NERUPI network

Evaluating & Researching University Participation Interventions

Evaluating access and participation: Navigating the steps and challenges

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Session Overview

- **Evaluation stages and steps**

    Part of reflexive cycle toolkit

- **Exploring the challenges**

    To undertaking evaluation

    For us as evaluators

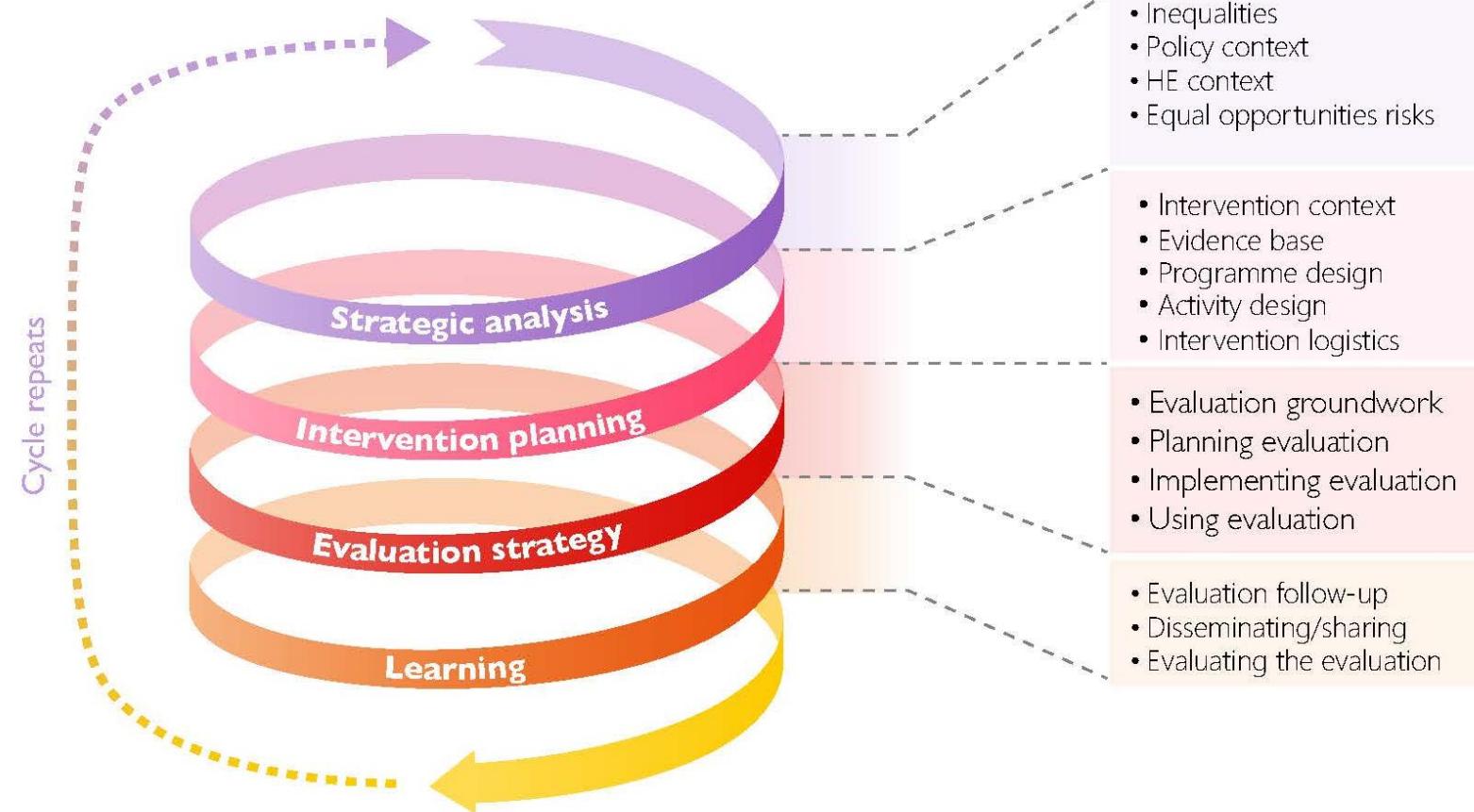   When does a challenge become a risk?

- **Evaluator self-evaluation**
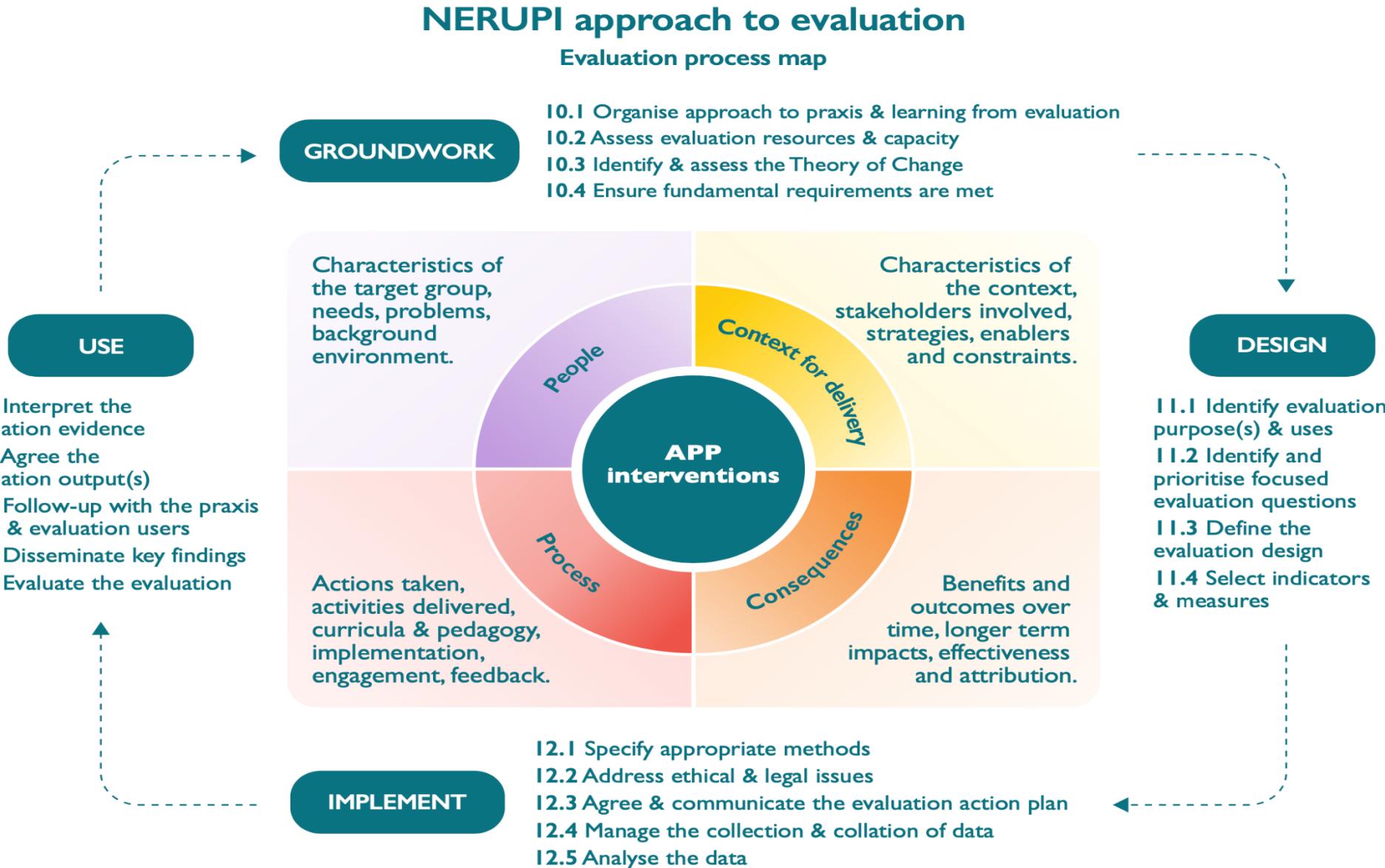
The Reflexive cycle

