Guidance Note 1

Annex 1 - Monitoring your Project

This document provides advice and guidance on Performance Monitoring designed to inform a later evaluation exercise and focuses upon the key outputs and aspirations of your project.

The evaluation exercise will incorporate much of this information into its research programme which will assess the actual outcomes and actual impacts of the project.

Prior to this exercise, you need to track your progress with regard to the key deliverables of the project and the targets that you intend to achieve through the project. Collectively, these define the improved state to which your project aspires.

A project's ***activities*** take place within the context of its ***objectives*** that express a determination to address various facets of a problem or issue. A project may have several objectives whose inter-relationship defines the coherence and order in which a project's activities and outputs address the problem.

From the outset, a project will be given ***targets*** to reach within each objective. These express the desire of the project promoters to achieve a certain Outcome with respect to a particular facet of the problem or issue in question. There may also be an expectation that certain ***results*** will emerge from the achievement of these targets.

These targets guide the delivery of the project in an effort to achieve the objective in question and relate directly to activities that generate outputs some of which will be key deliverables of the project. In turn, all of your key deliverables are outputs.

As the project progresses, ***milestones*** or markers will be passed which help to gauge progress. To gauge this progress, your objectives, activities, targets, milestones and outputs need to be **MEASURABLE** – because if they aren't, you can't track them.

Monitoring tracks your activities over time in relation to **OUTPUTS** and **TARGETS** with respect to:

- The 'key deliverables' of the project
- The 'other deliverables' of the project

But where do I start ?

During the initial design of your project, list your reporting requirements over the life of the project by asking yourself the question:

"*what will I need to report on and what information will I need for these reports* ?"

There are essentially two ways to determine what you will need to report on over the life of the project:

- Meet the requirements of the funding provider
- Meet your own requirements by linking Activities with Outputs with Targets.

The first is relatively straightforward in that the funding provider lists the desired information sought in your regular reports on the progress of the project. The information sought by the funding provider will normally be listed in the funding contract agreed between your organisation and the funding provider. You simply establish a monitoring system tailored to this list.

The second requires you to establish a link between the problem or issue at hand, the project's objectives, the activities undertaken to achieve the objective, the outputs arising from these activities, and the targets.

The fictitious example below illustrates the point………………

Description
Performance Monitoring

Issue

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Major difference in GSCE achievement amongst 17 – 18 yrs old pupils attending the same school but living in different neighbourhoods. This lowers school performance and recent major investment in school infrastructure made no difference to performance of pupils from these neighbourhoods.

Objective

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Reduce the gap in GCSE achievement amongst pupils attending the school from different neighbourhoods by 50% by 2007 and raise overall school GCSE achievement rate by 10% by 2007.

Activities

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Assemble robust information on starting position (the baseline)

Youth Workers deployed to worst performing neighbourhood to conduct barrier-busting activities through introduction of 'Buddying Scheme'.

Research and Monitor barriers to pupil performance and aptitudes.

Closely monitor progress and take corrective action

Parent – Teacher sessions to report progress of pupils in the scheme

Update baseline information to inform evaluation
Secondary data: school GCSE performance data 2000 – 2003

School report on eligibility of pupils from neighbourhoods to sit exams in 2003.

Number of youth workers employed between 2003 and 2006

Caseload per Youth Worker
Hours worked per Youth Worker and total Hours per pupil / family.

Feedback reports from Youth Workers

Barrier assessment per family and pupil

Pupil skills and aptitude assessment in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006

Pupils' eligibility to sit exams in 2007

Pupils' coursework performance assessed

Parent feedback to Youth Worker

Secondary data: school GCSE performance data 2000 – 2007

Target

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Raise the school performance of pupils from poorly performing neighbourhoods year on year between 2004 and 2006 such that the overall GCSE pass rate of these pupils is at least 25% higher than their counterparts in 2003.

The actual Outcomes and actual Impacts are assessed in the later evaluation stage

The monitoring system

To collect this information you'll need to establish a **monitoring system** that collects and collates data and converts it into information**.**

This is easier than it sounds.

For instance, you could ensure that all Youth Workers record pupil / family contact in a daily work log (paper based) with summary information input same day into computer database held in a palm-top computer and downloaded next day into master database held on desk-top computer. Database manager quality-checks data and produces weekly report sent to Project Manager for use in fortnightly meetings with Youth Workers.

That's a system.

