

Invitation to tender: Impact & Experience Evaluation of Dry January

Client: Alcohol Research UK and Alcohol Concern

Maximum budget: £35,000 (including VAT)

Application deadline: 5th November 2018

Overview

We wish to evaluate the impact of participation in Alcohol Concern's Dry January campaign on attitudes, behaviours and self-perceived wellbeing. The evaluation will also assess the specific benefits of participation (via website, Facebook or app sign-up) for support, advice and successful completion.

The evaluation will be used for both internal and external reporting purposes and for the forward planning of future campaigns. We will need timely and regular updates on data for internal monitoring, as well as the coproduction of a final report.

About Alcohol Research UK and Alcohol Concern

Alcohol Research UK and Alcohol Concern merged in 2017. The new charity will be launching its new name and identity in November 2018, so Dry January 2019 will be run under the new brand. The charity's core purpose is the reduction of alcohol harms among individuals, families and communities.

About Dry January

Dry January was first launched by Alcohol Concern in 2013. It has since become a high profile, widely recognised national behaviour-change campaign. It is one of the best known 'monthly abstinence' campaigns globally. The primary aim (intended impact) of Dry January is for participants to reset their relationship with alcohol. In particular, we are looking to increase participants' desire – and ability – to better control their drinking. Dry January does this by encouraging participants to undertake 'an experiment on themselves', trying a month without alcohol to:

- learn more about why and when they drink
- learn that a life with less alcohol is possible and beneficial
- learn how to cope with cravings, social pressures, triggers, and particular situations; and
- set goals for their future drinking.

Data from YouGov suggests at least 3 million adults attempted to stop drinking in January 2018. The number of individuals formally signing up to the Alcohol Concern campaign is lower, but has increased steadily over time. Since 2013, the number of new annual sign-ups have risen from 4,350 to 37,240 (2018). If registrations from previous years are carried over, 95k people signed up to DJ 2018. We have set ourselves a strategic goal of increasing 'sign-ups' to Dry January, converting many more of the people who go dry in January to do the official Dry January.

The Dry January campaign has digital engagement at its heart: including a dedicated app, blog, and extensive social media activity. The latter includes Twitter and Instagram feeds and two Facebook pages – one open and one ('Dry January and Beyond') closed. Many members of the latter continue to actively engage throughout the year. As of 23 Jan 2018 there were 88,904 engaged Facebook users; 1,891 Instagram followers; and tweets on the official feed had received 1 million impressions (with 2,200 retweets and 3,500 likes).

Our digital engagement activities are intended to support participants throughout the month by developing a community of motivated peer supporters. Evidence suggests that social support, in addition to motivation, are key to achieving sustainable results from temporary abstinence initiatives.

While primarily a campaign to change attitudes and behaviours around alcohol, Dry January has a secondary goal of enhancing the national conversation about drink, through high profile media activity. A tertiary goal is to generate income through corporate sponsorship and individual donations and fundraising.

Dry January has been evaluated to some degree in each year since launch. Prior evaluations have looked particularly at behavioural change (e.g. consumption levels, drink refusal skills) and self-perceived wellbeing (e.g. sleep quality, weight loss etc.). Prior evaluation reports are available on request.

An ongoing study of national drinking behaviours (the Alcohol Toolkit Study, carried out by a team at University College London) includes questions about temporary abstinence attempts. We are seeking to enhance the degree to which that study (a repeat, cross-sectional national survey) captures information regarding Dry January. The commissioned agency may be asked to engage with that study, although it is not expected that this will be a significant task.

Evaluation requirements

We are seeking an agency to conduct an evaluation of Dry January 2019 to answer the following questions about the campaign's impact, user-experiences and user motivation.

1: Campaign impact

What are the key causal factors behind participants experiencing a successful Dry January, where success is defined as:

- Abstinence or significantly reduced alcohol consumption throughout the month of January
- Sustained reductions in alcohol consumption over the subsequent 2-6 months
- Greater self-efficacy in controlling one's drinking over the medium-term
- Enhanced physical and emotional wellbeing?

To what extent is success affected by the following factors, if at all:

- The type and strength of the initial motivation
- Signing up to the official Dry January app or website, compared to doing it 'unsupported'
- The number of previous attempts
- Doing DJ with family, friends or work colleagues, compared with doing it alone
- The degree of social involvement with 'strangers' who are also doing DJ (specifically via our social media platforms)
- The type and degree of support that participants receive and access during the month (the app, social media, website resources etc.)
- Gender and other socioeconomic factors
- Initial drinking status at the time of sign-up (i.e. usual levels of alcohol consumption prior to Dry January)
- Other factors?

What are the changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that result from participating in Dry January and how long are these sustained?

2: User experiences

How positive is the user experience of the campaign, especially regarding:

- The Dry January mobile app
- Online support via Facebook and other social media
- Associated articles and blog posts on the website
- Broader campaign messaging
- The donation/fundraising messages?

3: User motivation

What might motivate more people to become or remain involved in Dry January in future years?

- Why do people do Dry January?
- How considered/impulsive is the decision to do Dry January?
- What triggers the decision to do Dry January and / get involved with the official campaign?
- Why do some people sign-up and others don't?
- What are the barriers to people signing up?
- How can we increase the sign-up rate?

Scoping and Flexibility

The successful agency will be expected to conduct an initial scoping phase with us to assess existing data in greater detail and to determine what further data needs to be generated as part of the evaluation. This allows the successful agency to refine the methods it sets out in the proposal, based on a fuller scoping phase, and means that whatever methods are proposed by agencies are subject to change. The output of this scoping phase will be a final project plan, including methods and outputs, to be signed off by us prior to commencement of the next phase.

Existing data

A good quantity of data is already captured by the DJ app and online sign-up process and, depending on timings, there may be an opportunity for the successful agency to shape these data collection tools for DJ2019. Data includes contact data for participants, as well as some baseline drinking data and data about drinking during DJ and beyond. Data comes with the necessary consents for personal data to be used for evaluation purposes. The app, Facebook page and website provide potential for recruitment of evaluation samples.

Research Methods

Applicants should outline their proposed research methods, with a clear rationale. Any generation of new data should be justified. We are interested in creative suggestions for the re-use or reanalysis of data from previous years to enable us to answer questions about the sustainability of any behaviour change and the possible effects of repeated Dry January attempts.

Our Facebook page in particular provides a rich repository of existing qualitative data about participant experiences and attitudes, that may reduce the need for the generation of some new qualitative data. Applicants are encouraged to include this component in their proposals.

We would expect the successful agency to propose a blend of both qualitative and quantitative data, as appropriate. For quantitative elements, we expect good quality sampling and bias mitigation.

Where applicable, applicant agencies should describe how sampled participants will be encouraged to remain engaged for follow-up, with attrition minimised.

The successful agency will propose effective ways to create a sample of people who do a dry January without signing-up to the official DJ, to generate learning about why people do a dj without signing up to DJ, and to produce control group to assess the effectiveness of the various elements of the official DJ.

Reporting

We will need frequent and timely updates on the progress of the project and to be notified and be involved in any substantive changes to the project plan.

Data generated by this project will be owned by us. We require the earliest possible sight of results to enable us to make our own use of data.

The **three primary outputs** of this project are:

- A **project plan** at the end of the scoping phase, including detailed research methods
- An **interim report** by end March outlining results to date
- A **final report** by September 2019

We are looking for an independent, robust evaluation that gives us an honest assessment of the benefits and disbenefits of Dry January, clear and specific recommendations for enhancements that could be made, and new learning and new ideas. We will not seek to shape the interpretation of results but will expect to be given an opportunity to comment on them, especially where it concerns potential improvements to the programme, or fundraising potential. We will expect an opportunity to ask for reports to be revised if they contain factual errors. The final decision on publication of evaluation outputs is ours.

We expect the successful agency to be fully committed to meeting our needs for this evaluation. Subsequent to our receipt of the final report, the agency may request use of the findings for peer-review publication or presentation. We will consider such requests reasonably but we reserve the right to refuse use of our data for wider publication. The costs of preparing such papers must not be funded by this commission.

Milestones

- Deadline for applications: 5th November 2018
- Shortlist interviews: 9th November 2018
- Launch meeting and scoping phase completion: w/c 19th November 2018
- Interim report: 31st March 2019
- Final report including overall analysis: Sept 2019

Selection criteria

Proposals will be scored against the degree to which they demonstrate:

1. An understanding of and creative response to our needs.
2. Expertise and experience of undertaking impact evaluations.
3. Expertise and experience in evaluating behaviour-change campaigns.
4. Appropriate proposed research methods.
5. A flexible and collaborative approach, especially a willingness to work with us to refine and agree research methods, while understanding how to retain independence in the evaluation.
6. An understanding of practicalities, risks etc. and the ability to present a realistic, deliverable project against the available budget and timeline
7. Strong project management methods that show a track record of delivering similar work to time and to budget.
8. Value for money.

To Apply

Submit a proposal by 5pm on 5th November consisting of a maximum of 8 pages of A4. The proposal should set out:

- Your assessment of our needs and a creative and thoughtful response.
- The proposed research design, with a rationale for the selected methods.
- The names and roles of team members, and their expertise and experience against the relevant selection criteria.
- Outline of costs, including day rates.
- An honest assessment of project risks and contingencies.
- Your previous experience undertaking evaluations and working with clients.

Submit your proposal by email to jenni.graves@alcoholresearchuk.org

Questions

Questions about this project should be directed to: james.nicholls@alcoholresearchuk.org

Note that we will not enter into discussions, as this stage, about the detail of existing data or proposed research methods, as these discussions are reserved for the scoping phase.