Monitoring and evaluation: a guide for community projects

Geoff Bates, Lisa Jones
Centre for Public Health, Liverpool JMU
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Glossary of terms used

**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.

**Projects**  An all-encompassing term used to describe work being carried out in the community. Examples of projects range from educational courses, to allotment provision, to community-wide carbon reduction campaigns.

**Groups**  Used to describe the individuals, communities and organisations that develop and manage projects.

**Participants**  Used to define those who take part in projects. The term is used to represent those who a project is influencing: they may be part of a community, attending a course or sessions ran by a group, or using facilities that a group has provided.

**Baseline data**  Information gathered at the start of your project which can be compared to information that you acquire through your evaluation. Having baseline data enables you to demonstrate the impact of your project.

If you plan to print this guide please note it is designed to be printed as a booklet. For best results please ensure the booklet option in the print menu is selected.
Introduction

The advice and information provided throughout this guide was compiled from interviews with community, voluntary and professional groups carrying out projects in the North West in green space or involving green infrastructure. Organisations that fund, commission and support these projects also contributed. Interviews were carried out between June and September 2012 and were supplemented by a review of other published monitoring and evaluation guides and toolkits. The overarching aims of this work, and the production of this guide, are to inform on-going and future community-based projects, to begin to develop a more consistent approach to the monitoring and evaluation of community projects and to explore opportunities for sharing knowledge and best practice among stakeholders.

About this guide

The evidence gathered from the interviews informed the content of the guide. Groups that we spoke with were involved with a range of projects, including tree and flower planting, food growing, the creation and development of green space for recreation and encouraging people to use the natural environment. Additionally, we spoke with groups involved in projects aiming to make their local community more green and sustainable. We also interviewed people from organisations who provide funding and support for community-based projects.

Using the experiences of our interviewees, the guide begins by putting monitoring and evaluation in context by exploring common beliefs and expectations about monitoring and evaluation. Drawing on relevant resources and tools, the guide provides advice and recommendations aimed at community and voluntary groups, but also at other stakeholders involved with funding or providing support for community-based projects.

Who is this guide for?

It is intended that anyone who is involved with the planning, set up, management, commissioning or supporting of community based projects will find this guide useful. The guide is primarily aimed at stakeholders linked to projects in green space or involving green infrastructure who would like to demonstrate the value of community-based projects across the three dimensions of sustainability (social [including health], natural and economic).
1 Monitoring and evaluation in context

Why is it important to monitor and evaluate?

There are a variety of reasons why it is important to evaluate your work. Evidence about what you have done, what works and what doesn’t work is useful for taking your project forward, demonstrating effectiveness and satisfying your sponsors and local community. Figure 1 explores these themes.

**Figure 1. Reasons to monitor and evaluate projects**

“The more evidence you have about the impact of your project, the easier you may find it when applying for funding. Can you demonstrate that you are worth investing in? Can you demonstrate that your work is effective?”

“If you can demonstrate that your work is having a positive impact, it will help you promote your project or group and improve your reputation locally. This can have knock on effects on participation, support and funding.”

“Allowing others to see the impact of your work may be very useful to other groups or organisations carrying out similar projects. Knowing what works and what does not work is likely to be of great value to those starting out and planning their work.”

“To demonstrate that their money is being used successfully; to fulfil obligations about evaluation that you may have agreed to; show them that you are worth working with and investing further in.”

“Evaluation enables you to see what parts of your projects are working, and what parts perhaps aren’t so successful. Are you on target to meeting your aims and objectives? Do you need to make any changes to your methods or focus?”

“Motivate yourself and other personnel working on your project. Demonstrating that your work is having a positive impact can increase your enthusiasm and help maintain your interest and drive”
Tip 1. How commissioning and funding organisations can help the groups that they sponsor carry out evaluations

Be realistic about the time and funding that will be required by groups to undertake any evaluation. Often evaluation requirements may be tagged on to the end of project plans, not included at all, or underestimated in terms of time and resources needed. Use knowledge and contacts to put groups in touch with training opportunities and organisations who may be able to help them regarding the monitoring and evaluating of their work.

