



The Catalyst Project, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and monitored by the Office for Students (OfS) is a partnership between the University of Essex, Essex County Council and Suffolk County Council.

Using cross-disciplinary expertise in data analytics, big data and evaluation, the University of Essex is supporting both County Councils to assess risks for vulnerable members of the community and provide evaluation techniques to fully understand the impact of Council initiatives.

The Catalyst Evaluation Team supported finalists bidding for Essex County Council's national Challenge Dementia Prize

In January 2018 Essex County Council launched the [Challenge Dementia Prize](#), as a national competition, open to anyone in the UK. The challenge was to discover a product, service or technology that could transform the way people live with Dementia.

The Dementia Challenge was supported by a range of partners, including the Catalyst Project Evaluation team, who helped shortlisted participants develop their business cases by devising strategies to evaluate the impact of their concept.

We interviewed Nicole North and Benjamin Mann from Essex County Council, who jointly-led the Dementia Challenge Prize Project and Kikia Chatsiou, from the University of Essex and asked them to give us an insight into the Challenge Dementia Prize process and the role played by the Catalyst Project's Evaluation Team.



From left to right: Nicole North, Benjamin Mann and Kikia Chatsiou

Why was the Catalyst Evaluation Team invited to work with the Challenge Prize?

Ben, Nicole: In past Challenge Prize events, competitors have found it difficult to measure and demonstrate the impact of their work. We knew it was important for competitors to be able to evaluate the impact of an idea and wanted to put together a support package for the nine finalists which would help them achieve the best outcomes.

How did the Evaluation Team support the work of the selected finalists?

Ben/Nicole: The finalists (a mixture of organisations, start-ups and individuals) had developed very different concepts and therefore the support package developed by the Catalyst Evaluation Team needed to be agile and flexible in order to meet the spectrum of the finalist's ideas and the different stages that they were at.

In order to design the support package, the Evaluation Team held a kick off workshop to meet the finalists and understand their concepts and explain the fundamental framework of good evaluation. This was an excellent opportunity for Dr Gina Reinhardt and Dr Kakia Chatsiou of the Catalyst Evaluation Team to apply academic theory to practice across a variety of concepts at different stages of production thought up by very different competitor groups.

Kakia: Ideally, good evaluation practices are introduced at the initial stage when business plans or processes are being drawn up. With the finalists being at varying product development stages the Evaluation Team needed to tailor the evaluation framework for each finalist to enable them to develop and demonstrate measures of the success of their concept.

Do you think the applicants benefited from the opportunity to include evaluation techniques in their business plan development?

Nicole explained that the finalists who engaged with the different support packages provided and understood the need and purpose of evaluation ended up by making the strongest business cases.

Would you say this was a useful collaboration?

Ben answered that the Challenge Prize itself has benefitted from the support provided by the Catalyst Evaluation Team by helping to tailor Essex County Council's evaluation framework for the Challenge Prize.

The collaboration was described as mutually beneficial with the Challenge Dementia Prize Team gaining theoretical insight into a structured framework for measuring and evaluating impact. Whereas the Catalyst Evaluation Team gained experience of putting theory into practice across different concepts during different stages of development.

Can you envisage future collaborative working?

Nicole answered that they would be keen on working further with the University, on the next Essex County Council led Challenge Prize and other future innovation projects, as key to any initiatives will be understanding the impact of any investment that they make. Both teams commented on the positive working relationships that had been created and had benefitted from knowledge exchange through the practical application of evaluation methodology.

Dr Kakia Chatsiou highlighted that finalists attending the awards ceremony were keen to find out the ways that they could work with the University of Essex in the future.

Dr. Gina Yannitell Reinhardt, University of Essex's Catalyst Project, Evaluation Team Lead commented: "Challenge Dementia gave us the opportunity to help organisations and citizens build capacity to evaluate their own work. We have been thrilled to work with the finalists and Essex County Council to strengthen the project and their ability to evaluate outcomes. The reward of measuring improvements in people's lives is remarkable."

The Catalyst Evaluation Team are currently exploring marketing options for their '[Spotlight toolkit](#)'. The toolkit is an on-line interactive tool and framework designed to enable any organisation to create their own evaluation process to assess the impact and effectiveness of their programme or services.

The Catalyst Project works in partnership with:

