Foreword by Dr Nick Cavill

Evaluation is often seen as a scary concept, evoking images of armies of clipboard-wielding researchers poised to criticise the work we do and withdraw our funding. But it doesn’t have to be this way: evaluation should be seen as a normal part of a routine approach to improving practice, and learning from our mistakes and successes.

That is why I am delighted to support this document, which ‘translates’ the Standard Evaluation Framework published by Public Health England, making it applicable to voluntary and community organisations. It should help contribute to an increasing focus on critically appraising our work, and ensuring that we are maximising effectiveness.

Dr Nick Cavill
Author of the PHE Standard Evaluation Frameworks
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Why is the SEF important?

Across the country, voluntary and community organisations are delivering many varied and vibrant programmes aimed at helping young people to get active and stay active. Traditional and non-traditional sports programmes, active travel initiatives and social prescriptions, to name a few, are playing an important part. However, with this variety in delivery there is also a big variation in how programmes are evaluated. Different programmes capture and record different outcomes. This makes it hard to compare programmes or to understand what is working well. The Standard Evaluation Framework (SEF) helps by recommending core criteria that all organisations can use.

In brief:

- Physical activity has long been recognised as vital to good health, but effective measurement of programmes has always been difficult.
- Using a robust framework enables multiple organisations to standardise their evaluation and build a stronger, collective case for commissioners of services.
- The framework is nationally recognised and public health commissioners will use the SEF criteria as a basis on which to commission local services.

What is the Standard Evaluation Framework (SEF) for Physical Activity?

The Standard Evaluation Framework is a checklist and set of guidance notes about how to evaluate your physical activity programme. It was designed by the National Obesity Observatory, now part of Public Health England. It is freely available to download.
How can Youth and Community Organisations use the SEF?

Activity providers and practitioners can use the SEF to plan, develop and deliver physical activity programmes. It helps to ensure that programmes are evidence based and enables you to show that your programmes are having an impact.

The SEF is very useful for discussing your plans with colleagues, partners and commissioners. By looking at each criterion in turn, you can quickly build a picture of which areas of delivery and evaluation you have covered already, and which areas need more attention.

This kind of planning enables you to decide, in advance, who will be responsible for which elements of the delivery and evaluation. Your commissioner will be as keen as you are to have good evidence of impact. You should be able to share responsibilities for doing the evaluation with your partners and commissioners. Many hands make lighter work, provided everyone knows exactly what they are supposed to be doing, and where it fits in the overall picture.

Links in this document

The e-version, downloadable from our website contains hyperlinks. Alternatively, copy and paste the document titles (in orange) into your browser.

Recommended Reading

The Standard Evaluation Framework for physical activity interventions (Public Health England, 2012); the framework and guidance, all in one place.

Sources of Information

Recommendations for the evaluation of physical activity programmes (SEHSA Active, 2016); contains 14 clear recommendations on how to plan, deliver and evaluate evidence based physical activity programmes.

Evaluating Sport and Physical Activity Interventions (Dudgill & Stratton, 2007); a useful guide for practitioners, with a comparison of measures available for physical activity from self-reporting to accelerometers and pedometers.

Everybody active, every day (Public Health England, 2014); a national, evidence-based set of guidelines that highlights the role of the voluntary and community sector in taking inactive activity.

Start Active, Stay Active (UK Chief Medical Officers, 2011); sets out the definitive physical activity recommendations for early years (under 5), children and young people (5-18), adults (19-64) and older adults (65 and over).

Sporting Future, A New Strategy for an Active Nation (HM Government, 2017); the cross-government strategy to increase physical activity and its associated benefits for physical, mental and economic wellbeing.

