

Evaluation Support Guide 3.1

Analysing information for evaluation



Evaluation can help you to work out what difference you are making through your services or activities. **Evaluation Support Guides 1.1** and **2.1** help you to get started. **Support Guides 2.2 to 2.5** look at how to collect and store information about your outcomes.

This guide looks at how you can analyse the information you have collected and stored. You can learn a lot about your work by analysing information. See **Support Guide 4.1** to find out how to use what you learn from evaluation.

Evaluation often works best when you can build it into your day to day work. Don't wait until a report is due, but make time to analyse information as you go along. If you do this, you break the work up into manageable chunks and can use any learning to improve practice right away.

Getting ready

Before you start to analyse your information, think about what you need to know about the work you've done and the difference you hope you've made. You need to gather the key bits of information, decide who is going to analyse the information and set aside analysis time.

Your information can come in a variety of forms and may include spreadsheets, reports and videos. Read **Support Guides 2.2 – 2.5** to find out more about the information you may collect and how you might store it.

Even if one person has the main responsibility it is good to involve others in analysing information, including service users or volunteers (bearing in mind confidentiality). Getting other people involved:

- increases their ownership of the evaluation process
- helps them to understand how you will use the information they provide or gather and why you need to collect it in the first place
- gives different perspectives
- increases understanding of what information needs to be collected

Analysing your Information

When you analyse information, you do not just read it or look at it, you need to critically review what it tells you. To do this you need to be clear what you are looking for. So you need to sort and assess the information you have collected to check:

- what difference you made (your outcomes)
- whether these were planned or unintended outcomes

- what you did to deliver your outcomes
- which activities or processes were most effective or important
- whether things worked in the way you expected

When analysing information you can make notes, cut and paste electronically, colour code information or physically write relevant information against each outcome on big bits of paper. Some information may fit against more than one outcome. As you analyse your material, you may notice gaps. If this happens, you need to ask yourself, whether this is because:

- you have set the wrong outcome
- you need to do more work to achieve the outcome (for example by changing your practice or working with another organisation)
- you probably are achieving the outcome but you haven't collected any information about it

The example below is one way of doing things but you should use a method that suits you and the material.

Example: Two workers and a management committee member from *Buddy Befriending* spend time analysing outcomes from the previous six months. They find the list of outcomes they had agreed at the start of the project and write it on flipchart paper. Then they gather their information. This includes case files, feedback questionnaires from referrers, notes from a discussion with volunteers, photographs from an event, video diary material and statistics. They go through the material and mark which outcome the material relates to and write up the key evidence on the flipchart.

They soon realise they have lots of evidence for some outcomes but very little for others. They will need to make some changes to their project and their information collection systems in future. They also discover excellent information about an unexpected outcome that might help them get more funding for a new project.

Working with numbers

These terms are useful if you need to analyse and present numbers:

- **Absolutes:** the numbers stand as they are - this works best if your numbers are small. For example, 9 out of 10 participants got jobs.
- **Sums:** adding and subtracting numbers. For example, five people who took part on the project said they increased their ability to "say no to drugs and alcohol" by two points on a scale.
- **Average:** for example, the average weight loss for men on a health and fitness programme was 4.7 kg. Watch out for figures that don't make sense such as 23.6 people. You should also be aware how extremes can skew the

average. If some people lose a lot of weight but most do not, then an average may be misleading.

- **Mode:** the most frequent occurrences, for example, out of 30 people, one person got an ECDL but 27 people learnt how to make personalised cards using a digital camera.
- **Range:** for example, at the start of the course people got between 14 and 20 answers out of 40 correct and at the end they got between 22 and 37. Ranges can be useful when you need to illustrate diversity.
- **Median:** the mid point of a range of numbers. For example in the list of numbers: 22, 28, 34, 35, 37, the median is 34.
- **Percentages:** for example, 58% of participants increased the amount of exercise they do. But don't use percentages with small numbers. For example 80% of trainees got jobs may just mean four out of five.

You can use Excel to turn tables of numbers into graphs or pie charts for a report. This makes your analysis more user-friendly so long as you do not put too much information in one graph.

