



CISVic Evaluation Framework for Community Support Work

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Introduction

The Evaluation Framework provides coherence and direction for the evaluation of the Community Support Work of CISVic and its member agencies. It is underpinned by CISVic's Evaluation Policy and Evaluation Procedures.

Data Evaluation Working Group (DEWG)

The design of the Evaluation Framework has been informed by the Data Evaluation Working Group (DEWG), which includes representation from CISVic member agencies and RMIT University. The DEWG provides ongoing support for finetuning and implementing the Evaluation Framework and it will assist with making sense of evaluation findings as they become available. As articulated in the DEWG Terms of Reference:

The purpose of the DEWG is to create an evaluation framework so that impacts of CISVic member agencies can be assessed, learnings can be gathered to inform service improvements, information can be gathered for advocacy, and CISVic member achievements can be presented to funding bodies and in the public domain.

DEWG is convened by the Policy, Research and Advocacy Officer on behalf of CISVic.

Evaluation Framework approach

Theory of Change

The design of the Evaluation Framework is based on previous workshopping of the Community Support Work of CISVic and member agencies using the 'Theory of Change' logic model. This was carried out by the previous Advocacy and Research Manager, in collaboration with member agencies. In particular, this Evaluation Framework refers directly to the service delivery dimensions of activities, outputs and desired outcomes (immediate, intermediate, and long term) of the CISVic Theory of Change model.

Triangulation

Within the Evaluation Framework, information and data is derived from multiple sources, following the principle that different methods yield different types of information. Every method has unique strengths and weaknesses, and when combined they are able to compensate for and complement each other. When we combine findings from the different methods, we are able to obtain a holistic picture of the phenomena under study, including the complex interplay between relevant factors.

In particular, the 'thin' information gathered through data entry can be complemented with the 'thick' data of in-depth interviews.

Developmental Evaluation

This approach is most suitable for program development as findings are routinely gathered, made sense of, and used for ongoing service planning and implementation.

This contrasts with more traditional approaches wherein evaluation is only carried out at the end of a program when it may be too late to implement the findings. Developmental Evaluation is in the same family as ‘action research’, which incorporates a re-occurring cycle of ‘*information-reflection-planning-action*’. Developmental evaluation is suitable for collaborative processes of designing and implementing research and for applying findings to ongoing service and support.

Participation

The Evaluation Framework is being designed and implemented in collaboration with CISVic member representatives and RMIT, in particular through DEWG. Participation and collaboration is seen as essential for the design and implementation of coherent and meaningful evaluation practice and for making sense of findings as they emerge. In particular, collaboration with member agencies is seen as crucial for their sense of ownership of the ongoing evaluation process and interest in the findings as they emerge.

In this first iteration, service user voices will be included through follow-up, in-depth interviews. Avenues to integrate service user participation in the evaluation process will be further explored in the future, in consultation with DEWG.

Realist Evaluation

The Realist Evaluation Approach involves the collation of information about what types or aspects of service work for whom and under what circumstances. This is expressed as ‘*Context-Mechanism-Outcome*’ (or CMO). Realist Evaluation recognises that the social world is complex and fluid and that local, situated factors are central to making sense of findings. This contrasts with pseudo-scientific approaches that attempt to imitate the physical sciences by positing universal laws of simple, linear cause-and-effect. Rather than trying to ascertain whether a program worked or didn’t work without identifying the salient factors in the result, Realist Evaluation provides a way of gathering transferable learnings and building meaningful and applicable theory in the process.

Data¹ sources

The data sources included in the Evaluation Framework include:

- Consortia service data on Community Support Work that is routinely entered on CDS
- Other data bases utilised by some member agencies relating to their Community Support Work, as appropriate
- Annual follow-up interviews with a sample of self-selected service users² (with ethics approval granted through the RMIT Ethics Committee)
- Feedback forms for service users
- Annual CISVic agency review

¹ ‘Data’ refers to both qualitative and quantitative data.

² Who have received some ongoing support involving three or more sessions.

