

## Resource C      When can you use ‘experimental’ evaluation? – A ready reckoner guide

You may not always be able to use an experimental design for an evaluation – often they will not be possible and other (less robust) methods will need to be used. Budget, nature of the intervention, its context and scale, data availability and likelihood of comparative evidence are the main influences on what is, and is not, possible.

	Randomised control trials (RCT)/quasi-experimental (QE) more viable when:	RCT/QE less viable when:
<b>Budget availability (for evaluation)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal evaluation: Allocated staff resources/release of suitably skilled and experienced project management and evaluation team</li> <li>External evaluation: Substantial allocated budget to procure appropriate contractors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited (or no) allocated staff resource or budget</li> <li>Constraints affecting financing or contracting</li> </ul>
<b>Nature of action or intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New intervention where the need for evaluation is anticipated at design stage</li> <li>Distinct change in system(s) or practice affecting participants</li> <li>‘Isolatable’ intervention</li> <li>Non-complex and stable intervention environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New intervention where the need for an evaluation was not anticipated at design stage, or added much later</li> <li>Initiative is already mature or established and being modified</li> <li>Multiple outcome/impact effects expected from initiative</li> <li>High levels of likely unintended consequences (e.g., leakage)</li> <li>Intervention environment not likely to be stable</li> </ul>
<b>Expected (likely) scale of initiative impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large expected effect</li> <li>Distinctive effect relative to other changes taking place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small expected effect</li> <li>Complex environment (multiple confounding factors)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable effect measurable in (relatively) short timeframe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long effect lead times or incremental impacts</li> </ul>
<b>Anticipated availability of appropriate data and comparator evidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate data available on all individual participants</li> <li>• No data access constraints (e.g., data protection)</li> <li>• Data well fitted to intervention period/classification needs</li> <li>• Comparative and control data – before-during-after intervention</li> <li>• Objective selections for intervention/control group</li> <li>• Minimised/measurable selection bias</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data coverage not comprehensive</li> <li>• Access constraints affecting some/all</li> <li>• Data not adequately differentiated</li> <li>• Data not well fitted to intervention period; data lags</li> <li>• Summative data collection only</li> <li>• Required data limited to pilot area; or inadequate comparisons</li> <li>• Ethical constraints to comparisons</li> <li>• Lack of control group within intervention</li> <li>• Unstructured participant selections</li> </ul>