



Program Evaluation Options Paper

Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) program

Ms. Liz Ridler, Delivery & Evaluation Lead, PSRU (Essex County Council)
Dr. Gina Yannitell Reinhardt, Associate Professor, Director of Catalyst Program Evaluation
Team (University of Essex)
Dr. Kakia Chatsiou, Senior Research Officer (University of Essex)

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This Options Paper was developed by Liz Ridler (Delivery and Evaluation Lead, Public Service Reform Unit, Essex County Council), in partnership with Dr. Gina Yannitell Reinhardt, Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor; Director, Catalyst Program Evaluation, and Dr. Kakia Chatsiou, Senior Research Officer, Department of Government, University of Essex, with funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), as part of the *Universities as anchor institutions "Catalyst" Project*.

These Options follow on from the Interim Financial Benefits Review authored by Dr. Gina Yannitell Reinhardt and Dr. Kakia Chatsiou in partnership with Ms. Liz Ridler, and presented to Mr. Richard Puleston and Essex County Council in June 2017.

For further information, please contact Ms. Liz Ridler at liz.ridler@essex.gov.uk.

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TCA Interim Financial Benefits Review - Options for Action

This paper sets out possible next steps in response to the Interim Financial Benefits Review (FBR) of the Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) funded projects.

While the FBR highlighted opportunities for further collaboration and work, it is only an interim review. As the projects complete, we will be able to draw conclusions regarding their impact and benefits, though for some of the projects these conclusions will be based on assumptions of the Manchester New Economy Model, rather than on actual performance data collected via the TCA projects. It has become apparent that we might not be able to unequivocally state whether the financial benefits delivered were in line with predictions due to flaws in the predictive approach. We therefore highlight 3 main issues to address with this Options paper:

Issue 1. Evaluation of the individual TCA projects.

Issue 2. Program evaluation capacity and resources within Essex County Council, including the organisation's culture of evaluation.

Issue 3. Additional actions for consideration.

Issue 1: Evaluation of Individual TCA Projects

The 5 TCA funded projects considered in the FBR are in differing stages of delivery. We therefore note varied potential for changing measurement and reporting of financial benefits. The table below uses themes from the FBR recommendations to highlight possibilities for enhancing the way financial benefits are understood and measured. We do not suggest that all possible actions are taken, as each will need to be weighed against the resources necessary for delivery. We do note, however, that these actions can be resourced within the existing PSRU team with support from Finance and I&I. Possible actions that can improve TCA program evaluation include:

- **Reconnect with Chairs of responsible boards** to reaffirm responsibility for managing benefits/sustainability
- Project leads **provide evaluation framework (FW) for review** by University of Essex Catalyst Program Evaluation Team (UofE). *FW are in place but we would be seeking to verify and strengthen financial measures.*
- Project leads **identify performance metrics** related to the financial model that will be collected and reported regularly during delivery.
- Project leads **conduct a baseline measurement exercise** related to the financial benefits model (could be retrospective).
- Project leads **collect data on opportunity costs**. *Time sheets are employed in some parts of ECC already with varied success.*
- Project leads **provide summary, retrospective assessment of opportunity costs**. *This may be heavily reliant on guess work.*

Following the TCA Interim FBR findings and recommendations, we note that these actions are possible for each of the projects as given in the below table. We then give options for actions based on this information.

	Potential Options/Actions					
	Reconnect with Chairs of responsible boards	Provide Evaluation FW for Review by UofE	Identify Performance Metrics	Conduct Baseline Measurement Exercise	Collect Data on Opportunity Costs	Retrospectively Assess Opportunity Costs
<i>DA Housing DB</i>	✓	✓	✓ e.g. number of homelessness applications	? - not sure if data would be available	✓	N/A - project in delivery
<i>IDVA</i>	✓	✓	✓ e.g. number of cases	✓ e.g. serious case MARAC figures for pre-project period	✓	N/A - project in delivery
<i>Social prescription</i>	N/A - project evaluation reporting imminently.	N/A - project evaluation reporting imminently.	N/A - project nearing completion	? - not sure if data would be available	N/A - project nearing completion	✓
<i>ED</i>	✓	✓	✓ e.g. number of partners who have shared data	✓ e.g. current figures of non-school readiness	✓	N/A - project in delivery
<i>PSV</i>	✓	N/A - project evaluation reporting forthcoming (Autumn 2017).	N/A - project nearing completion	✓ e.g. fire and burglary figures for pre-project period	N/A - project nearing completion	✓

Option 1.1: Focus resources on financial benefits evaluation for the Essex Data Program

Revisit existing ED financial benefits model for Prototype 1 and establish financial benefits model for ED future prototypes as they come through business case process. Do not pursue updated measurement of financial benefits for other TCA projects.