Steps & stages

Key Tasks

Potential challenges

Sign-posting to NERUPI tools and resources

Main steps/stages

Strategic analysis

Intervention planning

Evaluation strategy

Learning

Cycle repeats

- Inequalities
- Policy context
- HE context
- Equal opportunities risks

- Intervention context
- Evidence base
- Programme design
- Activity design
- Intervention logistics

- Evaluation groundwork
- Planning evaluation
- Implementing evaluation
- Using evaluation

- Evaluation follow-up
- Disseminating/sharing
- Evaluating the evaluation

Evaluation as a stepped process

NERUPI approach to evaluation

Evaluation process map

GROUNDWORK

10.1 Organise approach to praxis & learning from evaluation
10.2 Assess evaluation resources & capacity
10.3 Identify & assess the Theory of Change
10.4 Ensure fundamental requirements are met

Characteristics of the target group, needs, problems, background environment.

Characteristics of the context, stakeholders involved, strategies, enablers and constraints.

USE

13.1 Interpret the evaluation evidence
13.2 Agree the evaluation output(s)
13.3 Follow-up with the praxis team & evaluation users
13.4 Disseminate key findings
13.5 Evaluate the evaluation

People

Context for delivery

APP interventions

Process

Consequences

DESIGN

11.1 Identify evaluation purpose(s) & uses
11.2 Identify and prioritise focused evaluation questions
11.3 Define the evaluation design
11.4 Select indicators & measures

Actions taken, activities delivered, curricula & pedagogy, implementation, engagement, feedback.

Benefits and outcomes over time, longer term impacts, effectiveness and attribution.

IMPLEMENT

12.1 Specify appropriate methods
12.2 Address ethical & legal issues
12.3 Agree & communicate the evaluation action plan
12.4 Manage the collection & collation of data
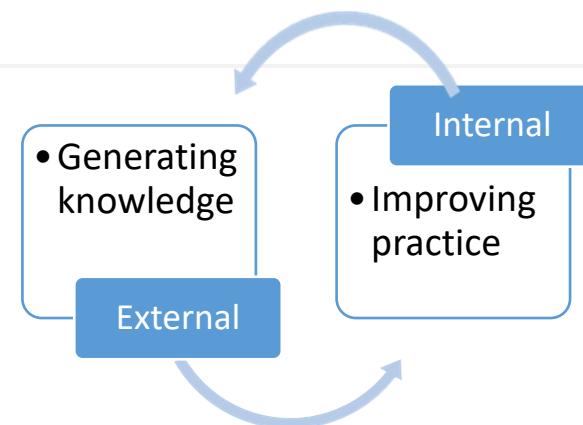12.5 Analyse the data

Level of evaluation?

	Intervention strategy level	Activity level
Description	Coordinated and related activities and measures designed to address the equity gaps and improve organisations/systems	Focused activity delivered to achieve specified deliverables and outcomes
Framing	Contextualised to the overall higher-level objective(s)	Focused on content and delivery as per the requirements of the activity goals/outcomes Could be managed in groups in a sequential manner to attain combined benefits
Timescale	Long term	Within a stipulated short-term timeframe
Evaluation focus	Impact on the equity gap/problem being addressed	Specific benefits/outcomes from a particular activity (which contribute to the overall result) in line with the theory of change
Success measures	The extent to which the strategy delivers the outcomes and impacts for which it was designed	Effectiveness in delivering benefits and outcomes, meeting specific objectives, degree of engagement, relevance and appropriateness to the participants etc
Focus	Strategic	Operational

Evaluation efforts

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Logic Models:	• **Did we do what we said we'd do?**
	• **Are we seeing the improvements we want?**
Theory of change (TOC):	• **Are our activities effective?**
	• **Why do they work (or not)?**

- Generating knowledge

Internal

- Improving practice

External

Evaluation Groundwork

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Approach to praxis and learning from evaluation

Resources and capability to undertake evaluation

Identify and assess the programme theory of change (TOC)

