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ensuring positive local change

Guide to **Evaluating regeneration projects and programmes**

CLES

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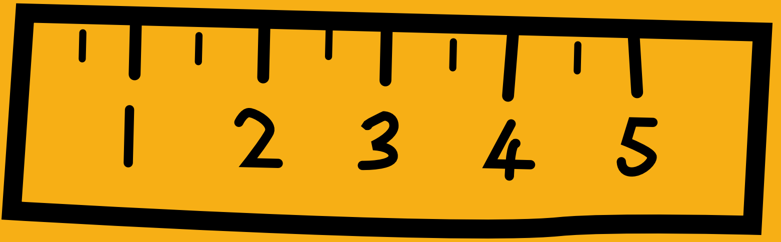

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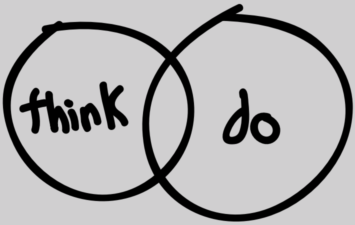
Sarah Jack and Jonathan Breeze

About CLES

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) is a not-for-profit think-tank, consultancy and network of subscribing organisations specialising in regeneration, local economic development and local governance, which was founded in 1986.



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Preface

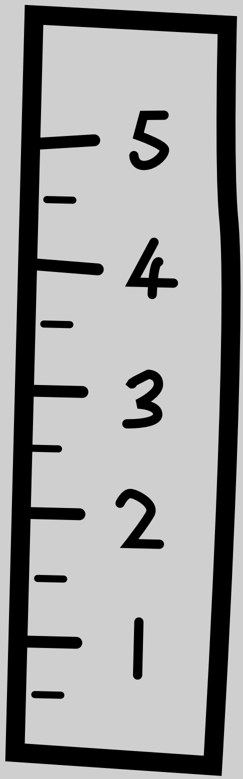
The contexts within which we all work are ever changing and dynamic. Within this, a successful project/programme in any one year, is not guaranteed success in a following year. For CLES, the ability to work within this dynamic situation and learn effectively about projects and programmes is predicated upon successful evaluation. For us, evaluation is the primary learning tool, a core means by which decisions about resources and how, where and to whom they are deployed is assessed. To not evaluate, is to risk wasting resources on wrong issues, target groups or location. For CLES, evaluation is part of progressive policy and the creation of effective projects.

At CLES we work on developing, implementing and evaluating a range of projects throughout the UK and Europe for CLES Members and clients. At times we hear and witness views in which evaluation is seen as a burden, time-consuming, something for experts and consultants. Indeed, much of the commissioning of evaluations from outside 'experts' is predicated on a belief that one needs sophisticated prior knowledge and that evaluation is something that is done 'to' a project rather done 'by' a project. This handbook, attempts to re-address this balance by explaining and demystifying the world of evaluation. In this, we are not suggesting that evaluation is easy, but merely that it can be appreciated and undertaken by practitioners and non-evaluation experts.

We hope you enjoy this handbook. Linked to our annual training programme, this handbook, reflects our wider charitable aim to develop and improve the performance of the regeneration and local economic development sector. In this, we hope this handbook goes some way in helping to address some of the persistent issues faced by local places and communities and contributes to ensuring positive local change.

Neil McInroy

Chief Executive, Centre for Local Economic Strategies.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Introduction

What is this book about?

This guide is designed primarily for people who want to undertake an evaluation of a project or programme. Regeneration is about improving an area's social, physical and economic environment. It does this through programmes and projects, which combine physical improvement of the built and natural environment with initiatives designed to boost the local economy. These projects and programmes are designed with the local community's involvement and full participation in the process of improving their area.

However, it is important that programmes and projects that aim to regenerate can be effectively evaluated by people who are involved in regeneration. Skills of evaluation are vitally important in the process of regeneration and in the creation of sustainable communities. This guide aims to respond to this need by providing a framework for evaluation which can be followed by professionals in the field.

This guide has been designed for a range of regeneration practitioners working on the development and delivery of regeneration programmes and projects across the UK. This guide aims to help unravel the meaning and practice of undertaking meaningful evaluation of a programme or project. It aims to take readers through a step-by-step guide to evaluation highlighting the tools, skills and knowledge required to successfully evaluate programmes and projects across a range of different topic areas.

The guide is based on CLES Consulting's experience as evaluators over the last 10 years and is rooted in real life experience of evaluation with a range of different projects and programmes throughout the UK and Ireland.

Who should use this book?

This book will be useful for a range of different practitioners within public and voluntary sector organisations, including those who:

- want to undertake their own internal evaluation of a programme or project
- want to develop systems for internal evaluation of projects
- want to commission external evaluation of programmes or projects

- want to understand more about evaluation and why it is important
- need to evaluate programmes or projects being developed for a particular area or community

What is evaluation?

Evaluation refers to a process of measuring or assessing the success of a project or programme. The primary purpose of evaluation is to learn lessons, both positive and negative, which can be used to inform future activities and service delivery.

Evaluation looks critically at what has been achieved through a project, programme, process or other intervention. It differs from monitoring, in that it looks beyond simply collating information about activities to asking questions about these activities. It looks critically at what has been achieved over a specific time period rather than relating to the ongoing review of data collected during the lifetime of a project or programme. It examines questions such as: What has changed as a result of the project or programme? How has this come about? Who has benefited? What didn't work as well as expected? What can be changed to make activity more effective? By asking these questions, the evaluation acts as a learning process to reflect on past activity and inform future working.

It is possible to identify two main types of evaluation:

1. **retrospective or summative** - this looks back at the achievements of the project/programme being evaluated, providing evidence on the process followed and outcomes achieved

2. **prospective or formative** - here the aim is to identify lessons, which can be 'fed in' to amplify strengths and address weaknesses in the project/programme being evaluated as it is being delivered

The scope and scale of an evaluation will depend on factors such as:

- the size of the project in terms of resources expended
- the stage of development or implementation the project is at
- the need to include wider social and economic considerations
- the techniques required and the amount of data to be handled

- the resources and timescale available to undertake the evaluation

Other activities similar to evaluation

There are other activities that are undertaken within organisations that have many similarities to evaluation and are related, but are distinctly different from evaluation. These are as follows:

Performance measurement
Performance measurement is a broader process, which can include evaluation but focuses much more on looking at the efficiency of an organisation. It involves a range of activities, which come together under an organisation's continuous improvement banner. Aside from impact evaluation, performance measurement tends to be more internally focused. For example, it can look at the effectiveness of internal management processes, communication structure, staff satisfaction or performance against assigned targets and expenditure.

Research
Research is an exploratory activity and does not involve a critical assessment of programmes or projects. Examples of work which fall into this category may be a feasibility study to look at the potential for a community centre in an area or the potential for a community voluntary organisation to expand their remit. However, it may be useful to use research methods in evaluation.

Monitoring
Monitoring is about an ongoing process of recording and evidencing outputs and expenditure against programme and project forecasts. It involves regular, often quarterly, reporting and collation of outputs and expenditure within an organisation. Monitoring information can be used within an evaluation process but monitoring itself is not an evaluation mechanism.

Why is evaluation important?

Often the process of programme and project evaluation can been seen as an additional task to be completed by an already overworked programme or project manager. The value of the process may not always be clear, particularly when organisations are focused very much on delivering practical projects on the ground. However, project evaluation can serve a number of purposes. It is of greatest benefit when the process is used as a forward planning tool in order to inform future project activities and enable a sharing of good practice between projects. Some of the most valuable outcomes of project evaluation include:

Understanding how the project is going
It is useful to be able to understand how well the project is going, how it is delivering impact in target areas and where it is experiencing difficulties. The process can be useful in terms of helping to recommend improvements and additional activities to improve the overall effectiveness of the project.

Learning for the future
Evaluation can help organisations learn lessons about what parts of a programme or project have been successful and what elements have been less successful. This process can help organisations to plan more effectively for the future.

Learning about why a project works
Often it will be clear that a particular project is working well. Evaluation helps project managers to understand why.

Accountability
Where projects use public funding to develop and deliver projects, it is important that they account for how public money and other resources are being spent. Evaluation can help to demonstrate to key organisations the impact that funding has had or is having in a particular area or among a particular target group.

Evidence for future funding
Linked to the point above is the fact that evaluation can help to provide reliable evidence of project impacts and additional needs in a community or area. This can help to inform future applications for funding.