Benefits

Can be resourced within the existing PSRU team with support from Finance and I&I.

Would allow project implementers to focus on delivery rather than measurement.

Allow focus on activities that will deliver highest potential benefit for resources spent.

Risks/Costs

Approximately 6 days work.

Could cause dissatisfaction for stake holders seeking updated reports.

Would not take advantage of DA project timeliness (i.e. later starting dates) to try to measure benefits.

Could omit opportunities to learn from other project evaluations.

Option 1.2: Focus resources on evaluation of Essex Data Program, DA Health, and DA Housing

Added to revisiting the ED model in Option 1.1, determine and establish performance metrics for inclusion in the quarterly reporting process for the two DA projects, as they are still in delivery. Do not pursue updated measurement of financial benefits for TCA projects other than the 3 listed here.

Benefits

Can be resourced within the existing PSRU team with support from Finance and I&I.

Allow project implementers to focus on delivery rather than measurement.

Gather measures for the three TCA projects with greatest potential for measurement.

Do not spend resources on measuring projects that may yield few new insights.

Risks/Costs

Approximately 10 days work.

Could cause dissatisfaction for stake holders seeking updated reports.

Could omit opportunities to learn from other project evaluations.

Option 1.3: Continue resourcing evaluations of all TCA projects, including those not in the FBR

Added to the actions for ED and the two DA projects from Option 1.2, plan to revisit financial benefits for PSV and Social Prescription in 6 months time, when they will have completed.

Benefits

Can be resourced within the existing PSRU team with support from Finance and I&I.

Would deliver complete report to stake holders.

Risks/Costs

Amount of work: TBD.

Would spend resources gathering information that is unlikely to yield insights.

Option 1.4: Maintain current state of affairs

Do not pursue updated measurement of financial benefits for any TCA projects.

Benefits

No further costs.

Risks/Costs

No change in our understanding of TCA projects.

Recommended Option: 1.2

Though all TCA projects are worthy of evaluating, estimates of financial benefits for projects beyond these 3 will not be updated sufficiently to warrant time and effort spent. We therefore recommend FBR resources be devoted to the 3 projects offering the greatest opportunity for input and learning.

Issue 2: Program evaluation capacity and resources within Essex County Council, including the organisation’s culture of evaluation.

The FBR recommended improvements to ECC program evaluation capacity and resources that would benefit the TCA Program, as well as future ECC units and stake holders undertaking program evaluations. Please see Interim TCA FBR for full recommendation descriptions.

FBR Recommendation 1: Embed program evaluation and metrics as part of planning, implementation and closure.

Option 2.1.1: Conduct knowledge transfer meeting to encourage cross-section learning.

I&I is working with TSU/PMO to integrate evaluation planning as part of the ECC BC review and sign-off process. Deliver a learning transfer meeting to involve Narelle Ong (I&I), Rochelle Matheson (Finance), David Hartley (TSU/PMO). Brief I&I, TSU/PMO/, FIT on TCA interim FBR to enable learning from TCA program to inform work already in progress. Discuss changes planned within these sections to support more effective program evaluation and metrics, including any tools and templates in development. Use I&I work as foundation to develop system-wide tools.

Benefits

Can be resourced from existing ECC staff.
 Unite relevant Sections to facilitate informed discussions on evaluation.
 Share lessons learnt to reduce potential to duplicate efforts.

Risks/Costs

Opportunity costs of staff time.
 Unless formally written and disseminated, information may not yield practical change.
 Unless senior decision-makers endorse, decisions may not result in practical change.

