

## Our mission

Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) works with the third sector and funders so that they can measure and explain their impact and use learning to improve practice and inform policy.

## In 8 simple words

We help charities demonstrate the difference they make.

## Our vision

Our vision is a Scotland in which services and activities are designed and improved using evidence from the people they serve.

## ESS principles for good evaluation

ESS is clear that there is no absolute standard for self-evaluation. What is good enough depends on what evaluation is needed for, service user needs and practical considerations like time and resource.

However there are principles for good evaluation. These are set out below and distil our 18 years' of experience. They will guide our work 2023-28.



### **About what matters**

Tells you what difference you make and how you make it.



### **Fits the way you do your work**

Tools are proportionate, accessible and built naturally into delivery.



### **Involves the people you support**

People are able to give feedback and know what you do with it.  
They can reflect for themselves on progress and feel included.  
They can lead on some aspect of evaluation if they want to.  
Evaluation does no harm.



### **Used by you**

To understand the value of our work, to celebrate, to improve and for planning.



### **Communicated well to others**

Funders, policy makers, and other stakeholders are convinced and able to use your evaluation to take action themselves

## **Need for ESS**

The pandemic reinforced our good evaluation principles and showed the third sector wants to use evaluation to:

- Celebrate **success**
- Check they are delivering the **right activities** in the right way
- Find out what to keep doing or stop doing **in future**
- **Share** learning with others

We know from [our](#) evaluation and consultation, including our [2022 stakeholder survey](#), that ESS is still needed to build **technical** evaluation knowledge and skills. This is particularly true for new organisations, people new to the sector and new funders.

Others are now familiar with the basics of outcome-focused evaluation. They need help with **adaptive** challenges such as getting staff and trustees on board with evaluation, ensuring that evaluation is useful and used, and how to judge whether evaluation or evidence is “good enough”.

## **ESS roles**

ESS is the expert voice on third sector evaluation in Scotland.

What that means is we:

1. Train and support third sector organisations and funders to do evaluation in a straightforward way<sup>1</sup>.
2. Provide solutions to evaluation challenges.
3. Influence evaluation and learning practice by championing what “good” looks like and sharing third sector experience.
4. Broker learning relationships between funded and funders.
5. Facilitate the use of third sector evaluation for learning and improvement in third sector organisations and in wider policy.
6. Strengthen third sector research practice.

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<sup>1</sup> We don't carry out external evaluations. We don't independently collect data from an organisation's service users or make our own judgements of an organisation's impact.

## **ESS outcomes – the difference we want to make**

Third sector and funders are better able to ...

- Evaluate\*
- build evaluation into their work
- use evaluation evidence
- support others on evaluation

*So that...*

Third sector and funders use their evaluation to...

- improve their work
- better explain their impact to others

*And ...*

Decision-makers are better able to...

- use evidence from third sector evaluation

*\*evaluate what matters*

## **Our learning priorities**

During the course of this strategy we want to learn more about:

1. How third sector and funders use the ESS evaluation principles to get their evaluation as good as it needs to be for them.
2. How third sector and funders can use evidence effectively.
3. How to do evaluation in a way that is equal, diverse and inclusive.
4. What the barriers and enablers are to effective third sector research.
5. What are the conditions that enable the public sector to be receptive to third sector evaluation and learning.

We'll gather and share this learning as we deliver our work.

## How we work

1. We are accessible. We use plain English. We are friendly. We work in a way that meets the different needs and abilities of people and organisations.
2. We work collaboratively with organisations, combining their expertise with ours to generate evaluation approaches they can own, develop and run with.
3. We use different and creative ways to engage people in evaluation. We promote a wide range of evaluation tools.
4. We are a centre of expertise on self-evaluation in the third sector and we share what we know.
5. We work in positive partnership with others, sharing our learning and adding value to the expertise of others. We provide effective platforms to share evaluation evidence.
6. We promote a culture of learning within ESS. We seek feedback from everyone we work with so we learn from our successes and weaknesses and get better at what we do.
7. ESS is a good place to work. We support and develop our staff and trustees so that they can fulfil their roles and feel valued.

