

Evaluation Report

Together an Active Future
Executive Summary

Lancaster University Evaluation Team

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Executive Summary

Background

The evaluation team, based in the Health Research and the Sports and Exercise Science departments at Lancaster University, responded to a request for an evaluation design for the Pennine Lancashire Local Delivery Pilot, Together an Active Future (TaAF) in May 2019, and began the evaluation in September 2019 in a two-year project that ended in October 2021.

Early design phases noted the need for evaluation activities to be flexible enough to respond to need, but also to be methodologically sound and use best practice methods. Therefore, the proposal outlined a programme of work comprising three strands that could flex as required, within the limits of possibility, funding and timescale. This ability to respond to the unpredictability of a live and constantly developing delivery within an on-going context approach enabled response to delays in the local area plans both before and particularly within the COVID-19 pandemic.

Together an Active Future (TaAF): The pilot and aims

Recognising the health and social benefits of physical activity, Sport England published their 'Towards an Active Nation' 2016-2021 strategy to tackle inactivity and achieve significant changes. Part of this strategy was the development of Local Delivery Pilots (LDP), which aimed to tackle inactivity at a focused, local level. Pennine Lancashire was one of 12 LDPs selected to deliver this vision and explore ways of doing things differently. This pilot is known as "Together an Active Future", or TaAF.

TaAF's aims are to address the prevalence of poor mental and physical health across the Pennine Lancashire area. Links between health and low activity rates have been noted in this location suggesting the need for increased engagement.

TaAF Evaluation Timeline in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic

Since March 2020, people's relationships with physical activity (PA), including their motivations and ability to participate, have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The TaAF projects and this evaluation were carried out at a time of unprecedented social change brought about by the current pandemic, resulting in significant changes to social life for people of all ages - including their engagement in PA. National and local restrictions have had many implications for sport and physical activity, with many social and PA venues closed and only reopening a few months before the end of the funded evaluation period. Nevertheless, the use of on-line and other resources enabled some activities to adapt, or try new things, and so this evaluation was able to adapt too.

The Lancaster University evaluation team worked closely with the TaAF Core Team throughout the evaluation project with specific strategies used to enable that. The Lancaster team adopted a

flexible and pragmatic approach to ensure the successful evaluation, despite the challenges faced throughout 2020-2021. We are grateful for the support from the TaAF Core and Wider teams who continued to make this success possible.

Doing things differently

Doing things differently has been an emphasis of TaAF from the beginning and this included the evaluation they commissioned from Lancaster University, such that the overall evaluation is not based on traditional metrics or outcomes such as numbers of people reached or increasing exercise. However, individual projects within networks may take some of these measures themselves and an important role of the evaluation team has been to design training and facilitate setting in place the mechanisms and training for individual projects to be able to do that (Evaluation Strand 3).

The evaluation emphasised understanding people's life histories in relation to attitudes to and involvement in physical activity (Evaluation Strand 2), and the process of implementing a range of different interventions and of organising TaAF, in order to learn what are the barriers and facilitators for projects to be implemented effectively (Evaluation Strand 1). The emphasis on learning and feeding back was a strong thread throughout the evaluation:

Action Learning

At the core of this evaluation was an intention to capture the learning that takes place during the operation of TaAF and its impact upon the wider systems within which it operates. This learning has been regularly returned to the TaAF core team and others for review and reflection using (i) an Action Learning approach; and (ii) various feedback reports and presentations.

The action learning approach provided time and space to reflect with the TaAF Core Team on the evaluation data being collected, enabling participants to engage in shared learning. It allowed time for both reflection and action which, in turn, supported the TaAF Core Team's decision-making processes and next steps. This supported TaAF and Sport England's desire for both rapid review and rapid learning.

There are three strands to the evaluation, **Process, Qualitative and Quantitative**.

Strand 1: Process Evaluation

The aim of Strand 1 was to carry out a series of process evaluations on the implementation of physical activity programmes and TaAF. These considered the many levels of TaAF and its delivery.

Objectives of the Process Evaluation

1. To evaluate implementation of TaAF as a group, including understanding potential facilitators and inhibitors of their implementation effectiveness;
2. To learn from processes and factors involved in delivery of physical activity programmes across Local Authority Districts (LAD) and two of TaAF's target groups;
3. To provide feedback on evaluation insights in a timely-manner to facilitate rapid shared learning and evidence-based changes within the 'test and learn' ethos of TaAF
4. To develop resources to allow individuals or groups at local levels in Pennine Lancashire to be able to conduct their own evaluations using the proposed evaluation approach.

The Evaluation Team was able to adapt plans to accommodate progress of TaAF. In relation to influences of pre-existing delays and the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on recruitment of potential interviewees, this required significant changes in timelines and proposed studies. Figure 1 below shows the three studies that were finally included.

