



Evaluation can help you to work out what difference you are making through your services or activities. **Evaluation Support Guides 1.1** and **2.1** help you to get started. **Support Guides 2.2** to **2.5** look at how to collect information about your outcomes. **Support Guide 3.1** looks at how to analyse the information you collect.

This guide helps you to learn from the information you have collected and analysed. It is useful to think about: what your learning is about, who would find your learning useful and how you can use what you have learnt.

### What is the learning about?

- Practice - the way you work
- Products - the achievements, outputs and outcomes
- Policy - the legal context and wider issues affected
- Programme - the overall strategy or approach to an issue
- Knowledge - research or intelligence
- Culture - the values and behaviours that apply
- Process/system - the nuts and bolts of how things are done or administered
- People - how they feel, know or experience

### Who is the learning useful to and why?

- Service users – will benefit from improved services
- Staff and volunteers – to plan their work
- Managers – to manage work and assess progress
- Sector - other organisations in your field can learn from your work
- Policy makers – your learning can feed into policy decisions
- Funders – to decide who to fund and how to invest
- Society - of interest or benefit to the wider public

### How can you use the learning?

Using your learning can involve either or both:

- communication - such as circulating reports to key stakeholders; publicising your project's impact in journals or talking to policy makers or funders
- organisational development – such as strategic planning events; organising staff or volunteer training; changing internal procedures.

You can use what you have learnt to:

- get better at what you do – like improve services or motivate your staff
- involve and engage service users
- get more funding
- lobby for change – in government policy or local authority practice
- improve wider understanding of what works and why

## Getting better at what you do

You may be able to instinctively use what you learn from evaluation to get better at what you do. For example, a trainer changes the words they use to explain income support to volunteers and therefore gets the message across better. Often there is more formal acknowledgement of learning, as changes or improvements affect how you use resources such as people or money. For example, a team may notice that not many people use a particular service, due to its timing or targeting. They may then change the times the service is available and produce new publicity to tell potential users of the changes and encourage them to use the service.

**Case study:** A local community centre and youth club run IT and other training courses for local community members. A self-evaluation showed that not many participants moved on to other training or employment. This was due to lack of progression within the courses - some people came back to do the beginners course year after year, who weren't really at that level anymore.

**Using the learning:** *they worked with a local college to offer a hierarchy of courses that would encourage movement between courses and develop people's skills beyond the basic.*

## Involving and engaging service users

An evaluation can tell you whether you are attracting a diverse range of service users or how much of a difference you are making for them. You can use the learning from evaluation to involve and engage your service users by:

- highlighting what you can do to help them,
- asking them to work with you to improve or change services or
- revising who you target your services towards.

New users may be attracted or existing service users may be motivated to continue working with you, even when things are difficult or challenging, because they better understand what you do and how you can help.

**Case study:** A mental health charity asked a representative sample of service users to give them feedback on the difference their work had made to them in picture, oral or written format.

**Using the learning:** *they found that the service users got really committed to the process and the response rate was 100%. The material produced showed the organisation's outcomes so vividly they were able to use it to make posters to illustrate their work to put up in places where other potential service users were likely to see them. They also encouraged referral agents to use the stories to tell potential clients about the work.*

## Getting more funding

Evaluations are often used as evidence to support funding applications. Indeed the Big Lottery Fund ask those seeking funding for existing work to submit an

evaluation of it. The evaluation may give evidence of the success of a piece of work or identify reasons why further funds should be provided to develop or improve the work. If an evaluation reveals weaknesses with a piece of work, it does not mean a funder will be unwilling to provide funds. They will look at the analysis and learning an organisation has taken from this activity.

**Case study:** A youth work project, working in several schools in a council area to increase the life skills and confidence of young people, tracked young people's progress through a system of "levels of achievement" they developed themselves. This clearly showed development both to the young people and the schools.

**Using the learning:** *They used the hard evidence of progress they had built up to successfully lobby other council areas to run similar programmes in their schools.*

## Lobbying for change

As you evaluate your work, you may find evidence that you can use to lobby for change. This lobbying may be an express part of your work. However, if it is not, you will need to evaluate the activities used to circulate the information and promote the change.

**Case study:** An advice service, who constantly monitored their case load, noticed an increase in consumer debt enquiries. Further analysis revealed a pattern relating to how the local Council department issued notices of Council Tax arrears following changes in peoples benefit.

**Using the learning:** *They used the statistics and illustrative case studies they produced to lobby the Council to amend their practice and make their letters of notification clearer.*

## Improving understanding of what works and why

Evaluating your work can inform wider understanding of what works and why. This is particularly the case where there is:

- little other evidence to support the benefits of your area of work
- concern over the future funding or support for your type of work

You may work on your own to tell relevant stakeholders about your work or together with others in similar projects or in intermediary or network agencies. Some funders explicitly state they want to use the learning from evaluation to inform wider understanding.

## Working out what you can and will do

**Case study:** A handicraft project working with hospital patients undertook an external evaluation of their service to explore the difference they made to the health and well being of users.

**Using the learning:** they circulated the findings to key stakeholders in public health policy in Scotland, other interested parties in the UK and similar projects internationally, adding to the existing research base on this type of intervention.

Here is a template to help you start to think about your potential next steps. You can look at the questions on your own or with colleagues, other stakeholders or a mentor. This can include different perspectives, which can result in a wider range of possible options.

Who do you need to communicate your learning to?	
What difference do you want using or communicating your learning to make?	
What are the forces helping or hindering you succeeding in using the learning?	
Who needs to be on board?	
What do you need to do to use or apply the learning?	
What are the logical steps involved in getting you there?	
What are the implications for staff, resources, systems and processes?	
How will you know you have succeeded?	
What will you do next?	

If you need advice about evaluation, or would like a copy of this guide in large print, Braille or audio, please contact Evaluation Support Scotland on [info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk](mailto:info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk) or 0131 243 2770. For other Evaluation Support Guides please visit our website: [www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk](http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk)