

Evaluation

It needs to be said that you can't do an evaluation without having followed a monitoring process beforehand, and you can't have a good enough monitoring process without first having planned the whole training course, youth project, church organisation, thoroughly. However, the emphasis of these guide notes is on evaluation. (See the Charities Evaluation Services training pack and the Community Work Skills Manual, section 22 pages 9 and 10 for more information on monitoring and planning).

Definition

1. Evaluation means judging the value of an activity by assessing the results an activity is designed to achieve, thus giving an organisation an insight into what it is doing and what it needs to be doing. In practical terms, this means asking carefully structured questions about an organisation at regular intervals." **Charities Evaluation Services**
2. The means of systematically determining the extent to which a planned intervention or programme achieves predetermined objectives." **World Health Organisation**

These are typical definitions of evaluation and they have their use. It is sensible to evaluate against what you set out to do. But sticking strictly to this criteria can mean that you miss what are sometimes called 'windfall outcomes' – those good things which happened which you didn't expect to happen. A good evaluation should also pick up these – not to mention the unplanned consequences which might not be so beneficial.

Key Concepts

- Clarity about the whole process (planning, carrying out and reflecting on the results) is of paramount importance and is the key concept regarding evaluation. For example, key points on which we need to be clear are:-
 - i. being sure what the words "evaluation" and "evaluation process" really mean
 - ii. being clear why an evaluation is being done
 - iii. knowing exactly what the findings are going to be used for
 - iv. being clear what it is that is being evaluated
 - v. knowing when the evaluation will take place
 - vi. being clear about the criteria to be used in the evaluation
 - vii. being clear who is to be involved
 - viii. deciding what style of evaluation is to be used
 - ix. thinking about how it will be carried out
 - x. being clear what resources will be needed to do a good job
 - xi. thinking carefully about the possible effect on relationships of the evaluation
 - xii. being clear what will happen once the findings are reported
- It is essential that any evaluative activities begin by having already invested in a planning stage.
- The time invested at the beginning will not only help to provide a clear focus about what you want to achieve and evaluate but also ensure that the tasks which need to be undertaken to achieve this can be identified.

- A clear and well-designed plan can save valuable time and help those involved ensure their work has a clear purpose and avoid the danger of drifting off course through a lack of clarity and/or the reasons for a later change of direction.

Benefits of Monitoring and Evaluation

- Ensures services meet users' needs
- Prioritise the organisation's resources
- Improve management efficiency
- Respond quickly to changing patterns of service
- Improve the efficiency of fundraising activities
- Develop the organisation further
- Provide information for longer-term planning
- Provide clear feedback for all stakeholders

Key Questions

- Does the organisation, and each project, team or department within it, have clear objectives for its work?
- Is adequate time given to considering what information needs to be collected in order to assess whether and how well objectives have been met, and what is the best way to collect the information?
- Is information which will be used for evaluation systematically collected and reviewed (ie. monitoring)?
- Do people in the organisation understand the uses to which evaluation can be put, and is the organisation using the most appropriate approaches to evaluation?
- When an evaluation is undertaken, are the results used as the basis for making changes and improvements?

Key Agencies/Resources

- **“Just about Managing?”** 3rd Edn, by Sandy Adirondack, ISBN 1-872582-17-6, published by LVSC, £18.95 – information about evaluation pp.73-74
- **The Charities Evaluation Services** – 020 7713 5722 – see website below
- **National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)** – 020 7713 6161- see website below
- **Practical Quality Assurance System for Small and medium sized Organisations (PQASSO)**, or projects within larger ones. Information from Charities Evaluation Service – see website below
- **“Achieving Better Community Development” (ABCD)** by Alan Barr and Stuart Hashagen – available from the Community Development Foundation

Useful Websites:

- <http://www.sandy-a.co.uk> – Sandy Adirondack provides training and consultancy on various aspects of governance and law for the voluntary sector.
- <http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/main.htm> - The Charities Evaluation Services supports organisations in becoming more confident, effective and efficient and in developing skills. This website includes information on their services, training courses and publications
- <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sfp/strategicplanning/?id=2218> – The Sustainable Funding Project – part of NCVO – provides a service to help voluntary and community organisations to look at a range of funding options to develop a sustainable funding mix.
- <http://www.cdf.org.uk> – Community Development Foundation (for information about ABCD)