

WHAT IS MONITORING & EVALUATION?

Monitoring and evaluation is an important part of an organisation. It is the process we use to check the progress of our work and whether or not we are achieving what we set out to do.

WHY EVALUATE?

In community work there are generally three groups of people affected by the work of any organisation.

- * Those who use the service;
- * Those who carry out the work; and
- * Those who pay for the work.

All these people are vital to the running of the organisation and have an interest in how the work is progressing, although sometimes they might not always agree! A good monitoring process will regularly feedback and inform all interested groups as to whether the organisation is actually succeeding in what it planned to do.

It helps everybody to check whether the organisation is effective and efficient, but more importantly it can be a learning experience allowing work to alter. It is rare that everything is done right first time and evaluating work allows us to change for the better.

HERE ARE A FEW STEPS TO HELP YOU:

* **Define the aims of your work**

Eg. "Increase the number of people who use your service" or "increase your membership".

If possible try to set targets but don't worry, numbers aren't the only thing that's important—enjoyment can also be measured!

* **Decide what information you need**

Eg. "How do people know we exist?" or "What qualifications do people

leave with?"

You are looking for information related to the aims of your work.

* **Decide how to gather the information**

Can you gather information through existing procedures? Do you want to develop evaluation forms? Consider whether, if at all, any parts of the evaluation should be carried out externally.

* **Assessing the information**

This could be calculating the number of enquiries each month, or maybe looking at more qualitative feedback such as the comments from people accessing your service.

Think about this information. Has the work been a success? Where could it be improved?

* **Tell everybody**

The results should be made available to all parties. They can then make informed decisions about how they want to use/improve the service.

It also shows a commitment to reviewing and improving your work.

* **Apply the results**

Often evaluations highlight areas where there has/or has not been much success. This gives you the chance to look at reasons for this and change working practice where necessary.

* **Did the evaluation work?**

Were all parties happy with the information collected? Was the process easy or difficult to manage?

Look at ways to make the process easier next time!

HOW DO YOU EVALUATE?

How your organisation chooses to monitor its work will depend on what you do, what information you require and what resources you have available.

The first thing to do is plan your own strategy. Try to include all relevant parties at this stage; staff, management committee members and funders (funders often give their own guidelines).

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- * Value your evaluation. Recognise its importance because it is important! Increasingly, funders want to know how their money has been spent before they commit to giving you more.
- * Set aside enough time and resources to carry out the evaluation. Where possible incorporate this cost into funding applications.
- * Evaluations work better if they are not left to the last minute! Try to make it part of your everyday working practice.
- * Despite our best efforts it is sometime easy to overlook things! Evaluations often highlight positive and negative things that you might not have been aware of.
- * Make sure that you talk to people who use your service, not just the staff. You could make this into an event, even have fun!
- * Remember to constantly revisit your objectives to make sure that you are evaluating them correctly.

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