

What's the use of evaluation?

Steven Marwick



81 people attended this session at the [SCVO Gathering](#) on 7 November 2023.

The format was a presentation from Steven Marwick and round table discussions.

This report is Steven's slides and a summary of participant feedback to three questions we asked at the end of the session.

Evaluation Support Scotland



We work with the third sector and funders so that they can measure and report on their impact and use learning to improve practice and inform policy

www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk



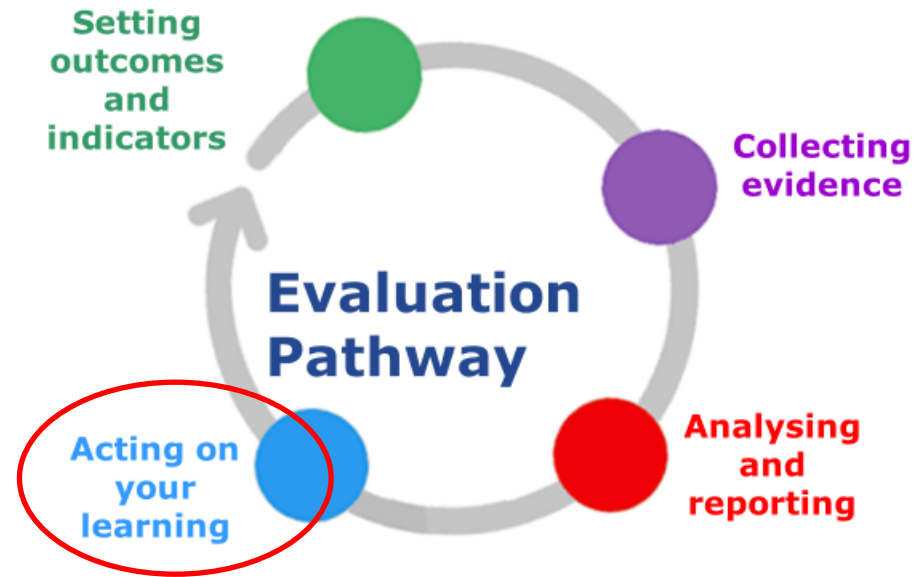
What are we using?

Outcome evidence collected and analysed

Stats & stories about your impact

Also?

- info on activities to achieve outcomes
- service user data / case studies



Why use evaluation?

Celebrate



Improve



Plan



Influence others

Connect staff
across the
organisation



Help service
users
recognise their
achievements

Spot great
practice – and
keep doing it

What isn't
working so well
and why – fix it



Improve
professional
practice

Show service
users you
listen and care

Make evidence
informed
decisions



Get more
funding

Be clear what
you want to
keep or stop
doing

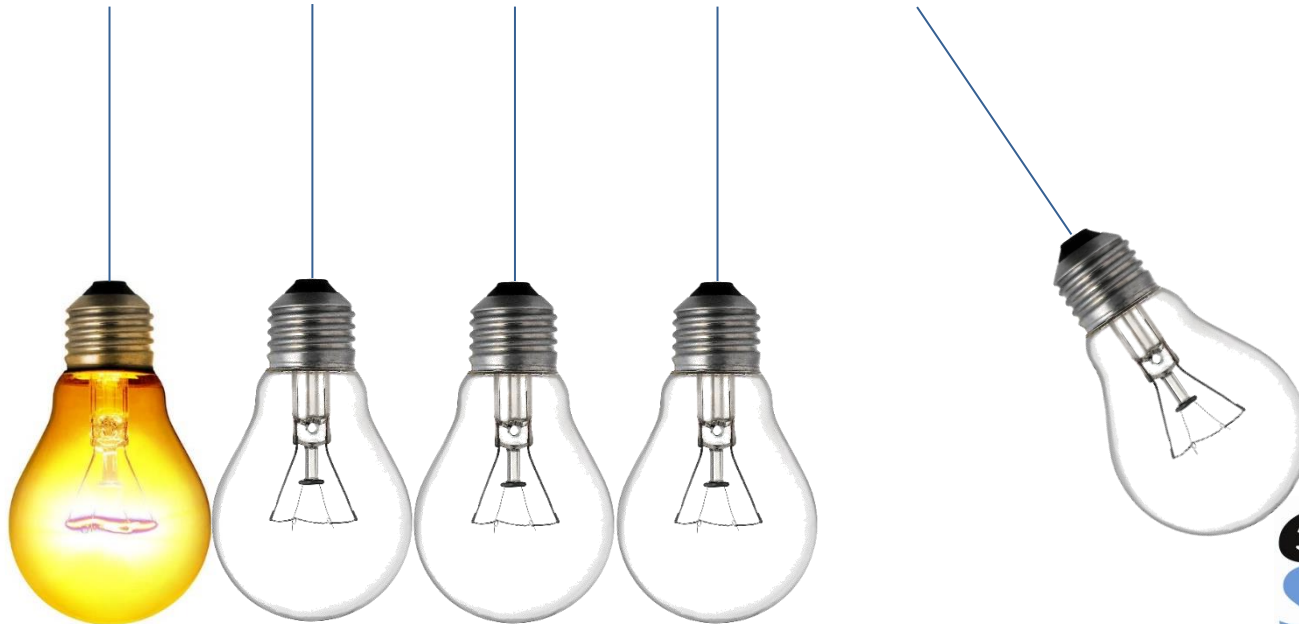
Tell decision-makers
what works



Stop others
reinventing the
wheel

Develop new
partnerships

What works is about identifying the **conditions** that lead to successful **outcomes**





What's needed to bring about outcomes? (How does the magic happen?)