Ensure fundamental requirements are being met

Outputs at this stage could include:
- Stakeholder analysis
- Praxis team TOR
- Evaluation self-assessment tool
- Evaluation development action plan
- Monitoring arrangements/plans
- TOC and evaluability assessment

Designing Evaluation

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Identify evaluation purpose(s) and uses

Identify and prioritise focused evaluation questions

Define the evaluation design

Select the indicators and measures

Outputs at this stage could include:
- **Evaluation purpose statement**
- **Evaluation Questions**
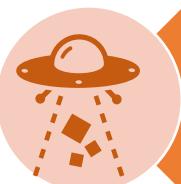- **Evaluation design and framework of indicators and measures**

https://www.nerupi.co.uk/members/resources/designing-evaluation

Implementing Evaluation
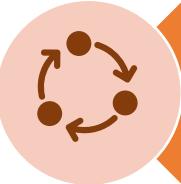
Specify appropriate methods that fit with the purpose of the evaluation

Address the ethical and legal issues

Agree the plan and launch the evaluation

Manage the collection of evidence (with attention to use)

Outputs at this stage could include:

- **Agreed evaluation plan, with clear roles agreed, responsibilities and timing**
- **Ethical approval**
- **Research protocols and tools – e.g. informed consent process and data sharing protocols,**
- **Data collection tools (questionnaires, check lists etc) Results of initial analysis**

https://www.nerupi.co.uk/members/resources/implementing-evaluation

Using Evaluation
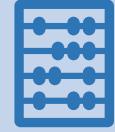
Analyse the evaluation evidence

