



Leadership in evaluation enquiry report

Introduction

ESS encourages third sector organisations to embed evaluation across the whole of an organisation. In the past few years, we have produced a guide – [Making it stick](#) and created an [embedding wheel tool](#). We've delivered a [Making it stick webinar](#) and created [case studies](#) in partnership with third sector organisations (TSOs). We have embedded the principles into our workshops and tailored support.

We have become aware that to embed evaluation successfully often requires a leader of evaluation in an organisation. Between September and December 2020, we are exploring what leadership in evaluation looks like, and what is required to make a successful leader in evaluation. By the end of this process we will have some ideas of how ESS can support leaders in evaluation in third sector organisations.

Methodology

The questions we set out to ask were:

- What do we mean by leadership in evaluation?
- What characteristics, skills and knowledge do leaders in evaluation require to be leaders in their organisation?
- What support do leaders in evaluation need?
- What support can Evaluation Support Scotland deliver to leaders in evaluation?

What we did

Our learning enquiry consisted of the following stages:

1. An analysis of a presentation from an ESS service user to extract some initial thoughts about characteristics, skills and knowledge of successful leadership in evaluation.
2. The results of the analysis informed the next stage of interview planning and questions.
3. ESS delivery staff were interviewed in September 2020 via Zoom.
4. ESS staff interviews were analysed and resulted in the production of a fictitious person specification for a leader in evaluation, potential leaders in evaluation to approach to interview and interview questions.
5. First round of analysis was completed to inform an interview schedule for external interviewees. An initial report was written.

6. Five interviews with identified leaders in evaluation were undertaken on Zoom during November and December 2020.

Interviewees

Interviewees were a mix of managers leading evaluation, senior managers responsible for evaluation, and those with evaluation in their job titles. They were all identified by ESS staff as leaders in evaluation. Some were aware that they were leaders in evaluation whilst others identified themselves as leaders during the process of the interview.

"I am a leader [in evaluation], but I didn't think about it before. But its more than me – it's the whole team."

Some were more hands on with evaluation than others and did evaluation themselves whilst others advised and managed others to evaluate. However, throughout the interviews all demonstrated many of the elements of the job description.

Findings from leaders in evaluation interviewees

- **Overall impressions of person specification**

All interviewees thought the job description covered everything needed for someone who leads evaluation. All but one person said they could not identify any gaps. One person said there was a gap in not recognising that evaluation takes time and resources (by resources they meant 'staff capacity'). That someone leading evaluation should be aware that without time and resources staff cannot evaluate their work.

"It is a thorough overview of the ideal. However when capacity is an issue you may not be able to do all of this....being practical and pragmatic are also important."

Some interviewees commented that the structure of the list needed tweaking and prioritising. There was some repetitiveness and a mix of skills and characteristics. They suggested that the characteristics were embedded within the skills and may not need to be listed independently.

Interviewees commented that the list is an 'ideal' but perhaps not realistic. You don't need to be able to do everything on the list to lead evaluation and the list may be overwhelming. If you can do a few, you can learn and practice the others, and get better at leading evaluation. One person commented that perhaps a leader may look at the list in terms of strengths within a team.

"If you have 2 or 3 skills on the list you can build and practice the others. These are all things that can be learnt."

- **Uses for person specification**

Interviewees thought the job description would be useful to share with a partner or potential funder.

"It would help them understand what evaluation is for and not just a random way of working. You need real skills, not just to be good at numbers and data but you need to think holistically, practically and pragmatically."

One interviewee thought she would use some of the list as a training tool. She said she could invite project leads to consider the list to identify what they could start working towards and what might need more practice. She said she would have to think carefully how to use and share the list as it may be overwhelming as it is now (a complete list), but she may take elements to use as discussion starters.

I have used this information and what interviewees said about their order of priorities to amend the list which appears later in this report under recommendations.

Exploration of themes

The following is a summary of the interview discussions categorised within themes whilst commenting on prioritising the list.

