

Storing evidence

Once you know how you are going to collect evidence about your outcomes [see *Designing evidence collection methods* support guide] it's time to think about how you will **store your evidence**. Make sure you are driven by what you need rather than what any particular fancy system could do!



Things to consider when thinking about storage

What different **kinds of evidence** are we collecting?

eg quotes, attendance numbers, photos, observation notes, questionnaire scores

You will probably collect a range of different types of evidence. Each type may need to be stored in a different way. You also need to make sure that any personally identifiable data is stored securely.

Who is collecting evidence?
When? Where?

eg volunteers, every month, at end of outdoor session

Try to make collecting and storing evidence part of your everyday work. Be careful not to ask too much of people. Think about how you will make sure evidence is stored appropriately.
E.g. who should volunteers give completed questionnaires to and when?

What **resources** do we have?

eg spreadsheet software, staff & volunteer time, money

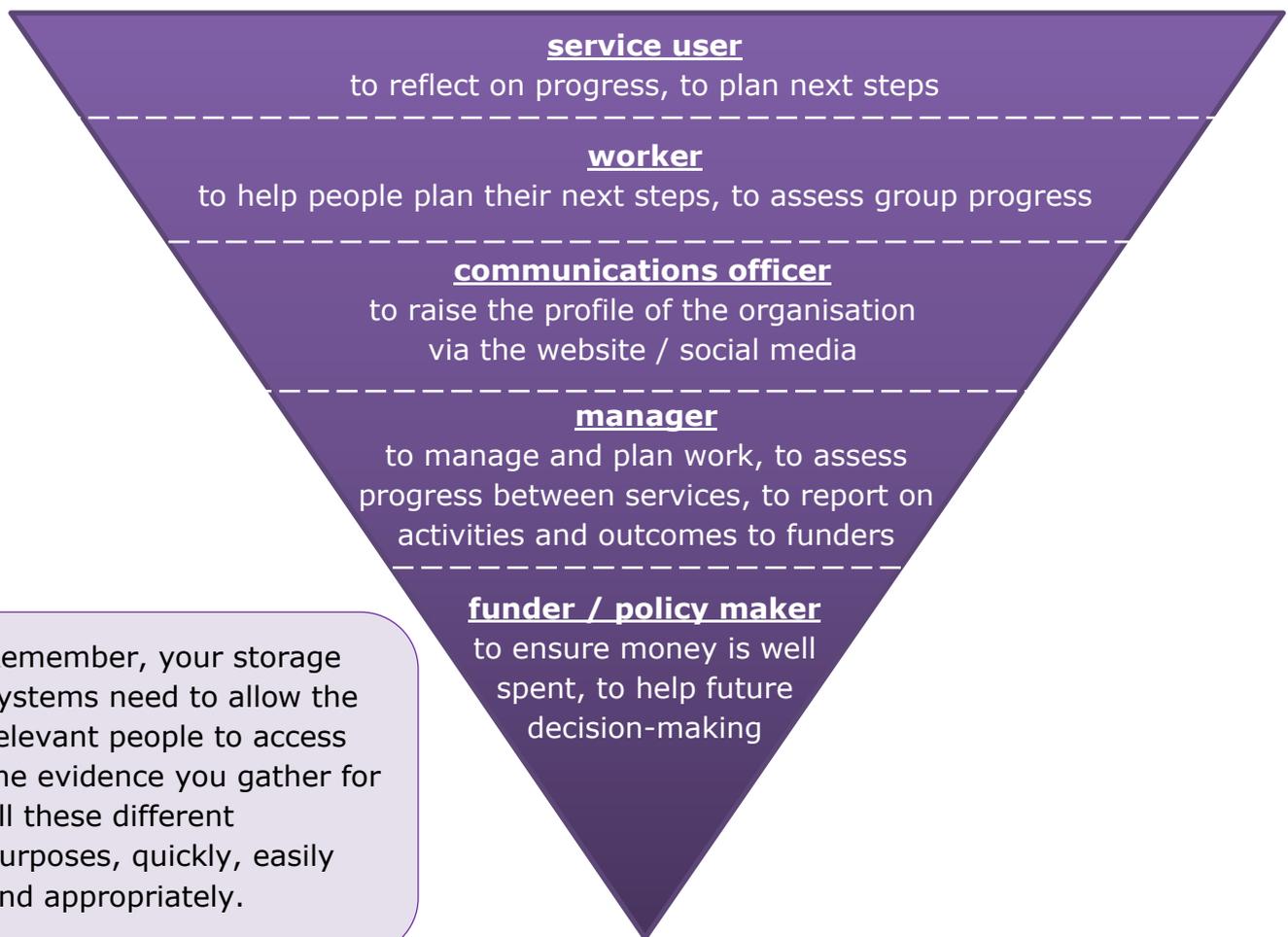
Setting up evidence storage systems may require a lot of resources (especially if you are considering developing a bespoke database). Getting it right can make all the difference when you need to access the evidence – allowing you to tell a more powerful story and saving you time. It's wise to pilot any new data storage system before implementing it more widely. Do think about possible future needs but make sure it serves its purpose now.

