

Knowledge Translation Evaluation Planning Guide

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Table of contents

Project team	3
Introduction	4
What is knowledge translation?	4
Why do we need to evaluate knowledge translation?	4
What is the knowledge translation planning guide?	4
Step by step planning.....	5
Conclusions.....	8
References.....	8

Project team

Prepared by
Knowledge Exchange
Provincial Addiction and Mental Health
Alberta Health Services

Contact

For more information, contact:
Knowledge Exchange
Provincial Addiction and Mental Health
Alberta Health Services
amh.knowledgeexchange@ahs.ca

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Introduction

What is knowledge translation?

Knowledge translation (KT) is defined as “a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically-sound application of knowledge to improve the health of Canadians, provide more effective health services and products and strengthen the health care system” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2016). Translating research findings to knowledge users (e.g., decision makers, practitioners or patients) in a format tailored to their needs is essential to ensure they base decisions on the best available evidence. The value of KT is becoming increasingly more recognized; it has become a key part of the research process with many research funding bodies requiring it in grant applications and health organizations are actively seeking out research information. There are many available theories and frameworks on which to base a KT plan.

Why do we need to evaluate knowledge translation?

With the increased focus on KT there is a need to determine if KT efforts are successful and worth the investment. Evaluating KT activities ensures that the intended impact is achieved. It provides a rationale for funding KT activities and enables users to make adjustments if the KT activities have not been effective. KT evaluation follows the same principles used throughout research and evaluation projects. Evaluation can be varied and can include the implementation/process and/or the impact of the activities themselves.

What is the knowledge translation planning guide?

This document provides an overview of factors to consider for KT evaluation and a guide on how to plan for it. This guide is meant for those planning and implementing KT activities. KT evaluation should be considered when first developing the KT plan; however, evaluation post-implementation can still provide valuable information. The figure below outlines the steps this guide follows for planning KT specific evaluation.

Knowledge Translation Evaluation Planning

1. What impact do you want your KT activities to have?

2. How will you know if this impact was achieved?

3. How will you obtain this information?

4. How will the KT evaluation results be used?

Step by step planning

1. What impact do you want your KT activities to have?

A clear and concise description of the KT plan and its objectives are needed in order to determine the intended impact of the KT activities.

The impact of the individual KT activities should be linked to the KT objectives and plan. The evaluation plan should identify the target audience and where the intended impact will occur (e.g., healthcare/well-being, clinical practice, policies/systems, or research/knowledge).

Consider decision-makers and stakeholders and consult them when appropriate.

2. How will you know if this impact was achieved?

The next step is to consider how you will know if the desired KT impact was achieved. The same principles that apply to research and evaluation projects also apply to measuring the impact of KT activities. Please refer to the Evaluation Resources page on the Knowledge Exchange website for resources developed to help individuals gain a basic understanding of evaluation. Evaluation can be process-based, outcome-based or impact-based. It is important to refer to your KT objectives and link your efforts back to them.

Consider how similar initiatives have been evaluated in the past. Existing literature and theories should be consulted to inform the evaluation. This can be obtained by conducting a formal literature search, looking at previous studies or seeking expert opinion. There are several frameworks that may be useful in guiding the evaluation process.

For the desired impacts you need to determine the associated outputs/outcomes/indicators. Examples of indicators are listed in Figure 1.

- The type of indicators used in the evaluation will depend on the purpose of the evaluation, KT activities used, and resources available.
- Indicators need to provide reasonable, useful and meaningful measures of the intended outcomes, and fit with the resources available and scope of the evaluation.
- Will these impacts be short-term or long-term?
- How will decision makers and stakeholders be involved? What information do they need and what is required from them?

Figure 1. Example Indicators to Measure the Impact of KT Activities*

Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Refers to how and how well the KT activities are carried out</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ KT knowledge assessment, generation, synthesis, sharing and capacity
Reach and Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Extent to which information is distributed, redistributed and referred to by organizations and users</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number distributed ○ Number requested or downloads ○ Media exposure ○ Referrals (e.g., website links, index, workshops, word of mouth, comments)
Usefulness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Quality of KT activities that are appropriate, applicable and practical</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Read/browsed, awareness ○ Satisfied with ○ Usefulness of ○ Gained knowledge ○ Changed views, attitude, intention ○ Product or service quality (e.g., duration, citation, impact factor)
Use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is done with the knowledge gained from the KT activities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Indicators of intended use, adapting and use of information ○ Systems changes ○ Policy, program or service and practice change indicators ○ Efficacy of program
Collaboration and Capacity Building
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How, how well and how often stakeholders are working together to share knowledge and resources</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Partnership/collaboration indicators (e.g., number of products developed or disseminated with partners, social network growth) ○ Capacity building efforts (e.g., number or type)

*adapted from Barwick, 2013; Ohkubo et al., 2013; Sullivan et al., 2007

3. How will you obtain this information?

Consider the data sources available. Is the information already available or will you have to collect it yourself? Do the tools to measure these indicators exist or will you need to develop and/or modify existing tools?

Will quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods be used for data collection?

Potential data collection methods:

- Databases (e.g., administrative records)
- Interviews, surveys, focus groups, direct observation
- Document reviews, chart audits

Data collection considerations:

- What is the reliability, validity, and sensitivity of the proposed measures and are they practical (resources and burden)?
- How often will indicators be collected? Will data be gathered on all program participants or only a sample?
- Who will be responsible for managing data collection? A process must be in place to accurately track indicators.
- Develop a data analysis plan.
- Does your team have the expertise required to do the evaluation or will you need external assistance?
- How will decision makers and stakeholders be involved?
- Consider the ethical implications of data collection.

4. How will the KT evaluation results be used?

Consider how the findings will be reported. To whom? When? How often?

What will you compare your results to? Some examples are averages, baseline, industry standards or expectations, goals or planned performance targets.

Use results for making decisions regarding future KT strategies to engage various stakeholders.

Evaluation can be an iterative process, and the findings may require the KT plan to be flexible and the approach be revised. How this will be captured and who is responsible for this will need to be determined.

Consider decision makers and stakeholders and consult with them when necessary. Different stakeholders may consider different information valuable and may need to be engaged at different stages of the evaluation.

Conclusions

KT evaluation can allow you to determine if the intended impact is achieved, provide a rationale for funding and enable appropriate adjustments if the KT activities have not been effective. The evaluation methods can take many forms. However, the objectives of the KT activities should guide the evaluation plan and highlight what information will be useful for stakeholders. The evaluation plan needs to be tailored to each project and consideration should be given to the time and resources available.

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