Experiments in evaluation: lessons from randomisation in research funding

An SNSF, EMBO & RoRI workshop, 1 & 2 December 2021
Virtual meeting via Webex (Day 1) and Zoom (Day 2)—see links in purple below

We are pleased to invite you to join us for a two-day workshop on Experiments in evaluation on 1 & 2 December 2021, at which we will share and discuss findings from RoRI's pilot project on uses of randomisation and experimentation by research funders.

Given the winter wave of Covid-19 cases affecting several European countries, this will now be a fully online event, but we aim to make online participation as interactive as we can. In light of the move to fully online, we have compressed the agenda slightly, to end at lunchtime (13:00 CET) on Day 2.

The meeting is the culmination of a fifteen month workstream, through which RoRI partners have collaborated to experiment and exchange insights on uses of partial randomisation in grant allocation. Our efforts to date have been focused in three areas:

- bespoke support for partners in undertaking trials of partial randomisation or other experimental funding methods;
- the creation of a practical manual The Experimental Research Funders’ Handbook;
- a qualitative study exploring motivations and drivers for partial randomisation.

The purpose of this final workshop is to share the results of this work, and also to design and plan a further wave of funder experiments to begin in 2022. We begin on 1 December with a morning session, open to a wider public audience, where we will hear updates from strategic partners on the experiments they have conducted. We will also present headline insights from The Experimental Research Funders’ Handbook and our study of funder motivations for uses of partial randomisation.

After this opening session, the remainder of the meeting will be for RoRI partners and invited guests only, to enable open sharing and discussion. This is an opportunity to reflect on experiences of funder experimentation in a supportive environment, and work together to design further projects and trials, which build on our findings from the past year.

Please reply by email to Helen Buckley Woods on h.b.woods@sheffield.ac.uk if you (or a colleague) would like to attend the partners-only sessions.
Day One—Wednesday 1 December 2021 (all times in CET / GMT+1)

Session 1: Experiments and the future of evaluation


09:30 Welcome and reflections on SNSF’s journey into experimental research funding
  Matthias Egger, President, Swiss National Science Foundation

09:45 Chair and introduction to RoRI’s work on randomisation and experimentation
  James Wilsdon, Director, Research on Research Institute

09:50 The Experimental Research Funders’ Handbook: highlights and insights
  Sandra Bendiscioli, Senior Programme Officer, EMBO,
  Teo Firpo and Albert Bravo-Biosca, Innovation Growth Lab, Nesta

10:05 Funder motivations for the use of partial randomisation
  Helen Buckley Woods, Research Associate, RoRI

10:15 Questions and discussion

10:30 Coffee break (15 mins)

Session 2: Insights and evidence from trials of partial randomisation

10:45 Chair & opening remarks
  Michele Garfinkel, Head, Policy Programme, EMBO

10:50 Randomising in pursuit of equity and impact: lessons from New Zealand
  Lucy Pomeroy, Health Research Council of NZ (online)

11:05 Rethinking the funding line: random selection at the Swiss National Science Foundation
  Marco Bieri, Scientific Officer & Rachel Heyard, Statistician, SNSF

11:20 Volkswagen Foundation’s “Experiment!”: risky research by lottery¹
  Dagmar Simon, Managing Director, EvaConsult

11:35 1000 Ideas Programme: a novel mechanism for novel ideas²
  Elisabeth Nindl, Senior Evaluation Officer, Austrian Science Fund (FWF)

11:50 Discussion panel for Session 2 speakers (joined also by Matthias Egger, President, SNSF)

12:25 Closing remarks
  Michele Garfinkel, Head, Policy Programme, EMBO
  James Wilsdon, Director, Research on Research Institute

12:30 Lunch break

¹ https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/en/funding/our-funding-portfolio-at-a-glance/experiment/partially-randomized-procedure
² https://m.fwf.ac.at/en/research-funding/fwf-programmes/1000-ideas-programme
Session 3: Funder-to-funder exchange and peer learning

Join via Webex: https://snsf.webex.com/snsf/j.php?MTID=md69ef032b1d37cdb26eba88efd9ab43b with password: CmW9Xy7eVj3

13:30  Chair and opening remarks
Jon Holm, Special Adviser, Research Council of Norway

13:40  Building the internal strategic case for experimentation in public and private funders
Opening perspectives (5 mins each), followed by discussion:
Kasper Nørgaard, Senior Scientific Lead, Novo Nordisk Foundation
Vanessa Cuthill, Director of Research, The British Academy
Albert Bravo-Biosca, Innovation Growth Lab, Nesta

14:30  Legal issues and practical implementation
Opening perspective, followed by discussion:
Thomas Werder Schläpfer, Member, Executive Management, SNSF

15:10  Afternoon break (20 mins)

15:30  Communication & stakeholder perceptions
Opening perspectives (5 mins each), followed by discussion:
Amanda Blatch-Jones, National Institute for Health Research
Michele Garfinkel, Head, Policy Programme, EMBO
Philippa Shelton, First Create the Media

16:15  Closing remarks for day one
Matthias Egger, President, SNSF and James Wilsdon, Director, RoRI

16:30  Close of Day One

Day Two—Thursday 2 December 2021 (all times in CET / GMT+1)

Join via Zoom (meeting ID: 829 1115 2184, passcode: 253542) and using this link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82911152184?pwd=MlplSGpVNVFpMmlVZUd6OWZxeG92QT09

Session 4: Expanding options and selecting methods

09:00  Introduction and goals of Day Two
James Wilsdon, Director, RoRI

09:05  Opening provocations (15 mins each)

Field experiments with grant peer review
Chiara Franzoni, Associate Professor, Associate Professor at Polytechnic University of Milan

Experimental methods and cost measurement for different funding modes
Adrian Barnett, Professor in the Faculty of Health, Queensland University of Technology
Philip Clarke, Professor of Health Economics, University of Oxford
09:50  Questions and discussion

10:00  Elevator pitches of ideas shared in advance or emerging from the meeting

10:30  Coffee break

Session 5: Develop, refine and co-design

11:00  Chair and opening remarks
Gert V. Balling, Senior Impact Partner, Novo Nordisk Foundation

11:10  Divide into three groups to develop and refine project ideas (50 mins)
(via Zoom breakout rooms)

Facilitators:
Group 1: Teo Firpo & Albert Bravo Biosca, Innovation Growth Lab, Nesta
Group 2: Michele Garfinkel & Sandra Bendiscioli, EMBO
Group 3: Tom Stafford & Helen Buckley Woods, University of Sheffield

12:00  Groups report back on progress (5 mins each)

12:15  Plenary discussion of emerging priorities and opportunities

12:45  Concluding remarks and next steps
Katrin Milzow, Head of Strategy Division, SNSF and James Wilsdon, Director, RoRI

13:00  Close of Day 2