

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 11th 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://www.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