Evaluation Leaders' Network kick-off event
3 October 2023

In August and September 2023, 52 people from Scotland's third sector signed up to Evaluation Support Scotland's new Evaluation Leaders' network and on 3 October **27 of them** took part in the network's first meeting on Zoom.

What happened at the event?

Steven Marwick from Evaluation Support Scotland's facilitated the session. His slides with a **brief introduction to the network** are on pages 3-10.

Participants discussed the rewards and challenges of being an evaluation leader and the jamboards are on pages 11-15. **Here's a quick summary:**

Being an evaluation leader is **rewarding** when you use evaluation to:

- ✓ inspire and motivate staff
- ✓ tell the organisation's story
- ✓ connect different teams
- ✓ reflect and learn
- ✓ get more funding to continue good work
- ✓ understand what works and what to keep doing or stop doing
- ✓ celebrate success and remember all the good stuff we've done

It's rewarding to lead evaluation in a creative way in line with our values

Being an evaluation leader is **challenging** when:

- ➢ Colleagues don't see the value of evaluation for them
- ➢ Staff don't document their evaluation or collect data routinely
- ➢ Everyone uses different evaluation words
- ➢ There isn't enough time or resource to do evaluation as well as we'd like
- ➢ Evaluation data doesn't tell the full story
- ➢ Funder requirements are varied, don't focus on what matters to us or keep making us prove the same thing
- ➢ We can't show long term impact

It's challenging to evaluate in a way that respects and engages service users

Feedback on the session and how the network should operate

1. Everyone said they wanted to stay involved in the network and were happy for their name and email to be shared with each other. Of 25 people who gave written feedback, 52% said this session had been very useful and 48% said it was fairly useful (other options had been "not useful" or "not sure").

2. There was pretty strong consensus that the network should meet **quarterly** with **one in person** meeting each year.

3. The approach taken in events should be **deep dive** into knotty topics, **action learning** around common challenges and short presentations from members to provoke discussion.

4. The discussion at this event threw up **topics for future discussion** and these could be broadly categorised as:
   - Challenges and opportunities around embedding evaluation internally
   - Methodological issues around doing and using evaluation meaningfully
   - Influencing the external evaluation environment – eg funders

5. Those who expressed a view were happy for ESS to lead **planning and facilitation** of sessions (people don't have time to be part of an organising group) but ESS should invite members to suggest discussion topics and volunteer to present themselves as a case study. ESS could canvass for topics in advance and evaluate the network after a year.

6. **Membership** of the network should be open to anyone eligible but we could cap attendance numbers to make events manageable. Some people wondered if we could diversify the membership (eg more men?!).

7. Most participants were lukewarm about setting up an **online messaging platform** such as Slack and several were opposed to it (more notifications to manage). The network should be about action learning and quality conversations in events rather than online messaging. So we won't rule out setting up an online platform in the future but won't do that now.

8. The most common (from 52% of participants) "other comment" on the feedback form was about the value of **connecting with others** at this event. Example quotes:

   "It's good to meet other leaders and hear their experiences and it's helped me realise that a lot of our challenges are very similar irrespective of the size of your organisation."

   "It was a nice opportunity to meet with others working in evaluation, and sharing insights, rewards, and challenges. Makes you feel you're not alone!"