Who will be using the evidence?
For what **purpose(s)?**

eg volunteers (client reviews), manager (board reports), fundraiser (funder reports)

Evidence will be needed at all levels of your organisation, but different people may need to use the same information for different purposes. They all need to know how to access it and the system has to work for everyone. Think about whether you need to be able to link evidence collected from the same service user at different times (e.g. to compare how they rate their skills at different times) or whether it's enough to work out the average change for all service users?

Examples of why people at different levels might need information



Remember, your storage systems need to allow the relevant people to access the evidence you gather for all these different purposes, quickly, easily and appropriately.

Ways of storing evidence

Remember you need to keep all the evidence you gather **securely** – especially if it could be used to identify individuals. The way you store and process all personal data *must* comply with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). For more information visit www.ico.com.

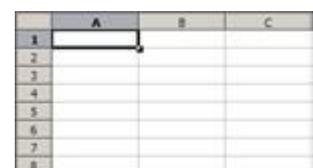
Before you start, make sure you are clear about what you really **need** to be able to store. Just because you can collect certain information, doesn't mean you should. Collecting information you won't use is a waste of time and potentially against the law.

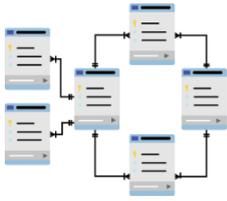
How am I going
to use this
information?

evidence type	storage options	worth knowing....
numerical data e.g. scaled assessments, attendance records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> diary / calendar spreadsheet database paper files 	some ways of gathering data will automatically store it, e.g. Google Forms™ will produce a spreadsheet containing all the responses
photos / videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> computer phone cloud storage online removable media (external hard drive, data pen, CD/DVD) 	you need permission to keep and/or use images of people who can be identified being careful about how you name files and folders can make it much easier to find the ones you want
comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> spreadsheet paper files e-mail database 	putting ad hoc comments in a spreadsheet as you receive them with a note of the context can save time when you want to use them
observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> paper files spreadsheet database 	thinking about who will record observations, where, when and how often will help you decide how best to store them
service user stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> individual files case studies in your head 	it may be that different staff and volunteers know about different service users or about different aspects of their stories – think about how to capture these and choose simple options which work well for those involved in recording them
creative feedback (e.g. body maps, relationship maps)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> physical copies photographs hand written or typed notes 	with many more creative ways of gathering feedback, it is important to check you have understood what the person intends to convey and make sure the person gathering it knows what kind of things need to be recorded in order to make the evidence valuable

Spreadsheet or Database?

Spreadsheets are very good for storing, sorting and calculating relatively simple information. They are quite powerful, much easier to set up than databases and are often an excellent storage option for relatively small projects.





Databases are more sophisticated and can show relationships between different types of data. They can be set up to produce complicated reports routinely, but it can take a lot of time and money to set up the right database for an organisation.

It is a good idea to ask other organisations of a similar size, doing the same kind of work how they store their information.

Evidence storage example

M8: Mates for young people

M8 is a small charity that provides a range of services to help young people having difficulties at home or school become confident adults.



M8's storage choice	what's kept there
spreadsheets <i>work well for numbers, easy to pull out statistics and information about numbers of young people worked with and number of sessions provided, analysis helps to identify potential case studies</i>	young people's periodic ratings of their confidence levels on a scale (start of service, reviews, end of service)
	young people's personal goals – what they are and the extent to which they are achieved
	attendance records - who participates in each service and how often
	exit information – what happens when young people move on from M8
personal files <i>more detailed, accessible to worker and young person for reflection and planning</i>	referral form
	assessments
	personal development plans
	review paperwork
computer files <i>help with service development and reports, analysis shows what influences individuals' progress</i>	notes of group sessions
	staff observations
	creative exercises
	ad hoc feedback (a "hurrah" folder)
	photographs

More help

Our training workshop **Make to Measure** will help you at this stage. To book a place visit the [workshops page](#) of our website.

What next?

Once you have gathered and stored your evidence, you need to be able to analyse it. See our [Analysing information for evaluation](#) support guide.



You can download all our **Evaluation Support Guides** free from our website.

For evaluation help and advice, or if you need a copy of this guide in another format, please get in touch.

info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk www.evaluationsupportcotland.org.uk



[@EvalSupScot](#)

0131 243 2770

Scottish Charity SC036529

You may copy or use this publication in part or whole for non-commercial reasons but you must credit Evaluation Support Scotland.