
7 Invest to Grow (ItG)

The National Evaluation has a remit to undertake the national evaluation of the 22 Established and Developing projects funded under the ItG initiative. Project level evaluation will also be undertaken by a Local Evaluator with the National Evaluation drawing a link from the local activity to the National Evaluation activity and to a cohesive whole for the Strategy, ItG funds a wide range of different interventions with the common theme that they are projects assessed as having potential for broader application.

7.1 ItG National Evaluation Questions

Key National Evaluation questions for ItG are as follows:

- To what extent have ItG projects contributed to improved outcomes for children and families in relation to the four priority outcome areas (healthy young families, early learning and care, supporting families and parents, and child-friendly communities)?
- What were the most important factors that facilitated improved outcomes?
- What were the factors that facilitated and inhibited the project logic models being implemented in different contexts?
- Which of the models were implemented in the most effective and efficient manner?
- Which of the models are suitable for broader implementation?

The ItG initiative shares many characteristics of CfC because both are aimed at children in their early years and their families. Hence, many of the kinds of interventions involved in ItG are similar to those likely to be funded by CfC, and so the impact on children, families and (to a lesser extent) communities is expected to be similar. The ItG Framework does not include the dimension *services working together*, but a number of ItG projects are focused on improved service coordination and/or community capacity building.

However, ItG is structured and targeted differently to CfC. The most relevant differences from an evaluation point of view are:

- ItG does not operate a FP model
- The interventions are not focused on designated communities
- ItG interventions tend to be much more structured and large-scale
- There is more emphasis on direct service provision and less emphasis on joining up different services.
- Suitability for broader application is a key criterion for the ItG evaluation
- ItG projects have a greater proportion of their budgets (up to 10 per cent) set aside for local evaluation, and so we expect the bulk of the evaluation activity to be undertaken by Local Evaluators. The evaluation will therefore be structured in a slightly different way.

The role of the National Evaluation will be:

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- To design, in partnership with ItG Local Evaluators, a ‘before’ and ‘after’ Service Users questionnaire, to be used as part of the impact evaluation in ItG⁸. This questionnaire will link to the Family Study instrument and to LSAC. (The core module of the Service User Study is now available)
 - To design a range of other tools (such as satisfaction questionnaires or service coordination questionnaires) which can be used by ItG projects for local evaluations.
 - To undertake an analysis of the interim and final local evaluation reports which draw out and synthesise the main themes and learning points from the local evaluations.
 - To analyse project models and progress reports to identify national patterns
 - To identify and disseminate promising programmes and promising practices in partnership with Local Evaluators.
 - To undertake themed case studies on a range of topics in partnership with Local Evaluators
 - To coordinate meetings with ItG Local Evaluators to facilitate information exchange and development of evaluation methodology in partnership with FaCS.
 - To review and comment on proposed evaluation methodology of ItG projects.

FaCS has provided guidance for ItG programmes on local evaluation activity to be developed by Local Evaluators. This sets out four strands of evaluation:

- Project logic – to provide a detailed description of the project model and its expected impacts on children, families, communities and other services
- Performance monitoring
- Process evaluation – to describe the facilitating factors and barriers to successful implementation of the logic model in various contexts
- Impact evaluation – to measure short-term outcomes for children and families. ItG projects can use the research instruments provided by the National Evaluation. However, these instruments are designed to assist projects, and where they are not useful for particular projects they are not required to be used.

7.2 Questionnaire for Parents – Service Users Study

The questionnaire will be provided to ItG projects to administer to parents before and after the intervention. The Service Users Questionnaire is described in the CfC section above. Data items, definitions and standards for the ItG questionnaire will be consistent with national standards or other significant studies (such as LSAC) where possible. The questionnaire covers:

- Demographics – child and parent
- Child physical health and development
- Parent wellbeing

⁸ This is the same instrument which will be used for the Service Users Study of the CfC evaluation.

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- Family relationships (including parent/child relationships)
 - Service use and satisfaction
 - Social support and community embeddedness (where appropriate)

A number of modules will be developed which can be adapted to the particular needs of specific projects. These will include:

- A version for infants, which would include issues such as behaviour and early learning
- Versions for children/people with a disability, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Indigenous children

The questionnaire will be designed primarily for self-completion by parents, but it is recognised that this may not be possible for all parents or projects. In some cases the questionnaire may be completed by (or together with) a project staff member.

7.3 Themed Case Studies

ItG Local Evaluators will collaborate on a voluntary basis with the National Evaluators on the Themed Case Studies described below in the Cross Strategy Evaluation Section (9.1).

7.4 Relationship between the National Evaluation and Local Evaluations

The respective roles of the National and Local Evaluators are described in detail in Appendix E (and Tables E1-E4). In summary the role of the National Evaluator in relation to ItG local evaluations will be to:

- Review and comment on proposed evaluation methodology of ItG projects
- Facilitate the sharing of methodology and findings
- Provide templates for reports
- Facilitate mutual support and sharing of instruments by Local Evaluators

The National Evaluation will **not** be conducting:

- Fieldwork in ItG projects
- Analysis of local evaluation raw data
- One-to-one events with individual projects
- Line management of Local Evaluators

ItG Local Evaluation Responsibilities in Relation to the National Evaluation

Local Evaluators and/or Project Managers

- Develop an Evaluation Plan for the Project
- Develop evaluation methods for local projects.
- Ensure that process and outcome monitoring data is collected
- Ensure reliability and completeness of data
- Collaborate on Themed Case Studies

Local Evaluators

- Validate promising practice (if chosen to participate)
- Complete interim, draft and final evaluation reports
- Use, if chosen, instruments designed by the National Evaluation, where appropriate
- Develop evaluation methods (and provide advice and training on the SFCS Outcomes Framework at the local level)
- Provide technical advice on issues like research methods and data use to the project
- Assist projects to establish evaluation and data collection systems

Table 7.1 Invest to Grow – Summary of National Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Questions	Methodologies				
	Parent Questionnaire	Quarterly reports	Local Evaluations	Promising Practice Profile	Synthesis Report
To what extent have ItG projects contributed to improved outcomes for children and families in relation to the four priority outcome areas?	✓	✓	✓		✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the most important factors that facilitate improved outcomes? 	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the factors that facilitated and inhibited the project logic models being implemented in different contexts? 	✓	✓	✓		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of the models were implemented in the most effective and efficient manner? 	✓	✓	✓		
Which of the models are suitable for ongoing funding or wider national application?		✓	✓	✓	✓
What were the unintended consequences (positive and negative) and how were these consequences addressed?	✓	✓	✓		✓
What new evidence has Invest to Grow provided?			✓		✓