

Guidance Note 1

Annex 2 - Evaluating your Project

Evaluation is a process by which you look back at the performance of your project and consider what lessons can be learnt from recent experience.

The principal question that the evaluation exercise should answer is whether your project made a difference, in the following respects:

- # To the place or individuals affected by your project (your intended targets)
- # To the problem or issue at hand (your intended results)

Evaluation is an integral part of your project and must be incorporated into it in the same way as the principal activities that you intend the project to deliver. In this respect, you plan the evaluation exercise when you design your project – hence you know when the evaluation will occur and what it will examine.

You can evaluate your project at an interim stage (usually the 'half-way' point) or following the cessation of the main delivery activities of the project (often mistakenly regarded as the 'end' of the project).

Evaluation is guided by the nature of your project and the approach taken must be 'fit for purpose'. Project promoters intimately familiar with their project will usually 'sense' the type of evaluation exercise that is required. Otherwise, you will need to choose one or more of the evaluation methodologies and techniques to evaluate the effectiveness of the project.

Drivers for the evaluation

One of the first decisions confronting project promoters in planning an exercise is the question of *why you want to do it*. In similar vein to your performance monitoring there are two drivers that will shape your thoughts on the matter:

- # The funding provider tells you to do it
- # You wish to do it for your own reasons

The first driver shapes your thoughts mainly through the prescription given by the funding provider who will agree with your organisation the Results (i.e. anticipated impacts) expected of your project in return for the funding support. The European Union Objective 2 programme is a good example of this with project promoters required to list the expected Results of the project during the application process.

The second requires you to link Project Objectives with Project Targets with Project Results, and to place these within the strategic context of the problem or issue to hand. The evaluation exercise will then reveal the actual Outcomes and Impacts in relation to these objectives.

Your motive in this respect will likely to be the need for your organisation to demonstrate a good track record in addressing the problem with a view to seeking future funding to undertake similar activities elsewhere, or to continue activities in the same area but with other beneficiaries.

The reason for undertaking the evaluation is referred to as the 'focus' and this in turn will help guide the 'style' and 'scope' for the exercise.

Examples of 'focus' (the reason)

- # Financial accountability
- # Attributing success or failure
- # Long term sustainability

Examples of 'style' (the methods chosen)

- # Quantitative, e.g. Value for money
- # Qualitative, e.g. Collect views of all stakeholders

Examples of 'scope' (the extent of the exercise)

- # Time
- # Geography / space
- # Coverage
- # Resources

The focus, style and scope of the evaluation will guide your thoughts on the type of information and data that you will need and the resources needed to get it. In this respect, your monitoring system will deliver some of the data required but you will need to identify the resources needed to collect other data acquired through research.

Continuous or periodic episode ?

Evaluation is a process and not a one-off event; it begins with the selection of the criteria against which you intend to assess the performance of the project and finishes much later with the evaluation exercise.

The exercise itself is a periodic episode in the life-time of your project but through your Performance Monitoring you 'build-up' to this episode such that a body of information has already been collected in readiness for and to complement the research activities of the evaluation.

The evaluation criteria must be chosen when you design your project and these criteria guide the collection of information via your monitoring system and later research.

Therefore, **PLAN** your evaluation well in advance of the time when the exercise itself will take place (a 'plan within a project').

This plan should:

- # Identify and agree all evaluation tasks, responsibilities etc.
- # Identify the information required
- # Set up the procedures for obtaining the necessary information and managing the evaluation
- # Budget

Aspects of evaluation

You should evaluate two aspects of your project;

1. what was achieved,
2. how was it achieved.

You will usually be guided by the following considerations:

- # **Relevance** – did you deal with the problems that were supposed to be addressed ?
- # **Feasibility** – was the project successfully managed ?
- # **Sustainability** – did the take-up of services happen and the flow of benefits continue after the project finished, or did it 'fall-apart' once the funding stopped ?

What information do you need ?

You must assess the effectiveness of your activities in three respects:

- # **Bottom-up** – *the effects of your project upon an individual or an area on a 'before' 'during' and 'after' basis*
- # **Top-down** – *relates to the strategic problem that your project seeks to address as expressed by the condition of a group of individuals or the geographic area in question.*
- # **Process** – *the structures and mechanisms devised to achieve the Outputs, Targets and Results.*

The evaluation exercise brings these elements together whereas your performance monitoring focuses on the 'bottom – up'.

Evaluation framework

You must develop an 'evaluation framework' to lend structure and coherence to your evaluation such that another person can understand it. Typically, this is presented as a table that contains the following information:

- # Your objective
- # The problem being addressed
- # The manifestation of the problem (your starting point)
- # The situation when your activities finish (your end point)

- # The measurable outputs of your activities
- # The measurable targets of the project's outputs
- # The measurable results of the project's outcomes

In depth guidance on evaluation frameworks is provided in the 'How To' guides contained in the Monitoring & Evaluation section.

Methodologies

The 'style' of your evaluation will largely dictate the methodologies employed to undertake the evaluation.

There are many methodologies from which you can choose but they essentially fall into two camps:

- # **Assessment of numbers** – also called the 'quantitative' techniques such as *value for money* in which you examine the cost per activity cross referenced with the same activities undertaken elsewhere ("were *your* activities significantly more expensive to deliver than *theirs* ?")
- # **Assessment of people** – also called the 'qualitative' techniques such as *focus groups* in which you canvass the views of a range of project stakeholders and cross reference the views of a number of groups to arrive at a conclusion (for instance, was there a consensus of opinion ?).

You may of course, mix and match to suit your purposes.

The evaluation report

This is typically the tangible output of the exercise. This report like any other needs to be structured and below we provide an example structure with which to guide your thoughts:

Example structure of an evaluation report

- # **Acknowledgements**
- # **Executive summary**
- # **Introduction**
- # **Purpose**
(Aims and approach, subject of the evaluation, overview of structure of the report).
- # **Initial conditions**
(description of the 'starting point' e.g. location, measure of need relative to other areas/groups)
- # **The Project or Programme**
(description of the rationale of the project or programme)
- # **Outputs, Outcomes and Impact**
(the actual outcomes and impacts of the project arising from its outputs and processes)
- # **Processes and Management**
(the influence of processes and management upon the impacts of the project)
- # **Conclusions and Lessons**
(Impact on target areas and/or groups, impact of expenditures, impact of processes)
- # **Recommendations**
(list of recommendations - easy to read and understand based upon the lessons)
- # **Glossary of terms**
(de-jargonise and inform reader)
- # **Annexes**
(key supporting material for the analysis and conclusions)

You don't need to have all of these elements but should you wish to produce a report that is highly regarded then you should follow the guidelines.

The report is the final output of the evaluation exercise if you have undertaken a Final Evaluation but not so for an Interim Evaluation which may result in the preparation of a corrective action plan to act on the recommendations of the interim report.

For more details and guidance on evaluation, you can visit the Monitoring & Evaluation section.