



Monitoring and evaluation: a guide for community projects

A short guide

Geoff Bates, Lisa Jones
Centre for Public Health, Liverpool JMU

This summary document provides an overview of issues relating to the monitoring and evaluation of community-based projects, with a particular focus on work in green space or involving green infrastructure. It briefly details the evaluative process including planning, data collection, analysis and how to use your findings

Introduction

This short guide is intended to be used as an introduction to the process of monitoring and evaluation. Readers should refer to the full guide for more information. In addition the full guide discusses common barriers to carrying out evaluation and solutions to these, and gives advice and tips on a variety of issues relating to the evaluative process.

What are monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring

The regular collection and recording of information about the delivery of day to day project activities.

Evaluation

Measures how successful an organisation or project is at achieving its aims and objectives.

Why is it important to monitor and evaluate your work?

Monitoring your day to day work and activities enables you to make informed decisions about and to make improvements to your work. Through evaluation you are able to provide evidence about the impact of the work that you do, which is useful for a variety of reasons:

- ◆ To satisfy commissioners and sponsors.
- ◆ To help you apply for funding.
- ◆ To inform your future work.
- ◆ To boost the profile of your work.
- ◆ To boost motivation and satisfaction amongst volunteers, participants and the community.
- ◆ To add to the evidence base and inform other work.

Planning for monitoring and evaluation

It is important to begin planning your evaluation as early as possible. Building monitoring and evaluation into your project helps to ensure that your plans are achievable and realistic when considering your resources and time restraints. It enables you to

identify problems that may arise and the solutions to these, and ensures that you build in and allocate resources to data collection at all necessary times throughout your project. This will help to enable you to successfully measure the outcomes that are important to you.

What should you evaluate?

Your project's outcomes (what you are going to measure) should relate to the most important changes that are expected to result from the project and to what is realistic and measurable within the timescale of the project. It is useful to consider how you will work towards your outcomes in context of your aims and objectives: each of your aims should have a related outcome that you will measure in your evaluation. Using a table such as that shown in **Table 1** you can plan out how you will get from aim to outcome.

Concept	Definition	Example
Aim	The longer term change to which the project will contribute.	<i>To enable hard to reach groups to access green space</i>
Inputs	Key resources needed to support the project.	<i>Volunteers, equipment</i>
Activities	The project activities. The activities should lead to the outputs.	<i>Outdoor activity programme</i>
Outputs	The tangible, direct results of the project. The outputs should lead to the outcomes.	<i>Access to and experience of local green spaces</i>
Outcomes	The changes that result from a project. The outcomes should contribute to the aim of the project.	<i>Improved knowledge and awareness of local green spaces</i>

Table 1. Key concepts in project strategies

Deciding what tools and techniques to use

Once you have established your project outcomes, you need to consider how you are going to measure them. There are a great range of qualitative and quantitative research techniques that you can use to evaluate work and some of the key differences between the two are described in **Table 2**.

The methods that you choose should reflect the outcomes and project indicators that you have identified and your own abilities and resources. It is advisable to

spend some time researching different research techniques to ensure that you select the most efficient and effective methods for your needs. Some common methods for evaluating work are described in **Table 3** with examples of scenarios where they might be applicable.

When should you carry out monitoring and evaluation?

You are likely to collect data for your evaluation throughout your project. It is useful to consider at the start what information you are going to need to measure

your identified outcomes, so that you can plan this accordingly and ensure that you collect all the data that you will require. For example, data necessary to answer questions about change in knowledge or behaviour as a result of your project would need to be collected at the beginning of a project and again at the end. You may also wish to collect data about specific events and activities.

Monitoring should be an ongoing process throughout your project. It involves collecting information about your activities and day to day maintenance of your project to be fed back into your work to improve performance and efficiency. For example, monitoring may be used to keep track of the characteristics of users, events/activities delivered, or what the costs of delivering a project are.

	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Questions asked	Who, what, how, why?	How much, how many?
Question type	Open-ended	Closed
Interaction	Dialogue or observation	Question-answer
Form	Semi- or unstructured	Structured
To whom?	Purposeful sampling	Formal sampling
Level	In-depth	Surface-accessibility
Analysis	Interpretation	Formalisation and statistical analysis

Table 2. Key characteristics of qualitative and quantitative research

Adapted from 'On Target. A guide to monitoring and evaluating community-based projects'.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001862/186231e.pdf>

Project Aim	Example of outcomes	Appropriate methodology
To encourage use of a greenspace site by improving for example safety, cleanliness, facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people using the site. • Onsite anti-social behaviour. 	<p>Observation: counting numbers using the site.</p> <p>Before and after interviews or focus groups with 'friends of the park' groups, or wardens.</p>
To reduce carbon footprint within a local community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local knowledge about carbon footprint & environmental issues. • Recycling behaviour. 	<p>Before and after survey of residents.</p> <p>Amount of recycling waste.</p>
To create a school greenspace to improve students' mental wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants' mental wellbeing. • Garden attractiveness & accessibility. • Children's play & interaction. 	<p>Reflective diaries.</p> <p>Before and after survey.</p> <p>Before and after photos, videos.</p> <p>Participant observation.</p>
To enable elderly local residents to grow their own fruit and vegetables through improving a local allotment site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site accessibility to local residents. • Fruit & vegetable consumption. • Impact on frequency of site use & enjoyment. 	<p>Before and after photos, videos.</p> <p>Focus group with local residents.</p> <p>Before and after survey.</p> <p>Reflective diaries.</p>

Table 3. Examples of when to use different methodologies

Analysing your data & sharing your findings

Once you have acquired your data then you need to analyse it. This will enable you to accurately describe your project's outcomes. The type of analysis that you use will reflect the nature of the evaluation that you have undertaken.