Interpret the evaluation evidence

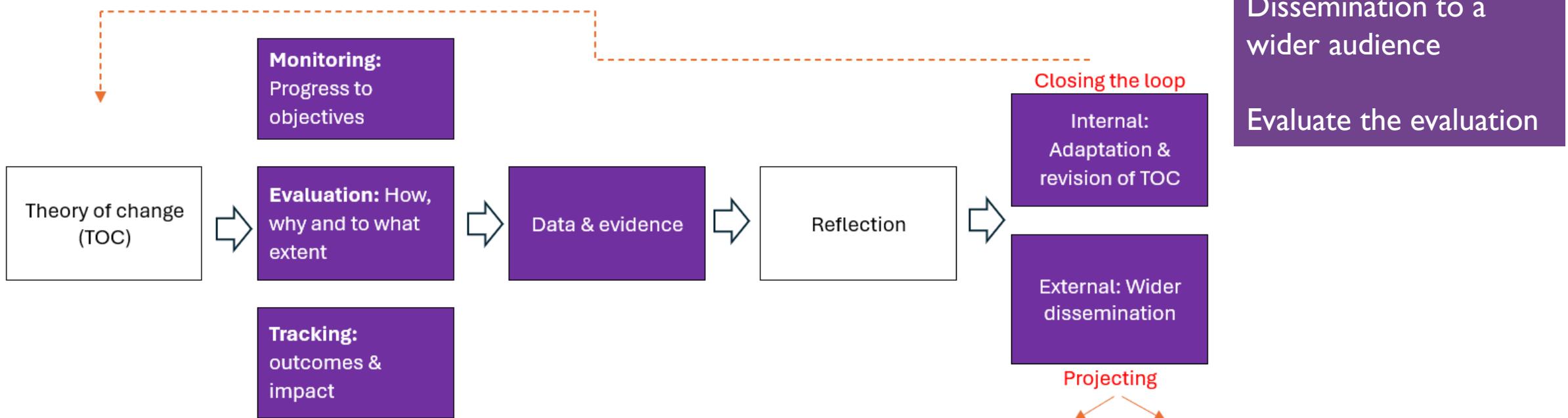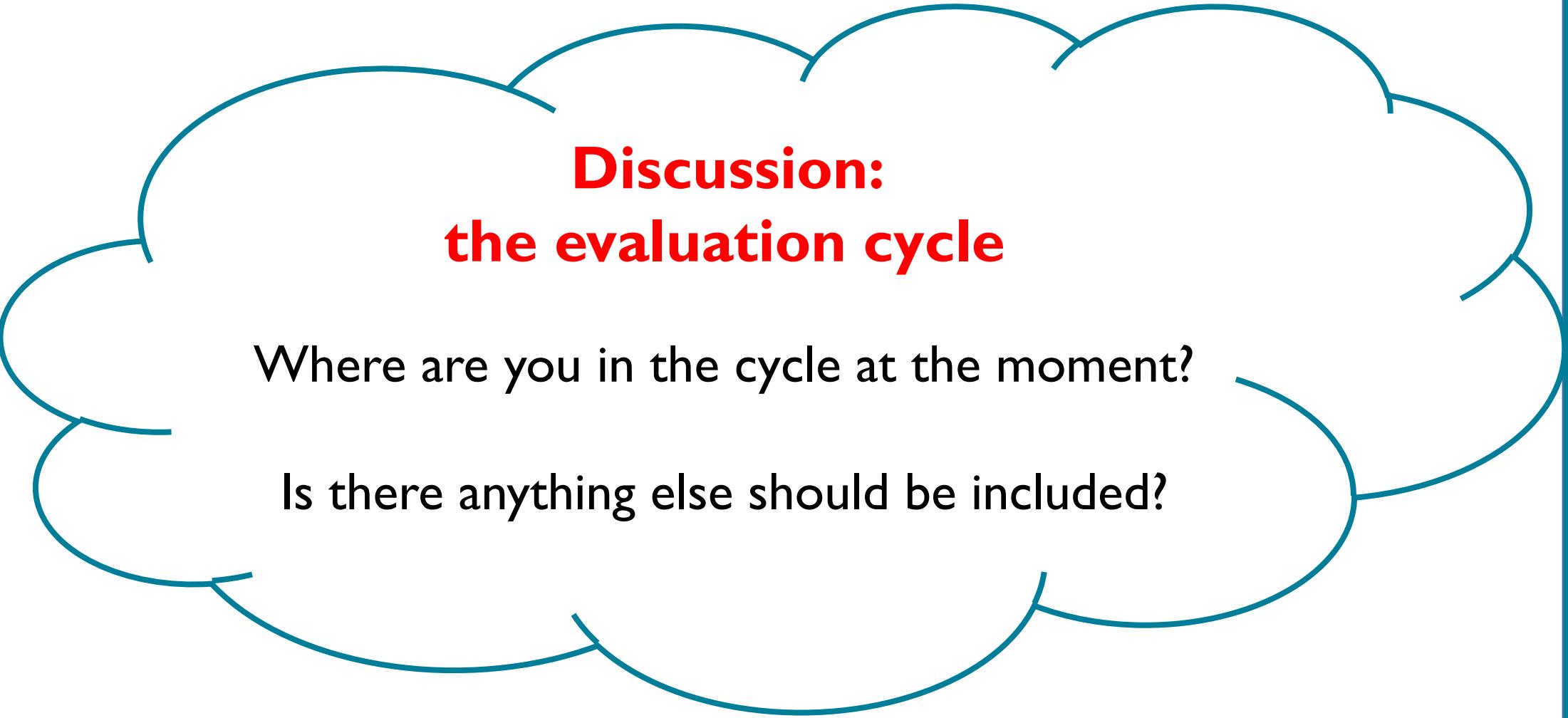**Agree an evaluation output**

https://www.nerupi.co.uk/members/resources/using-evaluation

Outputs at this stage could include:
- **Internal and external evaluation reports and other output(s) appropriate to the audience**
- **Executive summary**
- **Technical outputs, data and results**
- **Policy implications**
- **Academic outputs (e.g. academic article)**
- **Follow-up materials e.g. recommendations for future evaluations, refection/peer-evaluation output**
- **Dissemination action plan/next steps to maximise impact**

Learning

Evaluation follow up with users

Dissemination to a wider audience

Evaluate the evaluation

Theory of change (TOC) → **Monitoring:** Progress to objectives / **Evaluation:** How, why and to what extent / **Tracking:** outcomes & impact → Data & evidence → Reflection → Closing the loop / Internal: Adaptation & revision of TOC / External: Wider dissemination / Projecting

https://www.nerupi.co.uk/members/toolkit/action-2

Discussion:
the evaluation cycle

Where are you in the cycle at the moment?