Providing good practice examples
Evaluation can help to uncover good practice examples of project work, particularly where projects have been unusual or innovative in their approach.

Demonstrating the contribution to key targets and outcomes
Evaluation can play an important role in helping to demonstrate the contribution of an organisation's activities and strategies to targets

within government. These can be targets at national level such as Public Service Agreement targets or targets at a local level, such as Local Area Agreement indicators, sub-indicators and outcomes. It enables organisations to demonstrate their contribution to key targets and therefore ultimately overall national and local policies and priorities.

Informing future policy
Good evaluation work can be used to inform policy decisions, in terms of both formulation and implementation, helping to use lessons learned on the ground to suggest how policy should be directed at national and international level.

Targeting resources and interventions
Evaluation can help direct activities and prioritise resources to where they are needed most and where the greatest impact can be achieved.

Using evaluation to influence policy

One of the most effective and powerful reasons why evaluation is important is that it can help organisations to demonstrate their contribution to policy agendas and also to influence policy development. This means that lessons learned on the ground feed directly into the policy formulation and implementation process and can go some way starting to address the root causes of community problems and issues. Evaluation can do this by relating the findings to key policy priorities and targets that have been set at community, local and national level. This can be done through quantitative data (eg through some of the impact measures) as well as qualitatively. This qualitative approach can focus on identifying the linkages and learning in relation to the following:

Public Service Agreement (PSA) priorities and targets
PSAs have three year targets negotiated between each central government department and HM Treasury with a range of different targets all focused on different types of outcome. Evaluation can help link the types of outcomes and targets within a programme or project with the outcomes required by national Government in PSA targets which set out the key improvements expected in light of expenditure within different departments.

Regional/sub-regional priorities and targets
To place evaluation findings within a regional policy context, it is important that the evaluation process gives particular consideration to the:

- Regional Economic Strategy (overseen by the Regional Development Agency)
- other regional/sub-regional policy areas and strategic targets.
- policy context will vary depending on the location of activity

Local Area Agreement (LAA) priorities and targets
Local Area Agreements (LAA) are voluntary three year agreements between local authorities (and partners via the Local Strategic Partnership) and central government. Evaluation of programmes and projects should attempt to identify the contribution that is being made to these local targets wherever possible. In many cases, LAA targets are grouped within the following blocks:

- children and young people
- safer and stronger communities
- healthier communities and older people
- economic development and enterprise and the environment

The role of an evaluator

The role of an evaluator is to provide an objective and independent assessment of a particular programme or project depending on the specific needs identified. It is an important role, in that the results of the evaluation process will be of interest to a wide range of individuals and organisations (eg project managers and staff, local residents and politicians, other community groups and projects) and may affect the future funding arrangements of the project itself in either a positive or negative way.

Internal or external evaluation?

The decision as to whether to conduct evaluation in-house or appoint an external contractor will be dependent upon capacity and skills within an organisation and the importance of ensuring an independent perspective. Size of the evaluation project may also be an important consideration. As a guideline, it may be worth considering:

- internal or external evaluation for projects and programmes whose total value is less than £25k
- external evaluation only for projects/programmes whose total value is more than £25k

Internal evaluation

To effectively deliver evaluation internally it is worth considering the following questions:

- do we have the necessary staff base with the right skills and competence to design, deliver and project manage the work?
- what will be the human resource, time and cost implications of undertaking the evaluation in-house? How does this compare with external commissioning?
- how important is an independent approach in this context and does it preclude the evaluation being conducted internally?
- what processes of self-evaluation are in place already within the programme and/or project, and do we have a system for collating this data?

These issues are worth exploring as it may be that staff could undertake self-evaluation within the organisation, which may in turn help to maximise the sharing of learning. However, if there are time constraints on staff time already, which could limit their ability to work on evaluation, it may be more appropriate to appoint external evaluation organisations, such as external consultancies or academic bodies.

Commissioning external evaluation

Prior to commissioning evaluation, there are a number of thought processes, which should be followed to ensure the evaluation is necessary and that it achieves its intended outcome. There is a particular need to examine the availability of existing evidence and question the need for additional evaluation. Only once it has been confirmed that the evaluation will make a valuable contribution should the means of undertaking it, whether this is in-house or externally, be considered. Here are some of the key questions to consider before commissioning external evaluation.

- what is the purpose of the evaluation?

- what information already exists? Do I still need to commission evaluation and/or change the focus of the evaluation to reflect this?
- what is the most effective and efficient way for the evaluation to take place?
- what do we want to produce at the end?
- can the evaluation be done internally or do we need to appoint an external contractor?
- who needs to be involved in the commissioning process?
- how can the evaluation link with internal self-evaluation processes and quality systems?
- how will we use the findings to inform our work?
- to whom will they be of interest?

Effective evaluation requires a range of skills in order to fully capture the positive impacts of a project, as well as identifying areas for improvement and project development. In addition to the specific research skills required, evaluators must ensure they remain objective and unbiased towards the project being evaluated and that any difficult issues which arise throughout the evaluation process (eg people feeling excluded from the evaluation, consulting with project beneficiaries with particular language needs) are handled sensitively. In particular, it is important to ensure that regular communication takes place with the project manager and/or commissioning organisation (eg NOC Programme Manager) to ensure they are both involved in the process and kept informed of the findings as they emerge.

A third way

An alternative way of undertaking your evaluation is to consider a third way, which is to undertake your evaluation using a blend of external and internal evaluation support. There are at least two situations where this approach can be particularly appropriate:

- if, as an organisation, you already collect information about your work and undertake some form of self-evaluation, you can appoint an external agent to help you collate and analyse this information and provide you with independent conclusions and recommendations

- if your organisation is keen to get involved in the evaluation work in order to develop evaluation skills, it may be possible to appoint an external agent to work alongside your organisation to undertake the evaluation, (e.g. staff assisting with surveys, interviews and discussion groups). However, if this is an approach you would like to use, you need to address this carefully with your external consultant

When should evaluation take place?

The point at which a project, process or programme is evaluated will vary and organisations need to think about what they want to achieve through their evaluation as this will determine the type and timing of such work. There are a number of options you may wish to consider depending on the requirements of the evaluation, resources available, timescale and other factors. Some guidelines are as follows:

beginning – at this stage, the task is often concerned with identifying what future evaluation will take place and what the key indicators of success, against which progress can be measured, will be. Undertaking this approach at the beginning is often a useful tool for ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are put in place (to capture appropriate data) and, in some cases, for capturing baseline information to later assess 'distance travelled'.

formative or 'rolling'– this approach involves regular evaluation throughout a project or programme's history. It can involve an element of tracking – whereby specific components are followed to capture a process of change – and is usually more intensive that an approach based on one-off moments at the 'beginning', 'middle' and 'end'. As a result, it is generally more costly and time-intensive. It can, however, yield rich and informative results, both to identify achievements and to capture learning as part of a continuous improvement process.

end – undertaking a final evaluation when a project or programme has come to an end, or a process has been completed, represents a common form of evaluation. This approach is beneficial for celebrating achievements and 'positioning' the organisation for forward funding, sharing lessons to those working on similar initiatives, and informing project/programme development activity in the future.

What are the differences between programme and project evaluation?

Evaluation methodology can be applied to almost anything, but most commonly in regeneration, evaluation tends to be focused on evaluation of either a project or programme. The approach to these evaluations is similar, but it is worth noting that programme and projects differ in a number of ways, which affect the way in which they are evaluated. These differences are outlined in the table below:

	Programme	**Project**
Types of objectives	Often, programme objectives will be targeting a number of larger scale objectives	Generally, project objectives are targeted on particular issues or circumstances within the community
Management	Management may be more complex as there are a number of projects working within a programme	Management may be more straightforward as there is just one project to manage
Number of projects	Generally more than one project to evaluate	Generally just one project to evaluate
Amount of money	More likely to be large scale funding project	Can be limited funding
More consultees	Because there are more projects, there are generally more people to talk to as part of the evaluation	Generally just project specific
More beneficiaries	Because there are more projects, there will be a greater number of beneficiaries, who potentially evaluators may want to consult	Beneficiaries will be focused around one project
Larger geographic area	Can be across a wider geographical area	Generally area specific

What difference does this make to the evaluation process?

