

Key Performance Indicators and Action Research

What is a Key Performance Indicator (KPI or PI)?

- A key performance indicator is a statement that relates to the questions:
How will we know that the program/project/initiative is working?
How will we know if we are meeting objectives?
- A performance indicator is a sign post or reference point around which you can gather evidence to illustrate change, activities or processes enacted towards desired objectives.
- If a project is a journey along a road, then the indicators are the checklist that you use when you stop in at a road house to call home, they are guides to help you to inform, check in and be accountable to those you work with.
- There are different categories of indicators
 1. Indicators of change,
 2. Indicators of activities and resource use
 3. Indicators of enacting guiding principles and objectives

KPI's and Action Research

- Traditionally KPI's are measurements that indicate change. In an action research context a performance indicator is an agreed point of reference in an uncertain future. In Action Research it is difficult to predict what kinds of measures are going to be meaningful as the project grows, adapts and changes in response to action and learning. This means that indicators need to be broad enough to reflect the elements of a project that are agreed to remain constant throughout the lifespan of the project, as well as flexible enough to allow adaptation of project strategies.
- In Stronger Families and Communities Strategy there are eight guiding principles that underpin the work of all the funded projects and the government agencies involved. These principles are constant guides to projects through out their development and implementation. At a project level the objectives of a project are the constant guide to project action. Although the specific strategies of a project may change through an action research process, the broader objectives will remain the same. So it is by examining core principles and objectives that we can develop relevant and useful indicators in an action research context.

Performance Indicators and Evaluation

- Indicators are the key elements in an evaluation framework. They are the sign posts or reference points around which you can gather evidence, documentation and information that illustrates change and

activity in your project. By looking at the story that emerges and the quality of evidence in relation to your indicator you will know how your project is going (or be able to evaluate it).

- Attached is a copy of a provisional 'map' that illustrates a cycle of indicators and evaluation relevant to the SFF action research context. This has been used with some success by a number of SFF projects.
- Also attached is a diagram depicting the relationships of different groups to project performance indicators. This diagram demonstrates the relevance of indicators beyond government reporting.

Useful references

"Evaluation : a guide for good practice"
Canberra : Promotion and Prevention Section, Mental Health and Special Programs Branch, Dept. of Health and Aged Care, 2001.

"Strategic Questioning"
Fran Peavey, New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, PA, USA, 1994
Online
www.crabgrass.org/strategic.html