To satisfy commissioners and sponsors

Typically if you receive funding for your project you will be expected to provide evidence of how you have used that money and what impact it has had. You can use this as an opportunity to carry out evaluation to suit your own requirements as well as those of commissioners.

To boost the profile of your work

Through promoting the findings of an evaluation you can raise awareness about your project. This can help attract investment, participants and support for your work.

Motivation and satisfaction

Those working on your project will benefit from understanding the impact that their work has had. This can improve motivation to continue working, which may be particularly important for volunteers, and encourage your team to keep performing at a high standard.

To help you apply for funding

If you can provide evidence about how your project is effective it can help your cause when seeking funding. Commissioners will be more willing to invest if you can provide evidence of your abilities and the impact of your work.

To inform your future work

The findings of monitoring and evaluation can help you plan how to take your project or other projects forward. By examining what has been successful and why that is, you can develop your aims and methods regarding future work.

To add to the evidence base

Help to inform work carried out by other organisations that will benefit from understanding what impact your project has had, and how effective the methods and strategies that you have utilised have been. Reporting what hasn’t been effective can be just as useful to your own project and to other groups.
Characteristics of successful monitoring and evaluation

Successful monitoring and evaluation is incorporated into a project during the early planning stages. It focuses on outcomes relevant to the aims and objectives of the project and examines them efficiently and without bias. It is used to inform the development of the project and influences its methods and objectives as it is taken forward. Successful monitoring and evaluation will be used to improve the project, highlight your successes and achievements and raise the profile of the project in the local community. Some of the key principles and characteristics that your evaluation should reflect are described in Box 1.

Box 1: Key principles of evaluation

Evaluation is most effective when:
♦ it is a continuous (not just one-off) process informing planning and delivery as the project develops;
♦ it involves all those with an interest in the project in defining the questions they want answered;
♦ it uses imaginative and creative approaches, which engage those involved;
♦ it helps projects to be more accountable to the wider community;
♦ it is used to challenge discriminatory and oppressive policies and practice, and to overcome inequality and disadvantage;
♦ it highlights and celebrates successes and achievements;
♦ it encourages an honest appraisal of progress, so that you can learn from what hasn’t worked as well as what has.

Taken from Evaluating community projects: a practical guide.
Barriers to monitoring and evaluation and solutions

The following table summarises some of the common barriers to monitoring and evaluation that you may come up against. Alongside each barrier is a solution as to how these barriers may be overcome. Planning your monitoring and evaluation early and incorporating it into your project plans is key to identifying and overcoming problems that you may come up against later and ensures that you make the most of your resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers and problems identified by groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The emphasis during events, talks or sessions is to deliver work: there is limited time and personnel to carry out evaluation.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We feel that there is a lack of research experience amongst our organisation: we may lack the knowledge to carry out a meaningful evaluation.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Evaluation is time consuming - we only have one session a fortnight with our participants and evaluating a session can use up valuable time.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Personnel within our organisation don't see the value in doing evaluation and our reluctant to contribute.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;There is low uptake of the evaluation amongst our participants/ the community.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Lack of awareness amongst the community.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The target audience in our work is having difficulty comprehending the evaluation tools that we are using.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Can't afford to do evaluation - rely on volunteers, limited funding.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Barriers to monitoring and evaluation and suggested solutions
Ideas about how to overcome them

Keep evaluations brief and simple. If possible, minimise your involvement in the evaluation process by setting up ‘self-service’ evaluation methods that attendees can complete themselves. Consider for example short and simple surveys, recording conversations to save making notes during sessions, using guest books, diaries or a comments board.

You don’t need to be an experienced researcher to evaluate your work. Evaluations vary greatly in scale and complexity and you can design your evaluation to suit your experience and skills. Training may be available in your area and there is a great amount of information available about evaluating work aimed at all levels of experience and expertise.