The key difference that this variation in scale makes to the evaluation process is that it affects the capacity and resources available to evaluate a programme or project effectively. Depending on what is being evaluated, the depth of a programme evaluation will be proportional to the extent of the resource and capacity available of both an external and internal evaluator. An in depth programme evaluation may require consultation with a greater number of projects, consultees and beneficiaries. When evaluating a programme, which includes a number of individual projects, programme evaluators may also want to establish a framework for selecting a sample of projects, which are an appropriate representation of the full range of projects funded through the programme.

For example, if a New Deal for Communities (NDC) Programme has funded 100 individual projects, it may be appropriate for a programme evaluation to carry out an evaluation of a sample of projects rather than try to evaluate all 100 projects in depth. This is sometimes known as the development of a sampling methodology where you use varying degrees of evaluation methods to analyse projects within a large programme. In the case of the NDC Programme, you may decide that you want to evaluate 50% of the projects in depth with a desk review, survey, stakeholder interviews and discussion groups with beneficiaries. Whilst choosing to evaluate the remaining 50% of projects with simply a desk review.

Developing an approach to evaluation

In this section, we have discussed some of the questions that are often raised about evaluation, including what is evaluation, why evaluate, when should I evaluate and the role of an evaluator. This section has also discussed how evaluations can be conducted and the pros and cons around external and internal evaluation. It is important to consider these types of issues when you are embarking on an evaluation process, whether or not you are choosing to do the evaluation internally or externally. This will help to guide you through the evaluation process and ensure the end product of your evaluation is useful and relevant for your organisation.

The next stage is to consider how it should actually be carried out and what the different stages of doing the work will be, whether they are done by external consultants or internally. CLES have put together a common approach to evaluation, an "Evaluation Framework", which outlines the key stages of the evaluation process and what information and data needs to be collected at each stage.

In order to evaluate a programme or project, it is useful to develop a common approach to evaluation with specific stages that ensure all information required is captured and recorded and that this is analysed and presented in an accessible format. This common approach provides a framework for evaluation in your organisation, but one that can be tailored to meet the individual requirements of specific programmes or projects. The four key stages of an evaluation framework are illustrated below. The remainder of this report details each of these stages and explains how these stages can be implemented.

Stage 1 Getting started	**Stage 2 Measuring impact**	**Stage 3 Collecting and analysing the data**	**Stage 4 Reporting and disseminating**
Gathering background information, which describes the programme or project	Identifying the types of programme/project indicators and outcomes upon which to base your evaluation	Collecting and collating qualitative and quantitative data about the programme or project and analysing the results	Writing and disseminating the evaluation report

Stage 1: Getting started

Gathering background information, which describes the programme or project

Introduction

The first stage of any evaluation must be to gain an overview of the project to be evaluated. This is important for guiding the direction the evaluation takes and ensuring that you understand how the initiative fits into the local, regional and national context. In particular, this stage involves finding out why the project exists and what it is trying to achieve. This information is crucial for identifying how you will assess the impact and performance of the project (Stage 2).

This section provides an outline of the key background information that an evaluator will find useful to consider in the first part of an evaluation. This is not an exhaustive list and there may be other sources of information that will also be useful.

If you are evaluating a project yourself, this section will be a useful reference list. If the evaluation is being done externally, this section will be useful when you are writing your tender documentation.

Aims and objectives

It is important when undertaking an evaluation that you have a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the programme or project you are researching as early as possible. The AIM relates to the overall purpose of the project whereas the OBJECTIVES relate to more detailed issues concerned with what the project is seeking to achieve. The objectives should feed directly into the overall project aims. An example of what a project's aim and objectives might look like is provided below:

Example: Project Aim

- To provide access to information and communications technology facilities for disadvantaged communities living in area 'X'

Example: Project Objectives

- increase the take-up of training courses by local people
- raise Level 2 qualifications within the local area

- increase the take-up of employment opportunities by local people
- provide residents with better access to community information

Local context

It is important that when an evaluation of a programme or project is taking place, the initiative is seen within the context of the local area. This is important for assessing the extent to which external factors may have influenced the development of the project or the way in which it has been delivered. Knowing the local context will also enable an evaluator to scope out the potential impacts or outcomes of a programme or project within an area. Some of the particular issues that may be of interest regarding the local context are identified in the box below:

Example: Local context

- socio-economic characteristics of the area in which the project operates (eg age structure, ethnicity, levels of unemployment)
- existence of other projects or similar provision locally
- history of community-based activities and provision in the area

In order to understand the local context it can be useful to review local strategic documents and background material. This is sometimes known as 'secondary data'. For example this can include:

- Local Area Agreements
- Local Strategic Partnership documents
- Regional Development Strategy
- application form for programme or project
- any previous evaluation work
- any information that has been monitored over the life of the project, (eg quarterly returns to funding bodies or regular reports)
- minutes of meetings to discuss the project or programme

Target groups

In reviewing the aims and objectives of the project and providing focus for the evaluation, you will need to identify which groups it targets its facilities, services and activities are aimed at in particular. This may entail a wide range of groups or be limited to only one or two specific sectors of the population. An example of target groups would be as follows:

- all people from within a defined geographical area
- people of a certain gender (i.e. male or female)
- people of a certain age (eg young people 16-24 years)
- people with disabilities
- people of minority ethnic origin
- people from particular ethnic groups (eg Bangladeshi)

You may also wish to consider why the projects target these particular groups. Questions such as the following may be particularly important in this case:

- is there a lack of existing facilities/services for such groups in the local area?
- are the target groups dictated by the way in which the project is funded?
- do these groups face particular disadvantages or problems which the project is trying to address?

Set up and duration of a project

An important component of gaining an overview of the project is to find out:

- when the project was set up
- the project's duration
- why the project was set up (eg was it in response to a specific local issue?)

Projects are likely to vary significantly in terms of when they were first established and how long they are likely to run. In terms of their duration, some projects may be linked to particular funding streams and have an identifiable lifespan whilst others may run over a longer period. It is also important to bear in mind that some projects will have developed organically within the community over a number of years and whilst the existing project may only have been running for one or two years, its origins could have a much longer history. In this scenario, you will need to identify the period over which you are going to base your specific evaluation whilst providing a brief summary within the evaluation report of the historical context to the project. At this point, it is also useful to find out why the project was set up and whether it was in response to a specific local issue that the project is aiming to address.

Project funding

It is vital in evaluating the success of any project or initiative that ample consideration is given to issues of funding and resources. These factors are likely to play a significant part in determining the scope of the project and the activities it performs, as well as having an impact on any future plans for development or expansion. A review of the funding arrangements of the project (eg regeneration monies such as Single Regeneration Budget, local authority funding, European Union funding, charging of clients/users) is important for providing background on the nature of the project as well as forming part of the evaluation itself. Whilst initial consideration should be given here as to how the project is resourced, more detailed analysis will also be required as part of Stage 2 of the evaluation.

Project location and premises

An important facet of the background information collected on the project relates to the geographical area in which the project operates and, for some projects, the location/premises from which the project delivers its activities. The nature of the information acquired in relation to the project's location and premises will vary significantly between projects. In some cases (eg community centre) you will be able to identify a physical infrastructure to the project and the analysis will be able to include an assessment of the accommodation and premises in which the project is based. For other community-based projects (eg a project in which a health worker visits local schools) this may not be as straightforward as the project will not have a physical base as such. You will therefore need to adopt a flexible approach depending on the nature of the specific project being evaluated. Some of the key questions you may wish to consider are identified below:

Example: Project location and premises

- where is the project based? (eg community centre, house, school)
- are the premises owned or leased by the project?
- is the project's accommodation occupied solely by the project or are they shared with other businesses/organisations/projects?

- do project users come to the project base or does the project deliver activities from other locations or in other ways?

Management and staffing

A key element of evaluating any project which provides facilities and/or services to people relates to how it is managed and staffed. This effectively involves an examination of the level of human resources available to the project and is important when evaluating the outcomes of the project (eg you would expect a project which employs outreach workers to increase the take-up of learning opportunities to achieve a higher number of outputs with five project staff than if the project employed only two people)? In terms of management, a number of issues are of interest relating not only to the management structure itself but also to the key personnel involved and the particular role they may play in contributing to the project's overall success.

