

Achieving staff/volunteer commitment and participation in monitoring and evaluation

Introduction

Effective monitoring and evaluation depends on the active contribution of staff/volunteers¹.

There are three ways in which staff may be involved:

- They can contribute to your overall approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning by providing feedback on their work and on the organisation as a whole (we refer to this as having a ‘monitoring and evaluation culture’).
- They may be asked to collect data from service users (for example through outcome monitoring tools²).
- They may be treated as ‘monitoring and evaluation subjects’ (i.e. you can collect their views systematically, for example how they think services have worked and potential improvements).

This guidance briefly looks at each of these in turn and offers suggestions.

1) Encouraging staff to contribute to the broad process of monitoring and evaluation

This is the most important aspect of staff involvement in monitoring and evaluation. It’s about establishing **a monitoring and evaluation culture**. This may have the following features:

- Shared understanding of the outcomes that the organisation is aiming for and how these will be achieved (we recommend using a [theory of change approach](#) for this).
- Staff understanding why data is needed and why monitoring and evaluation is important.
- Staff who are open with their feedback.
- Staff who regularly seek feedback from service users.
- Staff who take responsibility for the quality and usefulness of the evidence they collect.
- Staff who think in terms of the outcomes they achieve rather than outputs they deliver. For example, staff should be able to recognise progress in service users and – crucially - record this.
- Motivation to collect evidence and to learn, and an appetite for knowing whether their work is making a difference. It can be useful to include a shared responsibility for monitoring and evaluation in job descriptions.

¹ For simplicity, in the remainder of this note we will only refer to ‘staff’, but all content applies equally to volunteers

² Please see separate guidance on outcomes tools

How to create a monitoring and evaluation culture

In any organisation, there will be people who are interested in monitoring and evaluation and those who aren't, and it's important to recognise this. However, irrespective of the range of views, everyone should see monitoring and evaluation as vital to the welfare of the organisation and its service users, and for ensuring the organisation's sustainability.

Developing this kind of culture is not that difficult. All staff already collect information and evidence of 'change' and 'improvement', even if it is only in their heads. An evaluation and learning culture is about harnessing and encouraging this type of practice, making it consistent, making it systematic and making sure everyone sees the benefits. It helps to make sure that all staff, including volunteers, are kept informed of research and evaluation plans, being clear what is expected of them and how it will fit in with their other work. Showing staff how the information collected is used, and the impact it has, is particularly important.

An idea you may wish to consider is engaging all staff in a **formal review of the organisation's aims and objectives and evaluation activities**: to agree what you are doing, why you are doing it, and the intended outcomes. This reflects the idea that research and evaluation should be participatory. Staff should be given the time to inform all stages; from identifying what it is they should be monitoring and questions to be asked of clients and stakeholders; the best process to adopt in answering these questions; and the dissemination and actioning of findings. Involving all staff and at least some volunteers in this review will help to secure buy-in. Stakeholder and service user input is also valuable particularly for piloting data collection methods.

By investing time into the review you should ensure that there is agreement across the organisation about its vision/mission, purpose and approach and develop a common understanding with shared responsibilities and ownership, so that all the work is not left to one person. A review of your vision/mission, purpose and approach will also reveal whether your monitoring and evaluation system is producing the right sort of evidence. You may discover that you are collecting information that is either not used or useful, or that you are missing 'collectable' information that you need.

Template for an organisational review of your monitoring and evaluation needs

This section outlines questions you might ask as part of a review of your monitoring and evaluation to secure buy-in from staff and develop a monitoring and evaluation culture.

Above all, we suggest using a [theory of change](#) process as the starting point for this. The key questions posed by the this are:

- Who are your service users and what are their needs?
- What outcomes do you want to achieve for your service users?

- What changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours amongst your service users will lead to this change (intermediate outcomes)?
- Who are you, what interventions are you providing to service users and why?
- What evidence do you need to test all of the above?

Your review could also pose the following questions:

- Does everyone in the organisation understand and can communicate your organisation's theory of change as it relates to your work?
- Are your organisation's short-term aims and objectives 'SMART' – this stands for specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound?
- What skills, experience and enthusiasm do your staff have for monitoring and evaluation?
- What do your funders expect?
- What do you need to know to improve and develop your services further?
- Does your organisation have a 'learning culture' which encourages staff to identify and address unexpected and unintended outcomes?
- Are you doing and achieving what you think and say you are? Can you demonstrate it effectively following good practice? Will you be able to demonstrate it if you collect the data above.

Depending on the size of your organisation or project and its complexity, this process (which includes planning, development, piloting and testing the data-gathering methods, and then refining and reviewing) can take anywhere from six months to a year.

Other things that may help you develop a monitoring and evaluation culture include:

- Commitment at all levels, including within the board, senior management, and trustees.
- A lead person with the authority to drive the process and obtain necessary resources.
- Sharing results and learning within the organisation. By offering the details of the organisation's progress and results, you not only demonstrate the value of the information collected but also build confidence in the organisation, enhance morale, and create an environment of open communication. This openness often generates improvements, as new ideas are encouraged and learning becomes natural.
- Scheduling an on-going review cycle.

2) Asking staff to collect data from service users

It's likely that you will need staff to collect data and information from service users. If you have gone through the steps above, your staff should be committed to collecting data and understand why it is necessary, but it may still be a challenge because:

- When resources are stretched, asking your staff members to invest time collecting data is difficult as they may feel it takes them away from client work.
- Staff may feel that collecting data from service users is intrusive and takes up clients' time without directly benefitting them.
- Staff may be apprehensive of monitoring and evaluation because they misinterpret it as a tool for measuring their performance.