Final TaAF Process Evaluation Structure

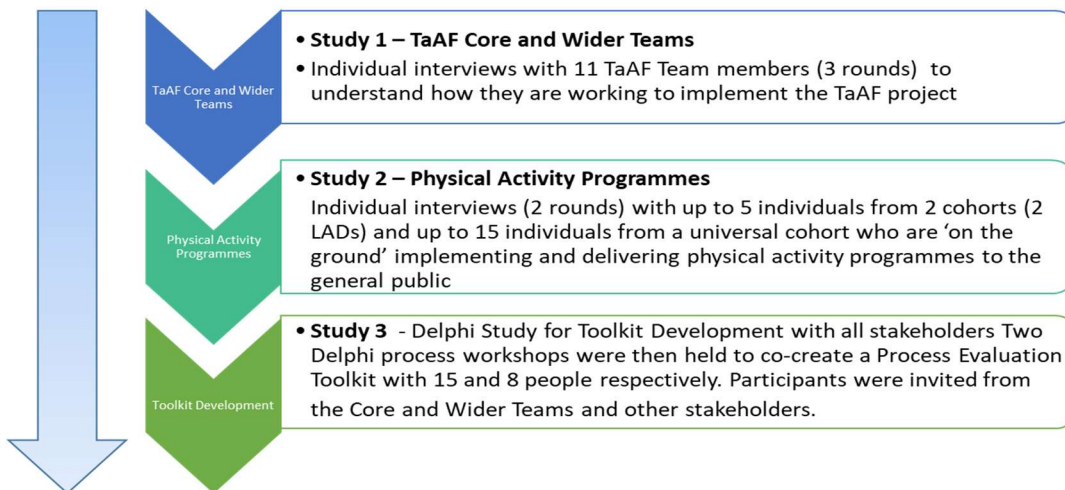


Figure 1: Studies in the final process evaluation

Methods of the Process Evaluation

Data for the evaluation were gathered and analysed using the **Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR)**, a well-evidenced cutting-edge methodology. This framework consists of five areas or ‘domains’: **Intervention Characteristics, Outer Setting, Inner Setting, Characteristics of Individuals, and Process** (<https://cfirguide.org>), each made up of more specific, focused areas called ‘constructs’, or factors. In Studies 1 & 2, TaAF members from the Core Team and Wider team, and members of local physical activity programmes and the universal programme were interviewed using a CFIR based interview.

Study 1: Findings for the TaAF Core and Wider teams

- Both Core and Wider Teams considered TaAF as a positive project in comparison to what has been attempted before and this was evident across the domains.
- Across the three rounds there were some changes observed. Fewer constructs within the CFIR framework were perceived as helpful for the Wider Team in implementing TaAF in Round 2 than Rounds 1 or 3. Much of this change was linked to the impact of Covid-19 with the Inner Setting domain most impacted. In contrast, the number of constructs perceived as helpful for the Core Team remained stable across the first two rounds, with some reduction in Round 3, although which factors were seen as facilitating implementation did vary.
- In each round, **strong facilitators** were identified, but these were different across rounds.
 - Round 1: *Intervention Source, Relative Advantage, and Planning*
 - Round 2: *Population Needs, and Opinion Leaders*
 - Round 3: *Adaptability, Trialability, Cosmopolitanism (external networks), TaAF Culture, and Access to Knowledge and Information.*

Main differences between team perspectives

Overall, the Core Team perceived more factors to be facilitative than did the Wider Team (63 versus 51), with the main difference being in the **Intervention Characteristics**, for example, *Intervention Source* and *Relative Advantage*. The Core TaAF Team were all there from the start and developed the programme, often seconded from other posts to TaAF. They worked closely together and may be more aligned to TaAF ethos and values, while the Wider Team members work in a variety of contexts, for example, some may be Local Authority District (LAD) leads. Given these differences, more mixed views in the Wider Team may be expected. This was only marginally so (35 in the Core Team as opposed to 39 in the Wider Team).

Highlights:

- There were good networks with external partners, and these are strongly helping the implementation and delivery of TaAF (known as **Cosmopolitanism**). Other helpful factors were acknowledged by both teams including: TaAF’s **adaptability, trialability**, understanding of the **population needs & resources, networks & communications** used within the project, the **culture** within TaAF, its **learning climate**, the **available resources**, levels of **self-efficacy** of team members, and the extent and quality of **engagement** with people inside and outside of

their team.

- The Core Team perceived that the way TaAF can be adapted, tested, tailored and revised strongly helps implementation (**adaptability and trialability**). Other facilitating areas were TaAF's **evidence strength and quality**, its **relative advantage** over other work, its **design quality & packaging**, the **structural characteristics**, **leadership engagement**, and the **reflection and evaluation** occurring throughout the work.
- For the Wider Team, strong facilitators for implementation included TaAF's: **culture** and the **access to knowledge and information**, suggesting TaAF's shared values, understanding and norms help project delivery and goal attainment. Other facilitating factors were TaAF's **compatibility** with other work, the values of people in the team and in the local area, **goals and feedback** received, the team's **knowledge and beliefs** about TaAF. The involved **opinion leaders**, **formally appointment internal implementation leaders**, **champions**, and **external change agents** were also contributing in a positive way to how TaAF is being delivered.

Barriers

A notable finding is the low number of barriers (factors that may be hindering implementation) identified. When they did occur, they were not lasting barriers. This is a particularly optimistic finding given the circumstances over the past two years. Barriers were *Relative Priority* in Round 1, for the Core Team only, and *Readiness for Implementation* in Round 2 for both teams. None were rated as strongly unhelpful, and none featured in Round 3, showing the role of development and changing challenges over time.

Bringing it all together

The strongly facilitating factors, as they changed across time, are illustrative of the development of TaAF, the importance of its adaptability and in depth understanding of, and links with local community leaders and organisations, and significantly, the role that characteristics of TaAF have played as the programme has weathered and adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic. The period with fewest facilitating factors was Round 2, corresponding to the period associated with the most restrictions on physical activities, strictest COVID-19 lockdown and furloughing of staff. This was particularly felt by the Wider Team. While COVID-19 may have dominated some of the timelines in this programme, normal development and flexing was also occurring. Factors such as TaAF *Culture*, *Access to Knowledge* and *Information and Learning Climate* all seemed to be robust elements of the intervention whereby even if there were mixed views in Round 1, this had become positive by Round 3.

Implications and future suggestions

A range of suggested actions were made for items perceived as barriers or which had mixed or neutral views, that may enable these aspects to become more facilitating. These may help inform discussions for moving forward and were fed back to the Core and Wider Team at each time period in a report and a live presentation. They were derived from recommendations associated with the CFIR and based on other implementation evaluations, but also from comments made by members

during the interviews.

