Big Local evaluation plan

By Jayne Humm, programme manager, July 2015

This paper sets out the evaluation plan for the Big Local programme building on the research and evaluation conducted thus far on the programme.

This plan was approved at the Local Trust board meeting on 19 March 2015.

Introduction

NCVO, OPM and IVR conducted an 'early years' evaluation of Big Local in 2014 and produced a framework to help steer future evaluation activities. This framework was discussed by trustees and developed further. The plan for the evaluation for the remainder of the programme takes into account the ideas from the evaluators (NCVO, OPM and IVR) together with the ideas and feedback from trustees and staff.

Given the number of Big Local areas involved, the timescale of the programme and light touch ethos the evaluators concluded that there is no single off the shelf methodology that will do all we need. Hence, they felt it important that the evaluation framework:

- is 'whole' programme focused but able to distinguish the contribution of particular key activities/processes/structures within the Big Local programme
- enables comparison through time and over the evolution of Big Local
- enables outcomes to be understood in relation to key processes and structures underpinning the implementation of Big Local (and its constituent parts)
- is easy to interpret and implement and retains a light-touch approach, minimising demands on research respondents
- will reinforce continuous improvement and learning across Big Local in a formative and learning manner; and
- lends itself to review and refinement as the programme evolves.

In this paper I set out an evaluation framework, measures and indicators and an evaluation plan that measures these indicators.

Evaluation framework

Measures of success for the Big Local programme fall under five broad headings to create our evaluation framework (see Table 1). Elements 1, 4 and 5 of the framework relate to how we (Local Trust) run Big Local in our unique style, our desire for lasting change and our wish to influence policy and practice. Items 2 and 3, the shaded columns, are the more traditional aspects you would measure for a programme evaluation related to delivery and outcomes.

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Table 1 – overarching evaluation framework

Element 1	Element 2	Element 3	Element 4	Element 5
Approach	Delivery	Outcomes	Impact	Influence
Local Trust takes the following approach to delivering Big Local: • resident led • asset based • community pace • opportunities for reflection • light touch support • willing to take risks.	The programme is well-managed and delivered in line with expectations of Local Trust's trustees and the trust deed.	The programme outcomes are achieved as set out in the theory of change.	The programme contributes to lasting and sustainable change in Big Local areas.	The programme has a policy and practice impact.
Doing things differently	Delivering to meet programme objectives	Achieving programme results	Creating lasting change	Influencing others

Measures and Indicators

Table 2 shows measures and indicators against each element in the evaluation framework. These are drawn from suggestions from the evaluators, from trustees and the Local Trust staff team. The third column of the table refers to the method of data collection in the evaluation plan outlined later in this paper, it appears in this table for cross reference.

Table 2 – measures and indicators

Element 1: Approach		**Method see table 3**
Measures	**Indicators**	
1.1 Resident-led: Big Local partnerships (local decision-making groups) comprise a majority of residents	Proportion of Big Local partnership members who are residents	2
1.2. Resident-led: getting involved in Big Local is accessible and Big Local partnerships are broadly reflective of the communities in	A. Proportion of residents in the Big Local area who know about Big Local B. Proportion of residents in the Big Local area who are direct beneficiaries of Big Local	6, 7, 8 6, 7, 8 2, 13

Element 1: Approach		Method see table 3
Measures	**Indicators**	
their area and have mechanisms in place to consult or involve the communities in their area where appropriate	C. The profile of those on Big Local partnerships (set against broad characteristics of the community) D. Mechanisms in place to enable different parts of the community to engage with Big Local	2, 4, 5
1.3 Resident-led: residents feel ownership of Big Local and feel in control of decisions made locally about their £1million	A. Proportion of residents in Big Local partnerships who believe Big Local is resident led B. Mechanisms in place to ensure accountability to the wider community C. The extent to which residents on Big Local partnerships feel they are in control	1, 8 4, 7, 8 1, 8
1.4 Asset based: residents use their skills and experience	Proportion of residents on Big Local partnerships report using existing skills and experience	1, 7
1.5 Community pace: Big Local is developed at the right pace for the community	A. Programme milestones achieved: all Big Local partnerships and plans endorsed by end of March 2016 and at least £220m spent by March 2027 B. Proportion of residents on Big Local partnerships satisfied with the pace of the programme	2, 10 1, 7
1.6 Opportunities for reflection: opportunities are created to learn, share and reflect	A. Big Local partnerships review their plans B. Number of Big Local partnerships showing improvement in planning, reviewing and delivering Big Local C. Number of areas participating in learning and training events	7, 14 4, 7 1, 7, 9
1.7 Light touch: the programme is delivered in a 'light touch', enabling way	A. Proportion of Big Local partnerships rating systems/rules as light and flexible B. Proportion of residents receiving support reporting it is enabling.	3, 7, 9 1, 5, 7, 9
1.8 Willing to take risks: the programme is bold and prepared to take risks	The number and type of examples that Local Trust, reps and partners provide of innovation and/or trying new things and/or doing things differently either nationally or in areas.	5, 7, 9

Element 2: Delivery		Method see table 3
Measures	**Indicators**	
2.1 Local Trust makes funding available via systems that are accessible and user-friendly (while still robust)	A. Amount of funding committed and distributed B. Level of satisfaction with proposal and plan submissions and monitoring processes C. Effectiveness of expenditure and activity monitoring processes D. Number of instances of recorded inappropriate use of funds	10, 11 3, 7 10, 11 10, 11
2.2 Local Trust offers appropriate and flexible support for Big Local areas	A. Reason for offering type of support B. Amount and type of support offered C. Number of residents and Big Local partnership members taking up support offered by reps, partners and Local Trust D. Profile of residents accessing (and not accessing) support E. Level of satisfaction with support offered	9, 11 9, 11 9, 10 5, 9 1, 5, 9
2.3 The programme continuously improves where learning identifies a need for change/improvement	Learning fed into programme delivery and programme developed in light of learning	11

Element 3: Outcomes		Method see table 3
Measures	**Indicators**	
3.1 Residents are better able to **identify** and **prioritise** what is needed to make their area feel like an even better place to live	A. Proportion of residents on Big Local partnerships reporting they are confident they can identify what is needed to make their area feel like an even better place to live B. Proportion of residents on Big Local partnerships reporting they are confident they can prioritise between different locally-identified needs C. Evidence that Big Local plans reflect the needs that people locally have identified	1, 7, 14 1, 7, 14 4, 7, 14
3.2 Residents are better able to **act** on what is needed	A. Proportion of residents on partnerships who feel they can make informed choices about how to respond to identified needs	1, 7, 14

Element 3: Outcomes		**Method see table 3**
Measures	**Indicators**	
	B. Proportion of residents on partnerships who feel connected to/aware of organisations and people who can help them deliver C. Proportion of residents on partnerships who feel confident in their decision-making	1, 7, 14 1, 7, 14
3.3 People have increased skills and confidence, so they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future	A. Proportion of residents on Big Local partnerships with increased levels of confidence as a result of their involvement B. Proportion of residents on Big Local partnerships with new skills as a result of their involvement C. Proportion of residents on Big Local partnerships who successfully and proactively engage with public service providers about improvements	1, 7, 14 1, 7, 14 1, 7, 14
3.4 The Big Local programme enables residents to improve their Big Local area in the way that matters to them	A. Number of areas progressing towards achieving the outcomes linked to the priorities in their Big Local plan B. Number of areas reporting **progress** in relation to priorities in their Big Local plan C. Number of areas reporting **impact** on the priorities the community have identified	4, 7, 14 4, 7, 14 4, 7, 14
3.5 People feel their area is an even better place to live	A. Proportion of residents in Big Local areas who say they feel part of a community B. Proportion of residents in Big Local areas who say they feel their area is improving C. Proportion of residents in Big Local areas who would recommend their area to their family and friends to live and/or visit	6, 7, 14 6, 7, 14 6, 7, 14

Element 4: Impact		**Method see table 3**
Measures	**Indicators**	
4.1 Big Local areas have an infrastructure to facilitate resident decision-making	A. A group of residents exist at the end of the programme: a. willing and able to make decisions on behalf of their community b. reflecting their community	12

Element 4: Impact		**Method see table 3**
Measures	**Indicators**	
	c. accessing resources for their community and d. recognised by key stakeholders/decision makers supporting their community	
4.2 The Big Local programme contributes to lasting and sustainable change in Big Local areas	Proportion of Big Local partnerships reporting and providing evidence that Big Local has contributed to lasting and sustainable change	1, 4, 7, 12, 14

Element 5: Influence		**Method see table 3**
Measures	**Indicators**	
5.1 Other funders use aspects of Local Trust's funding approach	A. Evidence from other funders using aspects of Local Trust's funding approach: a. resident led b. asset based c. community pace d. opportunities for reflection e. light touch support f. willing to take risks	5
5.2 Policies and practice are introduced that facilitate resident-led decision making	A. Evidence of increased government policy and practice (national and local) being used to facilitate resident-led decision making B. Citing and referencing Big Local in policies relating to resident-led decision making	5, 7 5

Evaluation plan

Table 3 sets out the evaluation plan that covers the measures and indicators listed in table 2. The evaluation plan uses a combination of in-house evaluation with independent outsourced evaluation.

Table 3 – evaluation plan

Method	Notes and issues	Resources	Measure from table 2
1. Partnership member survey: biannual survey of up to 10 members of each Big Local partnership (max 1,500 respondents) in 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022 and 2024. First three surveys offered on paper as well as online, move to online only with a mobile app for the remaining two. Mostly closed questions.	NCVO conducted a similar survey as part of the early years evaluation. CDF conducted two surveys of areas for the 'influences' research. This will be an in-house survey using contacts updated annually through the partnership review (see 2 below)	• Staff time: admin recording contact details; research design, analysis, report writing. • Software • When on paper: printing & data entry	1.3A, 1.3C, 1.4, 1.5B, 1.6C, 1.7B, 2.2E, 3.1A, 3.1B, 3.2A, 3.2B, 3.2C, 3.3A, 3.3B, 3.3C, 4.2
2. Partnership review: Annual review of partnerships conducted Sept-Nov by reps and reported in their quarter three rep reports, starting 2015	Partnership reviews happen already. This makes the process more reliable and consistent. It is already in the post-plan rep assignment.	• Rep time: conduct review, input data • Staff time: analyse data, report writing • System & software to enable reps to enter data online and for data to be analysed	1.1, 1.2C, 1.2D, 1.5A
3. Plan submission feedback: short questionnaire to get feedback on the plan submission process when plans are submitted from March 2016		• Staff time: analyse data, report writing • System & software to enable respondent to enter data online and for data to be analysed	1.7A, 2.1B
4. Plan assessment: As part of the plan/review/plan cycle data will be collected and inputted in-house using a new assessment process based on a rubric of assessment criteria. Introduced in September	We already assess plans. This ensures we can use the data collected for evaluative and management purposes. It relies on: new plan and review process introduced, assessment format agreed, staff and	• Staff and assessor time: design, collect data, input data, analyse data • System & software to enable staff to enter data and for data to be analysed	1.2D, 1.3B, 1.5A, 1.6A, 1.6B, 3.1C, 3.4A, 3.4B, 3.4C, 4.2

Method	Notes and issues	Resources	Measure from table 2
2015	assessors trained, system developed.		
5. Themed or ad hoc research: to capture topics and data not covered elsewhere	We already engage research delivery partners (CDF and IVAR). Although small projects may be conducted in-house research will typically be commissioned pieces of work by researchers or research organisations	• Staff time: management. • Budget already allocated in 'strategic learning' line	Could be any but we are most likely to need additional evidence on 1.2D, 1.7B, 1.8, 2.2D, 2.2E, 5.1, 5.2
6. Household survey: three snapshot random sample surveys in 15 areas for households in Big Local areas in 2017/18, 2021/22 and 2024/25. We need to decide if the surveys are going to be in the same 15 areas or in different areas each time	A fieldwork agency will be commissioned to conduct this research.	• Staff time: questionnaire design, analyse data, report writing • Fieldwork agency: conduct face-to-face or telephone interviews.	1.2A, 1.2B, 1.2C, 3.5A, 3.5B, 3.5C
7. Longitudinal multimedia project ('our bigger story'): in-depth, qualitative research in 15 Big Local areas in 2015/16, 2018/19, 2021/22 and 2024/25	TSRC et al are contracted to deliver the first wave of the project. They or other contractors will be commissioned to conduct future waves.	• Staff time: management • Budget already allocated in 'strategic learning' line	This project provides qualitative evidence to unpack many of the indicators, especially 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5B, 1.6, 1.8, 2.1B, all outcomes (element 3), all impact (element 4), 5.2A
8. SPHR Communities in Control research: Qualitative research in 15 areas to look at whether resident led approaches to neighbourhood	Resource would be needed to commission a statistical expert to update the datasets.	• Staff time: liaison • Updating stats in the area databases •	1.2A (household survey), 1.2S (household survey), 1.2C (area datasets),

Method	Notes and issues	Resources	Measure from table 2
improvement can reduce inequalities in health. Datasets drawn from publicly available stats will be available for each Big Local area.			1.3
9. Partner/contractor reporting: As part of contract reporting, evidence collected in systematic way, including rep reports	Delivery partners report to us already. This makes the data more consistent for evaluative purposes. Reporting will need updating once evaluation framework is agreed	• Staff time: input, analyse, write up • Partners and reps input reports • System to enable partners to enter data and for data to be analysed	1.6C, 1.7A, 1.7B, 1.8, 2.2A, 2.2B, 2.2C, 2.2D, 2.2E
10. Programme records: programme management data routinely stored on Big Local Community	We collect and record data on funding allocation already. This makes the data more consistent for evaluative purposes. Reporting will need updating once evaluation framework is agreed	• Staff time: update reporting • System to enable staff to enter data and for data to be analysed	1.5A, 1.6A, 1.6C, 1.6D, 2.1A, 2.1C, 2.1D, 2.2C
11. Programme development: a facilitated annual event for managers that documents decisions and processes for developing the programme.	We do this already on an ad hoc basis. This would formalise the process and ensure the data is recorded systematically	• Staff time: participation • Facilitator: design, conduct event, collate/analyse, write up	2.1A, 2.1C, 2.1D, 2.2A, 2.2B, 2.3
12. Independent evaluation: to assess the evidence collected above and conduct primary research to triangulate the in-house and/or self-reported evidence at the midway point, 2019/20 and towards the end the of programme 2025/26 to see if we are fulfilling our Theory of Change (ToC)	We did this for the early years evaluation.	• Staff time: management • External evaluation • Budget already allocated in ‘strategic learning’ line, additional resource required.	4.1, 4.2 Plus all collated data from the other data collection methods
13. Desk research: secondary data analysis on policy and influencing,	Some projects may be conducted in-house others will be	• Staff time: analyse data, report writing • Commissioned	Will support all but particularly

Method	Notes and issues	Resources	Measure from table 2
area statistics and the use of social media by areas	commissioned pieces of work by researchers or research organisations	research	1.2C, 1.6C, 1.6D, 5.1, 5.2
14. Plan reviews: each Big Local partnership will be required to review their plans with the help of their reps. Reps will provide answers to and evidence for the following: • What have you done against what was in the plan? • What money have you spent? • What impact have you had? • What have you learnt? • Have you progressed on your vision and priorities? • Do you need to refresh your vision and priorities? • How does this relate to the achievement of the Big Local outcomes? • Do you need a new or revised plan or carry on with existing plan? • How do you know this is what your community wants?	We currently ask areas to review their plans annually. Going forward we want Big Local partnerships to review plans when and how it is appropriate for them. The data will not be consistent across areas but they will be addressing the same questions. Going forward, reps will enter the data onto the system.	• Staff time: analyse data, report writing • Rep time	1.6A, all outcomes (element 3), 4.2

Timeline

The proposed timeline for the activity in the evaluation plan is set out in table 4. Timings are subject to the development of our technology systems this year to enable us to implement the evaluation plan.