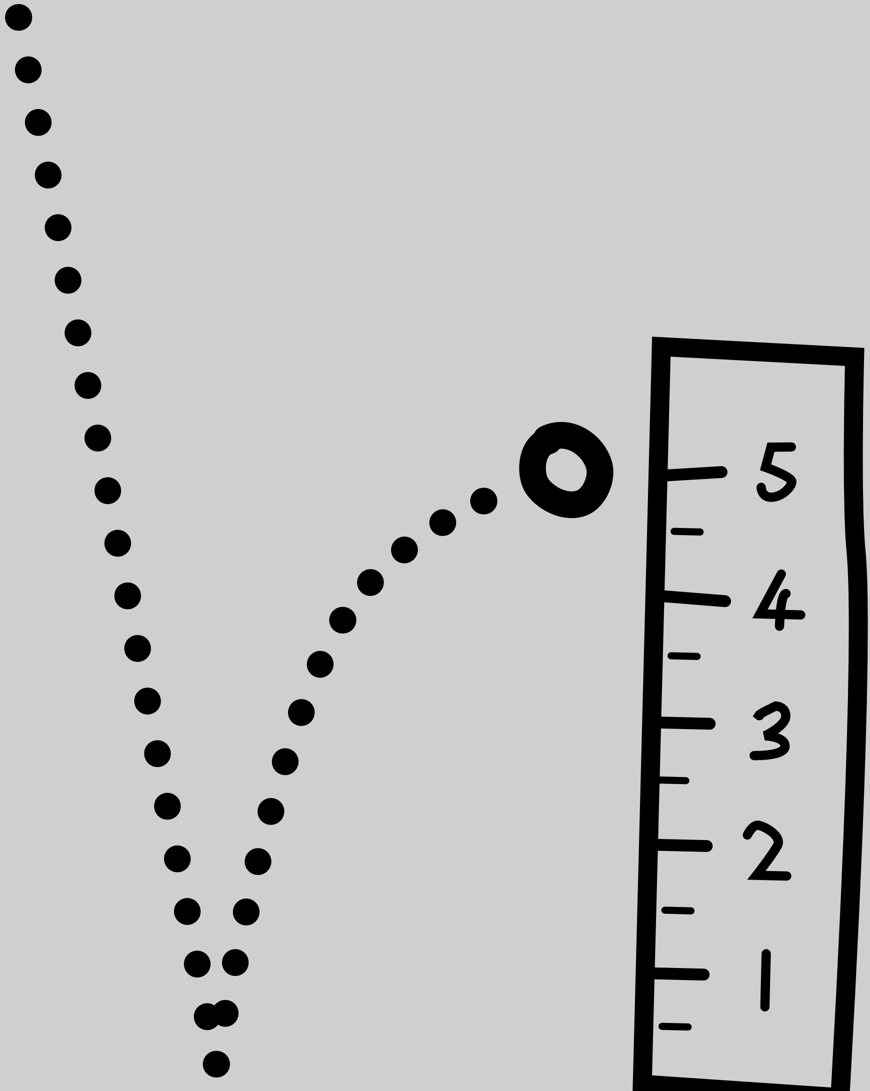
Example: Project management

- what are the existing management arrangements of the project? (eg overall project manager, assistant managers)
- does the project have a management committee or steering group? Who is represented?
- has this management structure always existed? If not, why has it changed and how does it differ?

In addition to finding out about project managers, your evaluation will also need to take into account information on other staff and/or volunteers involved in running the project. It is useful to explore the number of staff involved, the position they occupy and the type of duties which they perform. Some examples of the specific questions you may wish to consider are identified in the example box below.

Example: Staffing

- total number of staff (including breakdown by full-time/part-time)?
- What posts exist and what do these entail?
- Do any volunteers work for the project? If so, in what capacity?
- What are the characteristics of project staff (eg age, ethnicity, gender, religion, cultural background)? Are these considered important for their role?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Stage 2: Measuring impact

Deciding measures or indicators upon which to base your evaluation

Introduction

Having now found out the background to the project, you will need to consider what indicators you will use to evaluate your project and measure whether the project has been effective or not. You will also need to decide, according to the requirements of the evaluation, the time period over which you will base your analysis (e.g. this could be since the project's start date or may relate to a more specific time period such as the previous 12 months).

The first stage in developing measures and indicators is revisiting the original aims and objectives of your project or programme and how you originally considered these might be met.

What are the priorities for my evaluation?

Deciding on the types of indicators you want to use to evaluate your project requires that you ask questions about what you want to achieve through your evaluation and what you want to examine in more detail. At this stage you need to decide what the priorities are for your evaluation and what you want to do with the output. The types of priorities you may want to consider are as follows:

Financial priorities – it is important that this evaluation reviews the financial record of the project and considers the value for money offered in respect of the outputs and outcomes achieved

Project management – it is important that this evaluation focuses on how the project has been managed and delivered. What processes and systems were effective and what lessons can we learn from this?

Outputs and outcomes – what has the project achieved in terms of its impact on beneficiaries and partners? Who are the beneficiaries and what do they think are the strengths and weaknesses of the work?

Looking forward – we want the evaluation to focus on how this project could be mainstreamed in the future and what the future prospects for funding may be from organisations and agencies?

Ideally, you may want to look at all of these aspects of your project, however, you will have to consider what time and resources are available to you for the evaluation and subsequently place different weighting against each priority. We now consider each of these priorities in turn and consider what the key questions are in each case.

By asking these types of questions, evaluators and project managers can start to understand what they want the evaluation to achieve and what areas or themes they need to focus on during the course of the evaluation. This will also help to inform the types of data collection required.

Financial review

In Stage 1, you will have gained an insight into how the project is funded and the duration over which funding is in place. For evaluation purposes, you will now need to build upon this knowledge to consider whether the current funding profile mirrors that which was originally envisaged for the project and to consider the efficiency of the project in financial terms. The analysis of funding issues should seek to find the input and output costs associated with the project.

Input costs relate to the resources the project draws on (how it funds its activities), the scale of the incoming resources, and the period over which this income relates. Output costs refer to all outgoings and could include costs such as staff salaries, premises, equipment and such like.

By collecting this data you should then be able to work out the total project cost and the net income (or loss) the project makes. When undertaking the evaluation, it can be important to consider the cost effectiveness of the project, or the "value for money" offered by the project. One way of doing this is to compare the costs incurred for your project to those of similar projects elsewhere to provide an indication of value for money. Some of the key questions you may wish to consider to help assess the financial efficiency of the project are shown overleaf.

Key questions: Financial

- What is the net cost (balance between project income and outgoings)?
- How successful has the project been at accessing funding? What barriers/difficulties have been encountered?
- Have the project inputs been made according to planned amounts and timing?
- If seeking to match public funds with other resources (usually referred to as match funding or leverage) how effective has the project been?
- Does the project represent value for money (how does the unit cost compare to that for other community and/or similar projects)?
- Is there any evidence of resources being wasted?
- Have there been any "in kind" costs or funding within the project, which should be included, (eg volunteer time on a project or expert help and advice provided for free).

How will this influence the type of data I collect?

If the priority of your evaluation is to consider the financial element of a project, you will want to make sure that you have all the secondary data on the financial elements of the project which might include funding applications, budget, list of inputs and outputs. You may want to meet with funding agencies and the project manager to discuss what the value for money has been from the project.

Project management

Ideally, the process of evaluation should involve an examination of the way in which the project is managed and run, as well as analysing the more specific achievements of the project in terms of outputs and outcomes. In terms of assessing management, it is recommended that consideration is given to two key areas. The first is the processes that have been followed in order to maximise the effectiveness of the project within the local community. The second is the systems that have been put in place to measure, monitor and improve performance.

Processes

There is a range of measures which can be used to evaluate a programme or project's effectiveness and also provide insight into the way in which a programme or project has delivered its activity. While these measures will vary according to the specific nature of the project, they will typically relate to factors such as partnership working and community involvement and/or engagement. These are often referred to as the process outcomes of the project.

Key questions: Processes

- To what extent does the project have knowledge of or work with other projects and service providers in the local community? What benefits does this bring?
- How effective has the project been in bringing different partners together to provide services/activities? Can any lessons be learnt for the future?
- To what extent have the local community targeted by the project been involved in the development, management and running of the project?
- Has the level of involvement and participation met the local community's expectations?

Systems

The systems which are in place for the management and ongoing monitoring of a project are likely to vary significantly between projects. In many cases, the procedures and systems followed will reflect the specific requirements of the funding programmes being used to support the project's activities (eg quarterly monitoring returns are required for projects funded through SRB), therefore relating more to programme than project level decision-making. However, it is important to consider the extent to which the project adheres to these systems as well as examining whether the project has set-up any additional systems for capturing information to measure its performance and inform its activities.