This includes step-by-step evaluation guidelines and evaluative toolkits. Much of this is easily available online: see page 26 for a link to just some of the available resources. If you don’t feel capable of carrying out the evaluation yourself and have the resources to do so, then you may wish to consider using an external evaluator.

Do some research to find the best toolkits and guides to help you with your evaluation. Investigate training opportunities and look to make contact with local supporting organisations and other groups similar to your own group who may be able to help you.

Evaluation may be perceived to be time consuming but it is also an essential part of the project cycle. Motivate and improve understanding within your organisation as to the benefits of monitoring and evaluation (e.g. Figure 1) and find out what their areas of interest are, and think about how to incorporate that into your evaluation.

Consider involving all those working on the project as much as possible in planning the evaluation. Where possible utilise their ideas and interests and seek training opportunities around evaluation.

Work to raise awareness and the profile of your project in the local community. People are more likely to engage with a project when they are aware of its aims and benefits. Keep data collection tools such as questionnaires and surveys short, simple and to the point; people are more likely to complete and return questionnaires if they are brief.

When working with some populations such as children or people with learning difficulties, issues regarding communication and comprehension may arise. Learning and feedback should be used within any evaluation to inform and refine the approach used. Formative evaluation can be used to pilot data collection tools before commitment to a particular tool or approach.

Try and build the evaluation into your project at the start - include it in any funding application and make sure that funders are aware of your needs. Be realistic about time and resources needed as these are often underestimated when projects are being planned.
2 Planning for monitoring and evaluation

The project cycle

It can be useful to think about the stages in a project as being part of a cycle, as shown in Figure 2. Monitoring and evaluation should be part of this cycle and built into project planning from the beginning.

Conducting a needs assessment

Needs assessment is a method of assessing what the needs of your community are compared to what already exists. It is an important step in planning your project and will help define your aims and objectives according to identified differences between what you want to achieve and the current state of affairs in the population you are interested in. Additionally through a needs assessment you can assess what resources you require in order to complete your project in terms of time, finances and personnel. Identifying these now will prevent problems arising further down the line.

Developing a research plan

The following are the key stages involved in developing a research plan for monitoring and evaluation:

♦ Choosing your method of evaluation
♦ Identifying and deciding on outcomes
♦ Setting indicators to demonstrate whether or not these outcomes have been met
♦ Deciding who will conduct the evaluation
♦ Identifying appropriate research tools for collecting data

The guide is not intended as a definitive manual to monitoring and evaluation, but the subsequent chapters will help you to begin thinking about how you might plan for using monitoring and evaluation in your own project and signpost you to useful tools and resources.
Tip 2. Should you have your work evaluated externally?

Projects with the resources to do so may consider having an outsider carry out the evaluation on their behalf. This may be beneficial if your group lacks the abilities or resources needed to carry out the evaluation that you require, for example if you have limited numbers of personnel or experience within your group. External evaluators will have skills and expertise and being less directly involved in your work can make independent judgements that those close to the project may not be able to. However, having your project evaluated externally is likely to be costly and time restrictive and external evaluators may not be able to communicate with your participants in the way that your group is able to. If seeking external help is beyond the scope of your group then consider making your evaluation objectives more realistic to your capabilities and resources.

The charities and evaluation service have produced guidance about the costs of having projects evaluated externally, available here:


Tip 3. Build plans for evaluation as early as possible in the planning process

Evaluation can be particularly difficult when you don’t plan at the start of a project exactly when, how and what you want to evaluate. It is important to plan these steps thoroughly at the start of the process to ensure that you have the time and resources to dedicate to your evaluation.

Additionally, this will enable you to collect baseline data on factors you wish to evaluate later to enable you to demonstrate the impact of your work. Incorporating evaluation into your project plan will help you foresee problems that may arise and ensure that you have the support from commissioners and supporting organisations that you require.
3 Putting together a monitoring and evaluation plan

What should I evaluate?

There are different kinds of evaluation, depending on what you want to evaluate and the sort of questions you want the evaluation to answer. You may find that one or more approach may be appropriate. Evaluation employs a range of research techniques and the method or methods that you decide to use should be based on whether it is appropriate to the aims and objectives of the project, what in particular it is you want to evaluate, your own experience and abilities, and the time and resources that you have available.

Types of evaluation

♦ **Formative evaluation** – examines the formation of programme aims, objectives and procedures, including initial needs assessment. You might also use formative evaluation to pilot your project and gain insight into its appropriateness. Learning from formative evaluations can be used to inform and refine your project.

♦ **Process evaluation** – monitors what occurs during the process of programme planning and the procedures and tasks involved in implementing a project. This type of evaluation will help you to determine the degree to which your project has been implemented as planned and the extent to which it has reached its intended users.

♦ **Outcome evaluation** – the measurement of outcomes and impact over the short or long-term. Outcome evaluation measures the changes that occur as a result of a project and is used to determine whether it made a difference and impacted on the factors that you wanted to address.

Logic models

Logic Models can help in the planning, description and implementing of projects. In the form of a diagram they typically include strategic aims, actions and intended outcomes and demonstrate how these aspects of your project are connected. Through the model you are likely to identify potential barriers to successfully carrying out your project and evaluation, and how you might solve these problems.

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

www.proveit.org.uk


Where does monitoring fit in?

Monitoring involves the regular collection and recording of information about the delivery of day to day project activities. For example, monitoring may be used to keep track of the characteristics of users, the types of events/activities delivered, or what the costs of delivering a project are.

Identifying and choosing outcomes

You will not be able to monitor and evaluate all outcomes of interest. You will therefore need to identify clear short-term or long-term outcomes from the project’s aims and objectives. Outcomes 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. For example, you may not have the time or resources available to measure long-term changes in health outcomes. It can be useful to think about outcomes in relation to other key concepts in your project strategy. Each of these concepts is defined in Table 2 alongside an example.

Setting indicators

Indicators should measure change or progress in order to determine whether the outcomes of the project are being met. Monitoring and evaluation includes both progress and outcome indicators:

♦ Process indicators measure on-going project activity e.g. the number of people attending project events.
♦ Outcome indicators measure whether or not anticipated outcomes have been achieved at the end of the project e.g. changes in people's level of physical activity.

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

Table 2. Key concepts in project strategies
Scheduling data collection

It is possible for data collection to occur at different points during the project cycle, for example:

♦ at the beginning of programme or during a specific event/activity.
♦ during implementation of the project.
♦ part-way through a project.
♦ at the end of a project, or specific event or activity.
♦ periodically e.g. monthly, quarterly, annually.
♦ after a set period of time after the project has ended to determine longer-term outcomes.

The schedule for data collection should be determined by thinking about at which points in the project cycle it will be both possible and meaningful. For example, information about who is participating in the project should be collected at each session or event, whereas data necessary to answer questions about change in knowledge or behaviour would need to be collected at the beginning of a project and again at the end.
4 Evaluation tools and techniques

Identifying appropriate research tools

Once you have decided on your indicators and outcomes you will need to identify and choose suitable research tools to collect data. Research techniques include a choice of quantitative and qualitative methods, summarised in Table 3.

Quantitative research methods

Quantitative research involves the systematic collection of numerical data and quantitative research methods are commonly used to answer 'how much?' or 'how many?' types of questions (e.g. 'how many people increased their levels of physical activity after participating in the project?').

Qualitative research methods

Qualitative research methods are used to answer 'who?', 'what?', 'how?' and 'why?' types of questions (e.g. 'what worked well about a project?'). The data collected is non-numerical and may include interview transcripts, photographs or other types of observational material.