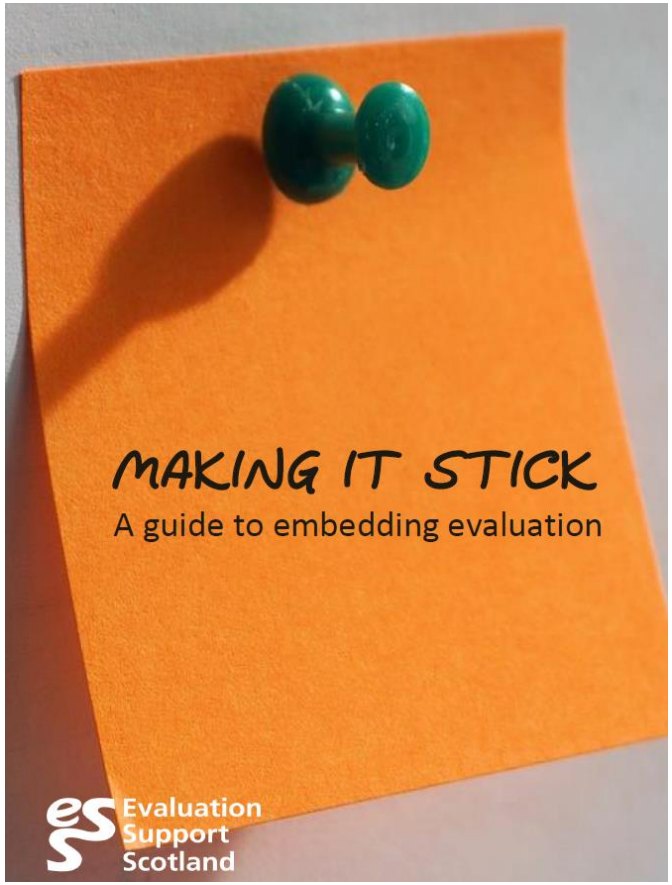
   "I found it very useful to connect with others. As a small org with limited capacity, I was nervous looking at the delegate list that everyone would have much more experience but it's increased my confidence in what I already do and many others have the same challenges."

   "good to speak to like-minded people, I think this could be a very useful and rewarding group in the future."

Next steps

Steven from ESS will be in touch shortly with a date for the next meeting in January on line.

Embedding evaluation



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Top Tips to embed evaluation

1. Build evidence gathering into regular activities
2. Don't re-invent the wheel
3. Ask the right questions!
4. Involve the whole team
5. Be realistic
6. Involve your service-users
7. Keep it on the agenda
8. Focus on learning
9. Avoid death by evaluation!
10. Make it fun!

Embedding resources

ESS has learned from our evaluation that we only achieve our outcomes if we help orgs not just with technical evaluation skills but also with "embedding" evaluation into orgs' day to day context

Evaluation Leadership

[Research](#) on who is an evaluation leader and what do they do

[Toolkit](#) for those people!

One element of embedding is having someone in the org responsible for making evaluation happen. Not doing it all but helping others to do it. We call these "evaluation leaders". We did some research about what evaluation leadership looks like and who you are. And we produced a toolkit aimed at people like you.

Peer learning

- Works well with **embedding** challenges (eg getting colleagues on board)
- values experience
- reassures ("I'm not alone")
- generates practical solutions

However recently we've found:

- One-off peer events no longer popular
- We asked our mailing list if there was interest instead in an **ongoing** network for at people with the **leadership** role and evaluation **experience**

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The new network!

52 people (so far …) said yes!

23% have "evaluation" in your job title

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Responses to Evaluation Leaders' survey (n=52)

What survey respondents said they wanted from the network

Learn from (and feel supported by) others

to hear about and learn from the experience of others

I am the only dedicated M&E employee, it would be nice to be part of a wider network of support

it's always useful to learn what others are doing and how they are tacking challenges both internal and external

Peer support, inspiration, learning from others' good practice

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Widen understanding of methods and approaches

I hope to gain new ideas or other ways to use methods we currently have to gain better results

Help with getting others on board

Better use of evaluation results internally and staff buy into the benefits of collecting and improving their evaluation efforts

Ways to enthuse other people to evaluate

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A movement?!

a supportive community of individuals involved in this work!

collectively pushing back against some of the persistent power imbalances in how evaluation is understood and used

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After introducing yourself please discuss ...

Group 1

What's rewarding about being an evaluation leader?

Giving something back to a project team who have worked had to deliver a project

Knowing what it means to all the people involved in a service...the whole 'family'.....immediate feedback from audience members etc. collected at the end of a performance.

Audience reactions filmed too...capturing things that words don't say. Holistic approach. How will this be memorable for the participants. All the 'thank-you's' you get too

Make something intangible tangible: relationship, trust, experience.

Quotes from participants are very impactful for funders to hear...brings the project alive.

Creativity in evaluation...outside data...e.g. drama

People are actually evaluating all the time but they don't often know they are...they might just need some help to document and collate it!