What are typical or exceptional outcomes?



How long does it take to achieve good outcomes?

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Good evaluation principles



About what matters



Fits the way you do your work



Involves the people you support



Used by you



Communicated well to others

Group discussion

1. How does your organisation **use** evaluation?
2. What **helps** you use your evaluation?



Pledges & messages!



Something I will do (or keep doing) to use evaluation

Message for ESS (about today's session or generally)

What would help third sector evaluation be better used

Feedback for ESS (about the session or generally)

There were 64 comments, the vast majority of which were positive.

22 participants gave **general positive comments**, for example:

"Always enjoy and get benefit from ESS session I attend The team at ESS are always so helpful"

"Excellent session to remind me of "why" we do evaluation"

19 participants commented positively on the **structure of this session**, for example:

"Great mix of info and discussion - appreciate the chance to learn from peers"

"The conversation with other organisations was very insightful - it helped people see we share challenges and so may share solutions"

9 participants said that they were **inspired to take action**, for example:

"Got me fired up to look more closely at our evaluation - tools, outcomes and how we use it"

"has inspired me to think about the organisation separately to the funding"

3 others reflected on what they'd heard or how they do evaluation themselves.

2 more negative comments were from people who wanted to have heard how ESS helped improve evaluation. That wasn't the session purpose but is useful feedback for the future. **9** others made **suggestions** for ESS to build into our future planning. They included:

- More examples of methods (especially creative ones and story gathering) and how to pick the right ones
- Encouragement for funders to support proportionate and joined up reporting
- How to measure and show long term impact
- Exploring the connection between evaluation and reflective practice

What participants will do to use evaluation

67 participants said what they planned to do next and 47 people gave their name. We will **follow up some of these people** in due course to ask if we can find out and share case studies.

- **15** participants' actions were about using evaluation more
 - 2 actions were general, for example: *"Try and make more time for the acting on evaluation part"*
 - 3 will use evaluation to celebrate, for example *"Find more opportunities to celebrate findings from evaluation with staff team and beyond"*
 - 4 will use evaluation for improvement, for example: *"Using it to improve our service and listening to the needs"*
 - 6 will do more to share evaluation learning, for example *"collaborate with comms team with video and pictures use for evaluation"*
- **17** participants they would **improve their evaluation methods**, picking up suggestions made by peers.
- **15** plan to improve the way they **plan or embed evaluation** in their organisation, for example:
 - "Think of the target audience and outcomes desired when planning an evaluation. Think more of how to gather the data"*
 - "Have more conversations with staff. Embed into our work a bit more effectively. Learn as we go"*
- **10** will evaluate their evaluation, for example *"Evaluate our evaluation process and assess whether we are asking the right questions to get the answers we need"*
- **10** people talked about doing more to **engage service users** in evaluation, for example:
 - "Make sure we feedback more to our participants"*
 - "Keep being creative and open-minded when gathering feedback from our service users"*
 - "Try to tailor the evaluation to the service and the service users"*

What would help third sector evaluation be better used?

56 participants gave their views on this question.

- **12** participants talked about actions **funders** need to take to help, for example
 - "Feedback from funders how stories rather than numbers have had an impact and changed their focus"*
 - "Longer term and more funding. Acceptance/understanding from funders that the typical outcomes are just as important as the exceptional ones"*
- **4** others said it would be helpful to have **less focus on funders**, for example:
 - "Less focus on what funders need and more focus on what service users need"*
 - "Focus on what the organisation wants to achieve rather than chase funding"*
- **11** participants called for more **sharing of good practice and honesty**, for example
 - "Working together rather than competing. Being honest about small wins to normalise small wins"*
 - "Sharing best emerging and failed practice stories. Openness and courage to report from all angles of success"*
 - "More sharing between organisations of their evaluation practice"*
- **9** suggestions were about the third sector building **evaluation use into planning and staff support**. For example:
 - "Best use of engagement with staff to help them understand how to feed back that it's not hard or extra to their job"*
 - "Think of evaluation - the "so what" at the start of the programme not tacked on at the end"*
- **6** said access to better **evaluation tools**. **4** participants talked about the need for **training**.
- **4** wanted **common approaches**, for example *"An industry standard M&E programme that is quick, customisable and user friendly"* (ESS isn't keen on this as we don't believe one size fits all but we do promote common [principles](#)).

➤ **3** participants said making evaluation **more user friendly** would help, for example, *“plain English. Accessible information. Include people we support in the action plans resulting from evaluation”*

The final 3 participants made specific suggestions relating to their policy area and about using Trustees’ Annual Report.

ESS will use all this intelligence and feedback to inform our future work with the third sector and funders so thank you!
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