Key questions: Systems

- How efficient are the project's administrative procedures, such as maintaining financial records?
- What systems are in place for monitoring the impact of the project?
- Have any additional systems been established, beyond those required by project funders, to measure performance? What benefits has this brought?
- Do the project's administrative and monitoring systems show achievements in relation to different groups and communities (eg by age group, ethnic group or geographical area)?

How will this influence the type of data I collect?

If the priority of your evaluation is to consider the project management of a project, you will want to make sure you speak to the project manager and frontline delivery staff involved, as well as any partners who have assisted or commissioned project delivery.

Outputs and outcomes

The main focus of any project evaluation should be on assessing the effectiveness and impact of the project on its target communities. This involves the analysis of both outputs and outcomes:

***Outputs*: The measurable or quantifiable results of the project (eg number of jobs created, number of people trained, number of local people provided with access to new sports facilities).**

Most projects are likely to collect at least some data relating to outputs which can be used for evaluation purposes. This may include monitoring information which is maintained and submitted to the project funders on an ongoing basis as well as data which is collected and retained by the project itself. For example, you may be able to access monitoring information collected as part of a regeneration programme (eg New Deal for Communities) as well as day-to-day records maintained by the project on anyone that makes contact with the project or uses its services (eg a daily record book). Our experience suggests that the detail and accuracy of output data available from projects varies considerably. Whilst the output analysis will be different for every project, it is possible to identify a number of general issues to address when considering project output information.

Key questions: Outputs

- What time period do the outputs relate to (eg 3 months, 12 months, project lifetime)?
- What has been the progress of the project in achieving outputs (eg people gaining qualifications) compared with any forecasts made at the beginning of the project?
- What factors explain any under-achievement or over-achievement?
- How successful has the project been at achieving outputs among its key target groups (identified through Stage 1)?

Outcomes: The wider effects or impact of the project within the target communities (eg decrease in crime rate, increase in employment aspirations among local people, improved levels of satisfaction with the local area as a place to live)

In addition to reviewing outputs, your evaluation will need to consider the extent to which the project has had a wider impact on its target communities and made progress towards achieving its original objectives. Outcomes are typically measured against a defined baseline (description of local conditions and recent trends against which changes delivered by the project are measured). However, you will need to bear in mind that a number of projects may all be working to bring about change to a common baseline position (such as, to reduce fear of crime in the local area) and that your evaluation should try to capture, as far as possible, the role played by your particular project. Whereas the output analysis will primarily be based on quantitative (numerical) data, the measurement of outcomes is likely to draw on both quantitative and qualitative (perceptions) data. In particular, you may wish to give consideration to the views and experiences of those who have been involved with the project as well as members of the wider community.

This will enable an assessment to be made of levels of awareness of the project locally as well as allowing for the positive, and any negative, impacts to be drawn out.

Looking forward: Sustainability and succession

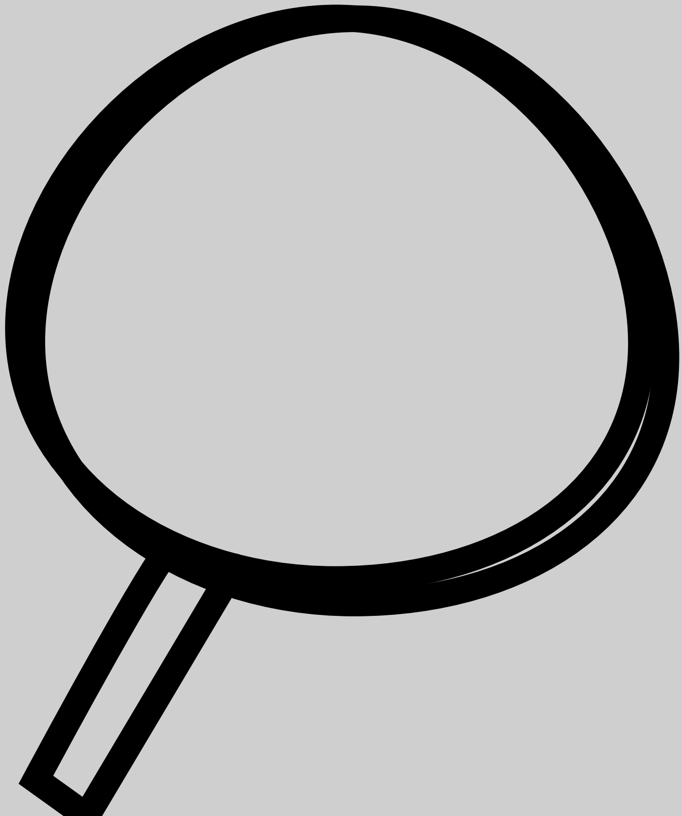
A key component of evaluation is about looking forward. Projects often face particular difficulties with regard to forward planning and sustainability due to the short-term nature of many funding programmes. In undertaking a project evaluation, it is therefore necessary to give ample consideration to how the project will continue to operate and develop in the future and that the evaluation report identifies any barriers to sustainability. Whilst many issues relating to sustainability and succession are likely to be closely linked to the availability of funding for the project, there may be other issues to consider too. For example, sustainability could be threatened by an over-supply of similar provision in the local area whilst the project's plans for its future development (succession) may involve a shift in focus to reflect changes in the characteristics of the local population since the project was first set-up. It may, of course, be that the project has not yet planned this far ahead and that your evaluation will need to provide broad recommendations to guide its activities in this area.

Key questions: Sustainability and succession

- how sustainable are the outputs/outcomes of the project?
- what factors, if any, threaten sustainability?
- is there a need for the project to continue
- what are the project's future prospects for securing funding to continue/expand its activities?
- does the project have a forward strategy/business plan?

Summary

By working through each of the priorities covered in this section, you should have now identified the measures, which will enable you to judge whether the project has been a success or not and how it is likely to fare in the future. Together with the issues raised in Stage 1, you will now be in a position to undertake a full evaluation of the project. Let us therefore move on to thinking about how best to capture this information.



Stage 3: Undertaking the research

Collecting, collating and analysing qualitative and quantitative data

Introduction

By now, you should have a good understanding of the type of issues your evaluation should examine and the key questions which you will need to answer to assess the impact of the project. You are therefore ready to move on to Stage 3 of the evaluation, which is about collecting the relevant data and information. However, you may feel that whilst you now know what to cover, you are still unsure how to go about it. In this section of the guide, we therefore provide information on application of some of the most common, and useful, research techniques with regard to project evaluation.

Types of data and methods

The two main types of data are quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative methods **tend to be based on numerical or statistical data and produce quantifiable results**

Qualitative methods **produce information on the views and perceptions of individuals or communities**

Types of methods that can be used to collect quantitative and qualitative data include:

Secondary data collection and analysis – this refers to the collection, collation and review of existing information, whether this is written documentation or statistical data. It differs from other (primary) techniques in that the evaluator does not collect the data first-hand. The data collected is mainly quantitative.

Observation – a method in which the evaluator typically seeks to examine details, processes and interactions by acting as an observer of a particular social situation or location. The data collected is mainly qualitative.

Social survey/questionnaire – a range of different questionnaire based surveys can be conducted to obtain relevant information for the evaluation (eg telephone, postal, face-to face, email). Surveys typically provide a mix of quantitative and qualitative information.

Interview – this is a qualitative method of research often used to target sensitive and important information and to obtain the interviewees' perceptions and attitudes to the issues being addressed. The data collected is mainly qualitative.

Discussion group – this is a group-based discussion, typically involving between 6-12 people. The role of the evaluator/researcher is to facilitate the discussion among the participants. The data collected is mainly qualitative.

There are no definite rules about when to use particular methods for collecting different types of information for evaluation purposes. You may need to be flexible in your methodological approach depending on the requirements of the evaluation, the availability of information at the project, and the willingness of the local community to take part in any consultation. In most cases, it will be appropriate to use a blend of methods in order to do the evaluation.

Throughout the following sections, we provide further guidance on each of the main research methods you are likely to use when undertaking your evaluation.

Secondary data collation and analysis

What does it mean?
This method refers to the collection, collation and review of existing information, whether this is written documentation or statistical data. It differs from primary research techniques in that the researcher does not collect the data directly.

When should I do it?
The collection of secondary data is often an important first stage to the evaluation process. The main use for this sort of information is that it

provides a starting point for the evaluation to gain some background knowledge and understanding of the project. Secondary data collection is also useful for contributing to the analysis and commentary throughout a research report.

What types of data sources are there?
There are a number of different types of secondary information. Some of the most common types are identified as follows:

Official statistics: This refers to national data sets relating to issues such as population, employment and unemployment, businesses etc. Much of this information can be acquired from the Office for National Statistics and government web-sites.

Other statistics: A wide range of other types of numeric data can be drawn on for evaluation purposes. (eg project monitoring information of beneficiaries and funding information).

Marketing and publicity material: This may be published material or information produced by the project and can act as a useful source of information for evaluation purposes.

Reports: Written documents, such as annual reports, government publications, previous evaluation studies, and research reports, are a common source of secondary information.

What do I need to consider when reviewing and analysing secondary data?
There are a number of key principles it is useful to follow when collecting and analysing secondary information.

1. Think about the project evaluation you are undertaking and identify the key issues and topics that need to be addressed. Having a clear idea of what information is required will make the collection of secondary information a lot easier.

2. Search for the information and data sources. Having collected the information, the next step is to read it and analyse it. This may be a time consuming process and it is advisable just to read the key documents initially. Making notes will help to refresh your memory at a later date and help draw out the key points of

information that directly refer to the evaluation work you are undertaking.

3. Collate information from secondary data into key headings that you are examining in the evaluation work. (eg this might be employment, social inclusion and health).

What is produced?
The information gathered from secondary data analysis can produce various outputs depending on the type of information collated and reviewed. Some of the most common types include statistics, data tables and charts, literature reviews, and quotes from written documents. The information may be historical and show how changes have occurred over time in a particular area. It could also be comparative, which allows the researcher to make comparisons between a number of different areas.

How can I use the end result?
A key issue when using secondary data is ensuring that all information is properly referenced and that it is clear where the information has come from. The background data acquired through secondary data analysis can be used to inform interviews and questionnaires whilst the results of the secondary data analysis can also be presented within the evaluation report itself.

Case study: Using secondary data to evaluate a project

A local community group wants to review its progress on an environmental project, which has aimed to improve the quality of a neighbourhood park for local people. In order to do this, the evaluator reviews all the secondary information about the project including background information about the area such as statistics about health in the area, some consultation work that was done with the local community at the start of the project, the funding application and photographs from the opening event. He makes a note of the way in which the objectives of the project have been addressed in all the project's activities to date. He also reviews the minutes of steering group meetings where the project has been discussed and decisions have been made. This information provides him with excellent background understanding of the project and how and why it has been developed in the area.

Observation

What does it mean?

There are two main types of observation techniques:

Participant observation: The evaluator plays an active role in the situation, which they are observing. For this method to be effective, it is important that the researcher is accepted as a natural member of the group or the situation under observation.

Non-participant observation: A technique in which the evaluator has no direct involvement with the social situation that they are observing. The researcher does not make an active attempt to become an included member of the group. This type of observation often tends to be more focused (eg a single event or meeting) than participant observation.

When should I do it?

This method should be used to gain a better understanding of the context in which the activities of the project take place or to observe changes to the physical environment. For example, you may want to use participant observation to understand how a project has been developed and operated and non-participant observation to evaluate the governance structures of a steering group or local partnership.

How do you do it?
There are a number of key principles to follow when undertaking observation:

- identify the groups/projects/situations that would be the most productive to observe
- decide on the specific methodology that will be used for each situation (i.e. participant or non-participant)
- contact the person who has responsibility for the project or group (particularly if examining social interactions). Explain exactly what the observation would entail and what is expected of the group

The observation process will focus on different things depending on the nature of your evaluation. However, some common examples are:

- characteristics of project participants: age, gender and such factors
- interaction within the group: the level of participation; how people within a group relate to each other
- physical surroundings: the project's location, premises and facilities
- the way in which an area has physically changed
- governance of an organisation and understanding of roles among trustees

What is produced?
Observation provides the researcher with qualitative data that is very focused on the specific issue or project being evaluated. It also provides the evaluator with an opportunity to "get close" to a project or community organisation providing them with valuable insight into the ways of working of individuals and groups.

Using the data
There are a number of issues to be aware of when using data acquired through observation techniques. In particular, when involved in observation the evaluator has to be aware that their presence could have the effect of altering the behaviour of the situation and the impact that this may have on the data achieved. Any instances in which you feel this may be an issue should be highlighted clearly within your evaluation report.

Case study, using observation to evaluate a project

A local council has been responsible for developing and implementing environmental improvement on a wasteland site adjacent to a residential area. They have done this in partnership with local volunteers and schools. You want to evaluate the successful partnership working within the project and in order to do this attend a steering group meeting which includes the local council, volunteers and school representatives. You undertake non-participant observation and simply "sit in" on a meeting being held and observe the interaction between different individuals and the roles that different individuals play within the group.

The site was once an eyesore and a focus for antisocial behaviour, litter and vandalism in the community. However, the site has been transformed by local action and now boasts a top of the range play area, football pitch, community garden and allotment site as well as a wildflower meadow. In order to evaluate the project, the evaluator meets with the community group at the site and has a tour of the area. This allows the evaluator to get an idea of the work that has been completed. They can also compare before and after photographs in the final report to show the change in impact.

Social surveys/questionnaires

What does it mean?

Social surveys are a questionnaire-based method of research that can produce both qualitative and quantitative information depending on how they are structured and analysed.

When should I use this method?

Questionnaire surveys can be used in a wide range of settings and to gather a variety of different types of information. This method is often used when an evaluator is seeking to acquire data/information from larger population samples or when examining very precise, factual information. The method is more structured than either the interview or discussion group. It can be carried out by phone, post, email, website or face to face.

What do I need to consider when undertaking a survey?

1. Identify what you want to find out as part of your evaluation

2. Begin to devise a set of questions that will deliver the information you are seeking to discover.
3. Decide on the type of method, or the combination of methods, which will be used to ensure a sufficient number of questionnaires are returned.
4. Have a practice run.

There should be an administrative system in place to deal with the questionnaires for when they are returned/completed. This may include numbering the questionnaires, recording what action has been taken with them, entering the results into a spreadsheet/database etc.

What type of data is produced?
The data that a social survey can produce is very much dependent on how the questionnaire is constructed. However, the data can be very useful for providing an overall picture of the way in which a project or programme is being implemented and how effectively it is impacting upon its target audience.

Examples of survey question types
There are a number of basic types of questions that can be used in a questionnaire.

Type of question	Purpose	Example
Closed question	The respondent chooses from a list of predetermined options, they have no scope to expand their answer beyond their choice.	Does the project provide accredited training? Yes / No / Don't Know
Open-ended question	The respondents can give a response specific to them. There are no specified options to choose from, it is simply giving an opinion.	How would you describe the level of support provided by the ICT project staff?
Control question	For finding out about who the respondents are.	Typically seek information on: Age, Gender, Ethnicity, Employment Status, Marital Status
Filter question	Help the questionnaire to flow. Respondents can leapfrog questions not relevant to them.	Do you provide training courses in ICT? Yes – please state what courses these are / No – please move on to Question 9

How do I analyse data from social surveys?

Surveys can be analysed by collating the frequency of responses to each of the questions on the survey form. This can be done manually using a "frequency table", which can be easily set up on an Excel spreadsheet (see below for an example of a frequency table). However, there is also a selection of statistical computer packages, which can be very useful if you are circulating a large number of surveys including:

SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists): this is a quantitative data analysis package, which is particularly useful for analysis of survey data as it covers a broad range of statistical procedures. The package can also produce tables, charts and graphs of results.

Case study: Using surveys to evaluate a project

A programme targeted on helping young people back into work through training wants to evaluate how well it is achieving its objectives. It uses a survey to canvas the views of young people who have been on the programme to date. The survey asks them closed questions about what training they have attended and how useful they have found the training (on a scale of 1:4). The survey also uses open questions to ask young people about what their plans are for the future as a result of the training (ie has it helped them to consider applying for full time work? Or further education opportunities?). The data from these surveys is collected and collated into a frequency table:

	Frequency of responses from surveys			
	Very useful	Slightly useful	Don't know	Not useful
How useful did you find the training?	22	3	5	2

The results of the survey are analysed and this provides conclusions about overall success of the game, which allows the programme manager to draw conclusions about the overall impact of the programme.

Interviews

What does it mean?

Interviews are a qualitative method of research often used to target quite sensitive and important information, and to obtain the interviewees' perceptions and attitudes to the issues the researcher is addressing.

When should I use this method?

Interviews are typically used when seeking the views and opinions of people with a specific perspective. They can be conducted by phone or face to face. They offer particular advantages in terms of acquiring information which might not otherwise be shared in a group setting.

What are the different types of interviews?

There are three clearly identifiable styles of interview- structured, semi-structured and unstructured:

Structured: Follows a set of specific questions, which are worked through systematically. This type of interview is used when the researcher wishes to acquire information where the responses are directly comparable.

Semi-structured: This is a more commonly used interview technique that follows a framework in order to address key themes rather than specific questions. At the same time it allows a certain degree of flexibility for the researcher to respond to the answers of the interviewee and therefore develop the themes and issues as they arise.

Unstructured: This method of interview does not follow any predetermined pattern of questions or themes. Rather the interviewer will address the issues as they emerge in the interview. The method is useful when the researcher wishes to explore the full breadth of a topic.

What type of data is produced?

The data that interviews produce is essentially qualitative data, however the nature of the data will vary depending on the specific type of interview undertaken by the researcher.

How can I analyse and use the data?

The information obtained from interviews can be used in two key ways. Firstly, by identifying and drawing upon common themes across the interviews. Secondly, directly quoting parts of the interview in the main body of the report. Quotes have to be referenced properly. For example, you may wish to refer to the title of the interviewee in identifying who made the quote (eg project manager). Remember that some information provided during interviews may be confidential. In such cases, you should only refer to the broad theme or argument being made rather than identifying who said it.

Discussion groups

What does it mean?

This is a group-based discussion, typically involving between 6 and 12 people, which is conducted specifically to get a group of people's views on a programme project. These people can be drawn from managers of an initiative or beneficiaries.

When should I do it?

Discussion groups are used when seeking the views, perceptions and opinions of people in an open forum. They are often used when more in-depth information is required than that which can be gained from a questionnaire. Compared with interviews, they can be used when confidentiality is not an issue and where it is felt that participants are more likely to contribute within a group setting rather than on a one-to-one basis. They can often be used to explore issues emerging from other types of research (eg interviews, surveys) in more depth.

What do I need to consider when undertaking discussion groups?

Step1: Setting it up

- Decide on the make up of the groups - identify the key groups and individuals that you need to speak to depending on what you need to find out. Identify the individuals you need to contact. You may know of people directly or you may require the assistance of others to provide you with a 'route in' to finding participants (eg project staff, community champions). If this is the case, simply outline what you intend to do and enquire as to who they think the best people to involve in the focus group would be. However, be aware that you should try to attract a range of participants with different views and experiences and that relying on one person to find all of your participants may limit this taking place.

- Arrange a location - ideally the discussion group should be held in a location that is familiar to the participants, as this familiarity reduces the anxiety of the participant. The next step is to contact all potential participants to invite them to the group, tell them what it is about, and inform them of the time, location etc. Ensure that you have more contact names than you need for the discussion group as some people may not wish to be involved.

Step 2: Facilitating the discussion

- In preparing for the discussion it is worthwhile having a short-list of questions, ideas and thoughts on the topic. The list could be useful in starting the discussion and ensuring it flows continuously.
- Ask relevant and open questions so that the discussion has breadth. It is important that the group has a discussion rather than a question and answer session. Therefore try to steer clear of questions that are narrow and can be answered easily without discussion.
- Encourage group interaction and participation. All members of the group should make a contribution to the discussion. Try to avoid just one or two people dominating.
- Pursue, capture and develop emerging issues. A good facilitator should spot issues that are emerging in the discussion and try to get the group to discuss them in more detail.
- Try to ensure that the discussion remains focused on the key themes or issues.

Step 3: Recording the discussion

- This can be done either through the use of a tape recorder or by taking notes. Tape recording the discussion is useful in ensuring that no important points are missed and enables the facilitator to focus on guiding the discussion rather than taking notes. However, you will need to make sure that you have a good quality tape recorder in order to pick-up the group discussion. A good alternative is to have a note-taker sit in on the discussion.

What data is produced?
The discussion group produces qualitative data about thoughts, views, experiences etc.

How should the data be analysed and used?
Use the information from interviews to identify the relevant themes that emerge from the discussions to put into your evaluation report. There are also statistical packages that you can use to analyse this type of data including:

NUD*IST: a qualitative data analysis package which enables non statistical information from interviews, group work, observation etc to be analysed according to chosen criteria. For example, it is possible to use the package to pull out all material relating to key words or phrases (eg neighbourhood renewal).

If recorded, you may not need to transcribe the whole discussion but just make relevant notes from the tape. This will enable you to quote directly from the discussion within your evaluation report, remembering to adhere to any issues of confidentiality.

Visual techniques

What is it?
Visual techniques in social research offers an interesting, stimulating and interactive approach to gathering information. They are appropriate in a variety of situations as they fulfil numerous functions, including:

- a method for effectively engaging hard to reach groups within areas (eg: black and ethnic minorities, young people, elderly people)
- offering an alternative to traditional discussion groups yet still being able to draw out the rich variety of qualitative information from participants
- producing tangible outcomes at the end of the research process (eg: series of community generated impacts illustrating how local people view the local area)

When should I do it?

Deciding to conduct visual research will depend upon the type and scale of the evaluation that you are undertaking. It may be appropriate to conduct this type of work at the start of the evaluation process as a way of highlighting issues to be examined further during the course of the evaluation process, or it may be something that is developed as part of a blend of evaluation methodologies.

Types of visual research that you might want to consider

Cartoon test – presented with a picture of a cartoon depicting a specific situation, the consultees are then asked what they think the character would do, say or think in response to another character.

Completion technique – using the cartoon test above, the character is shown thinking or saying something but the sentence is left uncompleted. Participants are given the opportunity to make suggestions to complete the sentence.

Collage/concept boards – uses a range of images that can be used to represent or describe the subject for discussion (eg services, project, issues etc). In this way, the participants can identify the subject with a range of feelings and moods. There are two ways to approach this technique; either the participants respond to prepared boards or they construct their own collage or concept boards.

Photographic research – consultees are either provided with a series of photographs by the researchers or given a disposable camera and asked to take their own. Depending on the nature of the research project, these photos might include depictions of the local physical environment and/or reflect how consultees view their community, including what they like and dislike about it. The use of photographs in research can be used to evoke feelings or trigger memories that lead to perspectives and explanations that would not have been unlocked using a more conventional research technique.

Ideas board – this board invites participants to jot down their ideas on post-it notes and add them to the board which is grouped by theme.

Money well – an interesting way of asking participants to prioritise future actions or developments. Participants are given a certain amount of fake money, which they can place on the options displayed.

Graffiti or ideas wall – a strip of paper is hung on the wall accompanied by shapes, such as speech bubbles. The participants are able to write comments about a research topic or discussion statement.

Things to consider when undertaking visual research

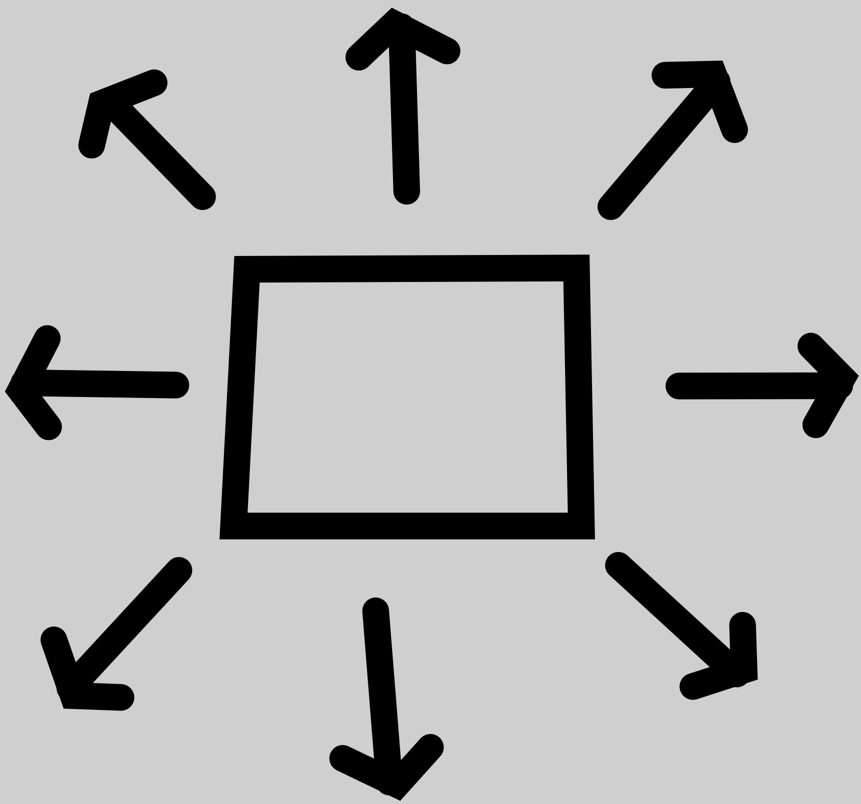
1. Consider who should be involved in this type of visual research and that the technique is appropriate for the type of audience you are seeking ideas and opinions from.