Methods of data collection

Most types of data collection will require a form or instrument for gathering the required information such as a questionnaire or an audiotape. The type of tool you should use will depend on whether the type of data you are collecting is qualitative or quantitative and the evaluation question that you are trying to answer. Some examples of methodologies that may be appropriate to different types of projects are explored in Table 4.

Questionnaires and surveys

Questionnaires and surveys are commonly used research tools for collecting quantitative data and can also be used for collecting qualitative data. Figure 3 provides some examples of evaluation scenarios in which you could use this type of tool to collect data.

Reflective diaries

Maintaining a reflective diary may help log thoughts and experiences following sessions, classes, meetings and events. This can be useful for facilitators to record their experiences and feelings, which can then be fed back to project managers and used in the development of your project. For participants, this method might be particularly useful if you are unable to speak with participants frequently, or if they are not comfortable or capable of talking with you openly and confidently. An advantage of this method is that diaries can be flexible to the needs of your participants: encourage drawings and photos if you think participants might communicate better than through writing. Shared diaries kept in communal locations that can be completed on an ad-hoc basis might suit participants who attend irregularly or at different times.

Interviews

Interviewing enables you to explore the issues that you are interested in using open ended questions that encourage the interviewee to provide thorough answers. The advantage over surveying is that you can discuss issues in more detail and with more flexibility, exploring interesting answers and asking follow up questions where appropriate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Qualitative Research</th>
<th>Quantitative Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions asked</td>
<td>Who, what, how, why?</td>
<td>How much, how many?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question type</td>
<td>Open-ended</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Dialogue or observation</td>
<td>Question-answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form</td>
<td>Semi- or unstructured</td>
<td>Structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To whom?</td>
<td>Purposeful sampling</td>
<td>Formal sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>In-depth</td>
<td>Surface-accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>Formalisation and statistical analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common methods</td>
<td>Interviews:</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• interviews</td>
<td>• questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• narrative</td>
<td>• cross-sectional (data at one point in time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• focus groups</td>
<td>• cohort (follow one group over repeated points in time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written text</td>
<td>• diary methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media analysis</td>
<td>• press articles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• drawings or photographs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• videos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>• participant observation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• non-participant observation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3. Key characteristics of qualitative and quantitative research</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adapted from ‘On Target. A guide to monitoring and evaluating community-based projects’</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001862/186231e.pdf">http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001862/186231e.pdf</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
If using this method you need to consider how you are going to capture the data that the interview provides, and how you are going to analyse your findings.

♦ **Focus groups**

The main advantages of running focus groups over conducting interviews are that you can explore your issues of interest with a larger number of people, and that conversation between participants can be stimulated by the ideas of others. Disadvantages of this method are that focus groups can be difficult to facilitate and there is a risk that you may not be exposed to all opinions as conservation can be dominated by more confident participants.

♦ **Case studies**

Studying a small number of cases that your project is working with or hoping to impact upon can enable in depth analysis which can be a useful method of evaluation. This method allows you to select cases that you think are particularly interesting and explore what the impact of your project has been, and why it has happened. Case studies can introduce new ideas and themes to your project that may not have emerged if using briefer and less complex methods such as questionnaires. The main disadvantage of this method is that results are not generalisable to all your participants and typically should be used alongside other methods of evaluation.

♦ **Visual evidence**

Your outcomes may be easily captured through photographs or videos to provide striking evidence of what you have achieved. This may be particularly applicable for work that has a strong visual impact such as projects developing pieces of land, planting trees or flowers, or growing food. Showing the contrast between what the land was like before and how it looks as a result of your work is an easy way to demonstrate the impact such a project has had. This can also be a useful addition to promotional material used to boost your profile.

♦ **Anecdotal evidence**

This is an easy and practical method of acquiring evidence that is useful for monitoring work and adding to your evidence base. You are likely to receive comments, feedback and have your own impressions about the impact of your work, satisfaction with a session or event and be aware of barriers and problems that you come across. If fed back and recorded this can be useful for improving your methods and processes and can form part of your overall picture of evidence about your progress.

