



Discussion paper 2

Strengthening LEAP's evaluation capacity

July 2019

LEAP's Demonstrating Impact Group



The purpose of this paper is to consider the benefits of strengthening LEAP's evaluation capacity and proposed ways to achieve this.

We want to recognise, reinforce and build on LEAP's existing capacity to plan and deliver our local evaluation, and strengthen evaluation and research knowledge and skills across the programme. We also want to continue to nurture a learning culture, whereby everyone involved with planning, commissioning and delivering the LEAP programme, is curious about what's working and what could be improved, and is willing to change based on what we learn. Without such a learning culture, there is little point in research and evaluation.

A period of consultation, where we welcome comments or suggestions on the topics covered in this discussion paper, will end Friday 26th July 2019. Please submit comments by this date to: leapevaluation@ncb.org.uk.

After this date, we will collate and consider responses and develop this paper into a tender specification.

This paper should be read and considered in conjunction with discussion paper 1: *Developing LEAP's Shared Measurement Approach* (summary and technical report).

Introducing LEAP

LEAP aims to improve children's diet and nutrition, social and emotional, and communication and language development. We do this through a range of strategies – *directly* by working with children to positively influence their developmental progress, *and indirectly* by strengthening communities and the workforce, through to promoting parenting skills and behaviours, improving the conditions that support good parenting, and achieving system reform. Our work cuts across all three strands of child development. We therefore focus on the *synergy between* all the developmental domains.¹

Current processes

LEAP's routine monitoring and evaluation refers to how we track the six data types – input, user, feedback and experience of service, engagement, outcomes and impact data - across our programme.

Currently, there's an expectation that LEAP services routinely collect monitoring and evaluation data as part of their contract with LEAP. We then commission planned, periodic evaluations and research through our 'approved suppliers list' - to date, we have commissioned three process evaluations, as well as a range of research to support programme development.

The main purposes of routine monitoring and evaluation are:

- performance monitoring (accountability) – to ensure services are delivering what they are meant to be delivering, and to formally report to our funders and other stakeholders

¹ Maggi, S., Irwin, L., Siddiqi, A., and Hertzman, C. (2010) The social determinants of early child development: An overview, *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 46: 627-635



- to inform internal operations, including the planning of independent evaluations. Specifically, routine monitoring and evaluation allows us to:
 - identify when and under what circumstances we could and should commission independent evaluations
 - contribute essential data to independent evaluations, such as baseline data and information about the nature of the intervention
 - contribute necessary information to interpret and apply findings from impact evaluation. This includes information about context, and data on the quality of implementation.
 - Improve and adapt services accordingly.²

Our main challenges

LEAP's goal is to make a positive difference to the children and families we serve, but we face several challenges with demonstrating this difference because:

- LEAP has limited internal capacity for evaluation. Many services don't have the capacity or capability to routinely collect high-quality outcomes data. Research skills and training is often needed to effectively administer outcome measurement instruments and to investigate sensitive topics. Also, the LEAP monitoring, data and evaluation teams do not have the capacity to design and do evaluation, and meaningfully analyse data, on behalf of all our services.
- Currently, LEAP simultaneously manages multiple evaluation and research contracts via LEAP's approved supplier's list. These suppliers work independently from each other, meaning no independent organisation has overall overview of the programme.
- LEAP's evaluation and research, public health, monitoring, and data teams, as well as many of our services, do not have full access to academic databases to search the latest evidence. Individuals rely on their own personal resource library access or Research Gate.

Proposal – for discussion

To strengthen LEAP's evaluation capacity, we propose the following approach:

Deliverable 1: Establish an Academic Practice Partnership to plan and do LEAP's evaluations.

Deliverable 2: Introduce Impact/Data Champions to support services with data collection for their routine monitoring and evaluation

Deliverable 3: Establish an Expert Advisory Group

Deliverable 4: Weekly LEAP evaluation and research support sessions

Deliverable 5: Evaluation and Research online resource library and training programme

² Perrin, B. (2012) *Linking Monitoring and Evaluation to Impact*, USA, Interaction.



Deliverable 6: LEAP mini-summit series

Deliverable 7: Improvement Science Strategy

See appendix 1 for the associated project plan.

We now consider each of the seven deliverables, in turn, below:

Deliverable 1: Establish an Academic Practice Partnership (APP)

What is this and why it is important?

An Academic Practice Partnership (APP) is a collaborative relationship between two organisations – in this instance, an academic institute and a practice programme (LEAP). The APP would be an independent institute, with considerable technical expertise, that would have overall oversight of LEAP's local evaluation. The partnership would provide necessary neutrality, and ensure our evaluations are robust and non-biased (compared with self-evaluation). An external evaluator would therefore add credibility to the LEAP programme, increasing stakeholder trust and confidence in our evaluation findings.

How will we do this?

The Academic-Practice Partner would be responsible for working with LEAP and LEAP's expert advisory group to:

- develop a local evaluation strategy, based on our programme theory of change and agreed shared measurement approach (see discussion paper 1)
- design and deliver our process, impact and economic evaluations
- secure data sharing agreements and ethical approvals with our services and partners
- ensure that any new projects have evaluation methods and tools embedded into their design and delivery
- review LEAP's service-level theories of change and measurement frameworks
- regularly review and refine theories of change and measurement frameworks (at both programme- and service-level)
- support LEAP services with their routine monitoring and evaluation – including ongoing support with training in using measurement tools aligned with the shared measurement framework, and interpreting the results.