Share a really good report with a funder. Very rewarding!

retention of funders

What is challenging?

Time

Capacity

If it's in someone's title, it's assumed it's only their role. Rather than a recognition that it's in everyone's role.

Too busy doing delivery to collect data for evaluation.

project team not aware that they are evaluating, but are not documenting it

Quotes are so valuable...trying to encourage people to do it.

People understanding why evaluation is important and the benefits to all the different stakeholders

Evaluating how we are reaching more diverse audiences. How to measure the change in diversity of audiences.

Explaining it's good for funders but also ensuring the service is 'on track' and doing what it's supposed to do.

Collecting young people's voices rather than someone...perhaps a parent or carer talking on their behalf. Getting creative!

Group 2

After introducing yourself please discuss ...

What's rewarding about being an evaluation leader?

- Learning about the positive impact being made
- Getting an overall picture of a multi-component program
- Seeing the impact / changes for the work
- Findings feeding into strategy, fine-tuning of approaches etc.
- Help assess if that's the right project to do - to create the impact we want. Might help to say no to things that are not a good fit.
- Helping clarify the objectives of a project
- Getting further funding for your organisation / project based on your work

What is challenging?

- Funders have different impact measures.
- Funders have different understanding of outcomes.
- Lack of shared M&E language
- long term outcomes are hard to capture / measure
- People's capacity to contribute to M&E
- discrepancy in data collecting, approach and reporting on data
- system for data storage and analysis, often expensive

After introducing yourself please discuss ...

Group 3

What's rewarding about being an evaluation leader?

Impact measurement helps prioritise and feel more connected to the difference they make

Allows people across the organisation to better understand how things are going

Supporting funding - keeping people employed

Evidence for the positives

Understand the difference between an 'output' and an 'outcome'

Motivation: the idea of what it can be from what it is now

Social impact importance is higher now

Helps motivate / inspire externally

Helps externals to understand our impact

What is challenging?

Tme and effort intensive

Some people don't want to change

Holding your evaluation to a high standard

Building a connection with the rest of the team / team leaders

Different expectations of evaluation in different areas

Getting through to people without being a broken record

Embedding the evaluation into the team - it's a team effort

The practicality of evaluation with everyday work

Motivation

Getting the funds for robust evaluation

Group 4

After introducing yourself please discuss ...

What's rewarding about being an evaluation leader?

- Confidence in what we do
- Being able to showcase positive impact and finding the things needed to improve
- Being able to tell a story about your work
- Being inspired to create new methods and evolve systems internally
- Love the learning
- Value the enforced period of reflection

What is challenging?

- Varying levels of engagement / enthusiasm from different groups that we work with
- Being bound by the restrictions imposed by some funders
- Introducing methods and staff engagement in long term impact
- Ensuring accessibility of evaluation methods - multi layered
- Continually having to prove the same thing eg youth work increases confidence
- Attribution
- Intrusive evaluation methods
- getting pulled in different directions by funders makes creating a cohesive overview of impact of org more tricky

After introducing yourself please discuss ...

Group 5

What's rewarding about being an evaluation leader?

- Seeing evidence of difference you're making
- Being able to prove that you are doing what you set out to do
- Being able to share with the team and give recognition
- Reminding ourselves of the things we've done (and often already forgotten cos we're looking forward)
- Evaluation can lead to growth direction and strategy
- If we can integrate our evaluation with our values and practice (not doing it for someone esle) then it's enormously sustaining and builds our resilience

What is challenging?

- Getting other people on board
- Measuring impact at a distance - as and umbrella body supporting members, we can evaluate our impact on our members services, but not on their children and families
- Reporting jointly on partnership projects with other organisations is extra challenging!
- Finding the right questions to get honest responses
- Maintaining the dignity of beneficiaries throughout evaluation processes
- Translating your work into the language / word count needed by funders
- People are busy and evaluation is just another added task to do in their long list of tasks
- Bridging the gap between the complex lives of young people (and our work with them) and the, often more simplistic, models of funders' ideas of value / impact.
- Time! to do it properly
- different outcomes for different funders

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