

Developing monitoring and evaluation options to support the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities: A report for the Centre for Ageing Better

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Background

- The global population is ageing and becoming increasingly urbanised
- In response, WHO initiated the Age-friendly Cities and Communities (AFCC) movement in 2007
- AFCCs recognise and respect:
 - diversity among older people
 - inclusion and contribution in all areas of community life
 - decisions and lifestyle choices
 - ageing-related needs and preferences
- National and international AFCC networks have been set up to promote and support AFCC initiatives in communities across the world
- Evaluations are an essential component of AFCC programmes as a means to assess their effectiveness
- However, cities and communities often lack the skills and resources to carry out evaluations

Research aims

- Work commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better to:
- Explore UK Network of Age-friendly Communities' needs and requirements for the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of AFCC initiatives
- Develop costed, relevant and realistic ideas for M&E resources and support that would help UK Network sites to better undertake M&E activities



Methods and research plan

The project was conducted in five stages:

- Review of academic and grey literature and collation of these and existing materials on AFCC evaluations
- Development of a catalogue of available AFCC evaluation guidance and material
- Survey of UK Network members
 - Designed to assess their current experience, skills, knowledge and needs with respect to evaluations
- Interviews with local AFCC leads and key informants
 - Further examination of their experience, skills, knowledge and needs with respect to evaluations
- Development of options for monitoring and evaluation resources



Results

Scoping review of evaluation literature

Grey literature

- Search resulted in 234 titles to screen with 34 titles selected for data extraction.

Academic literature

- Search resulted in 449 titles to screen, with 16 being selected for tools, indicators and guidance

Literature review findings

- Included papers and reports were downloaded and ordered and organised as academic or grey literature in preparation first draft of the catalogue
- Most structured around WHO domains
- Proposed repository will be online, searchable by domain, and with selected example case studies and tools and guidance

Survey results

- There were 12 responses to the survey from 11 sites across the UK
- 80% of respondents were moderately to very experienced at conducting M&E
- 42% were either conducting evaluations currently or were planning to do so
- 92% thought evaluations were important to their work
- 67% of respondents felt that lack of experienced staff was a barrier to evaluation work
- 42% felt insufficient funding was a barrier while the same proportion thought lack of data sources was a barrier.

Survey summary

Overall, about half of respondents stated that a lack of expertise and knowledge of evaluation methodology were most important, while the other half thought that staff or financial resources were the top priority. This suggests a need for resources around guidance and methodology and filling some of these resource gaps with better and accessible guidance.

Interviews

Nine interviews were conducted with staff who were working on or had good knowledge of AFCC initiatives.

As was revealed by the survey, knowledge and skills were an issue for some although not for all:

I've got limited knowledge in this area as to what type of monitoring and evaluation options there are. You know, how formal they are, how informal they can be.

Policy Team, UK city

I think we could do it. We do monitoring and evaluation for other contracts and things. So it's not outside the comfort zone.

Healthy Communities Team, UK city

A lack of access to the relevant data and information to properly conduct evaluations was often brought up.

I think we're doing some fantastic work, we know our work is well known, but sometimes it's about having to prove that and having indicators and being able to measure these things in a more, I think, coherent and consistent and better way than we're doing at the moment.

Age Friendly programme lead, UK city

Interviews summary

Many of the same issues that came out of the survey were also apparent in the interviews. These included lack of financial resources, insufficiently skilled and expert staff and access to relevant data that could be used for evaluations.

Conclusion

It was clear that most of those involved in age-friendly initiatives in their town or city were aware of the need for evaluations and either conducted or wanted to conduct them. A range of skills and expertise were apparent with some have little more no expertise while some were confident in their ability to carry out evaluations. Broadly, three groups could be discerned in terms of expertise: little or no experience or knowledge; some experience and knowledge but lacking the confidence to begin (probably the largest group; and sufficiently expert but lacking or not being aware of relevant sources of data.

Almost all respondents saw the benefits of carrying out evaluations of their age-friendly work although there were some clear barriers to doing so. The development of a searchable online resource with clear guidance, tools and examples and further information regarding access to relevant data would be highly beneficial to those wishing to evaluate their age-friendly initiatives among members of the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities.