



# Proportionate approaches to impact evaluation

**Exercises for the 1<sup>st</sup> NERC – SRA evaluation course**

**Course Tutor:**

**Prof. David Parsons ([drdj.parsons@gmail.com](mailto:drdj.parsons@gmail.com))**

## Practical Exercises

The course will involve two short, scenario-based exercises:

- Exercise 1: Managing for Realistic Expectations of Evaluation
- Exercise 2: Exercise on Experimental Approaches to Impact Evaluation.

A brief for each exercise is set out below and provides for:

- A brief statement of the scenario for the exercise and its context; and the tasks for the group/take away exercise.
- Each exercise to take approx. 25-30 mins.

Both will be group exercise through an online (Zoom platform) 'breakout' activity. The group responses to the exercise tasks will be feedback by one group member (rapporteur) in the plenary session and discussion which will follow the exercise.

Each exercise will be introduced by the tutor. You may find it helpful if you print out a copy of this pack to refer to during the exercise sessions.

## Exercise 1: Managing for Realistic Expectations of Evaluation

**Scenario:** *New guidance is to be issued by UKRI on developing equitable research partnerships in grant or research centre funded projects and programmes involving Co-PIs or other closely involved institutions or agencies from low and middle income (LMIC) countries. Draft guidance (March 2021) has been developed by UKRI from research by the UK Collaborative for Development Research (UKCDR), Ecosystems Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) and COHRED 'Research Fairness Initiative' and sets out principles of fairness for equity in design, delivery and dissemination of research. A pilot of the draft guidance has been running in 20 recent (starts in March-June 2021) GCRF capacity building projects, of varying durations (up to two years). UKRI is to fund an impact evaluation to assess the pilot for:*

- a) Effectiveness of PI and Co-Pi project teams, and host institutions adjusting to the (draft) new Guidelines*
- b) Impacts on quality of projects in the pilot (design, delivery and dissemination), and on the outcomes achieved*
- c) Costs and other burdens of guidance implementation on host and partner institutions*
- d) Implications for revision and roll-out of guidance and new procedures across all UK research councils.*

*UKRI is developing a specification for an external impact evaluation to provide for:*

- A (24 week) independent evaluation to inform guidance revision and roll-out decision making across UKRI funded projects and programmes from .*
- Use of project documentation, monitoring and management information, survey of participating institutions; follow-up virtual interviews (selected PIs & Co-PIs), 3-4 project case studies of effectiveness and positive outcomes.*
- An inception report (end July), interim report (mid-November), draft final report (mid-December) and final report and recommendations (by 31 December).*

*The budget is £20,000 +VAT; the evaluation will start by the end of June.*

**The exercise:** The exercise will look at how to best balance the stated needs and expectations of the impact evaluation so to provide practical evidence for a 'fit for purpose' and proportionate approach to inform roll out across all research councils (planned for April 2023) of revised guidance.

### **Issues for exercise:**

- What are the stress points for balancing expectations, needs and resourcing?

- What clarifications are needed to provide for a relevant and reliable evaluation (budget and timescale are fixed)
- What needs to change in the expectations set out in the draft specification?

**Format:** Breakout group discussions and plenary feedback.

## Exercise 2: A Framework for an Experimental Approach to an Impact Evaluation of a place-based pilot Initiative

**Scenario:** A public-agency ‘social marketing’ collaboration will be spending a one-off budget for a single year to tackle a persistent problem of (from an earlier research study) mainly school-aged young people deliberately setting grassland, brush and field fires in the summer-vacation period on metropolitan fringes. In addition to agricultural loss (crops, grazing, livestock) the deliberate ‘grassfire’ setting has been causing habitat destruction and loss of bio-diversity in environmentally sensitive areas close to urban peripheries. There have been social and economic costs to communities as well as significant expenditure to emergency services.

Under a place-based environmental protection programme, NERC is to fund a local university in an evaluation of a (single) place-based pilot to demonstrate the value and roll-out potential of the initiative to its funders (a consortium of local government, emergency services and Natural England). The aim is to roll out the initiative to other areas similarly affected (in subsequent years). The impact evaluation has a small budget of £20,000 which will fund an external design, delivery and analytical input (to be agreed) by the local university. The evaluation will run in parallel with the pilot initiative over six weeks of the 2022 summer school holiday period. The pilot will involve a cross-agency collaboration, running in a single, separate urban locality and with a multi-activity social-marketing campaign involving:

- An ‘out of school’ coordinated virtual educational programme
- A programme of community-based alternative activity events for young people
- A branded on-line information and events platform
- Local cross-agency anti-fire setting ‘action-days.’

All will be focussed on 12–16-year-olds resident in households in the selected pilot locality.

**The exercise:** Producing a ‘framework plan’ to measure and evaluate the impact of a trialled cross-agency initiative (local authority - youth services, fire and rescue service, Police and Crime Commissioners office, parish councils, Natural England) in a single pilot area using a social marketing campaign to reduce deliberate summer fire-setting by young people in urban fringe places. The evaluation will need to provide counter-factual evidence and report within four weeks of the conclusion of the pilot.

**Issues for the exercise:** The evaluation is expected to use past research evidence (a pre-initiative study by the local university) and also mainly available secondary real data (real time, web-based and activity monitoring information) to minimise costs

and speed up analysis. It will also have access to past management information on numbers, locations and attendance costs at deliberate fire setting incidents. It is expected to need either an experimental, quasi-experimental or constrained design to show what 'net' difference the initiative has made.

**Format:** Breakout group working with plenary feedback to outline the framework plan for either a fully, quasi-experimental or 'constrained experimental approach to meet these needs.