

Using the LEAP Framework

Common Issues and Problems



1. The language

New users are often unhappy with the language used, for example, inputs, outputs, outcomes, and often focus too much on the terminology. There is value in having a common language and we need to be able to use the language of funders and policy makers, even though it may take time to fully appreciate and understand the terminology. LEAP translates this more formal language at each key stage in the planning and evaluation cycle. For example Step 1 is about visioning outcomes and underneath the question we need to ask ourselves is displayed i.e. what (now) needs to change?

There's not much that's new about the 5 questions posed at each step and certainly nothing that we shouldn't be asking ourselves as a normal part of good practice

- What needs to change? (Visioning outcomes)
- How will we know? (Agreeing outcome indicators)
- How will we do it? (Action-planning)
- Are we doing it (monitoring)
- How useful was it and what did we learn (evaluation)

These basic questions are at the heart of good, reflective practice – we should always understand what impact we hope to have and action-plan accordingly; we should want to learn about what works and what doesn't and why and we should apply this learning in order to improve our own practice and ensure that, as individuals or organisations, we become more effective and efficient

2. Using LEAP as a paper exercise

LEAP describes a process not a form-filling exercise. It is important to think about the questions asked at each stage and the sequence in which they should be approached. The difference between outcomes and outputs should be clear if we ask ourselves the right questions and really focus on what it is we want to change or improve. LEAP should support what we do, not constrain it – if you find yourself struggling to put the right things in the right boxes you may need to look at how you're using the framework and whether you have gone through the process described. If our focus is on just the concrete paper product, we can lose sight of the value of the process e.g. that planning with other people builds understanding, consensus and new possibilities.

3. It's too complicated?

LEAP is a framework i.e. it is a set of assumptions; concepts; principles and values that constitute an approach to planning for change. As discussed above, the questions that are posed at each stage of the planning and evaluation cycle are straightforward and should be part of everyday good practice. Working in this way can be challenging because it asks us to be clear about what we are doing and why and to make a commitment to learning, systematically, from what we do and applying this learning. Challenging is different from “complicated” We should use the LEAP framework to support good practice not to tie ourselves up in knots!

The principles and values that underpin the LEAP framework are often those that underpin our own practice or are increasingly required or expected e.g. involving communities in decision-making processes. The principles are straightforward but they are ideals can seem like unattainable goals. It is important to remember that these are guiding principles. It is not about perfect participation for example (this is impossible!) but it is about commitment to the principles of participation and working to improve the quality of participation

Good planning is a complex process and often the more complex the intervention the more complex it is. Using LEAP doesn't and can't change this! LEAP directs us to acknowledge this complexity and strive to gain clarity of purpose in order to take effective action for sustainable change and to understand and value the process of collaborative decision making as a way of working that strengthens partnerships; addresses issues of exclusion and social injustice and produces new and innovative approaches.

Not easy but worth the investment!

4. It doesn't give enough detail?

As discussed above LEAP is a framework it does not address the detail of the various areas of practice described e.g. how to engage successfully with communities or conduct participatory evaluation etc this is not the purpose of the framework. The framework is intended to describe good practice at a macro level a framework is a structure that we build on. For example LEAP takes as its starting point that we are planning on the basis of identified need as understood from various perspectives– if we do not know how to get to this point we will have to learn about various approaches to need assessment, consultation etc There are many excellent resources that supplement the content of the LEAP framework some of which are highlighted in the “further information” section of the website.