Evaluation Report

Strategic & Quality Initiatives, August 2016

Contents

Executive Summary

As a result of staff feedback on research support needs, the Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services (ROWPHE) Department Leadership Team authorized the Strategic and Quality Initiatives Team to lead the planning and implementation of an internal knowledge exchange event focused on research impacting practice (see the logic model at [1963712](#)). The event, titled Research Expo, had the following desired outcomes:

- Increased staff awareness of research happening across the department
- Increased staff awareness of how research has changed practice
- Increased staff knowledge of research theory or methodology
- Staff provided with knowledge they could apply to future research or practice
- Increased connections between staff
- Increased knowledge of staff with expertise or skills in specific research or practice areas

Research Expo occurred on June 1, 2016 from 9am to 3:45pm at 99 Regina Street South. The event consisted of a keynote address by Dr. Maureen Dobbins, Scientific Director for the National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools; a showcase of eight posters; and 10 breakout sessions.

One hundred and one staff registered for the Research Expo, with 95 registered for the keynote address, 53 registered for the showcase, and 93 registered for at least one of the ten breakout sessions.

Paper and online surveys completed by Research Expo participants found that the event delivered on all of its desired outcomes. In addition:

- Ninety-eight percent of respondents felt that their attendance was a very effective or somewhat effective use of their time away from their regular work
- One hundred percent of respondents would recommend to their colleagues that they attend the Research Expo in the future if it were to be offered again
- There was most agreement that an event like the Research Expo should happen every two years
- Many staff expressed thanks for the event, and suggestions for improvement were mainly related to timing and access

Recommendations based on this evaluation:

1. Run a Research Expo every two to three years.
2. Invite staff from other Departments to attend the breakout sessions.
3. Modify the registration process to reduce the number of Training Registration System approval emails sent to Managers.
4. Allocate more time for discussions and the showcase portion of the event.
5. For showcase presenters, ensure clearer expectations for what is required, more presentation preparation support, and clearer and timelier poster size guidelines.
6. Evaluate future Research Expos against defined outcomes, but conduct only an after-event online survey for attendees and presenters.

Background

As a result of staff feedback on the research support staff would like, the Department Leadership Team (DLT) authorized the Strategic and Quality Initiatives (SQI) Team to lead the planning and implementation of an internal knowledge exchange event focused on research impacting practice (see logic model, 1963712). The event, called Research Expo, was intended for staff to:

- share research questions, methodology, and outcomes
- share research results dissemination strategies
- facilitate knowledge transfer and exchange of research projects
- highlight innovative, new, and emerging aspects of research
- highlight how research has affected practice

The Research Expo was also expected to inform DLT about the effectiveness of this type of forum as a future research knowledge exchange opportunity.

The defined, desired outcomes of the Research Expo were as follows:

- Increased staff awareness of research happening across the department
- Increased staff awareness of how research has changed practice
- Increased staff knowledge of research theory or methodology
- Staff provided with knowledge they could apply to future research or practice
- Increased connections between staff
- Increased knowledge of staff with expertise or skills in specific research or practice areas

The Research Expo Working Group (a working group of the Research Community of Practice) began planning the Research Expo in August 2015. Led by a Health Promotion and Research Analyst from SQI, the Working Group included staff from each Division, including two nurses representing nursing practice.

The Research Expo was advertised through email, video, and poster invitations beginning in early May 2016. The event ran on June 1, 2016 from 9am to 3:45pm at 99 Regina Street South. The event consisted of:

- A keynote address in room 508 by Dr. Maureen Dobbins, Scientific Director for the National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools
- A showcase of eight posters (Table 1) in room 508, along with a scavenger hunt activity (see 2139228) to encourage attendees to visit each poster and interact with the presenter
- Ten breakout sessions in various rooms (Table 2)

Table 1. Research Expo showcase presentations

Presentation	Presenter
Increasing Access to Public Health for Immigrants and Refugees	Heidi Harris, Mary Mueller
Examining Alcohol Retail Expansion and Outlet Density in Waterloo Region	Cheryl Bloemendal
Nursing Practice Reference Tool for Evidence Informed Care	Sharon Michael, Sheri Armstrong
Engaging Community Partners to Promote Nutri-eSTEP to Families: A Universal and Targeted Approach	Jillian Welk, Judith Kitching
How Should We Target Health Promotion Efforts? Mapping Private Well Water Samples in Waterloo Region, 2012-2014	Bethany Mazereeuw
Illustrating the Collective Impact of IDS Research	Taheera Walji
2015 Summary of Research Reviewed by Public Health & Emergency Services (PHE) Research Ethics Board (REB)	Sam Stevenson
Resource Centre Display	Cody Leduc

