**WHAT WORKS
FOR CHILDREN?**

Is research working for you?
A self-assessment tool

Developed as part of the **What Works for Children?** Project.
*Adapted, with permission, from an original 'Self Assessment Tool'
developed by the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation, Ontario.*

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Is research working for you? A self-assessment tool

The purpose of this self-assessment tool is to help projects evaluate their capacity to use research evidence in the design and delivery of services.

There are no right or wrong answers in the self-assessment. The tool can help practitioners and service planners identify specific areas of improvement which will enhance a project's overall capacity to use research in the design and delivery of services. Ideally, projects need to be able to:

Acquire research	Can the organisation find the research results it needs?
Assess research	Can the organisation assess if the research is reliable and high-quality, and if it is relevant and applicable?
Adapt its format	Can the organisation present the evidence to appropriate decision-makers in a useful format, which combines recommendations, conclusions and key issues?
Apply it in decisions	Does the organisation have the skills, structures, processes and culture to promote and use research evidence in decision-making?

This tool can be used to evaluate where you feel your organisation is and where it should be. Your ratings should reflect your organisation's views on how far apart these two are.

What do we mean by 'Research Evidence'?
When we refer to 'Research Evidence', this includes evidence from published research articles / papers. Academic research is only one sort of evidence, but has the advantages of greater rigour, relevance and independence. Other sources might include: Practice experience and knowledge of professionals or evidence from experience of and views of users / carers.

Why would we want to use research?

By making research work better for you, your organisation can:

- Enhance **accountability** to stakeholders
- Increase **objectivity** and **fairness** in decision-making
- Increase **confidence** in and **quality** of **decisions**
- Enhance **outcomes for children and families**

Service planners and providers are trying to make difficult financial, structural, service and resource decisions in a rapidly changing and highly complex environment. They are bombarded with vast quantities of information – frequently contradictory – by a multitude of stakeholders and interest groups. At the same time, demands for ever-higher levels of accountability come from service providers, users, and funders alike.

Research evidence complements – not replaces – the many other forms of data and knowledge which go into making decisions. The growing body of research in areas such as child care and education can help managers and policy makers evaluate the feasibility and potential impact of their options. Good use of the available research can also make it easier to explain where decisions came from, and sometimes help evaluate interest groups' competing arguments. By improving the organisation's abilities to find, create or use research in decision-making, both decision makers and

stakeholders can become increasingly confident that they are making the best investments possible to improve the lives of children and young people.

Where does this tool fit in?

Many organisations would like to make better use of research, but aren't sure where to start. Others feel they're doing well, but would also like to know if they are making the best use of their resources, or if there are areas they could improve.

The self-assessment tool provides a menu of the many forms of expertise, structures and practices which make it easier to use research in decision making. Through self-assessment, an organisation can discover its strengths, identify gaps, and

> This is not a test! It's tool to help your organisation identify, **for its own use**, what it's doing well, and where it may want to invest in improvements.

make plans for addressing priority areas in the future. We hope the tool will not only help in self-evaluation, but also provide ideas for where and how to enhance research use.

How do you use this self-assessment tool?

1. We suggest you build a cross-organisational group to undertake the assessment; an ideal group would include representatives from projects, management and the executive/ partnership board.

2. It may be helpful for each person to fill in the assessment on their own, before coming together as a group to discuss the different views and come to consensus on the ratings. A neutral facilitator may also help ensure everybody contributes to the discussion.

3. For each assessment area, evaluate *where you are* and *where you ought to be*; your ratings will reflect your group's judgement on how far apart these two are. If the group believes the organisation is doing as well as it ought to be in that area, rate it 4 out of 4.

4. To agree on a final rating in each assessment area, the group must balance a number of strengths and weaknesses.   By tracking the specific issues raised by members, the group will be better able to inform follow-up. For example, if the group believes the organisation needs to improve its capacity to appraise research results, is that because the necessary skills are lacking, or because there is no time to use those skills?

5. As the group identifies strengths, they may wish to discuss whether these are being fully used across the organisation.

6. Once the assessment is complete, the tool can be used as a guide to identify priority gaps and develop plans to address them; reviewing the issues raised during the self-assessment discussion should help inform this planning

7. Revisit the self-assessment as a group, as often as helpful to check progress against the original benchmark.

- Who defines what is "enough" effort or adequate resources? <u>You</u> do

- Skills and resources don't need to be on your staff or in your building, as long as you can get at them when you need them

- Decisions, like organisations, vary in size, complexity, and purpose. Effort should be proportionate to the importance of the decisions and the resources of the organisation

- The discussion of where you are vs. where you ought to be will likely be much more useful than the final score!

The Questions!

Use the following rating system to record your answers to the following questions

1	*2*	*3*	*4*
Don't do	***Do poorly***	***Do quite well***	***Do very well***
Don't do it at all.	*Do it - but not very well.*	*Do it quite well but with room for improvement.*	*Confident in your ability to do it well.*

For each assessment area, evaluate *where you are* and *where you ought to be*; your ratings will reflect your group's judgement on how far apart these two are. If the group believes the organisation is doing as well as it ought to be in that area, rate it 4 out of 4.