- **Buy-in – motivating staff, creating a culture of evaluation, connecting with teams**

Buy-in was mentioned by all the interviewees as necessary but challenging. They need to create a culture where staff and volunteers think about evaluation in all that they do. They need to get buy-in from all those collecting evaluation data, and who are part of the process e.g. inputting data into database. One interviewee talked about the need for staff to record information accurately and use appropriate evaluation methods. It is also very important to get buy-in from senior management as this sets the tone for frontline workers.

One interviewee mentioned the need for trustees to be supportive. To be supportive they needed to understand evaluation which would lead them to sanction the resources needed. CEOs should lead this, acting as a champion for the staff.

Sometimes it is a challenge to get staff to **see the importance of evaluation**. It is important that leaders are enthusiastic, realistic about staff capacity, can confidently communicate and really understand the work and what drives staff.

Using examples *"really enables people to see the value of evaluation and so they develop evaluation themselves. It brings it to life."*

"I make it achievable and manageable to ensure that staff engage and understand how to implement evaluation for themselves."

"You need others' involvement to be meaningful. You have to spread what's joyful about evaluation. When it comes to reporting it is firm and meaningful. Voices are heard which creates change. Evaluation can change the world, but you need to enthuse people."



Practice example:

1. One interviewee who was not a frontline worker, overcame buy-in issues by taking time to shadow frontline project workers to get to understand what they did on a day-to-day basis and to find out what evaluation methods would fit into the work without too much drain on staff time.

"You need to make an effort to understand the work of your staff and be willing to listen to staff who are doing the day-to-day work."

One interviewee talked about buy-in as a 'huge' part because evaluation does create more work for staff but the fact that they could demonstrate "a massive difference to the organisation's learning and funding" has won staff over and staff now accept that evaluation is "what we do including new staff". Also seeing the value of evaluation i.e. funding applications being more successful has helped with buy-in.



Practice example:

2. *"It was hard to get buy-in from the team and there was some resistance but when they were shown what can happen as a result of evaluation, they were won over. We continue to review things and we are not scared to change things."*

"I overcame this challenge by sharing the results and communicating with the team. I brought in key people from the start to shape how the evaluation looked and where it fitted."

3. Another interviewee *"kept people on the journey by inviting them to create action plans"*. This had made a difference as it started from the beginning of a project at application stage. She also mentioned that having an attitude of 'we're all learning together and that she wasn't the expert' also helped get buy-in.

• Communications – linked to buy-in sharing findings

Communication was closely linked to getting buy-in. Interviewees talked about the importance of demonstrating the benefits of evaluation through communicating the evaluation findings both internally and externally. Some staff they found were 'naturally averse' to evaluation and switched off when talking about evaluation however when they were shown the benefits from using the evaluation results, they got more buy-in. Spending time with staff to explain the value and benefits of evaluation is important.



Practice examples:

1. A member of staff in a pilot project was more averse than others in the team but on seeing the results of evaluation they began to participate in the evaluation fully and became the most enthusiastic evaluation team member.
2. One interviewee said she had asked for a slot in the organisation's monthly team meeting to talk about the importance of evaluation. Using the evaluation results from the first project – an event. She showed the insight of their event audience which then were used to shape the second event. She said,

"Communication is key and giving examples at the right moment."

3. Communicating evaluation results with the whole organisation and externally were very important too. Having regular meetings with project teams to check in about the progress of evaluation, with senior management to encourage a culture of evaluation, and with communications teams to ensure the results are communicated regularly.

"You need to be aware that evaluation takes place over a time. I need to prompt delivery managers about the next stage of evaluation - what is needed and when to trigger involvement in evaluation again. You need clear timelines or else it can be forgotten."

4. *"We want to tell the wider third sector about the difference we are making and use our evaluation results to do this. We are recruiting a communications officer to tell people about good news stories and case studies. We need to use social media and press releases to tell people what we do and how well we do it. We need to upskill our staff to identify good news stories."*

One interviewee talked about how they facilitated learning events to external audiences (in this case to local authorities and Scottish Government) as a way of communicating results and giving people the opportunity to learn from evaluation results.

A challenge for some were getting opportunities to 'shout about evaluation' whether internally or externally. One person commented that

"We talk more about the results than how we got there."

They thought to overcome this they needed to take ownership of the results and make/use more opportunities to talk with confidence and authority such as team meetings.

- **Working with others across the organisation**

Your role can be important when it comes to encouraging a culture of evaluation across the organisation. But you may need to get support from senior managers.

Some interviewees had help from others to get their evaluation message to all parts of their organisation because their role prevented them from doing this themselves. It is important to identify others who can support your success.

"Getting senior management on board helps as they can communicate what you as a leader can offer and mention you to other parts of the organisation – reaching staff that you can't."



Practice example:

One interviewee works in a large organisation that has an internal team responsible for change management and organisational improvement. So, they built a working relationship with one of that internal team as a route to supporting evaluation across the whole organisation.

During meetings with the corporate team the manager would feed in evaluation expertise.

"It's important to utilise others to support one another to success."

1. The same interviewee worked with a communications specialist within the organisation to support her messaging for internal and external audiences.

"We have a communication plan to share evaluation findings quarterly. We also have a two weekly bulletin and managers' meeting every two months where I can feed lessons and findings in and we produce a quarterly business brief which goes to everyone in the organisation."

2. One interviewee noticed that now in management meetings two other managers talk about evaluation unsolicited whereas previously she was the only one who would bring evaluation into discussions.

- **Identifying and solving capacity and time issues**

Time and structure were commonly talked about as challenges to successful evaluation. Sometimes this was a challenge for the leader in evaluation if evaluation was a 'minor part' of their role. Time was also a challenge for staff doing evaluation. In one case this was resolved by creating a volunteer 'evaluation role'.



Practice example:

"Time has been an issue for staff. Therefore, we created a designated role for an evaluation volunteer who inputs all our evaluation data. This gives a focus on evaluation and it has really worked."

Another interviewee pointed out that evaluation 'goes on at a higher level i.e. strategic level and this takes time and staff capacity. Leaders of evaluation should be mindful of this. One interviewee talked about the challenge of knowing where evaluation data is and should recognise that it may be hidden. It is sometimes in staff member's heads. So a leader has to recognise the need to put structures in place to encourage staff to record evaluation data in some format whether written or video.

- **Being adaptive, flexible and innovative but proportionate and use an appropriate evaluation tool and method**

"Being adaptive and flexible is needed. You have to make evaluation fit and work with staff and projects."

One interviewee commented that what helped her was having an evaluation framework but that she needed to be flexible within that framework. Different methods were needed for different projects.

"I need to explore a variety of evaluation routes."

"You may need to change your approach when things are not working well."

Another interviewee talked about the challenge of staff wanting to be told of a full proof way of evaluating.

"I've learnt that not one size fits all but this is challenging for staff who want to be told - do this and it will work. There's not one thing that works for everything."

One interviewee talked about leaders not just motivating staff to do evaluation but the need to make sure staff do evaluation 'correctly' i.e. if geographical information is important to evaluating the reach of your services then this information needs to be recorded in a way that is useful to you.

Having an effective tool was important. This often gave a structure to the evaluation. But one interviewee emphasised the need to review the process regularly (in their case annually) to make sure that the tool and structure was still working. They had tweaked their evaluation processes a few times. They were rolling out their tool for other services, but adaptations were needed.

"Adapt a tool if necessary" was their advice.

Interviewees talked about the importance of proportionality and the need to change the approach to each project. Different projects may have a different expectation of type and quantity of feedback from service users. There may be different funder requirements and levels of funding.

"Being adaptive and reactive is important".

- **Managing funder relationships**

The point about 'funders wanting honesty' caused the most contention. Interviewees were mainly sceptical about this but not all. Some questioned whether funders really want the truth and whether third sector organisations can really tell them the truth if they are frightened that their funding will be cut. This was especially a challenge for project staff.