This section sets out some ideas to consider for collecting good quality data without over-burdening staff.

Most importantly, you must clearly articulate the value of the information that needs to be collected and how it will be used. These messages can be communicated and reinforced through one-to-ones, staff supervision and team meetings on a regular basis. You may also wish to consider writing a short note/paper outlining the benefits for the organisation.

Key messages for staff may be:

- Data will help your organisation obtain funding, and thereby continue the work (jobs and service users depend on it).
- Data will help your organisation learn and improve services.
- Data will enable your organisation to test itself – are you really making a difference? And through this you can become more confident about what you do.
- Data collection and involvement in monitoring and evaluation will be good for individual's careers as it's a 'core competence' for those working in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) and criminal justice sectors.
- Monitoring and evaluation are not a means of assigning 'blame' for poor performance by staff or volunteers.

Other measures you can take to help the process of data collection are:

- It's critical to have visible buy-in from to the process from your board or management.
- As described above, it's important to engage staff members and volunteers in any reviews of data collection. **Above all, encourage staff to feedback about data collection: If they think the collection of certain data is meaningless or unhelpful then ask them to tell you why.**

- Ensure the data you collect and the way you collect it is respectful and sensitive. Train your staff in good practice methods to approaching service users about collecting monitoring and evaluation data. Ensure they understand your consent processes and are able to provide information on how the data will be used. There's more information on this in our [Guide to achieving user participation in research](#).
- Provide case studies/examples of where evaluation has been useful in informing practice and the development of services.
- While data collection should be as easy as possible, this consideration must not lead the process. Make sure the data you collect is relevant to your mission, aims and objectives, and that it is proportionate to the size of the grant/contract and the type of work you are doing. Furthermore, there needs to be a clear relationship between the data collected (your choice of indicators) and your intended outcomes. You can ensure this by using a theory of change and regular reviews of your monitoring and evaluation systems.

3) Staff as research subjects

As well as using staff to collect data from service users, you may also need to conduct research with staff themselves to get their own views, either about individual service users or about services in general. This is a good way to empower staff; feeding back on their experiences not only contributes to performance and achieving better results but is also motivating.

The following methodologies can be used to conduct research with staff:

- **Staff focus groups** can provide excellent intelligence for reviews and decision making. They allow open, in depth discussions amongst staff with similar roles and experiences and opportunities to reflect on services and possible improvements. The aim is to provide a forum that allows staff to reflect on the service they provide and areas of concern or good practice. Focus groups do not always have to be seen as standalone exercises, for instance such discussions can take place within team meetings. It helps if focus groups are led by an experienced facilitator, with pre-defined questions, this could be someone external and independent, as they may encourage more candid responses and offer a new perspective.
- **Staff supervision and case notes** – effective supervision provides you with the opportunity to discuss day-to-day practice and aspects of the overall service. Fundamental to these discussions should be the ongoing review of the quality of case notes, which are both an integral part of staff's day to day work and useful research tools. A lot may be learnt from the information held in up to date, concise case files. For example, they should hold information on the characteristics of service users, level of need, how the service responds and the impact achieved. If staff understand this they will realise that they are already collecting useful monitoring and evaluation information in their day to day work.

- **Peer networks** for staff are an opportunity for support as well as knowledge sharing as your staff can learn from each other, and adapt and build on each other's successes and experiences. Peer networks can also serve as a supportive environment for volunteers bringing them into contact with each other, sharing experiences and developing an understanding of the Sector/profession.
- Asking staff to write **case studies** is a good way to generate examples of good practice showing how the organisation works effectively with service users. Rather than just asking staff to "write a case study" it's important to give them a framework, which includes some key questions that you want them to think about. This could link specifically to your theory of change (i.e. examples of people who demonstrate different aspects of the theory of change). It's also important that case studies include learning for others working with similar service users.
- **Staff surveys (written or online):** Staff surveys often focus on issues like job satisfaction, which is an important issue, but other question can also be asked. In particular, elements of your theory of change are likely to relate specifically to staff's working practices (for example ability to gain trust with clients and to work flexibly) so it's important to have a measure of whether staff feel this has been achieved. To ensure staff participate in surveys it is important to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity as well as having a clear plan for taking forward their views and providing opportunities to discuss the findings.

Links to further resources

These following links and provide more detail on the idea of creating an evaluation culture:

<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/evalcult.php>

http://www.cgjar-ilac.org/files/publications/working_papers/ILAC_WorkingPaper_No8_EvaluativeCulture_Mayne.pdf

http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/client/tools_you_can_use/06-20-07_evaluation_culture.cfm

<http://www.tesol-france.org/articles/murphy.pdf>

This is a short good practice guide on engaging staff in evaluations from the homelessness sector:

<http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/homelesslink-data-collection.pdf>

This is a set of tips on helping staff to collect data effectively:

http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Encouraging%20Staff%20to%20Collect%20Data%200Seminar%20Handout%20-%20Centrepont_0.pdf



These links offer advice on running staff focus groups (the second link has an illustrative discussion guide):

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/employment-matters/docs/10-717-employee-focus-groups>

<http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Staff%20focus%20group%20guidance.doc>

This offers useful advice on designing and running a staff survey:

<http://www.business-marketing.com/article8.php>