For the Core Team, the most common recommendations in order of frequency were:

- **Round 1:** Identify and prepare Champions; Alter incentive/allowance structures; Conduct local consensus discussion;
 - **Round 2:** Alter incentive/allowance structures; Identify and prepare Champions; Assess for readiness and identify barriers and facilitators; Build a Coalition.
 - **Round 3:** Identify and prepare Champions; Alter Incentive/Allowance structures; Develop a formal implementation blueprint; Build a Coalition; Conduct local Consensus discussions
- For the Wider team, the most commonly recommendations, in order of frequency were:
- **Round 1:** Identify and prepare Champions; Alter incentive/allowance structures and, Conduct educational meetings;
 - **Round 2:** Identify and prepare Champions; Alter incentive/allowance structures; Build a Coalition.
 - **Round 3:** Identify and prepare Champions; Assess for Readiness and Identify Barriers and Facilitators; Alter incentive/allowance structures; Build a Coalition; Conduct local Consensus discussions

The top four suggested actions: The top four most mentioned were: identifying and preparing champions; altering the incentive/allowance structures; assessing readiness to implement TaAF, and identifying barriers and facilitators that may have an effect in delivery.

Learning from Success

While the above recommendations for areas that were not perceived uniformly as facilitating are important for implementation development and improvement, it is also important to take note of those factors that were consistently or eventually facilitating, or facilitating at specific stages (e.g. working well at the initiation of TaAF, or facilitating in a time of great change and upheaval), that is, the key strengths of the intervention. It is important to ensure we learn from these, to keep using and strengthening them, and to share with other Sport England projects and with the wider community of projects within TaAF's influence.

Study 2: Local Physical Activity Programmes and Universal Programme

As in Study 1, the evaluation in Study 2 focused on perceived barriers and facilitators for implementation and delivery of the interventions, aiming to use insights to make suggestions for members and participating organisations to consider when going forward. There were two evaluation (interview) time points: Round 1 October-December 2020; Round 2 June-July 2021

In addition to a universal programme, the **Active Lifestyle Hub (ALH)**, the two local area projects included were “**The Big Connect**” and “**How Active are you?**”.

Findings for Study 2

Detailed feedback reports and presentations have been given directly to contributors for each group. However, given the small numbers in each programme, to protect identity, findings are presented here in a combined fashion.

Helpful factors common to all programmes

In Round 1, there were seven factors that all programmes perceived to be helping their implementation (Figure 2), and three in Round 2 (Figure 3). Of these, two were perceived as helpful at both time points: the programmes’ relative advantage, and their goals and feedback.

Relative advantage compared to other programmes was noted as helpful for implementation. Interviewees noted that their programmes were unique in their specific approaches, and particularly that collaboration with multiple organisations or partners appeared to be helping. Having a clear knowledge of population needs and resources was important, facilitated by good connections and regular engagement with the local community to help understand cultural factors and barriers that may affect target populations’ engagement.

In terms of goals and feedback, having goals was seen as helpful for developing an effective service. These goals were reflected upon regularly through feedback from stakeholders. Feedback was reported as positive for the programmes, even at this early stage, which was encouraging for the general test and learn ethos of TaAF.

Round 1

How is the implementation of the Physical Activity Programmes going?

Helpful factors common to all interventions

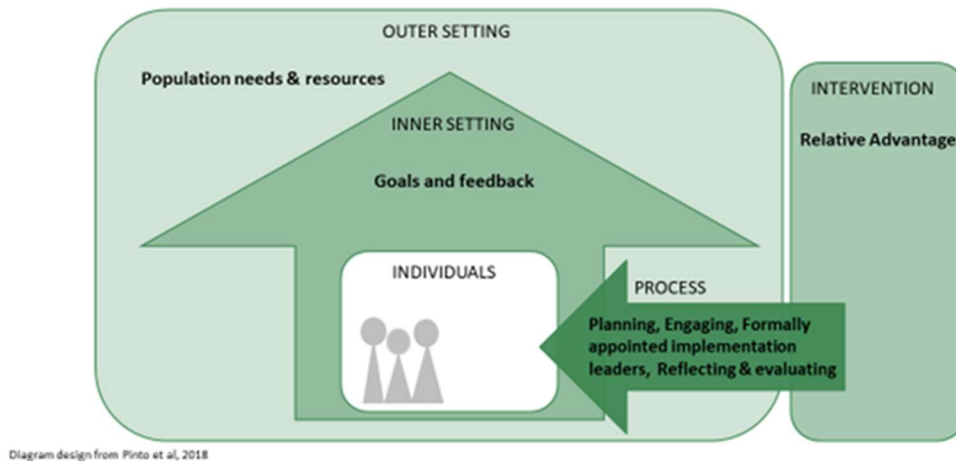


Figure 2: Helpful Factors for all three programmes in Round 1

In terms of the programmes' implementation Process, Planning was particularly helpful when plans were continually collaboratively and reflectively revisited and revised. Engaging was seen to happen more when a lot of time and effort was put in to building relationships with clients, staff and partners, with regular contact highlighted as important. Having several people involved in leading the implementation (Formally Appointed Implementation Leaders) was considered important but having a specific individual who can take the lead and keep everyone connected, or "Championing" the project, was a particularly strong facilitator for implementation. Finally, programmes showed that regularly planned reflection and evaluation, e.g. discussing processes and agreeing changes on an ongoing basis, was helpful. Collection of, and reflecting on, relevant data (e.g. outcome metrics, monitoring of client progress, case studies and stakeholder feedback) was also noted as helpful for programmes and their implementation.

