

## **Making time for evaluation and learning**

### **Top tips when resources are tight for voluntary and community organisations by voluntary and community organisations**

This document contains top tips on evaluation and learning when resources are tight. These were generated at a workshop with around ~50 people from voluntary and community organisations, on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

The tips have been grouped around 3 themes:

1. How we think about evaluation and learning
2. How to evaluate
3. What happens to the information collected

#### **How we think about evaluation and learning**

- Go back to first principles: what is the purpose of the evaluation?
- Break it down and keep it simple, focus on the information you really want and need to know.
- Integrate evaluation into the every-day work.
- Making the most of information already being gathered (such as thank you notes, comments, conversations).
- Partnership working with others (local organisations, universities) was beneficial.
- Encourage lots of staff to take responsibility for evaluation, rather than thinking it is one person's job!
- Sometimes difficult to get more than positive feedback, make the effort to explain that you want to know what isn't working as well as what is.
- Doing what you can (the 'something is better than nothing') - it being proportional and appropriate (e.g. don't do a half hour survey in a hr long session).
- Being clear on what you want to know.
- Starting small and building on it

## How to evaluate

- Ask people themselves the best way of reaching them and gathering their feedback and thoughts (don't just launch into it).
- Try incentives to overcome evaluation fatigue e.g. sessions people enjoy alongside group discussions (like dance or games).
- There are lots of free resources, i.e.:
  - *Zoom polls* have worked well with children and older students – they enjoy something short and quick.
  - *Zoom groups* with all staff to talk through evaluation findings and talk about clients and use what everybody knows to improve as going along
  - *Brainstorming boards* ([dotstorming.com](https://dotstorming.com)).
  - *Padlets* for post it note feedback.
  - *WhatsApp* user groups to ask questions and save the responses.
- Online surveys: keep them simple and accessible, so people can do them there and then, on whatever device they're using.
- On-the-go feedback – during sessions. Capture experience there and then!
- Find other ways to contact people i.e. visit groups that are still meeting (if safe to do so)
- Talking to people is key, have conversations: this is the evaluative process, it doesn't have to be filling in forms!
- Have more than one way of feeding back (surveys, calls, case studies, having a richness, video shorts etc)
- Involving staff and volunteers so they get the relevance of evaluation and are motivated by feedback.
- Being interested in people's stories – as part of this gathering feedback on what's needed, how people experience services, what impact they have. Capture stories creatively – videos; as part of conversations that will happen anyway.
- Keep tracking .... A year on we can see what we did, and how we responded. We've then fed this back to local commissioners to influence what they need to commission in the future.
- Staff could use basic template forms at the end of each week to measure together on a monthly/quarterly basis.

## What happens to the information collected

- Build in time to think about what you are going to do with the information you are collecting.
- Get service users and staff interested in the feedback and using the results.
- Closing the loop so evaluation feeds into change and is not for the sake of evaluation!
- Talk to your funder, and if you have had to make a change explain why.
- Write up the evaluation in creative and interesting ways (stories, case studies, videos, infographics)
- Recognise success- feeding back to the team when things are done well.
- Prioritise time to reflect – 1 hour a week could be given to all staff ringfenced time to protect reviewing services and discussing evaluation findings.
- Taking time to talk to funders and board members if what you're measuring needs to change.
- Feeding back – make sure the people who feed in see where their thoughts and time have gone