Table 2. Research Expo breakout sessions

Session #	Title	Presenter
1	From Data to Action – Changing the Landscape of Sexual Health Services for Youth in Waterloo Region	Meghan Randall, Marg McGee
2	The Raw Facts on Steak Tartare	Bernadette Moussa, Bhairavi Sivaramalingam
3	Conducting a Comprehensive Literature Review on Positive Parenting: Benefits, Challenges and Lessons Learned	Erin Tardiff
4	Mental Health Promotion: It's More Than You Think!	Stephanie Watson, Katie McDonald
5	The Joy and Pain of Ambitious Research Projects	Pat Fisher
6	Better Together: Partnering with Academia to Evaluate Ontario's First Smoke-Free Policy	Laurie Nagge
7	Using Service Improvement Methodology: School Service Excellence Evaluation Experience	Melanie Garbarz
8	Increasing Our Knowledge: Conducting a Situational Assessment of Gay, Bisexual and Other Men who Have Sex with Men	Adele Parkinson
9	Signing Routes to School: How Process Evaluation is Influencing Project Evolution	Annette Collins
10	Drugs, Substances and Rock 'n' Research	Andrew Sardella

Staff registered for the keynote address, the showcase, and the breakout sessions using the online Training Registration System.

Evaluation Method

The Research Expo evaluation focused on assessing the extent to which the event achieved its defined, desired outcomes. The evaluation involved:

- Keynote address attendees receiving a paper survey (see 2126792) and pencil on their chairs prior to the event
- Showcase attendees receiving a paper survey (see 2126792) and pencil informally as they passed the table with the survey return box in room 508
- Breakout session attendees receiving a paper survey (see 2126792) and pencil at the session

Event moderators were instructed to remind attendees to complete the surveys and to hand them in before leaving the events. The purpose of the paper surveys was to collect event-specific feedback regarding the defined, desired outcomes for the event. It was expected that paper surveys would have a high response rate. It was also agreed by the Research Expo Working Group that the results for the breakout session surveys would be reported only in aggregate, though presenters could request the results for their presentation.

In addition to paper surveys, all event registrants received an email invitation on June 2 to complete the Online Attendee Survey (see 2181759). The main purpose of this survey was to collect attendee's feedback on:

- the event as a whole and in the context of the defined desired outcomes for the event
- their perception of the event being an effective use of their time
- how often they think the event should occur
- their suggestions for event improvement

A few questions in the Online Attendee Survey were also asked to attendees of breakout sessions identified by presenters as having the potential to increase staff's evaluation capacity (see Appendix A). These evaluation-capacity building questions were included as part of ROWPHE's participation in Public Health Ontario's Locally Driven Collaborative Project on Evaluation Capacity Building.

All showcase and breakout session presenters were sent an email invitation on June 1 to complete an online survey (see 2181762) asking about what they appreciated most about being a presenter and what could have improved their experience as a presenter.

Evaluation components were divided among various SQI staff:
- In order to separate the event organization from the evaluation, a second SQI Health Promotion and Research Analyst (not on the Research Expo Working Group) created the evaluation questions and method in consultation with the Research Expo Working Group and the Manager of Strategic & Quality Initiatives.
- The Manager of Strategic & Quality Initiatives approved the evaluation questions, method, and a results output list (see 2126792).

- A Master of Public Health student in SQI printed, delivered, and collected paper surveys; typed written survey responses into Excel; and analyzed the data as per the approved results output list.
- The second SQI Health Promotion and Research Analyst guided the student in data analysis and led the writing of this report.

Qualitative analyses of text responses focused on the most commonly mentioned items. Thus, the output provided few singly mentioned items when it came to improvement suggestions. Focusing on suggestions mentioned by the most respondents was favourable because it allows for prioritization of improvement changes and it ensures that changes meet the needs of the most staff.

Results

Participation

- One hundred and one staff registered for the Research Expo, with 95 registered for the keynote address.
- Fifty-three registered for the showcase
- Ninety-three registered for the at least one of the 10 breakout sessions.
- All breakout sessions had at least 9 staff attending, with a maximum of 30 and an average of 18.
- Headcounts were not feasible for the keynote address and showcase because of people moving in and out, though Room 508 was observed to be quite full for each event.

