

Evaluation and impact

This simple resource is quick guide about assessing outcomes of a service within the volunteer and community sector.

VCSE organisations are set up to meet a need in the community, however how do we know what impact is actually being made by the interventions put into place?

This resource will look at:

1. Monitoring not only quantity but impact of outputs
2. Fulfilment of strategic aims and objectives
3. Outcome assessment and retention of flexibility as you travel
4. Mutually agreed outcomes and how these appeal to funders

1. Monitoring not only quantity but also impact of outputs will provide a greater picture of what changes are made to the lives of service users. A policy to keep evidence based records will support this type of monitoring. This may include:

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- What strategies have worked?
- What strategies have not been effective?
- Where have these results had success or failure?
- Why have types of intervention lead to an outcome?
- For how much has the outcome been achieved?

Collating data for analysis in these key areas will help to identify trends, therefore be a starting point to implement need prevent strategies, therefore log baseline data to be able to evaluate work later. Monitoring to support analysis of output may be done on bespoke software to allow ease of information storage and retrieval. When bespoke software is not available, other format such as paper based records or utilising Microsoft Office can help, although these are far more time consuming options with a more limited capacity.

2. Fulfilment of strategic aims and objectives is key to any project success. To help evaluate if aims and objectives are being met it is important when analysing outcomes to ensure there is internal validity of the study.

Items to address would be:

- Confounding i.e. considering all variables
- Selection bias i.e. not choosing data to achieve a desired outcome
- Spillover i.e. identifying where other issues may need to be signposted
- Contamination i.e. remove any bad data
- Impact heterogeneity i.e. include impact diversity

Randomising field experiments with homogeneous results will help to ensure the measurement of output will portray a fair result of the output impact, with a clear picture to what is being achieved.

3. Outcome assessment and retention of flexibility as you travel will help to ensure needs are being met for the current situation of service users. It may be useful to try a theory based impact evaluation:

- Use both quantitative and qualitative data

This will help to understand the reason for numbers in success and enable replication of successful methods in other areas.

A forest plot i.e. a graphical display of estimated results from a number of studies addressing the same question along with overall results, is a fantastic tool to support your organisation to understand wider trends in relation to service users.

Reviewing impact evidence will allow a strong basis by which to improve the effectiveness of interventions, this may also be used for addressing barriers or effectiveness of facilitators. One method to use here would be to follow on from baseline data with these steps:

- Code data from studies available
- Present quantitative estimates on interventions using forecast plots
- Where interventions are an appropriate homogeneous sampling, do a calculation of a pooled summary estimate using a meta-analysis. This will increase reliability of results for where projects may be improved.
- Systematically review impact evidence as new data emerges.

There are other methods also useful in helping to keep your service flexible such as the Kaizen model for slow and steady improvement with any changing beneficiary need.

4. Mutually agreed outcomes and how these appeal to funders is also an area supported by evaluation and impact of a project.

Some projects may have a brilliant idea to meet need and possibly even have a proven track record. However, circumstances may become apparent that are a barrier to the project moving forward. This may include lack of volunteers, premises or funding. With an outcome assessment to evidence the impact to be achieved it may be that struggling projects form a partnership or agreement with neighbouring organisations to share resources e.g. one partner may provide venue while another partner provides experienced and qualified staff or volunteers. Before entering any partnership groups must be confident that there will be reliability on the part of those to be joined, a proven track record or evidence of commitment will be very useful to begin those ties and form trust. Also ensure values are shared and that all work completed will be mutually beneficial for organisations and beneficiaries concerned. Mutual benefit and project changes made should all be included in the on-going evaluation of your project.

Where a bid is being written to apply for grant funding, identifying a need is not on its own the strongest basis to form an application. If the detail included further provides evidence of how the need is being met, for how much and what impact will be had on the lives of beneficiaries there is a far stronger chance of being successful.

What are the other uses of evaluation and impact of a project?

- To report on your charity to be regulatory compliant
- The government use SROI to measure monetary terms and advocate funds to the sector
- Impact of an organisation can be a push or pull factor for stakeholders

Evaluation of impact of a project is a brilliant basis to verify changes and therefore allow the project to be flexible in addressing current needs of service users, this will better equip service providers to be relevant and ensure best possible outcomes for those in need.

Support

If your organisation is struggling to verify the outcomes of a project based on cost support is available at Voluntary Action Rotherham to review the structure of a project, help with fundraising and more. If you would like to have a conversation about evaluation and impact please contact the triage team on telephone: 01709 829821 or by email on: triage@varotherham.org.uk .

