Evaluation & evidence

Advice for schools as community hubs (SaCH)

In a nutshell

Evaluation involves understanding what works by collecting, analysing and feeding back information on SaCH activities to make judgements and support better decisions about what to do next.

When leaders and staff adopt evaluative thinking, SaCH can adapt their activities based on evidence and are more likely to **achieve their goals**.

Are you an evaluative thinker?

Do you:
- set clear goals for projects and programs
- question assumptions
- observe and reflect
- collect and analyse relevant information
- invite and act on feedback
- compare implementation and outcomes with intentions
- adapt your design and delivery in response?

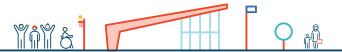In SaCH, evaluative thinking and acting can be **constrained** by a lack of strategic planning, inadequate funding and overburdening staff, or **supported** by a commitment to measurement, and transparent, structured reporting processes.

How do you define success?

School leaders, staff, students, families, the wider community and other stakeholders may define the success of SaCH in various ways. Refer to the 'Community strengths and needs analysis' and 'Partnerships and collaborations' advice sheets in this series.

Identifying **shared priorities** will help you find an agreed approach to evaluating your project's implementation, impact and value.

- Consider including measures beyond academic achievement to monitor and assess impacts on belonging, engagement, satisfaction and tangible benefits to students, families and the wider community.

- If possible, partner with trained evaluators.

- Share your findings with other SaCH and your community, so they can benefit from your experience and celebrate success.

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What kind of evaluation should you do?

It depends on the stage of your project or program and the decisions you need to make. The table below outlines evaluation types relevant to developing and sustaining SaCH.

Note: A 'project' might be an entire SaCH, or just part of it (such as designing and building a community vegetable garden). A 'program' is an ongoing activity in a SaCH (such as a gardening club that meets weekly).

Thinking and planning for evaluation at the conception of a project or program is essential. Before you commence activities, establish the baseline or starting point for each selected measure (e.g., students' sense of belonging) so you can monitor any change.

Evaluation type	When to do it	What it is	What it informs
Needs and strengths analysis	Before a project or program is proposed	Consulting or surveying school and community members and stakeholders to find out what they need or prioritise in general or concerning a specific issue. Consider what change is required and how long it will take.	How ready the community is to engage, and the objectives and intended outcomes of the project or program
Process or formative evaluation	During project or program implementation	Monitoring project or program implementation to determine whether it is proceeding as planned, or roadblocks or risks have emerged.	Whether project processes, resourcing or timeframes need adjustment
Outcome and impact evaluation	At the end of a project or at regular intervals during an ongoing program	Examining the extent to which a project or program has delivered the intended outcomes and achieved its objectives over an appropriate amount of time. This could include measures of effectiveness, efficiency and quality.	What's functioning and what's not, whether more work is needed – and if so, whether new approaches, resources or processes are required
Economic evaluation	Before, during and after a project or program	Assessing a project or program's feasibility, management or impact in terms of cost-effectiveness, cost-utility, cost-consequence, value for money, social return on investment, or cost-benefit.	Whether to start, adapt or discontinue a project or program

Case study: Doveton College

Evaluations at Doveton College demonstrated enhanced school-readiness of kids attending the on-site early childhood centre, increased school attendance, improved standardised testing results in years 7 and 9, and significant engagement by the community with adult learning programs.

Source: Paproth, Clinton & Aston (see below)

Timing matters

- Start by examining evidence from existing SaCH to steer new projects in the right direction, save time and avoid pitfalls.

- Plan your evaluation early and build information (evidence) collection into new projects and programs.

- Don't conclude outcome evaluation too soon: educational and social impacts take time and monitoring progress towards your goal/s is key.

- Choose your approach and measures carefully: once data collection begins, switching might be difficult even if a better method becomes obvious.

- Keep going – SaCH are constantly evolving and never 'finished'; neither is monitoring and evaluation.

Want to learn more?

Read the following chapters in _Schools as Community Hubs: Building 'more than a school' for community benefit_ (2023)

- _Evaluative Thinking and the Success of Schools as Community Hubs: Is there a Relationship?_ Paproth, Clinton & Aston

- _Are Schools as Community Hubs Worth It?_ Aston, Clinton & Paproth

- _An Evaluation Framework for Schools as Community Hubs_ Clinton, Aston, Paproth

- _Our Place implementation framework_ (Our Place, 2020, p.7)