LEAP's in-house teams will be responsible for:

- managing the external contract, relationships and outputs
- developing and maintaining close working relationships with external researchers to continuously identify areas of focus for LEAP monitoring, evaluation and research, and collaboratively plan and manage LEAP's research and evaluation
- knowledge brokering - effectively bridging the gap between academia, policy and practice, which will involve working closely with LEAP services to make use of monitoring, evaluation and research findings to refine, adapt and improve services accordingly



- triangulating evidence and input from our external contractors, partners and advisors.

Deliverable 2: Introduce Impact/Data Champions

What is this and why it is important?

We will introduce LEAP data/impact champions, ideally by Autumn 2019. Data/impact champions will be researchers who advise and support LEAP services (through workshops or 1:1 mentoring), to routinely collect, handle and report quality data in accordance with their measurement frameworks.

How will we do this?

We will recruit Band 4 Assistant Psychologists, or equivalent, to fulfil this role. Initially, the Impact/Data Champions will be recruited on a short-term contract while the APP is being set up. This is because we envisage the LEAP evaluation and data teams will have greater capacity to fulfil this role when the APP is fully established. We will also explore the possibility of offering this as a voluntary role, although we may struggle to achieve consistency with this approach.

Deliverable 3: Establish an Expert Advisory Group

What is this and why it is important?

An Expert Advisory Group (EAG) will help ensure that our programme is regularly informed by the latest policy and practice evidence across the many factors that contribute to early childhood development. The EAG will promote good evaluation and research working practice, and provide LEAP with ongoing challenge and expertise.

How will we do this?

We will establish an expert advisory group (EAG) to meet two to three times a year. It will be comprised of practitioners, senior managers, leading academics and policy officials in the field of early child development and include representatives from other place-based approaches and research charities.

The first task of the expert advisory group will be to respond to work to develop our programme-level theory of change and shared measurement approach.

Deliverable 4: Weekly LEAP evaluation and research support sessions

What is this and why it is important?

The LEAP evaluation and research team needs to protect time for strategic work to develop LEAP's shared measurement approach and establish the academic practice partnership (as set out in Discussion papers 1 and 2). At the same time, however, we recognise the need to strengthen the evaluation and research support available to LEAP services. The LEAP Evaluation and Research team has therefore reinstated weekly support sessions.



How will we do this?

Weekly support sessions will be open to all LEAP staff, partners and service providers. We are investigating options for reservation and online booking software so that services can see when there is availability and book on. We are also developing a 'Request for research and evaluation support' form to help us prepare for these sessions and best support LEAP staff, partners and service providers during these sessions (up to 90 minutes).

During these sessions, the evaluation and research team will be able to offer a range of research and evaluation consultancy support.

Deliverable 5: Online evaluation and research resource library with training programme

What is this and why it is important?

The LEAP evaluation and research team, with project support, will develop an online resource library. This will initially contain guidance to support services to develop or update their theories of change, ensuring they are science-based, and create a measurement framework. Throughout the year, we will build this resource to include other research and evaluation topics, such as depth interviewing and how to design and run focus groups. These resources will be a mix of in-house developed guidance documents, and published quality resources. The online resource library will also host additional documents from across the programme including LEAP policy documents, creative brief forms and request for evaluation and research support forms.

Additionally, we will develop an evaluation and research training programme for the year to align with the resource library. LEAP services, settings and partners will be welcome to sign up to and attend these informal sessions. We will also film or record these sessions, wherever possible.

How will we do this?

LEAP will work with our IT provider to set up a secure file sharing and storage space for LEAP's online resource library. All LEAP services and settings will be able to access this space, regardless of whether they have an @ncb.org.uk email address.

Deliverable 6: LEAP mini-summit Series

What is this and why it is important?

The Evaluation and Research team, with steer from the Demonstrating Impact Group (DIG), have put together a programme of internal learning events throughout the year, called 'LEAP's mini-summit series'.

At these mini-summits, the LEAP core team, with our services and partners, discuss the key issues facing LEAP families (the influencing factors which will impact on the extent to which our services can make a difference to families).



How will we do this?

The first mini-summit was held in January 2019, as part of LEAP's provider event, and focused on child poverty. Representatives from LEAP services and partner organisations heard about how child poverty is expected to further affect service provision, and child and family outcomes. The second half of the summit was a roundtable discussion called 'on the frontline of child poverty in Lambeth', with the aim of encouraging cross-service and cross-partner conversations about what we can do to mitigate against the effects of increasing poverty for our children and families.

Conversations about how child poverty impacts our work will continue at the next mini-summit series (part of our autumn provider event). We will also be discussing crime and violence in the community, and how this affects child development and service engagement.

Deliverable 7: LEAP's Improvement Science Strategy

What is this and why it is important?

LEAP is currently piloting the use of Improvement Science tools and techniques. Improvement science encourages the testing of creative ideas, initially on a small scale, to see whether they help improve some of our most complex problems. It empowers those closest to the problem - practitioners, parents, carers and volunteers – to use their 'on the ground' knowledge and expertise to discover solutions.

How will we do this?

The pilot project involved the Parent Champions team and investigated best practice for engaging underserved populations living in the LEAP wards.

The Evaluation and Research team will be leading the development and delivery of the LEAP improvement science strategy. We'll be organising and facilitating learning events, and promoting and publishing our improvement science work at internal and external events and conferences.



Appendix 1 – Draft workplan