## Funding evaluation support

We enable the third sector to access the support they need at minimal cost by

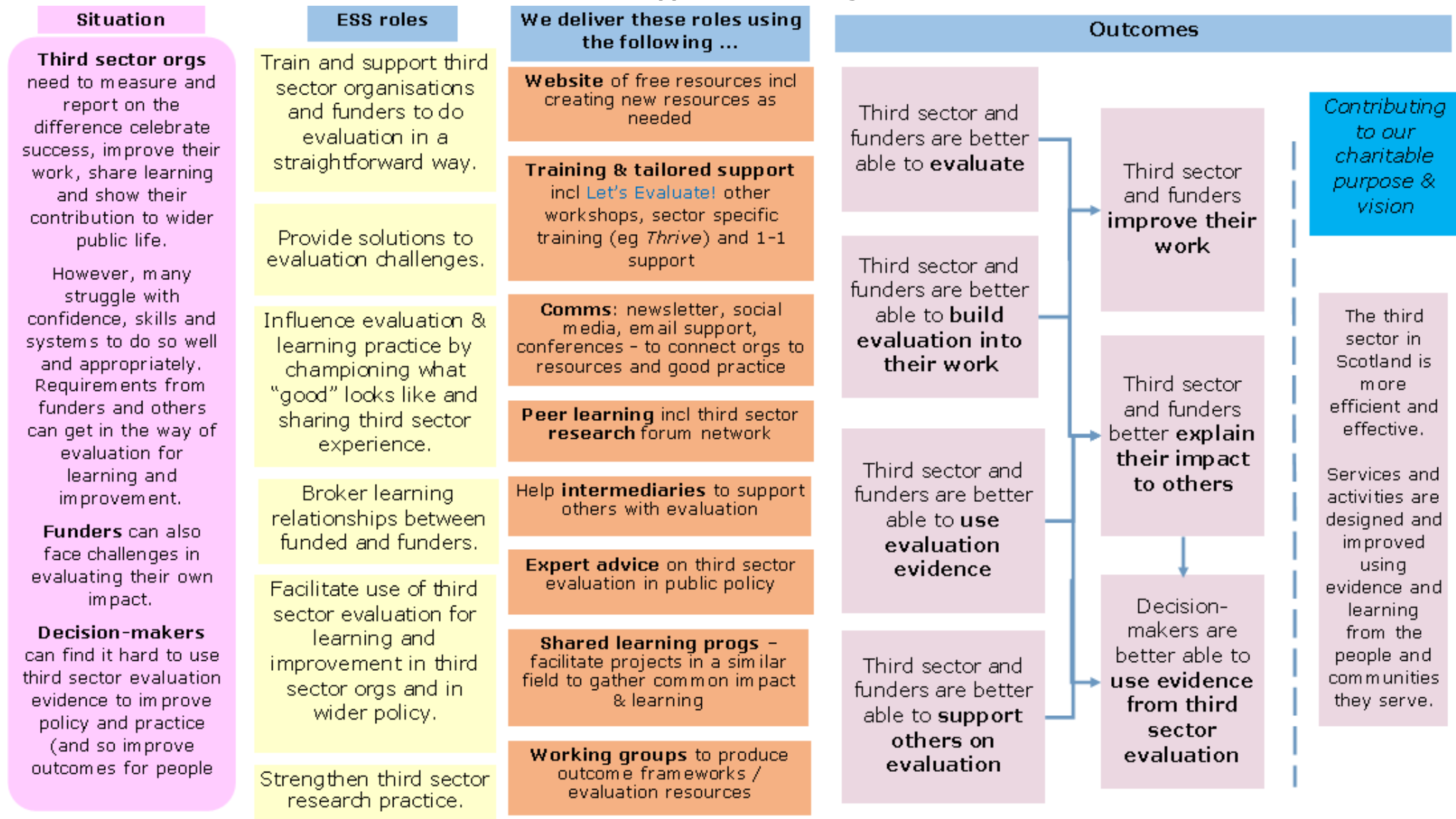
- using our Scottish Government grant to provide free resources and run free networks and events
- encouraging other funders to pay for grantholder support and to commission learning programmes that we facilitate
- supporting third sector organisations to find funding for evaluation support
- helping organisations to share learning to benefit others; including working with intermediaries to support others with evaluation

We will explore new income models for our own sustainable funding so long as this does not lead to mission drift.

1 April 2023

Website: [www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk](http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk)  
Scottish Charity SC036529  
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## Evaluation Support Scotland Logic Model



### Assumptions

- ◆ Self-evaluation can lead to learning and improvement.
- ◆ Good self-evaluation systems are those that are embedded into every day practice, and are relevant and proportionate.
- ◆ Improving understanding between funders and funded organisations is critical to developing evaluation and reporting systems that work for both parties.
- ◆ If we can bring together the right people in a given field or area of interest, we can heighten and share our collective learning.
- ◆ Self-evaluation can generate good (enough) evidence to improve practice and influence policy.
- ◆ Making evidence-informed decisions improves outcomes for people and communities.
- ◆ ESS can't work directly with all organisations but we can make a wider difference by working with partners, influencing key funders and sharing learning from our work.
- ◆ Improving public sector evaluation capacity (valuable though that is) is not ESS's job unless there's a direct benefit to the third sector (because of our charitable purpose).