Option 2.1.2: Conduct knowledge transfer meeting and create library of program evaluations and resources

This option involves all actions in Option 2.1.1, as well as the creation of a library of program evaluations and resources. The Catalyst Program Evaluation Team at the University of Essex has offered to create a searchable database of ECC program evaluations. This library would allow ECC staff to find previous projects and lessons learnt, as well as best practices for future implementation and evaluations. Users would then file new evaluations in the database to maintain the resource.

Benefits

All benefits of 2.1.1, plus:
 Create institutional memory of evaluations.
 Improve consistency of practice by reducing potential to duplicate previous efforts.
 Database is sustainable through staff attrition.
 Future guidance for business case preparation.
 Share knowledge with other Local Authorities.

Risks/Costs

Staff time collecting evaluations and transmitting to UofE.
 Require either a change in practice for all staff, or a designated staff member/unit to maintain.
 Time spent learning to use database.
 Space for database on ECC server.

Option 2.1.3: Maintain current state of affairs.

Benefits

No further costs.

Risks/Costs

No change in evaluation practices.

Recommended Option: 2.1.2

A knowledge transfer meeting will share FBR findings and lessons, and for relatively little extra ECC staff time UofE could create a permanent database to allow this sharing to continue. We therefore recommend that ECC staff collect program and project evaluations from all locations (e.g. computer drives, hard copies, etc.), and give those to UofE to enable database creation.

FBR Recommendation 2: Document all assumptions and information sources involved in creating and revising assumptions and metrics in financial benefits models.

Option 2.2.1: Create central point of access for TCA FBR documents.

Create a resource that provides an overview of the documents used for the FBR including the updated financial models and the rationale that informs them. The resource could be a document, spreadsheet, or file that outlines paths, dates, and sources for the models and FBR. The resource would need to be on a shared space as an exemplar so it can be accessed by all TCA project leads and interested partners. The resource should also link in TSU/PMO to understand how a central resource could be picked up in existing processes and training.

Benefits

Can be resourced from existing ECC staff.
Eliminate confusion regarding assumptions, sources and baseline information.
The TCA example could illustrate good practice to other Sections and future stake holders.

Risks/Costs

Staff time creating resource.
Time spent learning to use/access resource.
Space for resource on central ECC server.

Option 2.2.2: Standardise the creation of a central point of access for documents pertaining to each FBR.

In addition to 2.2.1, institute a practice of creating a central resource for each future FBR. Just as with the resource for TCA, each FBR's resource would provide an overview of the documents used for that FBR, including source materials, foundational assumptions, updates, and the rationale that informs them. Each resource needs to be on a shared space as an exemplar so it can be accessed by all project leads and interested partners.

Benefits

All benefits of 2.2.1, plus:
Eventually able to compare FBRs to each other across programs and standardize the set of documents expected/required.
Save time in future FBRs by having all information consolidated.
Lessons learnt from TCA FBR process will inform future programs' FBRs.

Risks/Costs

All costs of 2.2.1, plus:
Creating new central resources would require either a change in practice for relevant staff, or a designated staff member/unit.

Option 2.2.3: Maintain current state of affairs.

Benefits

No further costs.

Risks/Costs

No change in FBR preparation or execution.
Time to gather documents and review processes whenever staff changes or new people join.

Recommended Option: 2.2.2

While creating a central point of access for TCA documents is necessary, ECC can take this opportunity to spread the lesson to other projects. A central resource of documents related to each FBR will facilitate knowledge exchange and streamline evaluation processes. For relatively little additional ECC staff time, this sustainable resource will allow knowledge sharing to continue across Essex County Council. We therefore recommend the creation of a standardised central point of access for documents pertaining to the Financial Benefits Reviews.

FBR Recommendation 3: Develop template for cost/benefit models across projects/business cases.

Option 2.3.1: Augment current business case template to add section on evaluation mechanisms.

The current business case template does not require the inclusion of details regarding what measures will be collected, how data will be structured, or when evaluation and measurement will take place. With this Option, a section would be added to the current business case template to require definitive and specific intentions regarding measurement and evaluation. Business case preparers would have access to suggestions and examples, such as qualitative data collection via interviews, measuring perceptions via questionnaires, and gathering metrics from incident reports. The UofE has offered to help develop this template and guidance.

Benefits

Combine ECC and UofE insights and experience.
 Embed idea of evaluation from inception of business case.
 Compare evaluation plans across projects/programs.