One interviewee said that leaders have a role in:

- Challenging funders appropriately and be solution focused when you do.
- To be honest with funders if you think that what they are asking for is not proportionate or is not the 'right' question.
- As a leader *"you've got to give staff permission to say they've failed and why"*. Leaders need to support staff and convince them to be honest about reporting. That this is the right thing to do and not be afraid.
- Without funders an organisation cannot learn. Funders want to collect learning. As a leader *"I need to relay that message"*. *"However, it is harder if it's a big funder who is funding a project for a long time – people worry about giving the wrong impression."*



Practice example:

1. *"When I came into post I inherited a project that had been funded to do some very difficult to achieve activities. All the project staff had moved on. I had to have a discussion with the funder about why this project wasn't working. The funder was very supportive."*
2. A funder recently asked for feedback about the evaluation data they were asking third sector organisations to supply. This interviewee was able to comment about streamlining their process and changing the format to save the organisation's time and resources.

One interviewee asked what funders do with the information supplied to them by third sector organisations. They felt that funders should be doing more to turn third sector feedback into impact reports.

However, some interviewees talked about how funders who give feedback can be a good motivator for staff. It can show staff the connection between evaluation and funding which can encourage more buy-in to evaluation.

One interviewee acknowledged the support that their funder had given them in seeking evaluation support which had made a huge difference to them.

"Key support and guidance from a funder is important and influential. It's important that funders guided me, without their recommendation [to ESS] I wouldn't have known where to start [with evaluation]."

- **Power issues/ Being confident**

There was some discussion about the word 'confidence' as some interviewees questioned their confidence levels although they acknowledged that others probably saw them as confident. One person thought that other skills helped her such as working with integrity and values.

One interviewee talked about the necessity of a leader not to be 'all knowing' but have the ability to work through challenges with others to find a joint solution. They thought that it was important to influence and empower others in evaluation, to let it go at the right time and not to hold on to 'power'. In fact, they thought that if one person was seen to have all the knowledge and power that this was detrimental in getting staff on board with evaluation. *"Others will be deskilled or lack confidence that they can do it."*

A leader should see the strengths in team members and encourage them to use them.

Support for leaders in evaluation

Non-ESS

Organisation

- Senior management in your organisation prioritise evaluation, allocate staff time to evaluation, that they have an expectation that evaluation is done well, and learning is captured.
- Support from senior management to keep the message going and have opportunities to keep getting the message out.
- Having an evaluation plan from the beginning of a project.

Funders

- Funding applications expecting an evaluation budget to be shown. For staff time and training in self-evaluation. This helps get staff on board and be accountable, as they see this is a funder's requirement.
- Funders supporting evaluation through ESS's Evaluation Support Accounts
"If a funder hadn't recommended me to ESS this may have been a very different story."

Resources

- Cash (e.g. for a nice looking design for annual report)
- Identification of resources

Other

- Bench-marking – seeing what others are doing and how.

ESS

- ESS Let's Evaluate! workshop
Some participants have done all of these but now want to know **how to get others to evaluate.**
- Workshop about best to implement evaluation
- Workshop or peer event to learn from others who are leading evaluation about how to embed evaluation. Needs to be pragmatic, practical support at organisational level to make change.
- ESS resources
- Support needed to find new ways of reporting – presenting data and information in an attractive way.
- Webinars

- Peer Learning events.
- Peer network to learn from each other and share best practice in 'sharing your evaluation'.
- Opportunities to reflect
- Facilitated learning
- Matching pairs/threes to meet up of people in similar roles and stages to share their learning. *"Often challenges are about relationships so people may not want to talk about these more publicly."*
- *"This job description would have been really useful when I came into post!"*
- Support for trustees to understand evaluation and their role.
- ESS should work with leaders to help them respond to new evaluation challenges e.g. digital evaluation"