Jargon Buster:

- **Baseline data**: This is information that you collect about participants at the very start of (or ideally just before) their participation in your programme. You might use a questionnaire to collect information about their physical activity levels, for example. At a later date, usually 3 or 6 months, you can ask them the same questions and compare the results.
- **Objective**: A statement of what the programme is trying to do and for whom. For example: ‘To increase the number of children who are active for at least one hour every day’.
- **Evaluation**: Working out whether a programme has done what it intended and thinking about what worked and what did not.
- **Intervention**: Public health terminology for ‘programme’ or ‘project’.
- **Primary outcome**: This is the main thing that your programme is aiming for, and it is essential that you have a way to measure it. For example, your primary outcome could be: ‘An average increase in participation by young people in sports sessions, from once to twice per week’.
- **Secondary outcome**: This is something that happens as a result of the primary outcome, and is nice to know about if you can find a way of capturing it. For example, a secondary outcome from increasing participation would be increasing overall physical activity levels, or increasing wellbeing. You could use questionnaires to capture both of these if you wanted.
- **Target population**: The particular people for whom a programme has been set up. For example, a programme may be targeted at females, at a certain age range or at those who live in a certain area, or have a disability or a mental health condition.
- **Ethical approval**: For some programmes, it is possible that delivering certain activities or asking certain questions could be an intrusion into an individual’s personal life, or even put them at risk of harm in some way. This is particularly true when working with young people or vulnerable adults. If in doubt, check with your commissioner.
- **Population-level programmes**: Programmes that are intended to reach a large amount of people eg an entire local authority area. Examples of national, population-level programmes are Change for Life and This Girl Can. Generally, they raise awareness, promote and educate rather than directly deliver activities.

Getting Started

1. Download the SEF
2. Print the checklist on page 16 and 17
3. Use the checklist to see what data you already collect, and what you might collect in the future
4. Discuss the areas you need to work on with your colleagues and partners to decide who is going to do what

About The Young People’s Health Partnership

The Young People’s Health Partnership works with the Department of Health, Public Health England and NHS England as a strategic partner to raise the profile of the health agenda across the voluntary sector. The partnership includes Addaction, Ambition, the Association for Young People’s Health, Brook, CLIC Sargent, StreetGames and Youth Access.

We work to:

- influence and shape the health system to understand young people’s needs for age-appropriate services
- equip the voluntary youth sector to work in partnership with the health system
- support young people to exercise empowered and active voices in the healthcare system.

http://www.youngpeopleshealth.org.uk/yphp
Active Cheshire: Cheshire Girls Can

This programme set out to create sustainable behavioural change by educating, enabling and inspiring women and girls to change their lives through exercise.

When Active Cheshire were looking at how they could standardise and validate the evaluation of their “Cheshire Girls Can” project they wanted to know they were getting it right. They looked to identify how to evaluate programmes which aim to increase physical activity and found the SEF. They concluded it to be the most standardised and well adopted one with the BHFNC and Universities referencing it and he found it was also easy to follow, not over complicated.

They found that the SEF was not just an evaluation tool, but also a guide on how to set up a programme in line with best practice. By using examples of data and analysis on page 14 of the SEF they picked the measures they felt to be most relevant to their programme.

“The SEF helped us think about evaluation from the beginning, and really place an emphasis on what we want to achieve from the programme and how we were going to evaluate it” said Nont Iamkamphaeng, Active Cheshire.

They are now using the SEF with other programmes to create a strong baseline so they can better demonstrate impact of interventions. Active Cheshire are finding the SEF helps primarily in the planning of projects and considering how to capture and measure impact especially in light of the DCMS strategy’s 5 key areas and the focus on behaviour change in the strategy. With the new approach the SEF has enable Active Cheshire to better evidence behaviour change outcomes in their programmes.

Top Tips from Active Cheshire:
• Use the SEF early on in programme planning
• Build in the cost of evaluation as this helps with planning
• Think about impacts you want to measure, what are the objectives of the programme and who is your audience to communicate the outcomes of the programme to

You can read their evaluation report here: This Cheshire Girl Can

The Conservation Volunteers: Green GymTM Project

Green Gym™ works to mobilise communities to come together in meaningful physical activity whilst improving their local area at the same time. Green Gym™ transforms people’s health and wellbeing through weekly participation in outdoor activities, for example conservation, park management or food growing.

Volunteers come together regularly for 3 hours per week to work in their local community on regeneration or development of a green area. There is a lot outreach work with families, children, young people and local communities through education officers who run wildlife, gardening and nature sessions.

The Green Gym™ Managing Director has a Public Health background and has previously used the physical activity SEF. The Green Gym™ team felt it was robust, identifying support from PHE, major commissioners, funders and others in the fields of monitoring and evaluation.