**Tip 4. How to maximise the number of responses to your questionnaire**

If you are hoping to survey people at an event, in the community or by post or email then it is advisable to keep your questionnaires short and simple. This will enable you to survey larger numbers of people in the time that you have, and prevents the process becoming arduous and time-consuming for your respondents. In addition, reducing the number of questions that you ask allows you to clearly focus on your project’s key aims and objectives. This will keep your evaluation efficient and concise, which may be particularly important if you have limited time, resources or expertise for carrying out evaluation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Aim</th>
<th>Example of outcomes</th>
<th>Appropriate methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To enable elderly local residents to grow their own fruit and vegetables through improving a local allotment site. | • Site accessibility to local residents.  
• Fruit & vegetable consumption.  
• Impact on frequency of site use & enjoyment. | Before and after photos, videos.  
Focus group with local residents.  
Before and after survey.  
Reflective diaries. |
| To reduce carbon footprint within a local community.                      | • Local knowledge about carbon footprint & environmental issues.  
• Recycling behaviour.                                                                 | Before and after survey of residents.  
Amount of recycling waste. |
| To create a school greenspace to improve students' mental wellbeing.      | • Participants' mental wellbeing.  
• Garden attractiveness & accessibility.  
• Children's play & interaction.                                                                 | Reflective diaries.  
Before and after survey.  
Before and after photos, videos.  
Participant observation. |
| To encourage use of a green space site by for example improving safety, cleanliness, facilities. | • Number of people using the site.  
• Onsite anti-social behaviour.                                                                 | Observation: counting numbers using the site.  
Before and after interviews or focus groups with ‘friends of the park’ groups, or wardens. |

Table 4. Examples of when to use different methodologies

The Community Sustainability Engagement Evaluation Toolbox provides an online Tool Selector that you can use to help you select appropriate evaluation tools.

http://evaluationtoolbox.net.au/
When to use questionnaires and surveys

- Survey in your local community to gauge awareness and uptake of your work: ask people if they have heard of your work, and to what level they are interested in or are engaging with it.
- Use a brief questionnaire at an event or talk that you have put on to find out impressions on the location, speaker or display and how the event has influenced attitudes or intentions relevant to your work.
- Consider using a questionnaire at the start of a course or project and repeating upon completion to measure changes in the attitudes, intentions, knowledge and behaviours of those who have taken part.
- Find out the impact of a session or event by administering a questionnaire at the start and repeating at the end. For example you can determine the impact upon a person's mood or how their attitude has changed. Keeping the questionnaire short will prevent it using up too much time.

Figure 3. Examples of when to use questionnaires and surveys in an evaluation

Tip 5. Consider how you can get outside advice and expertise

Particularly useful for monitoring your progress, it can be greatly beneficial to be able to consult an 'expert'. This could be someone with experience from a similar project or working in an industry relevant to your work. An expert may be able to provide guidance on your projects progress, how you compare to other projects and have ideas for how you can improve. Additionally they may be a useful source for finding contacts and funding.

A project steering group made up members of your project team and outsiders, such as members of other project groups or individuals with relevant experience and expertise, can be a good forum in which to get this guidance.
5 Data analysis and sharing your findings

Analysing your evidence

After you have collected your data you will need to try to understand what the data is telling you. Your approach to data analysis will depend on the type of evaluation you have chosen and the type of data collected, but key questions you might want to consider when looking at all types of data include:

♦ Does the information gathered show that you have reached your goals?
♦ What are the project outcomes? (Be aware that outcomes may be both desirable and undesirable.)
♦ Does the information gathered highlight any achievements?
♦ Are there any problems or issues that need to be addressed?

It can be useful to think of analysis as a series of steps and Box 2 provides further detail about each of these steps.