Key messages

1. Use the leader in evaluation person specification as a resource, in a way that is helpful for you and your organisation.
2. Evaluation can make a huge difference to your organisation and its service users, but you need to enthuse people. Buy-in is very important so find ways like using your evaluation findings to show the value of evaluation.
3. Communication is key – to frontline staff doing the evaluation and senior management and trustees who can support a culture of evaluation in your organisation.
4. Find significant people in your organisation to help make sure the results of evaluation are used (and so colleagues see it's worthwhile). This could include the communications team who can tell the difference your organisation is making to an internal and external audience; fundraisers who can use evaluation for making the case for funding; or managers who can use evaluation to make services even better.
5. Find ways to make evaluation valued but not resource intensive. Work with frontline staff to understand their work and work in partnership to find evaluation solutions.
6. Regularly view and revise your evaluation methods and processes. Nobody gets everything 'right' the first time they try.
7. Share your knowledge and skills to empower others and instil confidence.
8. Keep talking about your evaluation results and the way you got there!

Recommendations

Changes to the person specification

Changes need to the person specification were to add an introduction, suggestions for use, change order of some points and some wording.

Introduction

The following list is a result of research into what makes a leader of evaluation. Third sector leaders in evaluation were consulted. The list attempts to list skills and attributes that will help make you a leader in evaluation and is presented as a person specification. However, this does not mean that you must have all these skills and attributes. The list can be seen as a box of ingredients or toolkit that in different combinations and different amounts will help you lead in evaluation in a variety of situations.

This list may be used in, whole or in part, as a starter to discussions with a funder, a partner and staff you are working doing the evaluation. If looking at the complete list it may be helpful to think about the list as in terms of strengths within your team. It can be used if you are recruiting an evaluation role.

Person specification of a leader in evaluation (revised)

1. You are enthusiastic about evaluation and can speak with integrity and confidence about evaluation. You understand the value and need to evaluate and its importance.
2. You motivate and enthuse others. You willingly involve others. You communicate and listen to others. You know the importance of giving feedback to encourage fellow workers to be involved in evaluation.
3. You understand that funders want honest reporting. As a leader you support others to be honest and encourage staff not to be afraid to learn from problems e.g. where things have not gone to plan. You challenge funders appropriately if they are not asking the 'right' questions or are not being proportionate. You offer solutions to funders.
4. You ensure evaluation results are used. You involve people in a communications role in your organisation who communicate the results of evaluation well.
5. You can facilitate and get the best from others. You empower others in good practice. It is important to be able to facilitate conversations so that those who are closest to the work are able to think about their evaluation needs.
6. You do not expect to find an 'off the peg' evaluation solution or be given the 'right' answer but are willing to be flexible and seek new ideas and adapt them for use in your organisation.
7. You are well organised and can project manage. You plan, prioritise and support others to plan. You delegate evaluation tasks and know the strengths of your colleagues. You do not look for perfection and you don't ask for the impossible. (You don't let perfect get in the way of excellence).
8. You take responsibility for making evaluation a priority in your organisation and see where the implications are. Unprompted, you bring evaluation into the agenda and can put it in context for your organisation. You have the ability to crosscut your organisation or work with others who can support you to do so.
9. As a leader in evaluation, you show the way in your organisation and encourage other people to evaluate. You spot difficulties and find ways to resolve them. You use evaluation evidence in a demonstrable way, saying "we're on the wrong path, it's ok to change this...." You lead by using evaluation in a demonstrable way. You show commitment by showing others the way you use information from evaluation.
10. You are committed to a culture of learning and reflection. You see the 'bigger picture' and see how evaluation will help achieve your organisation's strategic plan. You see evaluation as needed for your organisation's improvement and not just to report to your funders.
11. You identify where evaluation fits within your organisation. You are connected to and understand the frontline work but are not necessarily doing frontline work. You have some knowledge and evaluation skills, and identify when you don't, and you know when to seek support.
12. You are curious, you ask questions and want to know how your organisation can improve. You ask the 'tricky' questions. You will challenge people when necessary. You do not see evaluation as a tick box exercise but a way to improve and learn.
13. You know what evaluation looks like. You can explain jargon in a non-jargon way and what proportionate means in terms of evaluation.
14. You are aware that evaluation takes time and resources. You offer support to those evaluating to manage to take the time necessary and make senior management aware and ensure this is taken into account when work planning.

