

Changing behaviours: smart solutions to the ‘wicked’ issues An invitation to participate in research with an experimental design

The Institute for Political and Economic Governance (iPEG) at the University of Manchester has been commissioned by the North West Improvement Network (NWIN) to undertake a three year knowledge creation programme to produce a new evidence base for local government in the region. NWIN is a network of the 46 local authorities in the North West that has received £8m from central government to support its members to improve performance. Our work is overseen by an NWIN panel chaired by Joyce Redfearn, Chief Executive of Wigan MBC.

We now have support to develop new ways to test out how to change behaviour, in partnership with North West local authorities, and would like to take this conversation forward to the next stage.

How experimental designs could help

There is a gap in the evidence about how local government can deliver desired outcomes on some behaviours, such as: better parental control of children; residents reporting anti-social behaviour; people not dropping litter, abandoning cars, or dumping bulky rubbish; substance misuse, or binge drinking.

We are proposing to use randomised control trials, and/or design experiments on service users’ behaviours that local authorities would like to change, but have found difficult to do so, and where it is not clear what the most effective interventions would be.

Randomised control trials are the ‘gold standard’ of research methods. They test out an intervention against a ‘control’ group. A complement, or alternative, is a design experiment which takes place in a smaller setting.

What we are offering

We are now developing ideas for new experimental projects in partnership with local authorities in the North West with support from the North West Improvement network (NWIN). Over 2007-8, we are offering:

- Research expertise and experience of working with local authorities on robust methods of evaluation, such as experimental approaches, and suggestions for possible interventions
- Part funding towards the costs of research
- Backing from NWIN to spread the lessons of the research across the region
- An opportunity to test out new, high risk, or innovative approaches to tackling entrenched problems
- Robust results and evidence on the effectiveness of interventions

What partners would offer:

- An issue they want to address, and ideas for how to do it
- Part funding towards the cost of implementing the intervention
- Discussion and dialogue about the experiment in partnership with iPEG
- Strategic backing for iPEG data collection

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