In Round 2, the three factors helping all programmes' implementation were: relative advantage, goals and feedback, and leadership engagement, illustrated in Figure 3.

Relative Advantage compared to other programmes was still seen to be helpful in Round 2, related to their uniqueness. Comments included features such as ease of accessibility for target populations, offering support throughout programmes, being collaborative with multiple organisations to create a network of long-lasting relationships, and having a holistic approach to wellbeing whereby activities could be tailored to meet an individual's/client's physical, mental and/or emotional wellbeing.

In relation to Goals and Feedback, interviewees talked about receiving helpful feedback from Together an Active Future (TaAF), staff delivering interventions, and from those participating in the interventions. Interviewees discussed the usefulness of having plans to gather feedback and use this to support the planning and setting of goals for future work.

Round 2

How is the implementation of the Physical Activity Programmes going?

Helpful factors common to all interventions

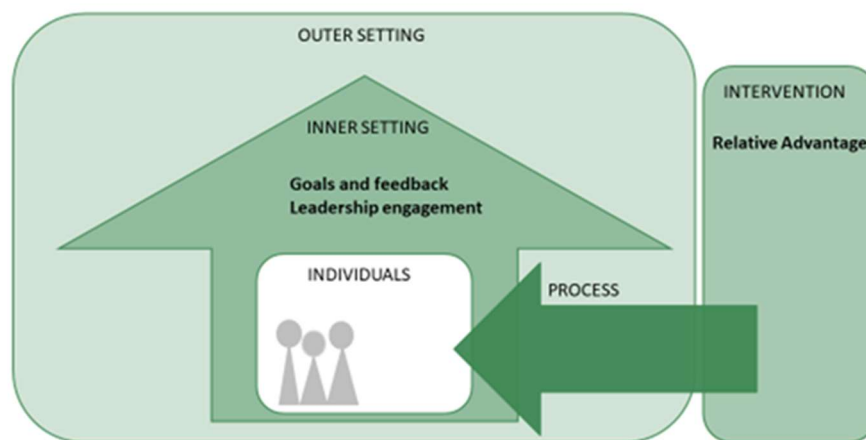


Diagram design from Pinto et al, 2018

Figure 3: Helpful factors for all three programmes in Round 2

Activities that helped raise awareness of the programmes and their benefits to leaders, managers and supervisors, were considered helpful for boosting *leadership engagement* levels and so programme implementation. Leaders offering support to programmes and listening and responding positively to suggestions from staff involved in programme delivery, were examples of helpful outcomes for implementation.

Strongly helpful factors for at least one programme

There were other factors and activities that were particularly strongly helpful for one or two programmes included in this study. While not present for all programmes, they may highlight particular activities or features worthy of exploring more to see if any learning can be shared to other programmes. In Round 1 there were 12 of these factors highlighting particularly strong influence of aspects related to the programme's characteristics, the inner and outer settings, and the processes related to programme implementation.

In Round 2 there were six factors of these factors, again highlighting aspects of the Interventions' Characteristics, the Inner and Outer Settings, and the Processes related to the programme and its implementation, but this was a different set of facilitators, illustrating change over time. Some factors were in common with Study 1, notably adaptability and understanding the population, highlighted as valuable characteristics that may enable these programmes to adapt to the pandemic

and continue to support local populations within it.

Examples illustrating some of these concepts from the interviewees are as follows:

- Being adaptable in response to COVID-19 restrictions was very helpful in order to deliver activities, e.g. doing activities online; having contingency plans in case circumstances suddenly changed enabled delivery.
- Understanding the needs and resources of the target population in terms of cultural barriers and expectations relating to physical activity, time constraints, as well as worries about fitness or body shape was very helpful.
- Sharing networks and connections was a major benefit in terms of support with grant funding applications, specific expertise, linking organisations with similar interests.
- A culture of empowering people in the community and helping people improve their lives through education, health and wellbeing was considered very helpful to implementation.
- Working relationships which are supportive, warm and compassionate, where those working to support the intervention are appreciated and valued are very helpful, linking to strong identification with the organisation.
- Despite the numerous challenges caused by COVID-19 restrictions, hard work of staff and volunteers to deliver physical activity interventions was somewhat successful.
- Holding focus group meetings, contacting and speaking with the target population on a consistent and regular basis facilitated activities and this was endorsed by participation and feedback from the target population.

Barriers

There were some challenges and barriers in Round 1 for at least one programme, often influenced by COVID-19. These were related to: the implementation climate of the inner setting and their readiness to implement the programme, the cost of the programme, and the external change agents. These were not perceived as barriers in Round 2.

In Round 1 (Oct-Dec 2020), interviewees reported that organisations had been particularly affected by COVID-19 and its restrictions. The priorities of people had changed as well as what was allowed to happen, making readiness for implementation a real concern for some. However, for those that did not see this as a barrier to their programme's implementation, COVID-19's impact was seen as something that could be overcome through rethinking the original plan, doing more collaboration, and adapting to the current circumstances.

Costs were identified as a barrier because of some uncertainty around funding being in place, if funds would be sufficient to deliver the planned work, or if target group members would be able to avoid fees associated with taking part in the programme. At this time, there was also some concern by at least one programme that their external change agents may have unhelpful attitudes towards participation in physical activity, which could potentially hinder implementation of their target group.

