

Why is monitoring and evaluation needed?

Many funders now ask groups how they will measure the success of their work. They want to know what difference their funding will make to the people who use your group's services or take part in activities.

Thinking through how you will monitor and evaluate your group's activities is an important part of planning your work. It can help you learn what worked and what didn't work so that you can change or improve future activities or repeat things that you know went well.

Monitoring and evaluating what you do does not have to be complicated. It's an activity that we all do constantly without thinking about it. For instance, when you organise a party or event you will ask yourselves afterwards "Was it a success?", "Did people enjoy themselves?", "Was there enough food?", "Would we do it again?". You just need to spend time making sure that you collect useful information and take time to discuss any important issues. It can help to reassure you that things are going well after all the hard work you have put in.

What is monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring and evaluation have two distinct, but complementary roles.

Monitoring means collecting and recording key information about what is happening. Monitoring can help you determine if your project is reaching its target group and help you decide on the evaluation you will do. Activities can be monitored in different ways, such as recording the numbers of people attending the youth club sessions, or asking what people thought about the activities that were organised.

It is important to record information and gather feedback as you go along rather than waiting until the end of the project when it can be more difficult to remember what happened. It will help to keep you on the right track and make any changes to things that may not be working well as you go along.

Evaluation means reviewing how things went by looking at the information that was collected and assessing how worthwhile it was. You might ask questions like:

- Did the activity or project achieve what we wanted it to?
- Who benefited from it?
- What did people think of it and did it make any difference to them?
- Could we have done it better?
- What changes will we make next time?

What to monitor and evaluate?

To decide what to monitor and evaluate you need to think about the following:

- What does our activity or project aim to do or achieve?
- What information will help us to see whether this has happened?
- What methods can we use to collect the information?
- Who needs to be involved in the evaluation?

Funders are interested not only in the numbers of people involved in activities, but also the quality of their experience. So, you might organise an event for a small number of people, but everyone there gets a lot of support and information and finds it very helpful. In addition to recording the number and types of people attending the event, it would be just as important to collect information that shows how people benefited. This could be done through a questionnaire or interviews at the end of the activity. Activities could be recorded by taking photographs and making up a scrapbook to show funders with quotes from people who took part, on what they enjoyed about the event and what difference it has made to them.

You need to think through how much time you spend collecting information. You may just need a simple questionnaire or registration form for the information you need.

Writing a report is a good idea to summarise your evaluation. This can be useful for yourselves when planning future activities, and for funders as it shows them that you know what you are doing.

A report could include:

- the aims of the activity or project
- the purpose of the evaluation
- what was being evaluated and who for
- the timescale for the evaluation
- who carried out the evaluation
- what information was collected
- what methods were used to collect information
- an analysis of the results
- proof that your project works well
- support applications for future funding
- your conclusions
- how the group will use the evaluation and make any changes when organising future projects or activities

Further information

- www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/er_eval_self_evaluation_uk.pdf
- www.ces-vol.org.uk/downloads/firstmande-15-21.pdf
- Charities Evaluation Service – Practical Monitoring and Evaluation ISBN 1 897963254
£33.50 excluding VAT