

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION AIC 2016: #40

1. Title:

Developing evaluation frameworks for programmes to address wicked problems

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3. Key words:

evaluation framework, complex problems, wicked problems continuous improvement

4. Abstract text:

a. Background and aims

In recent years, the New Zealand Government has been tackling more wicked problems – vulnerable children, youth mental health, place-based deprivation, to name but a few –establishing cross-agency, multi-pronged, multi-year programmes in an attempt to have a step-change in outcomes.

At the same time, they have been demanding both more evidence-based practices and evidence that their programmes have made a difference with the target populations. Hence, a core element of some programmes has been the development and implementation of an evaluation framework, comprised of an intervention logic, outcomes framework, key evaluation questions and an evaluation plan.

b. Methods

Superu combines a continuous improvement (Plan Do Study/Check Act) and collective impact approach to developing evaluation frameworks and plans for wicked programmes.

c. Results

By focusing on the basics, i.e. defining the problem to be solved, describing the programme and what it aims to achieve (intervention logic); describing how progress will be measured (outcomes framework); identifying what questions will have to be answered in order to describe what difference the programme made and how it was done; and planning to put the evaluation framework into practice, key stakeholders gain an understanding of what they want to achieve, and how they will measure it, as well as the ability to make changes to activities during implementation based on evidence.

d. Conclusion

Developing such evaluation frameworks early in the life of the programme has improved design and implementation and enhanced the understanding of what works and doesn't work with respect to these wicked problems. Having these fundamentals in place will improve implementation quality while building the evidence-base for future investment decisions.