Risks/Costs

Staff time to contribute to development.
 Does not follow up with changes to interim or final reports.

Option 2.3.2: Augment current business case template, interim reports, and final reports with templates for evaluation.

This Option would include everything in 2.3.1 and add augmentations to project/program interim and final reports. It would be expected that evaluation plans may change from design to execution due to implementation realities, and that interim and final reports would explain how and why measurement and evaluation changed.

Benefits

Combine ECC and UofE insights and experience.
 Embed idea of evaluation from inception of business case.
 Follow KPIs throughout duration of project.
 Report program impact to stake holders.
 Compare evaluations across projects/programs.

Risks/Costs

Staff time to contribute to development.
 Staff time learning evaluation methodologies and standardizing evaluation principles.
 Implementer time adopting new practices.
 Cultural shift will be necessary.

Option 2.3.3: Maintain current state of affairs.

Benefits

No further staff costs.
 No cultural shift necessary.

Risks/Costs

No proof of impact.
 No cultural shift will take place.

Recommended Option: 2.3.2¹

Augmenting the business case template is necessary to ensure evaluation is embedded in the planning stages and allow for some comparability across programs and interventions. We also recommend augmenting the current interim and final reports templates to take advantage of the UofE resources on offer, and to capitalize on the lessons learned from the FBR. Information will be comparable across projects and impact will be assessed and reported effectively.

¹ Note that implementing this option will also help address Recommendations 1 and 4.

FBR Recommendation 4: Ensure metrics included in cost/benefit projections are measured as projects are implemented.

Option 2.4.1: Enhance monitoring of TCA projects.

Relevant ECC staff will reconnect with Chairs of active TCA project boards to:

- Reaffirm responsibility for managing benefits/sustainability to inform current practices and improve evaluation;
- Ensure metrics included in cost/benefit projects are measured as projects are implemented;
- Enable learning from Interim FBR to inform work already in progress;
- Discuss plans to support effective program evaluation and metrics, including any tools and templates in development;
- Use I&I work as a foundation to develop system-wide tools.

Benefits

Can be resourced from existing ECC staff.
Unite project stake holders to facilitate informed discussions on evaluation.
Share lessons learnt.

Risks/Costs

Opportunity costs of staff time.
Chairs may have different levels of commitment/ understanding of evaluation needs.
Benefits have no official means to spread to other Sections or programs.

Option 2.4.2: Augment current templates for business cases, interim reports, and final reports with requirements for evaluation.

This Option would combine Options 2.4.1 and 2.3.2. Current business case, interim report, and final report templates would be augmented to require more definitive and specific intentions regarding measurement and evaluation. Business case preparers would have access to suggestions and examples. Though expected that evaluation plans may change from design to execution due to implementation realities, interim and final reports would explain how and why measurement and evaluation changed. The UofE has offered to help develop this template and guidance.

Benefits

Combine ECC and UofE insights and experience.
Embed idea of evaluation from inception of business case.
Follow KPIs throughout duration of project.
Report program impact to stake holders.
Compare evaluations across projects/programs.

Risks/Costs

Staff time to contribute to development.
Staff time learning evaluation methodologies and standardizing evaluation principles.
Implementer time adopting new practices.
Cultural shift will be necessary.
Staff time to contribute to development.

Option 2.4.3: Maintain current state of affairs.

Benefits

No further staff costs.
No cultural shift necessary.

Risks/Costs

No proof of impact.
No cultural shift will take place.

Recommended Option: 2.4.2²

Reconnecting ECC staff with Chairs of active TCA project boards will spread FBR findings and lessons. We also recommend augmenting the current interim and final reports templates to take advantage of the UofE resources on offer, and to capitalize on the lessons learned from the FBR.

² Note that implementing this option will also help address Recommendations 1 and 3.

FBR Recommendation 5: Standardize and disseminate a set of acceptable processes and methodologies for evaluating impact and outcomes.

Option 2.5.1: Conduct knowledge transfer meeting to encourage cross-section learning.

This Option is identical to 2.1.1. Deliver a learning transfer meeting to involve Narelle Ong (I&I), Rochelle Matheson (Finance), David Hartley (TSU/PMO). Brief I&I, TSU/PMO/, FIT on TCA interim FBR; discuss changes planned within these sections to support effective program evaluation and metrics, including any tools and templates in development; and use I&I work as a foundation to develop system-wide tools.

