

Social Action Evaluation

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What is evaluation?

It is important to know if something has been successful or not. Sometimes this is because the people who have given us money to do things want to know how they have gone, but also because we ourselves want to know if what we set out to do has worked or not, and what works best. Evaluation helps us to know whether we have been effective or not. What information you want to collect and how, will depend on what you are trying to do and how you think it can be shown and shared.

So, evaluation means:

- building on what people already know and do
- using and developing people's abilities and skills to monitor and evaluate their own progress and that of the whole project
- checking whether activities are having an impact on project objectives
- revealing whether resources (all sorts) are being used effectively
- getting good information for making decisions about planning and direction
- seeing your own project in a wider context
- analysing and using the information gathered to take action to improve services or situations
- increasing a sense of collective responsibility

Why do you need to plan evaluation?

- to be able to select priorities and objectives of the evaluation
- to indicate the kinds of methods you need to use
- to decide what you need to do in detail
- to ensure it is clear the role each person will take
- to work out how long the evaluation will take and how much it will cost
- to see how one part relates to the others
- to increase skills in planning and organisation
- to ensure evaluation fits with requirements of the project or project as a whole

What are the steps in social action evaluation?

Step One: Framing the evaluation

- All involved deciding exactly what the Aims of the project are. What is the problem the project wants to solve?
- Once these are agreed, we you can decide what the objectives of the evaluation are
- when you have reached agreement on the evaluation objectives, it is time to elect a small group to plan carefully and organise all the details of the evaluation

Step two: Designing the evaluation

- With the evaluation group consider the indicators with which you can determine, show and measure the effectiveness of your intervention. These have to be related to your objectives
- Find suitable participatory methods to explore the indicators (bearing in mind skills and resources available)
- Creating a written evaluation plan showing why, how, when and where evaluation will take place and who will be involved

Step three: doing the evaluation

- Preparing and testing evaluation tools, training people in skills required, producing appropriate information for people taking part
- Using the prepared and tested methods to collect the information required
- Project participants analysing the information (evaluation steering group)
- Results of analysis (findings) are prepared in written, oral or visual form
- Project participants then need to decide exactly how the findings will be used and how they can help improve the performance and effectiveness of the project and have wider influence

1st Step: Your project aims and objectives

What is the project about?

- What is the problem(s) your project wants to solve?
- Why do they exist?
- What are the aims of the project?

Project objectives

- It is crucial to be clear about this
- Project objectives might evolve over time and evolve in response to changing conditions.
- Besides the clearly stated objectives, there may be others, unofficial or unstated, that can be very important to participants
- Project objectives need to be specific, clearly stated and measurable in some way.
- it might be helpful to list project objectives in order of importance

Establish an evaluation group

- All involved deciding exactly what the objectives of the evaluation are
- When you have reached agreement on the evaluation objectives, it is time to elect a small group to plan carefully and organise all the details of the evaluation

2nd Step: Designing the evaluation

- What are the Indicators
- Consider suitable methods to attain the evaluation objectives (bearing in mind skills and resources available)
- Creating a written evaluation plan showing why, how, when and where evaluation will take place and who will be involved

3rd Step: Undertaking the evaluation

- Preparing and testing evaluation tools, training people in skills required, producing appropriate information for people taking part
- Using the prepared and tested methods to collect the information required
- Project participants analysing the information (evaluation steering group)
- Results of analysis (findings) are prepared in written, oral or visual form
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and remember . . .

- indicators need to reflect aims and objectives of the project
- the questions that an evaluation 'asks' must be very carefully chosen
 - knowing *why* a project succeeds or fails is even more important than knowing that it has succeeded or failed
- before an evaluation begins it is essential to know what different expectations people have
- who does the evaluation belong to? Really to all the participants, including those who paid for it - sort it out at the beginning
- many evaluations study what it is easy to study, not what ought to be studied
- measure what is important, rather than make the measurable important.

Some ways of gathering information:

interviews (face to face or telephone or Skype)

questionnaires – internet surveys

social media e.g. Facebook and Twitter

analysis of existing information

observations, photos and drawings

written information (reports, minutes of meetings)

group discussions

day books

statistics

files and records

records of personal work

diaries

focus groups

case studies

photos and video

drawing

smiley faces

dot voting

pros and cons

prioritising

graffiti boards

sentence completions . . . (I like it when . . . , the worst part of the session was . . . , I wish grown ups would . . . , Why do . . . , If only . . . , one thing I feel/think differently about is . . .

- make use of what you have and how you work
- remember the importance of careful description

Remember, methods need to be:

- appropriate - to setting, style of work
- manageable - fits with skills, resources, time, energy
- useful - will it do what you want?
- comparable - can you compare findings across methods?

Thinking about questions

- is language simple?
- could the question be made shorter?
- is only one question being asked?
- will respondents have the knowledge to answer the question?
- will all respondents have the same frame of reference?
- is the question leading?
- is the question negative?
- is the focus of the question clear?

Piloting

- Try out your evaluation tools with some respondents to identify and iron out any problems

Findings, analysis and interpretation

- Interpretation is about trying to discover meaning. There is never one 'true' interpretation of anything, rather multiple attempts to understand
- Look for patterns, key words, similarities, common themes or issues
- Look for relationships, correlations, associations or contradictions
- Expect to find questions rather than answers, and at least some unexpected themes, issues or patterns

Don't

- assume that changes are caused only by the work of the project alone
- ignore influences outside the project
- let people lose motivation
- claim too much for results
- leave planning too late
- use unreliable methods

What the findings are expected to show

- What project is trying to do
- What is happening
- Where there are differences or gaps between the project plans and reality
- Reasons for these differences
- What needs to be done about them

Get the meaning not just the numbers.

Link evaluation results with the action to be taken.

Report writing

- involve everyone as much as possible
- keep it short
- keep it clear
- use subheadings
- emphasise key points (bold, typeface)
- use listings and checklists
- edit carefully
- keep costs low
- submit on time

Dissemination:

Ways to share information

newsletter pictures events	DVD, utube displays	reports and summaries internet/websites meetings & discussions	pod casts social media
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Who needs to get results/findings?

- people involved in project
- staff of project
- community not involved in project
- funders
- other similar projects
- people working in similar ways
- other people working in the same community
- local, regional and national government

Acting on your findings

- There are many way you can use your evaluation. These include:
- Improving what you do
- Letting others know what you have done
- Sharing experience
- Campaigning for changes
- Influencing practice
- Developing new services
- Influencing policy

Evaluation findings -> decisions -> action

A final word

- don't forget to evaluate your evaluation!
- did it find out what you wanted, can you act on the findings, were people adequately supported throughout the evaluation, did people have the right skills and resources to undertake the evaluation properly, how do people feel now?

References and some useful publications

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