

C4D: Synthesise data across studies (research, monitoring data, evaluations)

What is it?

There are often questions beyond a single program or initiative, such as “Do these types of interventions work?” or “For whom, in what ways and under what circumstances do they work?” Answering these kinds of questions means locating the evidence, assessing the quality and relevance (and deciding whether or not to include it), extracting the relevant information, and synthesising it. The evidence may be sourced from bibliographic databases, unpublished studies, etc.

General information

The Rainbow Framework includes [comprehensive information on a range of methods](#) with links to further resources and tools. These range from the more rigorous systematic review methods, through to rapid methods of evidence assessment. [3ie also has a list of resources](#), particularly on the more rigorous and technical systematic review methods such as Cochrane and Campbell. It is recommended that some or all of these resources are reviewed before considering methods to apply to C4D.

Applying the C4D Principles

Learning-based

Synthesising data from across evaluations can be a useful way for better understanding the critical factors and qualities that make for successful C4D.

Critical

To ensure a critical and equity-focused approach, and to account for the complexity of different outcomes for different groups, the [realist synthesis](#) method would be useful for exploring what works for whom and in what circumstances.

Realistic

There are less expensive methods, such as [rapid evidence assessment](#), which may be useful where there is a need to realistically balance available resources and appropriate rigour.

Participatory

This task can be undertaken in a participatory way, supporting mutual learning.

Recommended methods and adaptations for C4D

Sources of data for a synthesis of C4D evidence

- - The [Communication Initiative](#) is a large repository of reports and evidence relating to C4D. It is searchable through text-search and filters.
 - Through a combination of filters for program areas and search terms such as 'systematic review' or 'evidence synthesis' it should be relatively easy to find examples of systematic reviews.
 - In an agency like UNICEF, it would be possible to synthesise evidence about C4D across different countries and regions from public and internal program evaluation reports.
 - Desk reviews are a common type of data synthesis approach, often commissioned to inform program design.

Recommended methods

- [Best evidence synthesis](#)

An approach to assembling and synthesising a wide range of evidence. It is consistent with the C4D Evaluation Framework in the following ways:

- **Participatory:** Builds in an iterative, participatory approach to building and using a knowledge base.
- **Holistic:** The approach is not as strict about what can be included as evidence compared to some other systematic review methods. Single case studies, can, for example, be included. The approach is also sensitive to the impact of context.
- **Learning-based:** The goals of Best Evidence Synthesis are to build a knowledge base that can be applied in programs.