**Jane Marryat,
Evaluation Support Scotland**

January 2021

Appendix 1

Interview questions for TSO leaders in evaluation

Are you happy for me to record the interview just for note taking purposes?

1. Please tell me a bit about your organisation and your evaluation journey so far.
2. We have written a fictitious person specification for a leader in evaluation. We think these are the most important things that you need to do to lead. Do you agree? Are there any missing? Which do you think is the most important/used most?
3. We think you have a role in leading evaluation in your organisation, do you recognise that?
4. Thinking about how you lead evaluation which of the following do you do? Which don't you do? Which do you do most?
5. What are the challenges? What's been your biggest challenge?
6. How do you overcome them?
7. What makes it easier?
8. What support would help/would have helped?
9. What support could ESS offer you now or in the past?
10. Would you be a case study?

Appendix 2

Person specification of a leader in evaluation

1. As a leader of evaluation, you show the way in your organisation and encourage other people to evaluate. You spot difficulties and find ways to resolve them. You use evaluation evidence in a demonstrable way, saying "we're on the wrong path, it's ok to change this...." You lead by using evaluation in a demonstrable way. You show commitment by showing others the way you use information from evaluation.
2. You are committed to a culture of learning and reflection. You see the 'bigger picture' and see how evaluation will help achieve your organisation's strategic plan. You see evaluation as needed for your organisation's improvement and not just to report to your funders.
3. You are enthusiastic about evaluation and can speak with authority and confidence about evaluation. You understand the value and need to evaluate and its importance.
4. You take responsibility for making evaluation a priority in your organisation and see where the implications are. Unprompted, you bring evaluation into the agenda and can put it in context for your organisation. You have ability to crosscut your organisation.
5. You identify where evaluation fits within your organisation. You are connected to and understand the frontline work but are not necessarily doing frontline work. You have some knowledge and evaluation skills, but you are proactive in seeking support.
6. You do not expect to find an 'off the peg' evaluation solution or be given the 'right' answer but are willing to seek new ideas and adapt them for use in your organisation.
7. You are curious, you ask questions and want to know how your organisation can improve. You ask the 'tricky' questions. You do not see evaluation as a tick box exercise but a way to improve and learn.
8. You motivate and enthuse others. You willingly involve others. You communicate and listen to others. You know the importance of giving feedback to encourage fellow workers to be involved in evaluation.

9. You are well organised and can project manage. You plan, prioritise and support others to plan. You delegate evaluation tasks and know the strengths of your colleagues. You don't ask for the impossible.
10. You know what evaluation looks like. You understand the jargon and what proportionate means in terms of evaluation.
11. You understand that funders want honest reporting and are not afraid to be honest and admit where things have not gone to plan.
12. You can facilitate and get the best from others. You know what good practice is and encourage others to meet your standards.
13. You ensure evaluation results are used. You involve people in a communications role in your organisation who communicate the results of evaluation well.
14. Other characteristics that you have are:
 - Confidence
 - Persistence
 - Pragmatism
 - You are not a perfectionist. (You don't let perfect get in the way of excellence)

You are unlikely to have all these skills and attributes. You don't necessarily need to have all these skills to be a good leader in evaluation, but a mix will be helpful.

Appendix 3

Interviewees:

ESS staff:

Steven Marwick
 Diane Kennedy
 Nicola Swan
 Martha Lester-Cribb
 Grace Robertson
 Shona Wells

Leaders in evaluation:

Elidh Brown, TSI Moray
 Alan Davidson, Bridge Community Project
 Lesley Kelly, Midlothian TSI
 Ruth McKenna, Waverley Care
 Lauren Salmon, Changeworks

You can download ESS resources free from our website.

For evaluation help and advice, 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.