Highlights

- Relative advantage, and goals and feedback, were stable enablers for helping these different interventions be delivered in their respective areas and target populations. Sharing the learning and experiences of these interventions may be useful for other programmes starting or already on their journey with TaAF-related work.
- Across both evaluation rounds, four factors were strongly helpful for one or more of the programmes evaluated. These were the culture of the inner setting of the programmes, the relative advantage of the intervention over other interventions, planning and the delivery (or execution) of the interventions.
- There was no consistently identified barrier across all programmes. There were some potential barriers to implementation identified by at least one programme in Round 1 including unsupportive attitudes of external change agents and the costs associated with the programme’s delivery. Readiness for implementation was particularly affected by COVID-19 and associated restrictions at the time. Not every programme saw these as barriers for their programme and its delivery, and in the Round 2 of the evaluation, these concerns had disappeared.
- Adaptability and Understanding Population Needs and Resources were facilitators in both Studies 1 and 2, highlighting the importance interviewees gave to these factors and their successful role in TaAF.

Study 3: Delphi Study for Toolkit Development

The aim of Study 3 was to develop resources to enable individuals or groups at local levels in Pennine Lancashire to conduct their own evaluations. A Delphi process was chosen as a recognised method for arriving at a group decision by consulting with experts or stakeholders, with a report or aggregated findings being shared with the group after each round. Two rounds in the form of group workshops took place with 18 and 7 people attending respectively. The first workshop covered what the toolkit should contain, how it should look and how best to deliver it to the target audience. The feedback gathered informed creation and design of the process evaluation toolkit. The second workshop offered the opportunity to gather feedback on the draft toolkit. Following the second workshop, changes were made to the toolkit to incorporate the feedback given. Figure 4 illustrates the development.

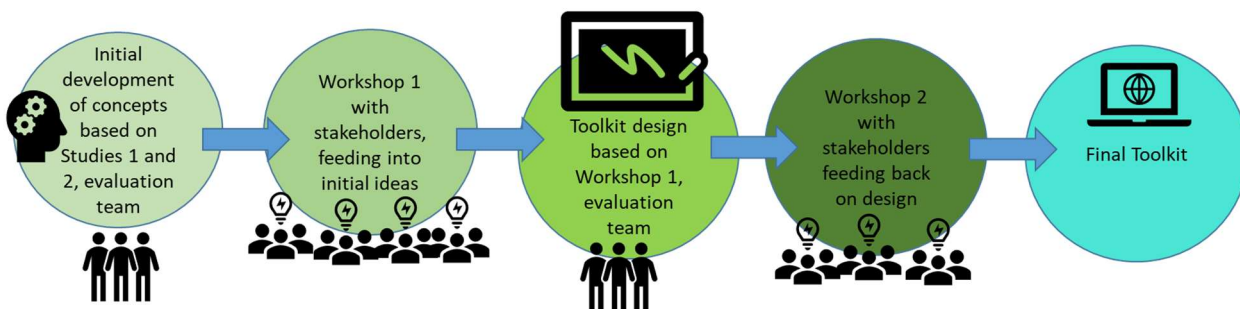


Figure 4: Illustrating the Delphi process to design the Evaluation Toolkit.

Delphi Workshop 1 findings

In this session, we discussed: 1) barriers target groups might have for carrying out process evaluations, 2) how to overcome these barriers, 3) design and content of the toolkit, 4) the CFIR.

Main barriers for people doing process evaluations

- **Perception of evaluation** - people can be 'fearful' of "evaluation" as a word
- **Timing of the evaluation** - evaluations carried out at the end of a project and not during as in TaAF, lose 'learning' that has happened during the 'journey' of the project.
- **Deciding what to prioritise** when evaluating and why, and what tools/measures should be used. Having options to choose ways of collecting data was important, with flexibility.
- Participants felt that they often did not **have the skill or knowledge to analyse data** they collected as part of the evaluation process.
- Participants were not always sure how best to **share evaluation findings** and what to include e.g. they felt that structured reports were not always engaging
- Participants **did not feel confident** in carrying out a process evaluation and were not sure where to start or what steps to take.
- Evaluation had to reflect **resource constraints of 'real life' projects**.

Overcoming the barriers

- **Clear and easy to use** step by step guidance on how to carry out a process evaluation would help boost confidence.
- Having **space to reflect** on what went well and what could have been improved upon when carrying out a process evaluation, throughout the journey, so learning can be done on a continuous basis and not just at the end. **Guidance on how and who to share reflections and findings with** was requested.
- Participants suggested that organisations they worked in needed a '**culture change**' to make process evaluations part of a normal practice. Having a standard process evaluation toolkit that everyone could use would help to have **united front**.
- **Tried and tested measures** - Have a list of resources/tools/survey measures
- **Data collection and analysis** - a range of ways to capture data that links in with your aim
- Make resources **accessible** by working with communities and partners to co-create and co-design them so they are more bespoke and tailored.
- Have **guidance on creating realistic timelines** for projects that everyone can agree on. A set of guidance questions on what needs to be thought about before you start an evaluation is needed.

Main toolkit design and content features

Participants were asked what they felt a process evaluation should look like and what it should contain, with examples.

- **Functionality** -the option of having digital and physical resources.

- **Image and tool led** - they preferred more images, diagrams, checklists, templates and case studies/examples rather than text. Images used need to reflect the users.
- **Usability** -guidance on how long each section of the toolkit would take, and easy access to sections of the toolkit without having to read the whole document
- Colour scheme should be reflective of TaAF, with a “Less is more” approach, keeping accessibility in mind. Cost of printing should be considered - materials should be able to be reproduced in black and white.
- **Future proofing** - the toolkit should be user tested to check for whether it’s useful, logical and user friendly. It needs to be able to be updated and improved upon as time goes on.

The Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR)

Participants were asked how accessible the CFIR was and how it could be better designed for non expert evaluators.

- Language - could be made more basic and visual aspects such as diagrams introduced.
- Simplifying and making it more practical than academic
- Snapshot vs changes -participants wanted to look at the ‘journey’ and changes over time, so would like to see how the CFIR could be applied in that way.
- Name of the CFIR - the participants suggested that they did not like the acronym CFIR as it linked to perceptions of difficulty and evaluation which they felt to be off putting.

Toolkit development following Workshop 1

The process evaluation team used suggestions provided by the participants in Workshop 1 and designed the toolkit addressing the feedback. Details in the main report explain how the suggestions were used (See Table 9).

Findings from Workshop 2

In the second workshop we gathered feedback on the draft toolkit:

Strengths and weaknesses of the design and content

- **Positive** - overall, participants liked the layout and structure. They suggested the ‘top tip’ boxes, templates/worksheets and planning sections were particularly helpful. They found the description of what a process evaluation was useful and commented on how the colour scheme matching the sections worked well and helped the sections flow throughout.
- **Negative** -the CFIR section was still text heavy, confusing and they didn’t like the colour scheme. Participants didn’t like the ‘contact an expert’ tone and felt that more templates and encouragement could be used to boost confidence.

Suggestions for improvements to the toolkit, what needed further explanation and any changes to the design

- **Worksheets/templates** - more worksheets on topics such as how to do quantitative and

qualitative analysis, examples of completed worksheets, examples of case studies and templates and a simplified version of the five main areas of the CFIR in a template to use.

- **Language** - participants suggested some alternative wording for sections of the toolkit, such as the names of the five main CFIR domains, the title 'process evaluation', and removing more academic terminology.
- **Strategies** -make the matching of unhelpful factors with suggested helpful strategies into a clearer diagram.
- **CFIR** -simplify the CFIR down to just the 5 main domains rather than all 39 constructs with an easy to use template with questions and prompts that could be asked in interviews, focus groups and surveys with an accompanying rating system.
- **Design** - coordinate colour schemes with the sections and making sure font and design elements are consistent throughout with as much use of images, graphics and space on the page as possible.

Finalising the toolkit

The final version of the toolkit produced by Lancaster University in conjunction with TaAF and other partners will enable partners to carry out their own evaluations going forward using a united systematic guide. There is potential for further collaboration with TaAF and Lancaster University to explore the impact and usability of the toolkit once it has been tried and tested by TaAF and partners, although this would need to be discussed with TaAF at a later date.

A new CFIR questionnaire

Exploring a way to gather data and use the CFIR in a quicker way was another aim of this work strand to help inform the toolkit development. The research team developed questionnaire items that could capture the CFIR constructs. Questionnaires were completed by participants in addition to taking part in the interviews, where possible, to be able to compare the results and establish whether the questionnaire could be a reliable and valid alternative tool.

Very few of the interviewees taking part in Studies 1 and 2 completed the questionnaire as well. The low respondent numbers for the questionnaire made it hard to draw conclusions as to how useful and efficient it is in its current form. Its length and time-consuming nature were off putting for potential participants and equally time consuming to analyse for researchers.

However, feedback from the Delphi study was that questions would be useful. Future work on this, including testing, would be really useful with lots of input from future users.

Strand 2: Life Course Evaluation

The life course evaluation combines co-design, action learning, and life course and deliberative methodologies. Through the use of a two-phased interview approach, we gained an in-depth understanding of individuals' relationships with and attitudes towards Physical Activity (PA), within the context of their lived experiences.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the TaAF pilot and this in turn had a bearing on the life course evaluation. To overcome the challenges faced, we worked closely with the TaAF Core Team to adopt a flexible approach to the evaluation.

What is a Life Course Evaluation?

A life course approach has been adopted because it is relevant for exploring 'how people make sense of their experiences and of the world around them' (Goodson, 2001, p.20). Life stories are important to people's identities, and so this is an important approach in understanding their lives, experiences, and relationships with physical activity.

The objectives include:

- Exploring each individual's relationship with physical activity
- Establishing key life events that participants believe to be important to their attitudes towards and relationships with physical activity;
- Identifying people's reasons and motivations for taking part in the physical activity intervention;
- Understanding the impact of these changes on the lived experiences of the participants.

Life Course Methods

We conducted individual, one-hour interviews with people who were participating in TaAF projects, repeated five months later to capture change over time. Throughout data collection, analysis, action learning meetings and deliberative panels, the evaluation team fed outcomes back to the TaAF Core Team. This ensured that learning potential from the evaluation was maximised in an ongoing fashion which in turn, supported the TaAF Core Team in their future decision-making, further funding applications and planned ventures.

Life course cohorts

The projects associated with TaAF from which participants were invited:

Cohort 1: Job Centre Plus customers (part of the Department of Workplace and Pensions (DWP)). The TaAF Core Team worked with DWP to reach people who are not in employment. Participants in this cohort attended two events hosted by TaAF at a Job Centre Plus in Pennine Lancashire.

Cohort 2: members of **Creative Football**, which works alongside Sport England and TaAF to provide

a range of bespoke football initiatives. At the time of interviews, sessions with limited numbers were taking place instead of the usual projects, including Blokes UTD and Girls UTD.

Cohort 3: Individuals who participated in the **Virtual Mile** in Rossendale. This challenge of running or walking a mile was open to anyone of any age or ability, and participants were asked to record and send in their best time. Due to our life course methodology, we recruited only adults aged 18 or over to take part.

Cohort 4: Individuals who participated in the **Active Lifestyle Hub**, also known as ‘Up and Active’. This workstream supports people in Lancashire to be more physically active. This cohort matches one of the Process Evaluation (Strand 1) projects.

Co-design

Co-designing components of the evaluation with the TaAF Team and locality leads was an important component of the Lancaster University Evaluation Team approach wherever possible. This included co-designing an approach for recruiting and interviewing participants, including what the teams would like to understand following the life course interviews, co-designing a set of questions. These questions were incorporated into the interview schedule. The TaAF Core Team also developed a ‘Life Course Reflection Tool’ to explore the relationship between key life events and physical activity levels, which the Lancaster evaluation team drew on to create a document to use in the life course interviews.