Ensure that you know where the information will come from, how it will be collected, who will collect it, and when it will be collected. Remember that there could be cost implications involved in this and these costs need to be incorporated into your project's financial plan.

Also ensure that you're familiar with how the information will be collated, examined and presented in order that it becomes helpful information to those unfamiliar with your project.

You can collect this information in one or both of the following ways:

- From the records kept by your organisation on the day to day activities of the project
- By conducting a survey of people or a target area on a 'before', 'during' and 'after' basis.

Your monitoring activity collects 'data' which comes in two forms:

1. **Volume based:** usually measurements or counts (e.g. sheep in a field) – often regarded as ‘Quantitative Data’
2. **Individual based:** e.g. residents' expressions of satisfaction with a service – often regarded as ‘Qualitative Data’.

(Refer to the Statistics section (Guidance Note 2) for further details).

You should collect this data continuously, from start to finish of the project. But you may choose to collect some information periodically (say, once a month, once a quarter, etc.). The nature of the information sought (e.g. financial) and the use to which it is put usually dictates the frequency with which it will be collected.

Create Indicators for your project

Indicators are an invaluable aid to informing you whether your project is addressing the problem or elements of the problem, and is a handy means by which you can distinguish between different elements of the problem within your project.

Again, the context is your aspiration to change the situation confronting your project and the later evaluation exercise will supplement your monitoring data with additional research.

These indicators need to be created from the outset of the project and will likely be identified within your application for external funding. They collectively sum to a ‘Baseline’ that reports the starting position of your project.

Changes to the baseline that can be attributed to your project reflect both the added value of your project and its additionality which is assessed in the evaluation exercise. Indicators are the principal means by which you attempt to detect this influence.

When creating indicators for your project you need to consider the following points:

1. Does the indicator reflect the intention of the project objective ?
2. Will changes to this indicator capture the expected results of the project ?

Indicators can be divided into 2 categories:

- Key indicators: measure the critical aspects of your project, and,
- Secondary indicators: measure other aspects of your project

Either can be Volume or Individual and both can be Quantitative in nature.

Given that the intention of your project is to redress a problem affecting people and/or a place, it follows that the key indicators relate to the key project objectives.

Typically an indicator brings together 2 or sometimes more datasets to represent a dimension of a problem under consideration.

By way of example……………. adult education course retention rate expresses the level of commitment to adult education courses in a unit that is comparable between geographic areas or groups of people.

The indicator could be…………..

Number of enrolled adults who complete their course per 100 enrollees in 2003.

Two datasets comprise this indicator:

- Number of adults enrolling on education courses in 2003
- Number of ‘completers’

Other people's information – other people’s monitoring

Baseline monitoring often comprises information other than your own where it includes a measure of the broader problem or issue in question. This data is usually a measure of the strategic setting for your project and is often collected by key public sector agencies such as the Government.

This data complements that collected by your own performance monitoring and usually form a vital input to an interpretation of the relative impact that your project has had upon the strategic situation in question.

By way of example, many urban regeneration projects seek to reduce unemployment in a particular geographic area. Your Target may be to heighten the labour market prospects of your beneficiaries and the Result that you seek may be to help arrest the rise in unemployment in the geographic area in question.

Your project’s performance monitoring system will collect data on the intended outcome of training activities (the outputs) upon the beneficiaries in question (raised self-esteem, new qualifications etc.) but you will need to track the overall level of unemployment in the area to place your project’s achievement into its wider context (i.e. the Impact).

Assume here that your project records that each beneficiary has dramatically improved their labour market prospects (an intended outcome) BUT none of them found employment within 6 months of completing the training AND the level of unemployment continued to rise absolutely and relatively within the area in question. In this scenario it is safe to assume that other powerful factors are militating against the effectiveness of your project.

This ‘wider context’ information is often referred to as ‘statistics’ or ‘data’, and is usually obtained from administrative records kept by public sector and major private sector agencies.

Much of this data is ‘Quantitative’ and comes in the form of ‘datasets’ that you obtain from the agency in question. There is a wealth of data available and in the Statistics section we signpost you to many of the sources of this data.

You will find that the following organisations can provide a wealth of information with much of it provided on the internet:

- Local authorities
- Health authorities
- Government Departments
- Office for National Statistics
- Constabularies (Police)
- Learning & Skills Council
- Business Link
- Colleges and Universities

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