REPORT

Understanding Intermediaries' Impact event

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The Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Evaluation Support Scotland

Contents

Page 3	Background
	What we did
	What we concluded
Page 4	We propose doing three things
Page 5	What participants thought of the event
Page 6	**Appendix 1:** Key highlights of the report
Page 7	**Appendix two:** Challenges discussed by the tables
Page 10	**Appendix three:** Next steps discussion
Page 12	**Appendix four:** What did people take away from this event?

The purpose of this seminar was to share the findings of a scoping study by Evaluation Support Scotland and to get feedback on the next steps.

The event was attended by 39 people (excluding ESS staff). This included 7 Scottish Government officials and a wide range of third sector intermediary staff.

Background

ESS undertook this scoping study at Scottish government's request. We aimed to gauge appetite for work on how to understand, measure and report on the impact of national third sector intermediaries.

The long term aim would be for intermediary bodies and their stakeholders to be better able to tell the story of the intermediaries role and impact.

What we did

At the seminar we

- ran through the scoping report (see appendix one for highlights, go to www.evaluationsupportscotland for the full report)
- had table discussions about the measurement and stakeholder challenges (see appendix two)
- considered what should happen next - priorities and approach (see appendix three).

What we concluded

There is enthusiasm for taking this work forward and Intermediaries are keen to be involved and consulted. Because of practical constraints, not everyone can be involved in a working group.

Very good getting so many orgs/reps together

We propose doing three things:

1) Produce a resource that explains the range of functions, activities and outcomes of intermediaries and measurement issues. The key audience for this resource would be intermediaries themselves, Scottish Government and other funders.

Any approach has to recognise the diversity of intermediaries and be clear that each case is different. It's useful to think of the resource as a toolkit for discussion between the individual intermediary and their funders.

We already have the makings of such a resource within the scoping report itself and from feedback at this event. It makes sense to us to:

- mock something up
- share, improve and add to with a short life working group (recruited from our existing contact list, third sector and Scottish Government)
- share with the broader group of intermediaries.

The Intermediaries Network (run by SCVO) is an obvious point of contact as an established network who have already started to look at this issue. But we need to ensure that organisations not in the network are also included in our consultations.

2) Share and promote this resource amongst SG and other funders. We can ask the working group and others consulted to come up with ideas for how this might be done.

3) Later on more in depth work around how to measure and report on outcomes. This might be through forums for sharing good practice, learning events or setting up conversational spaces to look at particular challenges. We should build on existing work and resources (for example previous work done by the Intermediaries Network or existing guides such as ESS's "Charting the Waters" guide that looks at evaluating policy influence). We will take stock of how to move forward on this, once the resource has been developed.

What participants thought of the event

(See appendix four for more detail)

Most people said the seminar was good or very good. Key themes were:

Well facilitated

Good discussion / format

Good pace

Excellent!

Very good getting so many organisations and representatives together

5 people made suggestions about improvements

2 people wanted more time

1 person suggested the task was not always clear

2 people suggested a bigger room would have been helpful

Participants said they came away with:

- Understanding the diversity of intermediaries
- Recognising that there are nevertheless common issues
- Increased optimism and increased appetite to work together collaboratively
- Specific bits of learning such as the value of membership.

Appendix one: key highlights of the report

Our definition of a third sector national intermediary:

- A national third sector organisation whose members are other third sector organisations
- whose role (partly or wholly) is to represent and support those members.

Intermediaries are diverse – although there are common functions, intermediaries mix and match them differently and take different roles.

Common functions:

- Representation and policy influencing
- Communication and networking
- Information and support
- Organisational development and capacity building
- Intelligence and evaluation,
- Promoting good practice
- Funding.

Additional functions:

- Run quality schemes
- Fundraising
- Managing and distributing funding.

Common outcomes:

- Increasing third sector/ member effectiveness
- Increased understanding of sector/ people's needs
- Improved policy and practice
- Improved connectedness and collaboration.

These outcomes relate to the people they work directly with (members, policy makers, and funders). It's much harder to show impact on clients and communities.

Wider published evidence has some measurement ideas, but no overall framework.

There is good evaluation practice to share and build upon.

But also some common measurement challenges:

- Staff capacity and skills
- Low member response
- Capturing stories or examples
- Impact on organisational effectiveness / connectedness
- Nebulous outcomes: raising profile / building a movement
- Attribution: especially for policy and connecting.

There are challenges around meeting the different expectations from and within different groups of stakeholders (funders, members and boards).

We concluded one size would not fit all.

Appendix two: Challenges discussed by the tables

Challenge	Is it an important issue?	Specific issues mentioned	Good practice and suggestions
Stakeholders have different expectations about how to measure and report on impact	• Yes high importance and high challenge for most • Some said expectations were reasonable and undemanding • Some said it was getting easier with greater agreement between funders about how to report on impact	• Problems with civil servants taking different approaches • Understanding about what is core funded • Lots of work across govt is unseen by funder department • Having to use approaches designed for delivery organisations • Role of intermediary in representing (whose voice when multiple voices, members or the sector?) • Timescales of reporting: can't show long term outcomes • Funder focused on activities not outcomes • Important to report on learning too!	**Good practice** • CYPEIF: differentiating policy lead from fund management • SG bringing together volunteering bodies to develop common outcomes for volunteering • Built Environment Scotland and others are working on aligning processes for evaluation across funders • Work around harmonising reporting **Suggestions** • Share this report more widely • Develop a set of principles/ guidance for govt officials
Measuring and reporting on increased membership capacity	• Mixed, not all Intermediaries build capacity, not all members want capacity built • Who is paying for it: members vote with their feet. Is that enough?	• Struggle to get a good response rate from members • Capturing evidence of this impact is important to show board, potential funders and wider	**Good practice** • Some organisations have managed to get a good response rate (e.g. VHS) • Good question is 'what would happen or go wrong if we weren't here?