Benefits

Can be resourced from existing ECC staff.
Unite relevant Sections to facilitate informed discussions on evaluation.
Share lessons learnt to reduce potential to duplicate efforts.

Risks/Costs

Opportunity costs of staff time.
Unless formally written and disseminated, information may not yield practical change.
Unless senior decision-makers endorse, decisions may not result in practical change.

Option 2.5.2: Participate in creation of toolkit to support evaluation of future projects.

The Catalyst Program Evaluation Team at the University of Essex is developing a toolkit of resources, tutorials, and templates to facilitate program evaluation. They aim to offer the toolkit to Local Authorities around the UK, and ECC has the opportunity to participate in development. This Option would begin with Option 2.5.1 and add participation in UofE's endeavour, to include:

- Meet with appropriate Section representatives to collect/agree evaluation needs.
- Trial UofE toolkit materials such as online template tools, tutorials, or worksheets.
- Give toolkit trial feedback via questionnaires, face-to-face meetings, and/or focus groups.

Benefits

Ensure toolkit development considers ECC priorities and concerns from inception.
Build evaluation capacity among staff as they participate in focus groups and beta testing of evaluation prototypes.
Attach ECC name and branding to the toolkit (such as Manchester has done with the Manchester New Economy Model).
Would initiate substantial cultural shift.
Access to early release of a standardised set of processes and methodologies.

Risks/Costs

Staff time for collaboration, trials, and feedback.
Staff and stake holder time devoted to learning evaluation practice and terminology, and adopting standardized evaluation principles.
If the toolkit does not end up reaching widespread adoption, the Essex brand will not proliferate.
Would initiate substantial cultural shift.
Early release materials may contain errors and require updating.

Option 2.5.3: Maintain current state of affairs.

Benefits

No further staff costs.
No cultural shift necessary.

Risks/Costs

No proof of impact.
No cultural shift will take place.

Recommended Option: 2.5.2

A knowledge transfer meeting is necessary to share best practice in evaluation findings and lessons. We also recommend collaborating with UofE to create a toolkit that would support evaluation of future projects and encourage a culture of shared learning. With ECC involvement, UofE could help reach a common understanding of ECC needs and ECC could attach its brand to cutting-edge information and methods.

FBR Recommendation 6: Endeavour to implement projects according to sound research principles, including randomisation and phased roll-outs.

Option 2.6.1: Conduct knowledge transfer meeting to encourage randomisation and rollout in future projects.

Deliver a learning transfer meeting to involve Narelle Ong (I&I), Rochelle Matheson (Finance), David Hartley (TSU/PMO). Discuss potential to integrate randomisation and phased rollouts into future projects, including changes planned within these sections to support scientifically designed impact evaluation protocols and any tools or templates in development to support these scientific designs. Use I&I work as a foundation to develop system-wide tools.

Benefits

Can be resourced from existing ECC staff.
Unite relevant Sections to facilitate informed discussions on evaluation.
Share lessons learnt to reduce potential to duplicate efforts.

Risks/Costs

Opportunity costs of staff time.
Unless formally written and disseminated, information may not yield practical change.
Unless senior decision-makers endorse, decisions may not result in practical change.

Option 2.6.2: Pilot an improved methodology for the ECC on select projects.

Build on Option 2.6.1 by identifying projects from within TCA or across ECC that could be part of a pilot to demonstrate randomisation and phased roll out methodologies. Unite implementers of potential pilot projects with University of Essex experts to strengthen the approach to evaluation design, data collection, and analysis. Design and adopt measurement protocol to establish baseline information and prepare for ongoing data collection. Adopt and implement randomisation and phased rollout methodologies, measuring key variables before, during, and after implementation. Use these projects as case studies.

Benefits

Some resources and support can be provided by UofE.
Opportunity to integrate impact evaluation research design into ECC.
Opportunity to develop state-of-the-art techniques within ECC while UofE still has resources to devote via the Catalyst Project.
Opportunity to test new techniques in a pilot phase, refine, and learn from pilots.