Using the findings of your monitoring and evaluation

It is important to use and make available the findings of evaluation that you carry out; even if findings have not shown what you wanted them to. They can be used to inform and refine current and future projects and having an idea of what is likely not to work is just as important for your own and other projects and organisations as your successes. Figure 4 explores some of the ways that you can use your findings to benefit both your own and other organisations.

Sharing the findings of your evaluation with other organisations

It is important to recognise that through the number and variety of projects involving the natural environment and green space, there is a growing knowledge base in the North West of England. While no two projects are the same, there may be overlap in terms of aims and objectives, methods and evaluation requirements between new and existing work. There are many benefits of sharing your findings with other people who are carrying out work which may have shared interests, methods and objectives to your own.

Benefits include:

♦ Groups can learn from one another about different methods of evaluation: what did they find useful? What methods didn't work? It might be useful to share tools, for example questionnaires and surveys that have yielded useful data.
♦ Problems experienced during evaluation can be shared. What difficulties did they have, and how did they overcome them?
♦ Enabling you to make contact and connections with other individuals, groups and organisations with similar projects to your own, creating networks of likeminded projects. This increases information sharing and co-ordination between different organisations.
♦ Individuals within groups are likely to have different areas of expertise and interest and may be willing to share their skills with other groups.
Box 2. Steps in data analysis

1 Reflecting

Think back to your evaluation questions and why you are 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’ by Community Evaluation Northern Ireland.

www.ceni.org/publications/ProveandImprove.pdf
Using social media and online resources

Having an online community to share information, contacts and experiences is an ideal way for groups to share resources. Social media can also provide many ways of keeping a variety of people up to date with your project, some different forms of social media are summarised in **Box 3** including websites and social network sites.

Additionally there are resources already available that may be useful to groups, for example Project Dirt ([www.projectdirtliverpool.com](http://www.projectdirtliverpool.com)) and the GreenSpace Community Network ([www.greenspace.org.uk/community](http://www.greenspace.org.uk/community)) which provide opportunity to make contact with organisations with projects that share your objectives and interests and to share your own findings and experiences.

**Box 3. Using social media to share information about your project**

The internet is a useful tool to raise awareness about your project and update others about its progress including the findings of evaluation. Using social networking facilities, such as Facebook and Twitter, or setting up a website are ideal ways of updating members of your community with news about your project. Writing a diary or blog and sharing photographs, videos and news about your project online opens your project up to a wider audience and helps to update and maintain interest amongst your community. Providing people with an easy way to find out about and contact your group can help you forge partnerships with other groups or like minded individuals.

**An example of good practice: Green Heart Den**

Marsh Street Arches and Garden Community Interest Company worked to transform a piece of derelict land into green space for community use in Barrow in Furness, named Green Heart Den. This organisation is a good example of the successful use of social media and the internet to promote a project.

You can find out about the project on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/greenheartden](http://www.facebook.com/greenheartden)) and Twitter ([https://twitter.com/greenheartden](https://twitter.com/greenheartden)) while a blog provides news, further information and opportunities for funding and volunteering ([www.greenheartden.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.greenheartden.blogspot.co.uk)).
Exploring how you can use the findings of monitoring and evaluation

As evidence
- Findings can be detailed in a report to commissioners or source of your funding. This may be something that you are bound to under the terms of your funding.

External promotion
- To raise the profile of your work in the community.
- To attract investment and interest.
- To promote your successes.
- To inform other similar projects and organisations.

Internal feedback
- Discuss in internal reports or group meetings.
- Use to influence the future direction of a project.
- Use when planning new work.
- Motivate project staff/volunteers.

Figure 4. Using the findings of monitoring and evaluation
findings of monitoring and evaluation

• Having evidence about your work will help you acquire more funding in the future. Funders are more likely to be interested in your work if you can demonstrate competence and evidence of what you have done, and what impact your work has had.

• As well as the results of larger evaluations, you can use small bits of evidence that you acquire to build up an overall picture of evidence about the impact of your work.