		audience • Hear from the same people all the time	• Get better evidence from events • Sample membership • NCVO have a tool to assess organisational effectiveness https://www.scribd.com/lists/4311421/VIP-Tools https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2013/07/03/six-challenges-for-infrastructure-organisations/
Measuring and reporting on improved policy and practice	• Two outcomes: Policy **and** practice, Policy is more difficult • The way the public interacts with govt is changing. Implications for intermediaries? • Providing channels rather than representing and creating a space for organisations to engage with policy.	• If respond quickly don't have time to develop models and clear outcomes, models have to be flexible • Attribution is an issue • Whose voice, sometimes the intermediary has a view based on greater evidence	**Good practice** • Using a quality standard helps **Suggestions** • Put the focus on when you don't make a difference and what works when you do
Measuring and reporting on increased understanding of sector or peoples' needs	• Yes, but only two tables looked at this issue • Not always funded to do this work, do because gives govt better info to understand need/ demand	• Need to look at issues in the broadest sense, other issues impact eg poverty, social security • Identifying attribution • Identifying needs of non-members • Over reliance on members, evaluation fatigue • Risk of intermediary being disconnected from the community it serves	**Good practice** • Range of support to draw on, media, desk research, collaborators, members, broader connections and communities' of need

Measuring and reporting on improved collaboration	• Mixed responses from tables because some collaboration is easier to evaluate than others. • Intermediaries enable conversations to happen and sharing of perspectives • Spectrum of loose connections at one end to formal partnership at the other. Formal partnership is easier to evaluate, clearer purpose and expected outcomes	• Collaboration is both a process and an outcome. There is a 'so what?' about it, decided it should be an outcome because its beneficial in its own • You don't know what's going to lead to what? (both in terms of activity and outcomes) • It can take a long time to build connections? Therefore more difficult to measure. • What's good enough return on investment and how do you measure that? • How do you measure the risk of not being there?	**Good practice** Joint reports to Scottish Government work if right systems and processes in place. (no specific example given) Need time to build trust Bringing specialism together can really add value

Appendix three: Next steps discussion

Participants were asked to say which of the following is the priority and to share the best approach

1. **Identify the range of intermediary functions and outcomes**
2. **Clarify with government what is needed and possible**
3. Explore or give specific support around specific issues: policy influence, collaboration, org effectiveness, other
4. Develop resources and guidance
5. Other?

The **first two** came out as being the top priority.

There was some appetite for sharing good practice and approaches across intermediaries, but a sense that we needed to clarify functions outcomes and expectations first.

It was suggested that it might be good to issue a good practice guide or set of principles for civil servants (and other funders), this might include:

- What is an intermediary (what they do, role, value bring)
- Intermediary outcomes
- What you can expect (the need to be flexible to allow intermediaries to respond to need/ changing context, etc)
- What you can't do (force things on their members, change their constitution, compromise their independence)
- Reporting arrangements: clarifying what is good enough evaluation and evidence, possibly an exploration of different funding models – e.g. reporting is different for a core function as opposed to a specific project.

It might also include tools for conversations between officials and intermediaries.

Approach

They key theme here was that everyone should be consulted, but not everyone could realistically be involved in working group or learning set. The SCVO Intermediaries Network is a good starting point for sharing and consulting with people, but does not currently include all intermediaries.

Some groups felt that we already had the makings of a simple guide within the Scoping report. There might also be other work that we could draw upon for example previous work through the Intermediaries Network or relevant guides produced by ESS or others).

We will be guided by the following Do's and Don'ts identified in groups.

Do's

- Carry on being inclusive and co-designing
- Be clear that this is an area the intermediaries themselves see as important (it's not just for government).
- Consult all intermediaries: give plenty of notice and consider timing
- Link with Intermediaries Network (but also go beyond intermediaries network and those funded by SG)
- Consider how the environment affects activities and outcomes
- Keep it simple and concise (report commended for its simplicity)
- Consider different timescales: short and long term outcomes
- Recognise that one size does not fit all
- Take a menu approach: so people can mix and match to reflect their approaches and functions
- Be proportionate and realistic
- Be authoritative: so funders take it into account
- Scope what is already out there: e.g. charting the waters (policy influence) and previous work shared through the Intermediaries' Network
- Explore with SG what they are looking for
- Engage across govt and other funders on value/ role of the intermediary

Don'ts

- Create a single framework that everyone has to use
- Over promise and under deliver
- Create a cottage industry
- Expect miracles
- Expect technology to solve everything (E.G knowledge hub)
- Forget the context in which intermediaries are working (be proportionate)

Appendix four: What did people take away from this event?

Two key themes came out of this feedback:

Understanding the diversity of intermediaries

Recognising that there are common issues

"There are shared issues but a lot of differences"

"The difference in scale, resources and understanding of intermediaries."

"That this is a shared challenge. Not specific to a handful of organisations."

A number of people also said they had increased optimism and increased appetite to work together collaboratively.

"Appetite for sharing. Possibilities of better understanding of intermediary role."

"Optimistic that there will be a greater understanding of the role of intermediaries + a willingness to work together."

A couple of people mentioned specific bits of learning such as recognising that some people were already evaluating well and the value of membership.

"Reflection on our membership and the value they place upon us as an intermediary and the benefits + enablement our members bring."

How would you like to be involved?

Most participants expressed a desire to be kept informed and consulted. There was a spectrum, with some wanting more light touch involvement, some being happy to share their experiences, others expressing a desire to be part of any working group. Time and commitment seemed to be a key factor. A couple of people mentioned the SCVO Intermediaries Network as a forum for keeping them informed.