1.   Can we <u>acquire</u> research evidence?

	Some hints	*Rating*			
1.1 Do we know how to find research?	Our organisation has <u>either</u> enough skilled staff with adequate time, incentives and resources, <u>or</u> arrangements with external experts, who search for, monitor and/ or undertake research relevant to our major management and policy decisions	1	2	3	4
1.2 Are we looking in the right places?	Our organisation is acquiring enough relevant research through:				
	a) **Journals**, by subscription, Internet or library access, including major child care / social care services research journals such as British Medical Journal, Archives of Disease in Childhood, Child Health and Development, Children and Society, British Journal of Criminology, British Journal of Social Work.	1	2	3	4
	b) **Non-journal reports (grey literature)**, by library or Internet access and direct mailing from research/ disseminating organisations such as the Department of Health, Education and Skills Council, REAL, the National Children's Bureau, Children's Play Council, Barnardos, Home Office Research Development Statistics.	1	2	3	4
	c) **Databases**, by subscription or Internet access, including resources such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, ERIC, the Cochrane Collaboration, the DARE (Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effectiveness), CAREDATA, Psychinfo, Pubmed, ChildData.	1	2	3	4
	d) **Websites**, including major evidence-based policy and decision-making sites which collate and/ or evaluate sources of research such as The NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination at the University of York, Research in Practice, Bandolier, The National Electronic Library for Health, the Campbell Collaboration (C2), the Cochrane Collaboration, Clinical Evidence, the Social Care Institute for Excellence (including CAREDATA), the Centre for Evidence Based Social Services at the University of Exeter, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and the publications section of the Health Development Agency (including Our Healthier Nation Database).	1	2	3	4
	e) **Working with researchers**, by formal and informal networking; plus by providing places where researchers (on staff and/ or external) can discuss their work with our staff and management; plus by getting involved in research as a host, decision-maker partner or sponsor	1	2	3	4
	f) **Learning from peers**, by formal and informal networks, to exchange ideas, experiences and best practices	1	2	3	4

2. Can we <u>assess</u> the validity, quality and applicability of research evidence?

	Some hints	*Rating*			
2.1 Can we tell if the research is reliable and high quality?	Our organisation has <u>either</u> enough skilled staff with adequate time, incentives and resources, <u>or</u> arrangements with external experts, who use critical appraisal skills and tools to:				
	a) Evaluate the quality of the methodology used	1	2	3	4
	b) Evaluate the reliability of specific research by identifying related evidence and comparing methods and results	1	2	3	4
2.2 Can we tell if the research is relevant and applicable?	Our organisation has <u>either</u> enough skilled staff with adequate time, incentives and resources, <u>or</u> arrangements with external experts, who really know our organisation and have the skills to:				
	a) Identify the relevant similarities and differences between our context and the research context *(including organisational, political, social, technological, and structural factors, and skills required)*	1	2	3	4
	b) Evaluate which of these differences are relevant, and whether the research intervention could still be successfully implemented in our context (*What may be different in the implementation or outcomes for us, our partners or stakeholders?)*	1	2	3	4

3. Can we <u>adapt</u> the format of the research results to provide information useful to our decision-makers?

	Some hints	*Rating*			
3.1 Can we summarise results in a user-friendly way?	Our organisation has <u>either</u> enough skilled staff with adequate time, incentives and resources, <u>or</u> arrangements with external experts, who use research communication skills to:				
	a) Present research results concisely and in accessible language	1	2	3	4
	b) Synthesise in one document all relevant research as well as information and analysis from other sources	1	2	3	4
	c) Link the research results to key issues facing our decision makers and provide recommended actions	1	2	3	4
3.2 Do we provide results to decision-makers?	Summarised and easy-to-use research evidence is routinely brought to the attention of relevant decision makers (*such as through regular meetings or reports; or participation by researchers/ analysts in management meetings to present/ discuss evidence)*	1	2	3	4

4.   Can we <u>apply</u> the evidence in decision making?

		Some hints	Rating			
4.1 Do we lead by example and show we value research use?	a)	Using research is a priority: our organisation has committed sufficient people, time, training and budgets to access, appraise, adapt and apply research in making decisions	1	2	3	4
	b)	Our organisation's job descriptions and performance incentives include enough focus on activities which encourage using research	1	2	3	4
	c)	Both management and front-line staff support and participate in frequent forum where staff and invitees present and discuss research evidence related to the organisation's main goals	1	2	3	4
	d)	Management has clearly communicated corporate strategy and priority areas for improvement, so that people creating or monitoring research evidence know what is needed	1	2	3	4
	e)	Our organisation has effective communication channels so that priorities, evidence and ideas are exchanged across divisions, as well as between management and front lines	1	2	3	4
	f)	Our corporate culture is to value and reward flexibility, change, and continuous quality improvement, and we provide adequate resources at all levels to support change	1	2	3	4
4.2 Do our decision-making processes have a place for research?	a)	When we make major decisions, we usually allow enough time to identify researchable questions and create/ obtain, analyse and consider research results and other evidence	1	2	3	4
	b)	Our management team has enough expertise to evaluate the feasibility of each option, including potential impact across the organisation as well as on its clients, partners and other stakeholders	1	2	3	4
	c)	When staff develop or identify high quality and relevant research, decision makers will usually give formal consideration to any resulting recommendations	1	2	3	4
	d)	Staff and appropriate stakeholders know when and how major decisions will be made, how and when they can contribute evidence and how that information will be used	1	2	3	4
	e)	The staff who have provided evidence and analysis usually participate in the discussion before a decision is made and, when possible, so do relevant non-staff researchers	1	2	3	4
	f)	When a decision is made, feedback to staff and appropriate stakeholders includes a rationale for the decision, and review of how the available evidence influenced the choices made	1	2	3	4

What's next?

WWFC is creating a range of resources to make it easier for managers and policy makers to find and use research. We are developing a series of 'Evidence Nuggets', summaries of research evidence on particular subjects and interventions. We also hold workshops for managers and practitioners to make research more accessible and usable.

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