



Feasibility study guidance

This document provides guidance on the Youth Endowment Fund's expectations for feasibility studies and implementation and evaluations (IPE)

This document begins with an outline of the aims and objectives of both early-stage feasibility studies and broader implementation and process evaluations, which are commissioned alongside YEF impact evaluations. This is followed by an outline of methods, success criteria and reporting.

1. Feasibility studies

Feasibility studies are commissioned by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) when an intervention is in a very early stage of development and could benefit from further refinement and specificity. Feasibility studies may also be commissioned when a relatively well-specified intervention is being adopted from another context (e.g. abroad), to test its feasibility in a local context.

Aims and objectives

The main aim of a YEF feasibility study is to ensure that the intervention is ready for piloting. This means that all the steps 1 to 4 in the [EIF 10 steps to evaluation success](#) must be completed.

The specific research questions or objectives of the feasibility study will vary depending upon the intervention specificity, (both in terms of its underlying theory and delivery), likely implementation feasibility and other contextual factors (e.g. policy and practice context), and should be agreed through discussion between the YEF Evaluation Manager (EM), developer and evaluator. In some cases, elements of YEF feasibility and YEF pilot studies will overlap, specifically when assessing implementation feasibility.

Most YEF feasibility studies will involve some refinement of the logic model alongside testing aspects of intervention feasibility. Some will also involve refinement of the theory of change and development of an implementation plan (or 'blueprint'). Therefore, the objectives will fall into the following categories.

1. Theory of change and logic model development

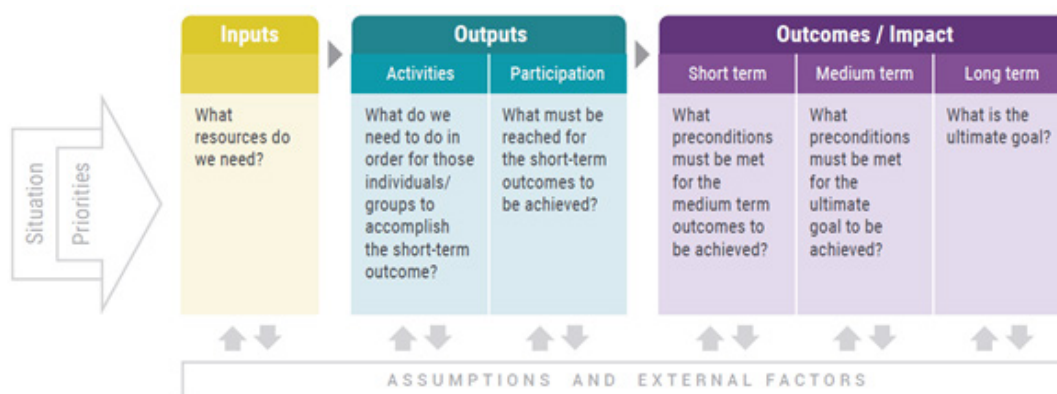
The theory of change and logic model have two separate but important purposes:

- The theory of change specifies why an intervention is important for children’s outcomes, including any evidence to support this theory (see Step 1 of EIF’s [10 steps to evaluation success](#)).
- The logic model graphically represents what the intervention will do and the hypothesised causal pathways to achieving the intended outcomes (see Step 2 of EIF’s [10 steps to evaluation success](#)).

Usually, the YEF will only fund a feasibility study where an intervention has a clear theory of change. Each YEF applicant will have provided some details regarding their theory of change and the evidence and assumptions underpinning the project. However, in some cases there may be aspects which need clarifying or that might benefit from further investigation by an independent expert.

Similarly, many YEF applicants will have provided information related to their logic model in their application. However, this will often benefit from further refinement with support from an independent evaluator. This is likely to involve a series of workshops between the evaluator and intervention developers (and possibly other primary stakeholders). Figure 1 shows the main elements of a logic model. However, often the relationships between inputs, activities and outcomes are not linear and will require further investigation. Evaluators will be expected to work with delivery teams to develop the hypothesised causal pathways and evidence to support them (for example, via literature review).

Figure 1: The key elements of a well-specified logic model



Source: EIF

2. Development of an intervention plan or 'blueprint'

Step 3 in EIF's ten steps to evaluation success involves the specification of a detailed intervention plan for how activities link to immediate outcomes. Often this is the domain of the developer. However, in some cases where an intervention is at an early stage of development¹, developers may benefit from support from an evaluator or collaborator with specific expertise in intervention development. In these cases, an output of the feasibility study may be the development of a comprehensive intervention plan.

In some cases, where there is already an intervention plan or 'blueprint', but it has not been delivered in the UK, there may be some refinement of the 'blueprint' required to ensure it fits the intended context. In these cases, the feasibility questions will be linked to the development of the intervention plan (see next section).

3. Intervention feasibility

Step 4 in EIF's ten steps to evaluation success involves a range of activities that consider whether the key components of an intervention's logic model and implementation plan are practicable and achievable (i.e. can it achieve its intended outputs in this context?).

During the feasibility study set-up phase it will be important to identify the most salient dimensions of and factors affecting implementation and consider how they may be assessed. Table 2 provides a comprehensive description of possible dimensions of implementation (orange rows), and factors affecting implementation (purple rows) that might influence (positively or negatively) those dimensions². The YEF would encourage evaluators and developers to use this table or an established implementation science frameworks such as the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research or EPIS framework when developing their research questions.^{3 4}

Feasibility studies and IPEs should be carried out with due regard to racial and cultural sensitivity and for each project it will be important to explicitly assess the experience of different groups of children and young people who receive the project where possible.

1 In these cases it will be important to appoint an evaluator or collaborator with expertise in early stage service design and intervention development.

2 Drawn from literature reviews on implementation (see references in table).

3 <https://cfirguide.org/constructs/>

4 <https://episframework.com/>

The relevant factors affecting and dimensions of implementation feasibility and how they interact will vary by project, as will the precise research questions. For example, for long-running projects, the level of implementation support provided after initial training is likely to relate closely to implementation quality. For mentoring projects, the attitudes of providers is likely to be closely related to participant responsiveness. For well-developed interventions that are being transferred from outside the UK, it will be important to consider how the local service systems and culture may require adaptations to the intervention to ensure it adequately fits its new context.

Box 1 goes into more detail about the differences and similarities between EIF Step 4 and YEF feasibility studies.

Box 1: Similarities and differences between YEF feasibility studies and EIF's Step 4

The EIF Step 4 (conducting a feasibility study) emphasises the importance of:

1. Exploring the feasibility of the resources required to deliver the intervention.
2. Exploring the barriers to implementation.
3. Collecting practitioner and manager views about the feasibility of the implementation tasks.
4. The feasibility of desired recruitment and retention to the intervention, including collecting data on user satisfaction and comparing to the demographics of those recruited to intended population data.
5. Tracking service use as an outcome (not usually included in a YEF feasibility study)
6. Assessing unit cost (not usually included in a YEF feasibility study).

The first four points relate closely to some of potential dimensions of and factors affecting implementation that could be analysed in a YEF feasibility study (see Table 2). However, tracking service use outcomes (point 5) is more likely to be included at the YEF pilot stage. YEF feasibility studies tend to focus primarily on implementation outputs and the feasibility of these.

Also, although YEF might expect evaluators to assess the likely feasibility of the resource inputs required (including an assessment of cost and affordability), YEF only requires full cost reporting at the pilot and efficacy/ effectiveness stage.

2. Implementation and process evaluations (IPEs)

This section describes implementation and process evaluations as delivered alongside pilot and efficacy / effectiveness studies.

YEF evaluations will typically have an implementation and process evaluation component. IPEs should be complimentary to the pilot / impact evaluation, and they should be tailored to each individual evaluation. The intervention logic model should be used to guide the design of the IPE.

Aims and objectives

The main aim of an IPE is to examine how an intervention is put into practice, how it operates to achieve its intended outcomes and the factors that influence these processes⁵.

IPEs should be used to explore the mechanisms underlying the intervention, including how, for whom and under what circumstances the intervention leads to the intended outcomes. They can also be used to understand why an intervention did not work e.g., the intervention may not have been implemented as intended.

The nature of an IPE will likely vary depending on whether a pilot, efficacy or effectiveness evaluation has been commissioned. This is reflected in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Potential focus of IPE by evaluation type

Evaluation type	Potential IPE focus / questions
Pilot	Is the project ready for trial? How manageable is the intervention? What appears to be the most important factors in successful implementation?
Efficacy	Association between aspects of implementation and successful outcomes. Gather data to support guidelines for successful implementation
Effectiveness	How the intervention is interpreted or used at larger scale. Contextual variability in implementation. Successful factors to guide policy.

⁵ IPE_Handbook.pdf (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

Table 2: Dimensions of and factors affecting implementation that might be considered in a feasibility study and broader implementation and process evaluations

Name	Possible research questions
Dimensions of implementation⁶	
Fidelity / adherence	To what extent do implementers adhere to the intended delivery model?
Dosage	How much of the intended intervention has been delivered?
Quality	How well are the different components of the intervention being delivered?
Reach	What is the rate of participation by intended recipients?
Responsiveness	To what extent do the participants engage with the intervention?
Intervention differentiation	To what extent are the intervention activities sufficiently different from existing practices?
Adaptation	Are changes are needed to accommodate context and population need?
Factors affecting implementation⁷	
Community level factors ⁸	What is the level of need and readiness for change in the context where the intervention will take place? Including, the policy, practice and funding context?
Provider / implementer factors	What is the perceived need for and benefit of the intervention amongst implementers? Do they have the necessary skills, experience, attitudes, and psychological characteristics?
Intervention characteristics	What form does it take? Is it compatible with the context in which it is intended to be delivered? Can it be modified or adapted to sufficiently to the intended context?
Organisational capacity	What is the readiness and capacity for change in the settings in which the intervention will take place? Is the culture, coordination, communication and leadership sufficient to enable implementation?
Implementation support system	What strategies and practices are used to support high quality implementation? What training and ongoing support or technical assistance is available?

6 These dimensions of implementation are drawn from the [EEF's IPE handbook](#). It is important to consider every dimension and how they relate to the intervention. A failure of any dimension of implementation may lead to a lack of impact on intended outcomes.

7 Durlak, J. & DuPre, E. (2008) Implementation matters: a review of the research on the influence of implementation on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41, 327-350.

8 This paper provides a useful example of a process-oriented pilot evaluation that focuses mainly on the acceptability and feasibility of a school-based emotional well-being programme: Kendal, S., Callery, P., & Keeley, P. (2011) The feasibility and acceptability of an approach to emotional well-being support for high school students. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 16, 193-200.

3. Methods

The design of the feasibility study or IPE will depend upon the aims and objectives that have been identified for the evaluation. However, it is likely to include a mixed-methods approach including both quantitative (e.g. surveys, analysis of monitoring data) and qualitative approaches (e.g. observations, interviews and focus groups) with stakeholders, including both providers and participants.

Dimensions of implementation can be measured quantitatively or qualitatively (see suggestions for measuring dimensions of implementation below) and mixed-methods research with stakeholders used to explore the possible reasons for implementation challenges and feasibility. In some cases, where an intervention is being developed and adapted, it may be appropriate for the evaluator and developer to use rapid cycle design, testing and feedback, to assess and refine these adaptations.

The evaluator should specify as far as possible which research methods will be used to capture the relevant aspects of implementation, including any decisions about how the data will be collected (e.g. sampling strategies) and analysed, and how this data will be used to answer the research questions and inform intervention logic model and/or theory of change⁹.

Measuring dimensions of implementation

- Fidelity/adherence may be assessed by rating the proportion of sessions covered, and/or extent to which the implementer followed the session protocol. A distinction should be made between adherence in terms of content delivered and the prescribed approaches to delivery.
- Dosage may be assessed by rating the number or proportion of intervention sessions delivered and/or the amount of time spent delivering the intervention.
- Quality may be assessed by rating implementer interest and enthusiasm, preparedness, clarity of expression, and responsiveness during delivery. Interviews or semi-structured observations with recipients or providers may also be used to explore factors that contribute to quality.
- Participant responsiveness may be assessed by tracking retention to the intervention or through focus groups or interviews with recipients and/or implementers, or by rating engagement through observation. It will be important to ensure racial and cultural sensitivity when assessing participant responsiveness.
- Reach may be assessed by rating the proportion of the intended intervention recipients present in a given session or comparing the demographics of those recruited to that of the intended population.

⁹ There are useful detailed recommendations about best practice in pre-specifying, analysing and interpreting mixed-methods designs in the [2019 EEF IPE guidance](#).

4. Success criteria and/or targets

Where possible evaluators and developers are encouraged to agree together and set out in the evaluation plan any success criteria or targets that may be applicable for the feasibility study or IPE. For example, 'the intervention is feasible if at least 50% of participants attend all sessions'. It is important that these targets are realistic and meaningful and where appropriate they should be linked to the research questions or study objectives. Where there are multiple stages to the feasibility study, then success criteria or targets at each stage should be set out separately.

We recommend evaluators to set targets which fall under the following criteria:

1. Project implementation (i.e. fidelity, adherence)
2. Recruitment (and retention) of participants and workforce

For each criteria, there should be GREEN (GO); AMBER (PAUSE AND THINK); RED (STOP).

For example, if one of the criteria under recruitment is 'Proportion referred who are eligible' it may be appropriate to have:

- 70% = Green
- 50% = Amber
- 40% = Red

5. Reporting and next steps

Feasibility

Analysis for feasibility studies will be descriptive. It will be vital for the report to directly answer the research questions and objectives identified for the study. The evaluator will also be expected to review the logic model and theory of change based on their findings and this will always be one of the outputs of the study.

evaluators should aim to draw judgements of feasibility where applicable and report on any success criteria or targets. Feasibility studies should conclude whether the intervention is feasible or not, and if feasible then whether any changes should be made to the intervention, its intervention delivery, and/or the main study design. These conclusions and recommendations should be clearly set out in the evaluator's reporting outputs to the YEF. Failure to meet feasibility targets, does not necessarily mean that the intervention should be abandoned, but will suggest that it requires revision.

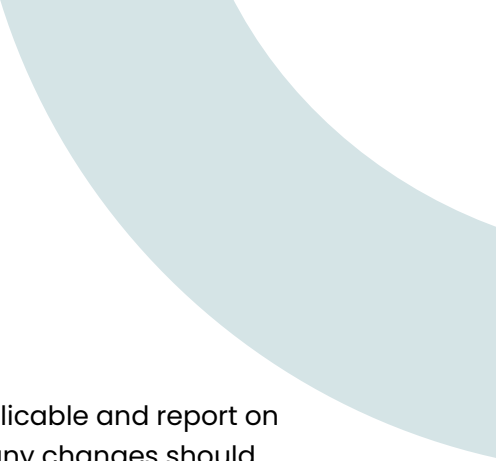
Usually, the initial output of the feasibility study will be a presentation from the evaluators, to the developers and the YEF. The presentation will be used to inform a discussion about next steps (e.g. progression to a YEF pilot, further revisions to the intervention, or no further action). This will usually be followed by a written report of the results, to be published on the YEF's website.

Implementation and process evaluations

Analysis for IPEs will typically be descriptive, as we expect analysis of qualitative data to provide a detailed narrative summary of the data collected. We are keen to see a diversity of views, so we discourage evaluators from focusing on numbers and percentages unless there is a strong rationale, and in those cases, it should be stated in the report. Generally, references to numbers/percentages can be avoided by framing the finding in a different way e.g., to indicate the strength/weight of a reoccurring finding within the study population, it may be helpful to state that 'there was a widespread view that...' or 'there was a dominant view that...'¹⁰. There may be some cases where it is appropriate to use quantitative analysis for specific types of data, this may include quantitative data on fidelity/adherence, dosage, etc.

It will be crucial for the report to directly answer the IPE research questions and objectives identified for the pilot/impact study. Evaluators should aim to draw judgements about the

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of this topic see '[Qualitative Research Practice](#)' pg. 311-312.



feasibility of carrying out an efficacy/effectiveness study where applicable and report on any success criteria or targets. If feasible, they should say whether any changes should be made to the main study design. Failure to meet success criteria, does not necessarily mean that the main evaluation should be abandoned, but will suggest that the proposed design or methods require revision.

As IPEs will typically be commissioned alongside pilot/impact evaluations, any outputs will need to be reported in the pilot/impact report. This will be published on the YEF's website.



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We reserve the right to modify the guidance at any time, without prior notice.

The Youth Endowment Fund Charitable Trust

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