Data analysis

There were two key strands of data analysis: one for each of the four participant cohorts (within-cohort data analysis) and one for the cross-cohort data analysis. For **Within-cohort data analysis**, Thematic Analysis of transcribed interviews was used to identify emerging themes. The **cross-cohort data analysis** was informed by the concept of ‘thematic networks’. Basic Themes are identified within the data, which are then grouped into Organising Themes and, finally, into Global Themes.

Action Learning Meetings

An action learning approach provided time and space to reflect with the TaAF Core Team on the evaluation data being collected and the initial themes emerging from the data analyses, enabling participants to engage in shared learning. It allowed time for both reflection and action (Dunphy et al. 2010), which, in turn, supported the TaAF Core Team’s decision-making processes and next steps. This supported TaAF and Sport England’s desire for both rapid review and rapid learning.

Deliberative Panels (Insight Events)

Deliberative panels methodology can play a key role in including a range of people in research and in shifting research findings from data analysis to meaningful recommendations for policy, practice and guidance.

The use of deliberative panels in the life course strand of this evaluation:

- enabled other stakeholder groups to contribute to this strand of the evaluation;
- contributed to data analyses;
- provided important opportunities for verifying and fine-tuning the qualitative findings from each cohort.

As the follow-up life course interviews were completed, four deliberative panels (Insight Events) were held with a wider group of participants from each of the four cohorts. Each insight event was co-designed with the TaAF core team and included members of the TaAF Core Team, Sport England, and individuals who had been involved in organising the physical activity intervention the cohort participated in.

Life Course Study findings

In order to make findings as accessible as possible, audio, infographic and animation media are used, please see links below in each section.

Within-cohort findings

The life course evaluation comprises four participant cohorts: Job Centre Plus; Creative Football; Virtual Mile; and Active Lifestyle Hub. Infographics and audio recordings are used in this report to present the findings from each of these four participant cohorts. It is hoped that these resources clearly present the key findings from each of the four different cohorts, and that they can be used by TaAF colleagues to support dissemination and development activities as their work continues.

An overview of the participants within each of these four cohorts is presented below, with further detail provided in the accompanying infographics and audio recordings.

Cohort 1: Job Centre Plus

Five JobCentre customers were interviewed at two time points (n=10 interviews). The participants were three men and two women, aged between 20 and 50 years. Four of the five people lived alone, and they had been involved with the JobCentre between 12 months and 25 years - mostly several years.

[Together an Active Future | Lancaster University](#)

Cohort 2: Creative Football

Three Creative Football participants were interviewed at two time points, while two participants were interviewed once (n=8 interviews). The participants were two men and three women, aged between 20 and 50 years.

2 men, 3 women

[Together an Active Future | Lancaster University](#)

Cohort 3: Virtual Mile

Three Virtual Mile participants were interviewed at two time points, while one participant was interviewed once (n=7 interviews). All participants were women, and were aged in their 30s and

40s. Virtual Mile participants were the most active of our participants across the cohorts.

[Together an Active Future | Lancaster University](#)

Cohort 4: Active Lifestyle Hub

Five Active Lifestyle Hub participants were interviewed at two time points (n=10 interviews). Participants were three men and two women, aged between 35 and 65 years. The people taking part in this cohort were therefore at very different life stages. For example, one participant had two young children, while two participants were retired.

[Together an Active Future | Lancaster University](#)

Cross-cohort findings

Four Global Themes were identified across the cohorts: **Life; Identity; Networks; Perceptions of Physical Activity (PA)**. The tables below summarise the Global Themes, and the Organising and Basic Themes from which they were developed. These findings are also supported by an animation and infographic.

Global Theme 1 This theme summarises aspects of life that have had a key influence on the way people live. This incorporates positive and negative experiences that have been present throughout individuals' lives, and how these have influenced decisions and actions. The theme addresses what is currently happening in people's lives, along with past experiences.

[Table 1: The organising and basic themes related to the Global Theme "Life"](#)

| GLOBAL THEME: | Organising Theme | | | |
|---------------|--|--|---|--|
| LIFE | Mental health (MH) | Physical health | Significant events / moments | Trauma |
| Basic themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving mental health • Drinking • MH symptoms • Difficulties with crowds • MH difficulties • Negative impact on MH & wellbeing – COVID | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weight • Ill health • Negative impact on physical health – COVID | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance struggles • College • Children • Education • Employment – enjoyment • Military Service • Negative impact on life – COVID • Positive impact on life – COVID | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic abuse • Bereavement (loss) • Concern for family • Grieving • Family difficulty • Judicial system |

Global Theme 2: This theme relates to the extent to which an individual’s identity is associated with physical activity. It shows how different sources and experiences throughout life have shaped individuals’ perceptions of the personal importance of physical activity.

Table 2 The organising and basic themes related to the Global Theme “Identity”

| GLOBAL THEME: IDENTITY | Organising Themes | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| | Hopes and Aspirations | Developing PA identity | Prioritising PA |
| Basic themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirations • Hopes for the future | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childhood PA • Active in childhood • Parental influence in childhood PA • Active teenager • Active when working • Active family • Adulthood activity • Bereavement and PA (impact) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of PA • Benefits of PA • Limited PA (activity, knowledge, options) • PA enjoyment • Change in activity levels • Juggling commitments |

Global Theme 3: This theme relates to the networks that individuals have and are part of in their lives, and the extent to which these influence decisions, actions and their motivation and capacity to be physically active. These networks are unique to the individual and look different for each person. Some networks are considered to be chosen and supportive, while others are perceived as being forced upon them and controlling.

