their organisations about direction/needs/barriers/gaps to feedback to the COP.</p> <p>Collation of memberships areas of expertise, resources, lessons to share</p>	<p>CoP Workplan developed biannually to reflect top 4-6 priorities</p> <p>Bimonthly/monthly (?) Meetings (key priority topics and networking/problem solving)</p> <p>Online mechanism to network and share resources</p> <p>Collation of Register of Members Expertise and Experience</p> <p>Preparation and dissemination of Eval CoP views – Position papers / communication materials through OPEN and/or other formal or informal avenues</p> <p>Members requested to :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief management of Eval CoP key directions/activities</li> <li>consult with their organization about needs/barriers/gaps to share with this group</li> </ul>	<p><b>At the level of individual members</b></p>		
			<p>Strengthened knowledge and relationships with other evaluation practitioners in the sector</p> <p>Increased understanding of common evaluation priorities, needs, gaps across the sector</p> <p>New expertise and insights gained through peer support and training</p>	<p>'Phone a friend' - Improved access to knowledge, advice, resources and training</p> <p>Expanding expertise and confidence through sharing learning and expertise</p> <p>Increased confidence and support leads to increased collaborative opportunities and improved efficiency</p>	<p>Improved awareness/access to options to support evidence building which meets CSO diverse needs</p> <p>Collaborative networks generate cost savings and emerging cross org evidence projects</p>
			<p><b>At level of the organisations and sector</b></p>		
			<p>CSOs have greater awareness of evaluation practices and specialists across the sector</p> <p>CSOs have improved understanding of DHHS evidence reform context and national and international best practice</p> <p>DHHS has increased understanding of the sector's <b>context, needs and barriers to evidence building and use</b></p>	<p>Stronger agreed collective voice about sector evidence priorities and purposes and barriers.</p> <p>Building strong DHHS/Sector engagement and shared understanding which informs direction</p>	<p>Increased transferable knowledge and skill across our orgs</p> <p>Strengthened resourcing to evaluation teams</p> <p>More informed, agreed interpretation of evidence sufficiency and purpose enabled through policy settings.</p> <p>Improved data quality that can be used to more effectively inform policy and practice</p> <p>improved understanding of program effectiveness across the sector</p>
<p><b>Participation</b></p> <p>Members are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation/research officers in CFS orgs or allied CSO orgs</li> <li>Researchers working with CFS orgs or related</li> <li>Endorsed by the org to participate in CoP</li> </ul> <p><b>Secretariat:</b> OPEN</p> <p><b>Program dev:</b> CoP Committee</p>					