Table 4 – evaluation timeline

Method from table 3	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024	2024/ 2025	2025/ 2026
1		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
3		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6			✓				✓			✓	
7	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
8	✓	✓									
9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12					✓						✓
13	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Evaluation reviews

In line with good practice, our approach to learning and the length of the programme; the evaluation plan, data and products will be reviewed by staff and trustees to ensure it remains fit for purpose at the end of the 2017/18, 2020/21 and 2023/24 financial years.

Advisory group

Following on from feedback from trustees, we will establish an advisory group to guide the development and implementation of the evaluation. This will enable a group of relevant and respected researchers and evaluators to advise on the research, act as a sounding board for ideas and help test our approach. This also builds on the advisory group used by the evaluators who conducted the early years evaluation.

People with extensive experience of research and evaluation and suitable knowledge will be invited onto the advisory group. Initial membership may include individuals from the Big Lottery Fund, relevant academic institutions including Goldsmiths, SPHR, LSE, a couple of Big Local reps with a research or evaluation background, previous partners such as IVAR and NCVO and/or relevant research think tanks and public sector researchers.

A Local Trust trustee will be a member of the advisory group as will a programme manager. The advisory group will be supported by a member of the Local Trust staff team.

Membership of the advisory group will not prevent individuals or the organisations they work with from tendering for Big Local contracts but if they are successful we will assess whether this is a conflict of interest and they need to stand down from the advisory group.

The proposed terms of reference for the advisory group are below.

Function and role of the advisory group

- to guide the development of the Big Local evaluation
- to offer advice on key elements of the research process – methodology, sampling and analysis
- to help Local Trust identify and address potential issues or challenges with the research
- to act as a sounding board for ideas and to help Local Trust test the approach, analysis and findings
- to help Local Trust sustain the quality and robustness of all stages of the research.

Membership

The advisory group will involve up to ten individuals with an interest in the evaluation and relevant expertise (i.e. in research methods, programme evaluation, community development and participation, and policy).

Membership will be by invitation from Local Trust. Due to the timeframe for this evaluation, membership of the advisory group will be reviewed and refreshed every two years. All members will be asked to commit to at least two years of membership.

Meetings

Frequency: the advisory group will meet approximately every six months.

Attendance: each meeting will be attended by representatives from Local Trust and at least three advisory group members.

Format: meetings will be primarily face-to-face with the option of a conference-call format if advisory group members feel this is appropriate. Face-to-face meetings will be held in London and advisory group members will be reimbursed travel expenses for attending meetings in line with Local Trust's expenses policy.

Risks and opportunities

We are keen to ensure that we capture and consider relevant risks and opportunities related to the evaluation. The evaluation plan enables us to assess Big Local against the five elements in the evaluation framework in a cost effective and timely way. As illustrated above, it makes relevant use of in-house activities alongside external evaluation. It enables us to use the opportunities presented to us in a timely manner and ensures monitoring and reporting from areas, reps and partners captures relevant data.

The plan is challenging. The early years evaluators, OPM and NCVO, were asked to check that the evaluation plan set out in table 3 is rigorous, timely and appropriate and they said, "It is an ambitious but necessary programme of data collection. The biggest challenge will be pulling all the data into a coherent whole, with a coherent narrative - this could definitely be a job for independent evaluators".

As this programme of work develops we will review the risks and opportunities presented to us and ensure relevant ones feature in our risk and opportunity map to ensure we mitigate risks and maximise opportunities.

Next steps

We are sharing this revised document with trustees and our staff team. We will also share it with our partners and reps; the Big Lottery Fund and provide relevant information to areas.

We will implement this plan and provide updates to trustees and through our website.