Twelve Cambridge office staff registered for the Research Expo. Figures 1 and 2 show registrants by staff category and Division, respectively.

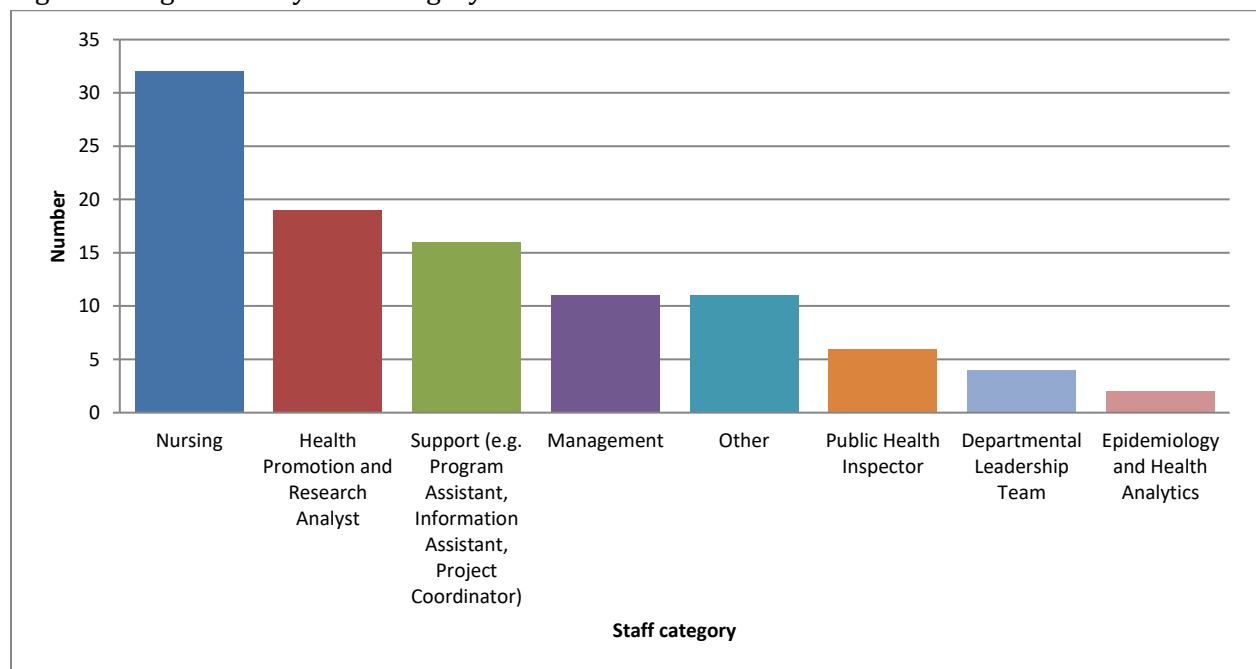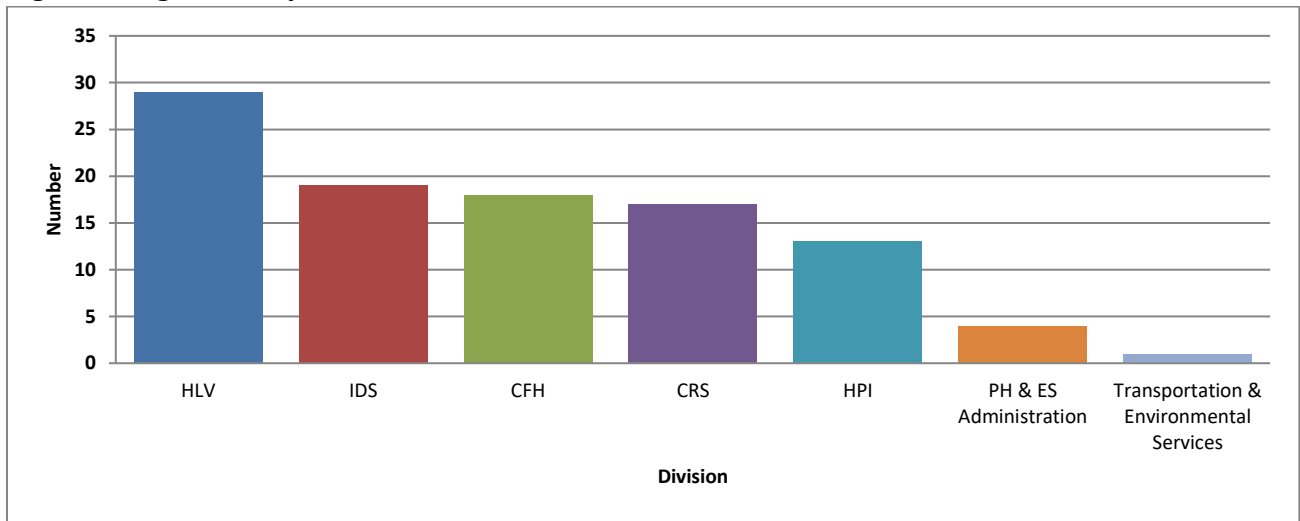Figure 1. Registrants by staff category

Figure 2. Registrants by Division

Sixteen staff handed in scavenger hunt forms completed during the showcase. Two people commented in the online surveys that the scavenger hunt encouraged attendees to visit each poster.

Attendee feedback

Overall event

Forty-six Research Expo attendees completed the Online Attendee Survey, which represents 46% of those registered. Of those, most respondents (74%) were Nurses and Health Promotion and Research Analysts.

Participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale (with "Not at all" at the lowest end, "Somewhat" in the middle, and "A lot" at the highest end) the extent to which their overall attendance at the Research Expo achieved for them the outcomes of the Research Expo. Table 3 shows the percent of participants indicating "not at all" (1) to "a lot" (5) for each outcome, with the most common ratings highlighted.

Table 3. Percent of respondents indicating ratings for Research Expo outcomes.

Outcomes	Respondents indicating a rating of:				Combined rating of 4-5
	1 (not at all) or 2	3 (somewhat)	4	5 (a lot)	
Increase your awareness of research happening across the department	2%	4%	37%	57%	**94%**
Increase your awareness of how research has changed practice*	7%	34%	36%	23%	**59%**
Teach you something new about research theory or methodology*	16%	32%	34%	18%	52%
Provide knowledge that you could apply to future research or practice*	7%	16%	54%	23%	**77%**
Increase your connections with other staff	9%	41%	26%	24%	50%
Increase your knowledge of staff with expertise or skills in specific research or practice areas	9%	28%	26%	37%	**63%**

*Non-responders to this item (2 people) were not included in the calculation.

With the exception of increasing staff's connections with other staff, all outcomes had most respondents indicating that the Research Expo personally delivered on the outcomes by more than "somewhat". The event appears to have contributed most to:
- increasing staff awareness of research happening across the department (94% rated 4-5)
- providing staff knowledge that they could apply to future research or practice (77% rated 4-5)
- increasing knowledge of staff with expertise or skills in specific research or practice areas (63% rated 4-5)
- increasing staff's awareness of how research has changed practice (59% rated 4-5)

The event appears to have contributed least to increasing connections with other staff and teaching staff something new about research theory or methodology; however, 50% and 52% of respondents, respectively, indicated that the event delivered on these outcomes by more than "somewhat".

The staff positions with the highest proportion completing this survey (Health Promotion and Research Analysts and Nurses) indicated approximately equal extents to which the Research Expo personally delivered on its outcomes.

The most reported gains because of respondents' overall attendance at the Research Expo were learning about different projects happening across the department, networking, and knowledge of tools and resources.

Sixty-five percent of respondents felt that their attendance was a very effective use of their time away from their regular work, 33% felt it was somewhat effective, and 2% were neutral. None indicated it was a somewhat ineffective or very ineffective use of their time away from regular work.

One hundred percent of respondents would recommend to their colleagues that they attend the Research Expo in the future if it were to be offered again.

Most respondents thought that a research-focused event like the Research Expo should happen every two years (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Opinions about how often an event like the Research Expo should happen
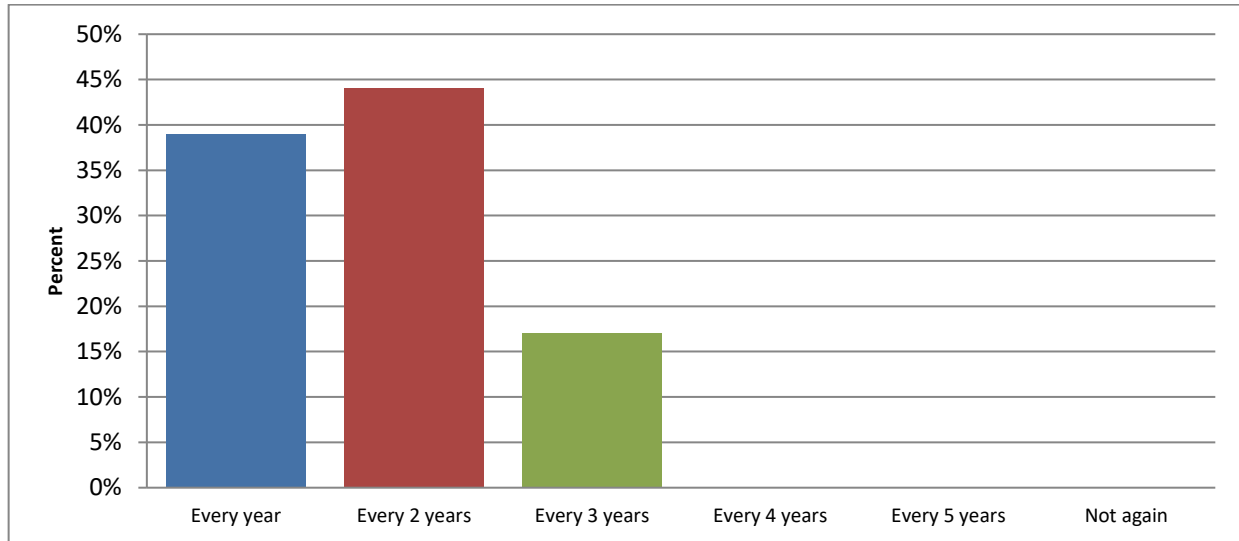
Timing and access were the most common themes for how a research-focused event like this could be improved in the future. Regarding event timing:

- four respondents recommended that more time be given for discussions
- two respondents recommended more time for the research showcase
- two respondents recommended that the event be run as two half-days
- one respondent recommended more time for breaks, as some of the sessions went over time

Regarding access:

- three respondents mentioned that not all staff had the same degree of opportunity to attend the event (e.g. some had to stay in the office to cover for those who attended the event)
- two respondents suggested extending the invitation to other Departments (e.g. Community Services, Transportation & Planning)
- one respondent recommended better promoting the event for Cambridge staff
- one respondent suggested inviting external partners, such as academia

When asked for additional comments, many respondents expressed thanks for the event and thanks to the organizers.

Keynote address
Sixty-five keynote address attendees completed the paper Keynote Address Feedback Survey.

Most commonly indicated as what respondents gained because of attending the keynote address were awareness of how research has changed practice, knowledge that could be applied to future research or practice, and knowledge of other resources specific to research.

The Evidence-Informed Decision Making process, the research process and its challenges, and the importance of questioning current practices were identified as the most common valuable things gained by staff because of attending the keynote address.

Showcase
Twenty research showcase attendees completed the paper Research Showcase Feedback Survey.

Most commonly indicated by staff as what they gained because of attending the showcase were awareness of research happening across the department, increasing connections with other staff, and knowledge of other staff with expertise or skills in specific research or practice areas.

Networking, awareness of initiatives across the Department, and advice on how to do something related to research were the most common valuable things gained by respondents because of attending the showcase.

Breakout sessions
One hundred and forty-six paper Breakout Session Feedback Surveys were completed by breakout session attendees.

Most commonly indicated by staff as what they gained because of attending the breakout sessions were:
- awareness of research happening across the department,
- knowledge that could be applied to future research or practice, and
- knowledge of other staff with expertise or skills in specific research or practice areas.

When attendees where asked to indicate the most valuable thing gained because of attending the breakout session, no themes were common to all sessions; responses were mainly specific to the session topic. When attendees were asked for any other comments about the breakout session, no themes were common to all sessions though the majority expressed gratitude for the events.

Presenter feedback
Twenty-one out of 25 Research Expo presenters completed the Online Presenter Survey.

Most commonly mentioned by showcase and breakout session presenters as what they appreciated about being a presenter were presenting to an interested audience, discussing the project with others, and showcasing a project they were involved in.

Showcase presenters
Showcase presenters most commonly mentioned clearer expectations for what was required (3/10 respondents), better room set-up (2/10 respondents), and more presentation preparation support (1/10 respondents) as what could have improved their experience as a presenter.

Regarding clearer expectations, one person specified that it would be helpful to provide presenters with timely and clearer poster size guidelines.

Breakout session presenters
The most commonly mentioned items by breakout session presenters as what could have improved their experience as presenters were:

- Nothing (4 respondents)
- More preparation time (2 respondents)
- Easier manager approval (1 respondent)

Although not related to being a presenter, one manager and one employee expressed concern about the number of Training Registration System approval emails sent to supervisors, indicating that the high number seemed excessive or was suspected to frustrate supervisors, respectfully.

Discussion
Outcome achievement

Staff attendance at the Research Expo was high, and the event delivered on all of its desired outcomes.

It seems fitting that the Research Expo contributed most to increasing respondents' awareness of research happening across the Department. Although the event appears to have contributed least to increasing connections with other staff and teaching staff something new about research theory or methodology, at least half of survey respondents indicated increases on these outcomes by more than somewhat. Whether the event could have better supported opportunities for staff to connect or whether staff connections were already high coming into the event (and would thus result in a lower score on this outcome) are not clear. Regarding the outcome of teaching staff new research theory or methodology, perhaps this should be more expected at Research Community of Practice meetings or training events.

Although related, the keynote address, showcase, and breakout sessions appear to be individually valuable. For example, the Evidence-Informed Decision Making process and the importance of questioning current practices were identified as the most common valuable things gained by staff because of attending the keynote address, but these gains were not among the top identified at the showcase and breakout sessions. As well, the second most commonly indicated gain by staff attending the showcase was increasing connections with other staff, but this was not among the top three gains identified because of attending the other events. In other words, the various components of the event, contributed separately to the overall anticipated outcomes.

With ninety-eight percent of online survey respondents feeling that their attendance was a very effective or somewhat effective use of their time away from their regular work, it may be that the voluntary event attendance helped screen for people who would find it effective.

Event frequency

Most respondents thought that a research-focused event like the Research Expo should happen every two years, with the second largest agreement being every year, a substantially smaller agreement being every three years, and none voting for 4 years, 5 years, or not again. A benefit of having the event every two years instead of one year is that it allows more time for presentable research activities and learnings to accumulate. Another benefit of doing the event every two years instead of annually is it reduces resource costs: Although planning for a similar event in the future may rely on much of the planning materials and processes developed for this year's Research Expo, planning for another event will likely still require significant staff time; attending the event also requires staff time. Having the event more frequently may better ensure that staff's needs are satisfied when it comes to research knowledge exchange.   Running an event every three years meets these just-mentioned advantages, along with providing sufficient time for the availability of new research to showcase.

Improvement suggestions

Timing and access were the most common themes for how a research-focused event like this could be improved in the future. The most common suggestion for improved timing was that more time be given for discussions. This is feasible to implement. For example, presenters could be asked to allot a larger proportion of their time to discussion.

Two respondents suggested that more time be given for the showcase event, which also seems to easy to implement, perhaps by shortening the keynote address.

Two respondents also recommended that the event be run as two half-days. Reasons given were that it allows staff to work on normal duties the other half of the day and that it spares staff from sitting at Research Expo events the entire day. A drawback of having the event as two half-days, however, is that it requires more set-up and set-down time. One way to minimize issues with sitting at a one-day event could be to encourage standing at events. Other reasons in favour of a one-day event are in slide 6 of the Research Learning Showcase presentation to DLT on December 11, 2015 (see 2027341).

Regarding access, three respondents mentioned that not all staff had the same degree of opportunity to attend the event (e.g. some had to stay in the office to cover for those who attended the event). Running duplicate events or video recording the events may address this issue with coverage, though it would require significantly more resources.

The suggestion from two respondents to extend the invitation to other departments (e.g. Community Services, Transportation & Planning) seems feasible for the breakout sessions (as many presentations had room) and the showcase, but it does not seem feasible for the keynote address if a room larger than 508 cannot be secured, as the room appeared near capacity. It may be useful to gauge other Departments' interest in participating before inviting them to attend and/or allow limited registration only after ROWPHE staff have registered.