Is there anything else should be included?

What could possibly go wrong?

Potential challenges in groundwork

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Organisational challenges

- Focusing effort
- Working as a group.
- Avoiding asymmetric relations
- Keeping the focus on the primary users of evaluation

Human challenges

- Developing evaluation expertise
- Establishing trust
- Getting clarity /consensus
- Sustaining interest

Communication challenges

- Making the programme theory clear
- Capturing changes
- Keeping the TOC a 'living document'

Systems challenges

- Working across context/delivery sites
- Getting evidence that supports theory-testing
- Linking evidence to decision-making

Personal Reflection: It's not you it's me

- **A lesson in working with complexity, systems mapping and engaging all the stakeholders**
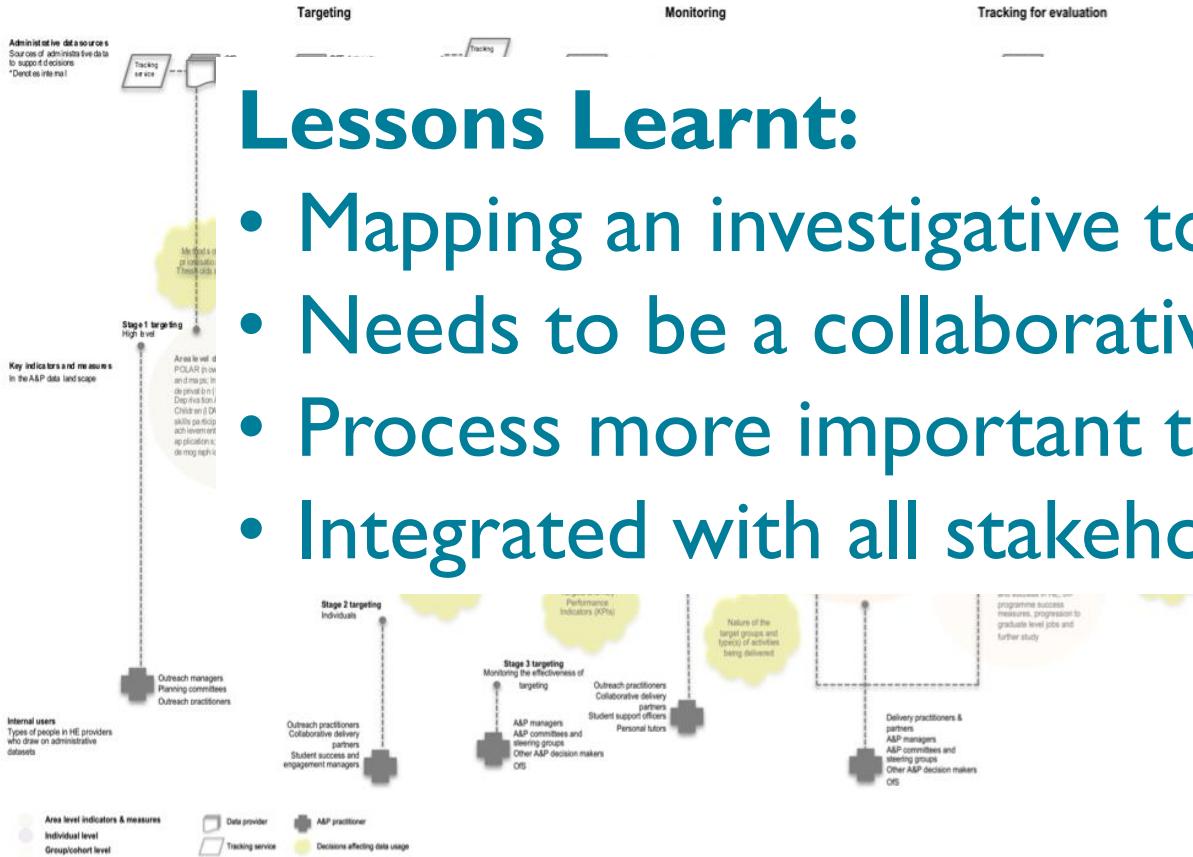
Lessons Learnt:
- Mapping an investigative tool
- Needs to be a collaborative
- Process more important than presentation
- Integrated with all stakeholder views