In the future data sources will be reviewed and may also include interviews with a sample of service providers, reference to case worker records, and greater participation by service users in the design, implementation, analysis, and application of service evaluation.

Data analysis and reporting

The Policy, Research and Advocacy Officer is responsible for analysing all data together and reporting on it, in collaboration with DEWG, RMIT, and the Sector Development Manager (the latter in relation to CDS data).

Utilisation of evaluation findings

The table below outlines targets and purposes of Evaluation Framework findings.

Avenue	Target	Purpose
Internal and member agency communications (various)	CISVic Board CISVic EO and staff Member agencies management, staff and volunteers	Inform ongoing service design and implementation Inform ongoing evaluation practice Inform advocacy (see below)
Advocacy actions	Public Media/ social media Key decision makers Sector collaborators	Present community issues Present demand for services
Annual Report	Regulators Public Funders Support sector Key decision makers	Legal accountability Public/sector awareness Engage funding bodies Advocacy on systemic issues
Policy submissions	Key decision makers Sector collaborators/other peak bodies	Systemic change
Funding submissions	Funding bodies Philanthropists	Present CISVic work and outcomes Present demand for services
Sector publications Sector forums Sector networks	CISVic and member agencies Sector partners Other peak bodies	Build theory with transferable learnings to inform service directions, service design, and advocacy
Academic journals Academic forums (RMIT collaborations)	RMIT and academic audiences	
Media/ social media	Public	

Description of CISVic Evaluation Framework

As shown in the diagram on the following page, the evaluation design begins with identification of what information is of interest to us (including what is required for the Emergency Relief funding body, Department of Social Services). This is shown in the second column under the heading '*What do we want to know?*' The categories of information are based on previous 'Theory of change' workshopping with CISVic member agencies. (See 'Theory of Change' above).

The following columns identify the sources most suited to obtaining the different types of information. (See 'Triangulation' above).

The first column groups the type of information being sought by *Context*, *Mechanism* and *Outcome*. (See 'Realist Evaluation' above). 'Outcomes' are further categorised as 'Immediate', 'Intermediate', and 'Longer term'. Only people receiving ongoing support will be asked to participate in an interview to explore intermediate or longer term outcomes. Immediate outcomes may be ascertained through data entry on CDS and also service feedback forms.

Diagram of CISVic Evaluation Framework

Source:

CMO	What do we want to know?		Consortia data	Other data bases ³	Case worker records	Annual follow-up interviews service users (sample) ⁴	Front desk/ phone	Feedback form service users	Annual CISVic agency review
AGENCY CONTEXT	No. clients		√				√		
	No. sessions		√						
	No. service types		√						
	Volunteer/paid hours								√
	Type of service/local setting								√
CONTEXT	Demographic – suburb/ gender/ age/ cultural background /disability		√						
	Circumstances-housing/income source		√						
	Presenting issues		√				√		
	Other issues		√				√		
MECHANISM	SERVICES PROVIDED								
	Assessment/engagement		√						
	Material assistance		√						
	Information/advice/FC		√						
	Advocacy support		√						
	Referrals/linking		√						
OUTCOMES	OUTCOMES								
	Basic needs met/ not met	Immediate	√		? ⁵			√	
	Additional services/linking		√		?				
	Respectful, empathic, welcoming service				?	√		√	
	Capacity to make informed choices (individual/systemic + any barriers)	Intermediate		√	?	√			
	Presenting/underlying issues resolved, at least in part					√			
	Increased knowledge and mastery ⁶			√	?	√			
	Increased financial literacy			√	?	√			
	Linking with early prevention and support			√	?	√			
	Improved mental wellbeing from sharing burden with others						√		
	Repeat 'Intermediate' items(above)	Longer term		√	?	√			
	Strengthened relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other community members • Household/family members • Community groups/clubs • Services 			√	?	√			
	Volunteer satisfaction and connections			√	?	√			

³ This only applies to some agencies e.g. Casey North.

⁴ May include service providers at a later date

⁵ ? = under exploration

⁶ Empowerment/feeling of control.