Showcase and breakout session presenters were highly satisfied with their presenting experience. Showcase presenters' suggestions for clearer expectations for what was required, better room set-up,

more presentation preparation support, and clearer and more timely poster size guidelines are all feasible to implement. One comment regarding room set-up was that the back of 508 was somewhat cramped until chairs were moved.

The breakout session presenter suggestion for more preparation time is easy to implement. It is not clear what could be improved regarding easier manager approval, but two survey comments suggest there may be a need for less Training Registration System approval emails being sent to managers (registration required that participants register individually for each session). It may be worthwhile to consider whether the registration process could be modified to do this in order to minimize the number of approval request emails.

Evaluation strengths and limitations

A strength of this evaluation is that is solicited comprehensive feedback using paper and online surveys, which made evaluation participation easy and accessible, helped to examine if findings corroborate, and allowed for evaluation of specific events. A limitation of this evaluation was that not all attendees provided feedback, so results cannot be perfectly generalized; however, there was high participation in the paper surveys and reasonably high participation in the online surveys, especially for presenters. Another limitation of this evaluation was the potential for the people who presented or organized the event to have filled out the survey more positively than had they not presented or not organized the event.

A few Research Expo Working Group members commented in a meeting after the event that paper surveys at each event seemed like overkill (see 2149272). No attendees outside of the Working Group voiced this opinion in the paper and online surveys, though the surveys did not ask for feedback on the evaluation. Future evaluations may benefit from having just an online survey for attendees and presenters, as this evaluation found that each event type appears to be valuable and thus measuring this again may not be worthwhile. Having only an online survey would also leave more time during events for discussion. However, it is recognized that having paper surveys available onsite to the "captive audience" may have contributed to a healthy response rate.

Conclusion

The Research Expo delivered on all of its outcomes, and the overall event was a success for attendees and presenters. One hundred per cent of respondents would recommend to their colleagues that they attend the Research Expo in the future if it were to be offered again.

The following are recommendations based on this evaluation:

1. Run a Research Expo every two to three years.
2. Invite staff from other Departments to attend the breakout sessions.
3. Modify the registration process to reduce the number of Training Registration System approval emails sent to Managers.
4. Allocate more time for discussions and the showcase portion of the event.

5. For showcase presenters, ensure clearer expectations for what is required, more presentation preparation support, and clearer and timelier poster size guidelines.
6. Evaluate future Research Expos against defined outcomes, but conduct only an after-event online survey for attendees and presenters.

Appendix

Table 4. Breakout sessions identified by presenters as having evaluation-capacity building potential

Session #	Title	Evaluation-Capacity Building Potential		
		Increase staff's awareness of evaluation methods or tools?	Increase staff's confidence that they can do evaluation?	Provide staff with knowledge they could apply to current or future evaluation projects?
5	The Joy and Pain of Ambitious Research Projects	No	Yes	Yes
7	Using Service Improvement Methodology: School Service Excellence Evaluation Experience	Yes	No	Yes
9	Signing Routes to School: How Process Evaluation is Influencing Project Evolution	Yes	Yes	Yes

Of respondents attending breakout sessions that could increase their awareness of evaluation methods or tools, 79% indicated that their overall attendance at the Expo increased their awareness of evaluation methods or tools somewhat to a lot. Staff commonly mentioned that methodology related to evaluating service satisfaction, the Service Improvement Planning and Implementation method, and the tools available at the National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools were the evaluation methods or tools that they learned. The keynote address and breakout session 7 were commonly identified as the events that taught them these things.

Of respondents attending breakout sessions that could increase their confidence that they can do evaluation, 53% indicated that their overall attendance at the Expo increased their confidence somewhat to a lot that they can do evaluation. Staff commonly mentioned that learning concrete examples of evaluations that had taken place at ROWPHE and that connecting with colleagues who they can consult when doing evaluations helped increased their confidence that they can do evaluation. Some mentioned that the keynote address was the event that taught them these things; none mentioned the breakout sessions that could increase their confidence.

Of respondents attending breakout sessions that could provide them with knowledge that they could apply to current or future evaluation projects, 75% indicated that their overall attendance at the Expo provided them with somewhat to a lot of knowledge that they could apply to current or future evaluation projects. Staff commonly mentioned that the Service Improvement Planning and

Implementation method (SIPI), different approaches and methodologies when conducting research, and presenting evaluation results were the knowledge they could apply to current or future evaluation projects. Some mentioned that the keynote address and breakout sessions 7 and 9 were the events that taught them these things.