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/data-use-for-access-and-participation/

Potential challenges in design

Strategic issues

- Establishing the priorities
- Not doing everything at once
- Which theories and outcomes to test
- Feasibility and utility of different types

Practical considerations

- Data availability
- Expertise

Technical issues

- Phrasing evaluation questions
- Identifying (proxy) indicators
- Identifying the critical factors
- Understanding interrelationships
- Establishing a baseline
- Taking account of 'contamination' factors

Personal reflection: The evaluation from hell

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- **A lesson in dealing with mission creep, being responsive whilst maintaining evaluator independence, and being alert to 'red flags'**

Lessons learnt:

- Responsiveness with integrity to design
- Keep a paper trail
- Programmes not projects
- Contingency budget
- Find out how you work best

Exploring the challenges:
Setting up the evaluation
- individually put your own ideas of challenges
  and possible solutions on post-its
- share your thoughts with your group
- group the post-its on flip charts removing overlaps
- display for viewing during coffee break

Potential implementation challenges

Methodological challenges

- Fitting evidence to use
- Navigating trade-offs
- Understanding limitations

Human challenges

- Managing expectations
- Dealing with conflicts
- Convincing others

Ethical and legal issues

- Knowing what's required
- Obtaining ethical approval

Procedural challenges

- Communicating processes
- Maximising data appropriately
- Anticipating analysis and results

Personal Reflection: It's not what you do it's the way that you do it...

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- **A lesson in establishing systems across multiple delivery sites and dealing with data collection surprises in the field**

Lessons learnt

- Systems take time
- Data sharing early and contractual
- Clarify and test arrangements
- Do a small-scale pilot
- Consistent messaging
- Don't underestimate the resource
- Attrition and contamination factors

Potential challenges in use

Practical challenges

- Resources and skills for analysis
- Volume of data

Strategic challenges

- Deciding on output(s)
- Making recommendations
- Affecting decision-making

Interpretation challenges

- Finding the patterns and meaning,
- Working with uncertainty
- Making evaluative judgments
- Being clear on values

Reporting challenges

- Simple and 'whole picture'
- Negative or unexpected findings
- Facilitating use of findings
- Warding-off users mis-users

Personal reflection: When institutional pride gets in the way of the facts

- A lesson in working with data limitations, navigating conflicting stakeholder requirements and reporting negative findings

We're the sector leader

here

Heads of Participants
Co-Evaluator
Evaluators

Lessons learnt:

- Make sure of understandings

- Use a steering committee

- Schedule in review points

- Consider multiple reporting formats

**Exploring the challenges
Implementing evaluation**

- individually put your own ideas of challenges and possible solutions on post-its
- share your thoughts with your group
- group the post-its on flip charts removing overlaps

Working with risks

- IMPORTANCE & IMPACT
  - likelihood of the risk and the level of impact (E.g. likely and catastrophic versus unlikely and minor)

- MITIGATION
  - things will attempt to stop the risk happening in the first place? (E.g. clarity on procedures, training, qualified staff, planning)

- DETECTION
  - things that alert to what's happening (E.g. monitoring, reporting mechanisms, data audits)

- RESPONSE
  - measures to lessen the impact if a risk plays out (E.g. contingency plans, backups, alternative processes and procedures)

Challenge or risk

- decide which issues are just challenging/difficult, and which are major risks
- discuss each risk and prioritise
- identify mitigations
- feedback main risk to whole group

Evaluator self-evaluation

- What keeps you motivated as an evaluator?

- What are your strengths and weaknesses as an evaluator, including the personal qualities you bring to the role?

- What alliances and resources could you foster to support your strengths and balance your weaknesses as an evaluator?

- Evaluation can be frustrating, especially when it doesn't go to plan. How can you keep a constructive mindset in the midst of challenges?