



Towards a family justice observatory to improve the generation and application of research

Expressions of Interest

Overview

The Nuffield Foundation is seeking expressions of interest for delivery of a scoping study to develop proposals for the purpose, functions and delivery options for a family justice observatory. The observatory would promote a system-wide approach to the generation and practical application of research evidence and administrative data relevant to family justice issues. Although for brevity we refer to an 'observatory', this does not necessarily imply that we envisage a single organisation. Indeed, this is an issue that the scoping study will explore.

Background

The Nuffield Foundation has a long-standing interest in research on family justice and its links to court decision-making because these issues can have a profound influence on the lives of families and children.

However, there is relatively limited research capacity to address the fundamental questions in family justice. Indeed, the Family Justice Review in 2011 highlighted a need for: improved dissemination of up-to-date research and analysis on the needs, views and development of children; a system-wide approach to research and evaluation; and improved mechanisms for synthesising and vetting the quality of research in ways that are accessible and useful to practitioners, be they judges, legal representatives, social workers, Cafcass officers, or members of Local Family Justice Boards.

In October 2015 the Nuffield Foundation published a [briefing paper](#) (Rodgers, Trinder and Williams 2015) that outlines why better use of research evidence is important and how to address the problem of limited use of research within the family justice system. In particular, it sets out the preliminary case for a new infrastructure, provisionally called a family justice observatory, that could a) develop the research base for family justice b) work on the synthesis and integration of evidence c) promote the use of evidence and d) build capacity amongst researchers and/or practitioners. A key factor that underpins many of these proposed functions will be building data infrastructure and making administrative data available for research.

Remit of the scoping study

The scoping study will extend the preliminary analysis presented by Rodgers, Trinder and Williams (2015) to provide more comprehensive answers to the following questions:

- **Need:** Is there sufficient demand from potential users for improved research evidence to support the family justice system? How do the primary users prioritise the proposed range of functions and would others be helpful? What is the relative importance of evidence to support decision-making in specific cases as opposed to system-wide data? And should an observatory cover medical evidence as well as social science research?
- **Remit:** to what extent can and should any solution cover the whole of the UK (given the remit of the Family Justice Board to cover England and Wales only), and to what extent should its focus be confined to children and families involved in the court system.
- **Delivery models:** in particular whether to conceive of the observatory as an integrated network of specialist organisations, or a single institution; and whether to grow it organically or to start from scratch. A key question is how data access and management should be handled in the light of the development of the Administrative Data Service and Research Centre spearheaded by the ESRC.
- **Funding and sustainability:** including the balance between core- and project-based funding and the potential for self-sustaining funding in future; the interface with other organisations; governance arrangements; and how the impact of any new observatory should be evaluated.

Aims and objectives

The scoping study will map existing provision and establish the case and requirements for additional institution(s) or mechanisms that would facilitate evidence based decision-making within the family justice system. In particular, the study will:

- a. Map the main user and research provider groups and further develop understanding of their needs and priorities.
- b. Refine the proposed functions that might be offered by a family justice evidence service.
- c. Identify what sorts of data and research are likely to be in scope.
- d. Assess the extent to which existing organisational infrastructure fulfils functions, and identify key gaps.
- e. Develop and appraise different organisational models for delivering the proposed functions and develop recommendations for sequencing.

Timetable

Fri 16 th Oct 2015	Issue call for EOIs
Mon 9 th Nov 2015	Deadline for EOIs
Early Dec 2015	Issue Invitations to Tender
Mid Jan 2016	Deadline for ITT submission
Feb 2016	Interviews
Mar 2016	Project starts
Dec 2016	Project ends

Estimated budget

£100k - £150k

Assessment criteria

- Experience of undertaking scoping and/or feasibility work that involves a wide range of stakeholders to develop credible and sustainable delivery options and mechanisms (30%).
- Understanding of the technical, legal, ethical and methodological issues associated with linking, analysis, storage and sharing of administrative data (20%).
- Understanding the research and evidence requirements of practitioners and other stakeholders in the family justice system (15%).
- Understanding the issues related to translation of research into decision-making and practice (15%).
- Understanding the relevant pros and cons of different organisational models (10%).
- A track record of successful project management, delivering research or consultancy projects to time and to budget (10%).

Instructions for submission

- EOIs must be submitted by **5.30pm Monday 9th November 2015**
- The EOI must specify which people and organisations would be involved in a bid.
- The substantive section of the EOI should be structured under headings that reflect the assessment criteria outlined above. This section must be no longer than **2000 words**.
- Please send your EOI to Alison Rees arees@nuffieldfoundation.org
- A submission of an EOI does not guarantee an invitation to tender and the Foundation does not routinely provide feedback on EOIs.
- All grants are given subject to the Nuffield Foundation's [terms and conditions](#).