Typical steps in data analysis

1 Reflecting

Think back to your evaluation questions and why are you doing the evaluation, who is it for, and what do they want to know about your project? Consider your outcomes and indicators of success.

2 Collating

This involves bringing together the information into a workable format. Quantitative data may need to be organised through statistical analysis or using basic calculations (e.g. total numbers, averages, percentages of the total). Qualitative information needs to be organised thematically; the term 'thematic analysis' is used to describe the process of identifying key themes or patterns.

3 Describing

You should provide a description of the facts which have emerged from the information gathered e.g. what was delivered, how much, who to, when and where. Remember to describe both positive and negative findings.

4 Interpreting

Interpreting goes beyond describing the facts, to try and understand the significance of your data and why things happened as they did. Look at internal and external factors which contributed to the project's achievements; also consider any challenges or difficulties encountered.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

Draw out conclusions based on the strengths and weaknesses of the project. You can then begin to make recommendations for building on these strengths and addressing areas for improvement.

Adapted from 'Prove & Improve: a self-evaluation resource for voluntary and community organisations'.

www.ceni.org/publications/ProveandImprove.pdf

How to use your findings from monitoring & evaluation

Your evaluation is evidence of the impact of your work

- ◆ Findings can be included in written reports for commissioners, press releases and newsletters.
- ◆ Evidence of your abilities and your project's impact is useful to include in funding applications. Use findings to improve your project and in planning of future work.
- ◆ Consider how your findings can influence the future direction of a project. What is working? What isn't working and could be changed?
- ◆ Have you identified any issues that could be the focus of a new project?
- ◆ Motivate staff, volunteers or participants by demonstrating the impact they are having. You should promote your work and share findings with the local community.
- ◆ Raise the profile of your work in the community and promote your successes through social media, the press or at local events.
- ◆ Having evidence about what you do will attract investment and interest – promote your work as widely as possible.
- ◆ Look to inform other similar projects and organisations who can use your findings including both your successes and failures when planning their own work.

Useful resources

There are a great variety of free and easily accessible resources available that aim to help with the monitoring and evaluation of projects.

This list is not intended to be definitive and there are many more resources available online, but provides a starting point for those looking for a steer on monitoring and evaluating their work.

Prove and Improve: A Self-Evaluation Resource for Voluntary and Community Organisations

Available at:

www.ceni.org/publications/ProveandImprove.pdf

Guide including resources and materials to aid self-evaluation of projects, case study examples and advice on accessing further support for undertaking evaluation.

Making Local Food Work: Exploring Your Impact

Available at:

www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/Exploringyourimpact.cfm

Guide exploring methods of evaluation for projects that involve growing or selling food. It provides a step-by-step evaluation guide and case study videos of projects relevant to this area of work.

Investing in Communities - Case Studies

Available at:

www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/iic_case_studies.pdf

Report containing detailed case studies of projects. The case studies include descriptions of evaluative methods, how successful methods were and what challenges were involved.

The Greenspace LEAP (Learning, Evaluation and Planning) Framework

Available at:

www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/outcome-planning-evaluation.aspx

Guide describes the framework aiming to help groups plan and evaluate projects and discusses issues around methods, tools, techniques and how to use your findings.

Evaluating community projects: a practical guide

Available at:

www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1859354157.pdf

Step-by-step advice on how to evaluate community projects from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Prove it! Toolkit

Available at: www.proveit.org.uk

Toolkit that includes a useful Evaluation Planning Template that you can use to help build your monitoring and evaluation plan.

Evaluation Support Scotland: Support Guide

Available at:

<http://evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/>

Includes guidance for the development of Logic Models by voluntary and community projects.

Community Sustainability Engagement Evaluation Toolbox

Available at:

<http://evaluationtoolbox.net.au/>

An online resource that includes a Tool Selector that you can use to help you select appropriate tools for your evaluation.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following individuals and organisations for their contributions to this guide, including Gary Bickerstaffe (Bolton NHS), Peter Aston (Congleton Sustainability Group), Debbie Townend (Food4Macc), Jan Pell (Landlife at the National Wildflower Centre), Anna Chimento (Liverpool University: A Haven of Greenspace), Zoe Knowles (Liverpool John Moores University: Active Play), Zoe Cohen (Low Carbon Lymm), Pete Stringer (Red Rose Forest), Susan Doughty, Jenny Haines & Linda Poole (Sandbach Allotment Society), Paul Sargeant (L'Arche Liverpool: Seed to Soup), Paul Nolan & Jo Sayers (The Mersey Forest).

Additionally, the authors would like to acknowledge the North West PCTs for their role in commissioning this project.

For further information please contact:

Geoff Bates
Centre for Public Health
Faculty of Health and Applied Social Sciences
Liverpool John Moores University
Liverpool L3 2ET
Web: www.cph.org.uk
Tel: 0151 231 4511
Fax: 0151 231 4552
Email: g.bates@ljmu.ac.uk