Why did Green Gym™ find the SEF useful?
• It is short, concise and clearly laid out which is an advantage when putting it in front of others.
• It is broad and as such is accessible so if there were to be internal questions it is easy to “get hold of” and understand.
• It makes recommendations for a number of reliable tools.
• It sets out a clear way of working with the framework and gives sensible and evidence based approaches.
• It has the potential to be able to compare project outcomes and benchmark.

The Green Gym™ team recognise that no evaluation is without challenge, “collecting follow up data after the project has finished is a challenge. Participants are less engaged and money is usually not there to do the follow up.”

Top Tips from Green Gym™, who have been awarded Level 2 Evidence Standards from Nesta and TSIP:
• Speak to someone who is ahead of you in the process of using the SEF to see how they have got on and learn about avoidable mistakes.
• Address the full cost of quality research and evaluations including resources, staff and systems; depending on the overall project value evaluation could be around 10% of the total project cost.
Living Streets: Walk to School Travel Tracker

WOW (formerly walk once a week) is Living Streets’ year-round walk to school challenge that rewards primary school children who travel to school actively with collectible badges. Currently used in over 2,000 schools across the UK WOW is available as an off-the-shelf commercial model, as well as a model where action in schools is supported by a network of Living Streets coordinators across the country. WOW is supported by an online monitoring tool called Travel Tracker, which captures pupils’ mode of travel to school.

In 2013 Living Streets Evaluation Manager Tim Fitches attended a workshop hosted by the Department of Health and Sport England and heard Nick Cavill talk about how to apply the SEF. It stayed on Tim’s radar for some time, but he was cautious of how it could work in their setting with the practicalities of balancing delivery against his charity’s limited monitoring and evaluation capacity.

Following talks with the Department of Health in 2016, the value of the SEF came to the fore again, and Living Streets commissioned Nick Cavill to carry out a critical appraisal of the online Travel Tracker tool. The report highlighted how the tool meets the principles of the SEF, and how it might be further improved.

An important point that Tim makes is that he specifically chose the SEF because of its appropriateness to public health commissioners:

“Our Walk to School projects are already well-established in the transport field, and by aligning WOW and the Travel Tracker to the SEF we can better show how relevant and appropriate it is to public health commissioners as well.”

The SEF remains an ongoing influence in Tim’s approach when considering the evaluation requirements within funding bids and live projects.

Top Tips from Tim

- Agree with your commissioner what their expectations are as not every project is readily compatible with the SEF
- You MUST get baseline data so you need to plan your monitoring and evaluation before starting delivery
- Be pragmatic with what you collect. For example, collecting personal data in a school-based project carries additional data protection considerations and may not be desirable or even possible
- Even if you can’t “tick all the boxes” of the SEF, then following the principles of it will still allow you to use the SEF proportionally

Case Studies

Strengths and Limitations of Physical Activity Measures

Adapted from Evaluating Sport and Physical Activity Interventions; A guide for practitioners, 2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Activity Measure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Tools Available</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-reported questionnaires</td>
<td>Participants are asked to recall physical activity in different areas of their life including at work, traveling and recreational activities. They also ask about frequency and duration of sedentary behaviour</td>
<td>GPAQ, IPAQ, PAQ-C/A</td>
<td>Captures qualitative and quantitative information, inexpensive, easy to complete, can be done on paper or electronically</td>
<td>Over and under reporting not uncommon, misinterpretation of questions - language problems</td>
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<td>Wearable Technology</td>
<td>Activity is recorded by apps on phones or other electronic devices that are worn or carried. Data can be downloaded and shared</td>
<td>Accelerometer, Heart rate monitor, Pedometers, Activity Tracker, Phone app</td>
<td>Objective indicator of body movement, provides a measure of frequency, intensity, duration, times of day, and days of week, data recorded automatically and easy to analyse</td>
<td>Not all activity is detected, must be kept charged, less useful for detecting upper body movement and incline walking, can be expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>An independent observer watches and records each person’s activity</td>
<td>Systematic, Direct, Observation</td>
<td>Can provide qualitative and quantitative information, concurrently specific physical activity behaviours can be coded</td>
<td>Time to train observers, time taken for intensive data collection, observer presence may alter behaviour</td>
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