Risks/Costs

Staff time and resources will be necessary regardless of UofE involvement.
Adoption of new methodologies may meet resistance.
Relies on commitment and collaboration from UofE, an external stake holder.
New techniques may never be adopted ECC-wide.

Option 2.6.3: Maintain current state of affairs

Benefits

No further costs.

Risks/Costs

No ability to truly evaluate impact of public programs.
No improvement of practice or implementation.

Recommended Option: 2.6.2

A knowledge transfer meeting is necessary to encourage randomisation and rollout in future projects, facilitate informed discussions on scientific design of impact evaluations, and share lessons learnt. We also recommend collaborating with UofE to pilot an improved methodology on select projects that could demonstrate these techniques. ECC and UofE staff should reach a common understanding of needs and requirements, and develop state-of-the-art techniques within ECC to test, refine and learn about these methodologies in a safe space.

Issue 3: Additional Actions for Consideration

Currently the FBR only considers those projects that had associated financial benefits in the TCA bid. We have not yet examined non-financial benefits. To address this issue, we offer these options:

Option 3.1: Extend review of all TCA funded project benefits.

Examine all projects not considered in the interim FBR, as well as those already considered, with respect to any non-financial benefits. Collate and review all project benefits, collect data on 'lessons learnt', and compile review for general staff knowledge.

Benefits

Can be resourced from existing ECC staff.
Unite relevant Sections to facilitate informed discussions on benefits.
Share lessons learnt to reduce potential to duplicate efforts.
Gather information for funders and stake holders.

Risks/Costs

Opportunity costs of staff time.
Unless formally written and disseminated, information may not yield practical change.
Unless senior decision-makers endorse, decisions may not result in practical change.

Option 3.2: Create wider evaluation of overarching TCA Program.

In addition to Option 3.1, this Option would add a wider evaluation incorporating all TCA projects and the TCA Program as a whole. This would be something similar to the work carried out by Imogen Heywood from the CEIS for ED. It would include not just component evaluations, but also a broader narrative about the benefits and challenges of running an initiative such as TCA that gathers projects under one umbrella, rather than running projects separately. UofE may be able to help with this, as long as ECC provides data and coordination.

Benefits

Can be resourced from existing ECC staff, and/or can utilize UofE help.
Would serve as guide for consideration of future umbrella service delivery schemes.
Would offer funders and stake holders an overarching narrative, which can be easier to digest than separate project evaluations.

Risks/Costs

Staff time to coordinate and collect data, and to write or input to narrative.
May not be useful unless disseminated to decision makers for potential schemes.

Option 3.3: Maintain current state of affairs.

Benefits

No further costs.

Risks/Costs

No overarching TCA evaluation.

Recommended Option: 3.2

While reviewing non-financial benefits will help TCA program stakeholders and funders, it is not certain whether lessons learnt can have wider applicability. We therefore recommend that in addition to a review of the individual programs, a wider evaluation of the overarching TCA Program be conducted. This will serve as a guide for consideration of future umbrella service delivery schemes and offer funders and stakeholders an overarching narrative.

Summary of Recommended Options

This paper sets out Options that could be chosen to address issues raised in the interim FBR. Our recommended Options are those designed to ensure the learning from this FBR is shared and transferred to other parts of the organisation, and to enable the sustainability of the key projects. We summarize these options here:

Issue 1. Evaluation of the individual TCA projects.

- Focus resources on evaluation of Essex Data Program, DA Health, and DA Housing (*Option: 1.2*)

Issue 2. Program evaluation capacity and resources in Essex County Council, including the organisation's culture of evaluation.

- Conduct knowledge transfer meeting and create library of program evaluations and resources. (*Option 2.1.2*)
- Standardise the creation of a central point of access for documents pertaining to each FBR. (*Option 2.2.2*)
- Augment current business case template, interim reports, and final reports with templates for evaluation. (*Option 2.3.2*)
- Augment current templates for business cases, interim reports, and final reports with requirements for evaluation. (*Option 2.4.2*)
- Participate in creation of toolkit to support evaluation of future projects. (*Option 2.5.2*)
- Pilot an improved methodology for the ECC on select projects. (*Option 2.6.2*)

Issue 3. Additional actions for consideration.

- Create wider evaluation of overarching TCA Program. (*Option: 3.2*)