Example: *Fruitfield* grows and sells organic fruit and vegetables in a community centre 2 mornings a week. A Trust may award a grant if they can show their impact on the health of local people. 28 local people answer a question about the number of times a week they eat fresh fruit and veg:

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 14 people - 7 times a week | 2 people - 12 times a week |
| 1 person - 10 | 1 person - 16 |
| 1 person - 5 | 1 person - 1 time a week |
| 3 people left it blank | 2 put don't know |

This means:

- 64% of the people eat fresh fruit or veg more than 7 times a week.
- The average number of times people eat fresh fruit and veg per week is 5 (total number of times fresh fruit is eaten divided by the number of people answering, 144/28).

In doing the analysis they found themselves asking more questions:

- Was this a typical week?
- Was the 28 people representative of local people?
- Did Fruitfield alone get people to eat more fruit and veg?
- What other health benefits are people gaining?

Working with written material

You may need to analyse case notes or written feedback from service users. When you start to analyse, you can review samples of material and look for repeating themes. Or think about keywords that relate to your outcomes and

outcome indicators. You will then find it easier to scan the rest of your data looking for these keywords or phrases.

If you have evaluation information in an electronic format (see **Support Guide 2.5**) you can search and find keywords automatically. However, this will only help if people use the keywords! Service users may use slang, local terms and metaphors to describe things. You may also miss less obvious or unintended outcomes if you stick rigidly to this approach. Getting others to help can reduce the risk of missing things. However, helpers must be clear on what you need, so make sure everyone is on the same wavelength.

Example: *Ropes* takes children on week long outdoor challenges to increase resilience and improve independence and health. The team review some quotes from participants at the end of the course:

'I was scared of climbing but it turned out I could do it. The others helped me and I'm proud I done it.'

'We didnae get lost, the map reading bit wasnae that hard, fair made me chuffed we got tae the bothy first.'

'Learnt what the lines on the map mean and how to dig an outdoor toilet- we all had a good laugh doing that'

'I thought I'd hate being cold and wet but I surprised myself. I realised I could do things I thought I couldn't.'

The *Ropes* team go through the feedback and decide the main themes are:

- Working as part of a team
- Learning new skills
- Stretching yourself and feeling proud of yourself

They feel this shows increased resilience and increased ability to maintain good relationships (unplanned outcome). But they need to get more feedback to work out if they've increased health or independence.

Working with visual material

Visual material comes in many forms such as artwork, videos or evaluation tools such as body maps or lifelines (you can read more in **Support Guide 2.3: Visual Approaches**). When you analyse visual material, you need to ask:

- Does this tell you what you did (your output) or what difference you made (your outcome)?
- Can the material stand alone or does it need to be explained?
- What can you reasonably say about it?
- Is material representative of the typical or more uncommon?

You may find it takes more time and you need to be more systematic to assess progress when working from video diaries or taped footage.

Example: *Beagles* drama project has an outcome to increase confidence. It's easy to see that Amy, who was too shy to perform when she joined but who played a leading character in the play, gained confidence. But analysing her development involves reviewing video footage as follows:

| Description | Comment | Outcome |
|--|---|---|
| In background, not speaking, no eye contact | Quiet, shy | Baseline lack of confidence |
| Group discussion, Amy looking down, small posture, quiet voice, no input | Typical early observed behaviours | Baseline lack of confidence Baseline lack of participation |
| Reading for others learning lines, quiet voice but some engagement with others | Learning to speak out lines, comfortable with her voice and involvement | Developing confidence Changing participation |
| Excited, engaged and having a laugh about mistakes | More comfortable with self and group | Developing confidence, Improving participation |
| Speaking lines with other actors, moving in set | Taking on more responsibility | Increased confidence |
| Section of live performance | | Increased confidence |
| Video diary – answer to question 2 | She gave a super quote | Increased confidence |

What next? Reflection, learning and action

As you analyse your material, you will form opinions, test your assumptions and learn. This will help you understand the difference you are making and consider changes or improvements. However, there is no point in analysing material if you are not going to act upon it (see **Support Guide 4.1: Using What you Learn from Evaluation**).

If you need advice about evaluation, or would like a copy of this guide in large print, Braille or audio, please contact Evaluation Support Scotland on info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk or 0131 243 2770. For other Evaluation Support guides please check out our website: www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk.