Discussion outcomes of the workshop session 'Back to the Future' Cluster meeting for European Policy Experimentation Projects – the Way Forward - 21 June 2017

The Cluster meeting gathered all policy experimentation projects selected in the framework of 3 different calls: 2014, 2015 and 2016. In total, 38 coordinators and evaluators/researchers, representing the 19 on-going projects, were present in the meeting.

The meeting provided a platform for exchange of good practice and feedback. By bringing all projects together, networking opportunities were strongly encouraged and new synergies across the projects were created.

One part of the programme was a workshop session 'world café' which involved all participants and allowed them to share their experiences & recommendations. The theme of the world café session focused on the future of policy experimentation. Groups were asked to consider what they would keep in their experimentation, what they would change and what steps they would take to implement these changes. In addition, representatives working in experienced projects (those selected in 2014) were asked to put forward recommendations for projects which were recently launched.

This newsletter presents the main discussion outcomes of the workshop session.
Workshop session: Back to the Future

What would you KEEP in your experimentation?

Partnerships and Workforce
- Sustainable partnerships: diverse membership and cooperation with ministries, working groups, NGOs, public institutions/authorities and other stakeholders in different countries
- Limited group of partners makes the procedure smoother because it’s a smaller group and more democratic
- Good relationship with partners
- Stable team

Methodology
- Compensation for those who take part in the research
- Two-phase application procedure
- Agree on a specific and concrete evaluation question treatment, outcome and method
- Keep the overall goals of the project
- Methodology for evidence
- Multi-method approach

Project Management
- Face-to-face meetings
- Flexibility (particularly in relation to finance)

Other
- Structure – digitising everything so that it is easily accessible
- Continue communication
Partnerships and Workforce

- Approach with partners for setting up the implementation and provide more incentives for the partners (qualitative evaluation is very demanding). Ensure that all partners are fully involved.
- Get a more diverse workforce with different skills – have a team member who has expertise in dissemination.
- Reduce the number of different countries in the project.
- Close collaboration with the agency.

Methodology

- Better approach for the methodology.
- Start a smaller pilot experiment before scaling.
- Scale up and test in different countries.
- Have stronger involvement of national policy.
- Make the evaluation methodology more detailed from the beginning.
- Quality assurance on data collection and more explicit goals for research.
- Bring in ethics dimension more strongly.
- Have a 2-phase process: pre selection, meeting of all partners to finalise details, then put together a final proposal with 'pre-funding'.
- The level of flexibility, adaptability e.g. possibility to change the methodology.

Project Management

- Better scheduling and time management - agree on dates, technical planning and design. Ensure that there is sufficient time for meetings/workshops/capacity building with partners.
- More time and money for qualitative evaluation.
- Organise a coordination meeting of pre-selected projects.
- More flexible finance management (e.g. lump sums).
- Planning translation efforts more cautiously (include quality control).
- Balancing the role of each partner (e.g. coordinator vs. researcher).

Communication

- Improve internal communication, including person to person relationships and regular communication from the bottom up.
- Dissemination after project, social media and policy makers.
- On time, clear dissemination strategy – something that happens progressively through the report.
Timeframe

- Larger time frame - 3 years is not enough to do a good job and obtain good results
- Change the expectation that you will provide results at the end of year 1 (also delivery)
- Possibility of having a yearlong extension period which can be requested halfway through the project in order to have another school year worth of data, for example
- Calendar for project implementation should be flexible given the different contexts e.g. school years

Other

- Accept failures and view them as a learning curve
- Review administrative bureaucratic steps
What STEPS you need to take for these changes

Methodology

- Involve national coordinators
- Country analysis/common trends
- International comparison
- Spend more time on proposal writing window of the call – at least 6 months
- More effort on pre-planning content based development/experimentation
- Flexibility of the project
- Involve external expert for deep pre-test discussion on ethics of randomised control groups
- Be more pedagogical about research aims and methods
- Create a pre selection phase (with some funding) to bring all project partners together to finalise the methodology, to agree on important details, to sensitise all partners to the importance of the evaluation. This could include a meeting organised by the agency to answer questions, particularly regarding the evaluation

Project Management

- Interim reports
- Pre-financing (second application phase)
- Be strict about the deadlines
- More meetings
- Internal finance audit
- Make the duties and responsibilities for the project manager clearer
- Have someone responsible for translations

Partnerships and Workforce

- Get partners involved in the early stages, including in the planning phase
- Make sure that your partners come from a committed group of people
- Have less partners
What are your RECOMMENDATIONS?

- Keep the two phase application procedure
- Keep the info days
- Clarify the expectations for dissemination and usability (in the call)
- Pre-announcement of the next call (date and priorities)
- Allow at least 6 months between the call and application deadline

- Give projects the possibility to extend the grant period for an additional year
- Give more time for experimentation
- Be more flexible in terms of the project duration (changing behaviour in organisations takes time)
- More flexibility regarding the start of the project
- Allow for a pilot 1 year before implementation

- Provide feedback on whether partners are trustworthy (where applicable)
- Rethink the use of timesheets
- More flexibility regarding the use of the budget
- Faster and more hands-on approach to guidance and support on admin and finance management (and easier procedures)

- Organisations should carry out internal audits regularly
- National research coordinators
- Be more clear about the methodology to be adopted in the beginning of the project
- Less co-financing for large projects or small organisations

- Give more opportunities to share preliminary results during projects
- Enable more cooperation between projects generally, especially during the start-up phase, facilitated by the EC
- EC to facilitate contacts between project owners and policy makers/intermediary organisations, especially in Brussels
- Fund a discussion/workshop for evaluators after the completion of projects
- Support of recommendations (projects’ output) from the EC – dissemination and advocacy for successful programmes