2. Ensure that the meeting is held in a neutral venue where people will feel comfortable and able to share their opinion freely.

3. Think about how the visual research will link into the rest of the methodology and how you will use it to inform the evaluation process

What is produced?

The interesting thing about data produced through visual research is that you produce visual data, which can be used to illustrate your evaluation and provide a very immediate and real way of demonstrating how a project or programme has impacted upon local people and communities.



Stage 4: Writing and disseminating the evaluation report

Introduction

Writing-up the findings of an evaluation is an important task for ensuring a lasting record is provided of the work which has been undertaken. However, this should not be a daunting task and you can be confident in the fact that if you have worked through Stages 1, 2 and 3 you will have undertaken all of the necessary data collection and analysis to enable you to produce an interesting and informative report. There are no definite rules you must follow with regard to writing up the evaluation. However, it is possible to identify a number of key issues which you ought to take into account and, in most cases, a number of core themes which your report will need to address. This section of the guide takes you through each of these.

Who is the report for?

It is important when you are thinking about writing and compiling your final report that you consider who it is for, in what kind of format they would like to see and what will be accessible to your audience. This will depend on who has commissioned the evaluation to take place:

- an independent evaluation commissioned by a programme funder (eg as part of an SRB scheme). You will need to present your report to the regeneration partnership or the governing organisation concerned
- an individual evaluation commissioned by the project itself. You will need to present the report to the project manager and/or management group

What style of report should I choose?

It is important that, when writing the evaluation report, you consider the style in which it should be written. Depending on whom the report is for, you may want to consider whether you include photographs, large sections of text or tables and graphs. You may also want to consider how the aims of the evaluation will influence the type and style of report that you produce. The following styles might suit the following audiences.

- if your report is designed for members of the local community, you may wish to use photographs and quotations from people that you have spoken to as part of the evaluation work

- for members of a management committee or steering group, you may wish to provide a report with more text, graphs and tables demonstrating the main trends in the evaluation

- for the operational staff involved in delivering a project, you may want to include key recommendations and conclusions about how the project can be taken forward or improved in the future

When should I write it?

The evaluation report should typically be written at the end of the period of research, once all the data and information has been gathered and analysed. However, preparation for writing the report can be done throughout the process as the evaluator gains a greater understanding of the project and the issues, which are emerging.

How do I go about writing the report?

There is no one way to write an evaluation report. However, some of the following guidelines may provide a helpful start:

- check the original aims of the evaluation to ensure that you have collected all the relevant information to allow you to write the report
- assemble all the relevant data and background material that you have collected throughout the evaluation process. It is important that before you begin to write the report you have organised the information and that it is clear in your own mind what issues you want to draw out
- the next step is to bring together all of the key points and quotes that you will be using in the report and have them in

note form. This will aid the organisation and is the start of creating a structure for the work.
- draft an outline of the structure of the report. You may wish to consider at this stage how much emphasis you will give to each section of the report.
- start writing! It is always better to get something written which can later be altered or amended. Although you may be working to tight deadlines it will be beneficial to the quality and overall standard of the work if the report goes through more than one draft

What should the structure of the report look like?

There is no set format or structure for the final report of an evaluation study. However, you will probably find that the following outline will prove suitable for the majority of reports:

- title page: name of project, date
- contents page
- executive summary- a brief summary of the key points and recommendations
- a brief description of the study - when it was undertaken, who by and methodology used
- a descriptive overview of the project – its aims, objectives, activities, and expenditure
- key questions the evaluation sought to address and the main findings
- conclusions and recommendations

Depending on the scale and outcomes of your evaluation, you may wish to think about dividing your discussion around the key questions and main findings into more than one section in the report. If necessary, you may also wish to include an appendix/appendices at the end of the report for more detailed information (eg large data tables, list of people you have consulted as part of the evaluation, bibliography).

What about confidentiality?

In writing up your evaluation findings, you should bear in mind issues of confidentiality and anonymity. It may be the case that some of the people you interviewed do not want to have their names attributed to certain comments and you should ensure that you respect these wishes when presenting your findings.

Disseminating the report

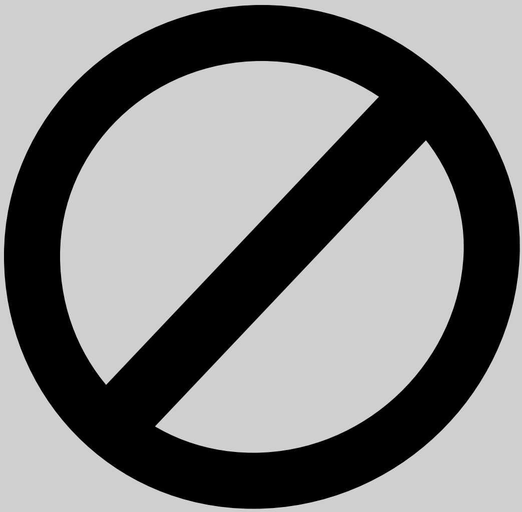
One of the main purposes of evaluation is to find out the positive and negative lessons about the project in order to improve its own performance and inform the activities of other projects and initiatives. It is therefore important that the findings and recommendations of your evaluation are shared as widely as possible, albeit taking place within the context of any specific confidentiality issues. In particular, you will need to provide feedback on your findings and recommendations to the programme or project itself as well as to whoever commissioned the evaluation. However, it may also be appropriate to disseminate the findings to project users and to the wider community in which the project is based, particularly if they have been involved in your evaluation research.

Dissemination can take place in a number of different ways:

- distribute copies or summaries of the evaluation report. It may be useful to produce a glossy summary, which is shorter and provides detail on the main issues and conclusions raised in the report
- place an article on a community web-site or in a local newspaper or newsletter or professional press.
- hold a local event where you present the findings of the report. This can either be through a formal meeting with key stakeholders or an informal event where community members are also invited to participate
- attend pre-arranged meetings to feedback the findings
- It is likely that you will need to work closely with the project and/or commissioners of the evaluation to identify the most appropriate dissemination techniques (depending on the local community, resources and time available etc) rather than take sole responsibility for this

Do I need to know anything else?

In general, you should try to use plain English when writing your report and aim to make it as clear and concise as possible. Remember, you want the report to be both informative and interesting to read!



Conclusion

This guide has provided an overall framework for evaluation that can be used in conjunction with a range of programmes and projects. It has highlighted the four key stages in developing an evaluation framework for programmes and projects and shown how this can be tailored to meet the individual requirement of your project/programme.

Perhaps the most important message from this framework is that if you are considering undertaking an evaluation of a programme or project that you consider from the start, what it is you want to evaluate about your initiative and what the key questions are that you want your evaluation to answer. If you are clear from the start, what the evaluation needs to achieve and what it aims to find out, this will make the process of gathering, collating and analysing the information easier.

Further guidance and support

If you would like further information and support about evaluation, contact CLES Consulting on:

(0044)161 236 7036

or email evaluation@cles.org.uk.

Our staff are available to take enquires about evaluation methodologies or approaches that you may be thinking about after reading this handbook.

You can also look at our website which carries details of evaluation work that we are undertaking across the UK and Ireland and information about training courses that we provide to help regeneration practitioners in their evaluation work.

www.cles.org.uk