Table 3 The organising and basic themes related to the Global Theme “Networks”

| GLOBAL THEME: NETWORKS | Organising Themes | | |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|
| | Relationships | Chosen / supportive networks | Forced / controlling networks |
| Basic themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support network • Dog companionship • Importance of knowing someone • Finding out about PA activity • Feelings of belonging – not being alone in their situation • Feeling safe • Negative impact on relationships – COVID • Positive impact on relationships – COVID | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health coach • Organisers • MH professional support • Support of family • Support of dogs • GP intervention • Support during COVID • Encouraging / introducing to PA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MH treatment • Hospital admission • Waiting for help (MH) • Job centre – negative / lack of control / fear / lack of understanding • Fear of losing benefits • Lack of control • Lack of support during COVID |

Global Theme 4: This Theme addresses perceptions of what physical activity means for participants, and comprises different aspects including an understanding of what physical activity is and what it means at an individual level. The theme also addresses individuals’ motivations to be physically active, along with the barriers that can prevent people from being physically active.

Table 4 The organising and basic themes related to the Global Theme “Perceptions of physical activity”

| GLOBAL THEME: PERCEPTIONS OF PA | Organising Themes | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| | Motivations for PA | Barriers to PA | Understanding PA |
| Basic themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of MH on PA • Influence of PH on PA • Motivation challenges • Motivation to improve • Technology motivates • Children as motivation • Bereavement prompts PA • Encouragement from others • Inclusivity – easy to access • Positive impact on PA – COVID | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PA financial restrictions • Employment prevents PA • Fear of being judged • Negative impact on PA – COVID | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence • PA with support • No discussion with GP about PA • Social aspect of PA • Dogs and PA • Walking • Benefits of running • Active at home • Valuing PA / what counts |

Key learning points from the life course evaluation

There are eight key learning points from the TaAF life course evaluation findings, listed below. These also feature in the short animation and infographic which can be found [here](#).

- 1) Mental and physical health can sometimes act as motivators to be physically active. However, people also told us how ill health can get in the way of being active.
- 2) Difficult life events and traumatic experiences can prevent people from being physically active. When life is challenging and people are experiencing a transition, physical activity is often not a priority.
- 3) Everyone we spoke with had been active in childhood.
- 4) People who described themselves as physically active adults had often been encouraged to be active as a child.
- 5) Having supportive networks and relationships is important for people's physical activity levels. People often became involved with a physical activity through these supportive networks, and encouragement from others was very important.
- 6) Some people's lives included examples of forced or controlling networks. These tended to be negative examples of networks, and were perceived to restrict an aspect of life in some way.
- 7) For some people, physical activity was about having time for themselves, while for others the social aspect was important.
- 8) Feeling safe and that they belonged led to people continuing their involvement in physical activity.

The final action learning meeting: reflections and actions

Members of the TaAF Core and Wider teams attended the final Action Learning Meeting in October 2021. In line with an action learning approach discussion of findings led to the development of a series of actions for those who attended and who will be continuing to work on the TaAF programme over the next few years. This process highlighted the importance to TaAF of the following key learning:

- Life events and the concept of different transition points within people's lives were of particular interest to the TaAF team, including how to ensure people are encouraged and supported to be physically active at these times;
- The concept of people living their lives through participation in different networks was of interest to the TaAF team. In particular, attendees thought it could be useful to consider different types of networks in their future work (whether these are chosen and supportive, or forced and controlling), including where particular organisations may sit within this;
- The choice of language when conducting research about people's physical activity was considered to be important. The group discussed the barriers created by the term 'physical activity', and Sport England's recent shift to use the alternative term 'movement'. It was agreed that the choice of language needs to be consistent, as it can have a significant impact on what different stakeholders think 'counts as' or value as physical activity;
- Those in attendance at this final action learning meeting thanked the evaluation team for the



opportunity to hear about, discuss and reflect on the learning from the life course evaluation. The action learning approach has been valued by and has benefitted the TaAF Core and Wider teams. Feedback received also acknowledged the importance of sharing the data analysis approaches used, making it clear how themes and key findings had been developed in a systematic and robust way.

Strand 3: Quantitative evaluation

The initial aim of Evaluation Strand 3 was to train volunteers to take basic functional ability measurements and use standardised questionnaires and to prepare an online database where the data obtained could be entered and used by all partners, as well as TaAF.

In the context of the COVID-19 restrictions, a different approach was required. It was agreed that the assessment training would enable end-users to self-assess. This would be achieved by the creation of short movie clips showing how to complete the physical tests and ‘conversion’ of paper-based questionnaires to an online format. This should allow wider dissemination and ease of collecting data, increasing sustainability.

- Quantitative measures of physical activity, functional ability and general wellbeing were determined and developed based on ease of delivery and minimal need for equipment. The short physical performance battery (SPPB) was chosen as the method to train, covering balance, walking speed and leg strength as this needs minimal equipment (a mobile phone, a chair and a tape measure).
- Accompanying questionnaires chosen were the Global Physical Activity Questionnaire, the Neighbourhood Environment Walkability Scale (NEWS) and the International Fitness Scale (IFIS). Appendix 2 gives the instructions.
- Instructions were developed and feedback obtained. Three videos were developed detailing how each test could be run, incorporating feedback. Finally, the questionnaire format was developed and disseminated to different TaAF groups for feedback on ease of use, comprehension, clarity and design. Links to the video clips and surveys can be found in Appendix 2.
- The measures were ultimately developed as online resources for dissemination to the ‘end user’ (Pennine Lancashire residents) rather than e.g. fitness trainers, sport centre staff etc.
- A spreadsheet for programme staff to use to collate data was designed to enable easy recording ready for analysis on effectiveness of individual programmes.