How can you share your findings with the local community?

• Submit articles to local newspapers and the newsletters of local organisations.

• Detail findings on your own website or a supporting organisation’s website.

• Organise or join in with a community event to engage with local people and promote your project and successes.

Use your findings to improve your work

• Consider your aims, methods, participants, volunteers, evaluative methods. What worked? What didn’t work? What would you do differently next time?

• Is a project worth continuing with? Can you use your findings to make changes?

• Reward and motivate those who have put time and effort in to the project by showing them the difference they are making.
There are a great variety of free and easily accessible resources available that aim to help with the monitoring and evaluation of projects. These include general advice and guidelines, step-by-step guides that take you through each aspect of evaluation, toolkits that provide examples of methodological tools that you can use and reports containing case study examples of how other projects have been evaluated. Whilst there are resources that are specific to the evaluation of projects involving green space and the natural environment, many useful guides are generalisable to different topics and areas of work.

Below are detailed some examples of useful guides and tools. 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

*What does it contain?*
Produced to inform the voluntary and community sector, this guide includes resources and materials to aid self-evaluation of projects. The guide also includes case study examples and provides advice on accessing further support for undertaking evaluation.

*How can it be useful?*
The guide explores a model for self-evaluation that can be followed by groups, which breaks down evaluation into clear and logical stages. It is easy to follow and the examples given at each stage make the guide accessible to all levels of experience and expertise. The guide covers all stages of evaluation including project planning and identifying of outcomes, the setting of indicators, data collection and analysis and reporting your findings. By following this guide groups can be confident of producing a rigorous evaluation of their project.

**Making Local Food Work: Exploring Your Impact**

*Available at:*  
www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/Exploringyourimpact.cfm

*What does it contain?*
An example of a guide aimed at a specific type of project, this resource explores methods of evaluation for projects that involve growing or selling food. It provides a step-by-step evaluation guide and makes available case study videos of projects relevant to this area of work.

*How can it be useful?*
The guide is aimed at anyone who is involved in projects that involve a food related social enterprise or community food business, or a project that uses food growing to have an
impact on people, the local economy or the local environment. The step-by-step guide provides clear and detailed instructions for evaluating these projects. The case study videos may be particularly useful to those looking to understand the methods and experiences of other similar groups.

**Investing in Communities - Case Studies**

*Available at:*
www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/iic_case_studies.pdf

**What does it include?**
The report contains detailed case studies of projects that received funding from the Big Lottery Fund. The case studies include descriptions of the methods used to evaluate each project, how successful these were and what challenges were involved.

**How can it be useful?**
Any group planning a project will benefit from identifying similar projects that have been carried out. There is the opportunity to learn from the experiences that other groups have gone through and to use the advice that they give in these case studies. The projects discussed vary greatly in size and focus but many of the key points will be relevant to all groups who wish to evaluate their projects. The advantages and difficulties of using different methodologies such as diaries, questionnaires and case studies are outlined and barriers to carrying out self-evaluation are discussed. Having knowledge about these issues will prepare groups for carrying out their own evaluations and help them to overcome difficulties before they arise.

**The Greenspace LEAP (Learning, Evaluation and Planning) Framework**

*Available at:*
www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/outcome-planning-evaluation.aspx

**What does it contain?**
The LEAP framework aims to help groups plan and evaluate greenspace projects on your own or in collaboration with colleagues, members of the community and external organisations. The LEAP method considers planning and evaluation as integrated activities and as something to do with communities and partners, rather than to be done to them. The guide describes the LEAP framework and discusses issues around methods, tools, techniques and how to use your findings.

**How can it be useful?**
This guide is aimed at anyone involved in any greenspace activity. Those involved with projects that are in their early stages will find it particularly useful as the framework encourages evaluation to be integrated with planning and as part of the project from the beginning. The guide provides a great level of detail and explanation on all aspects of the framework, which guides the user through all aspects of project evaluation.