

Acting on your learning from evaluation



This guide helps you think about what you might do with the learning from your evaluation results.

Your evaluation should tell you whether you:

- did what you intended to do (i.e. carried out your planned activities)
- made the difference you hoped to make (i.e. achieved your expected outcomes).

Learning doesn't have to be complicated. It might be as simple as discovering that the thing that really helps people engage with your project is making time for a cup of tea. You are likely to have learned lots of different things including:

- what works and what doesn't
- for whom
- in what circumstances

For detailed advice on how to identify learning from your evaluation see our guide: ["Learning from evaluation: What works in your third sector organisation"](#)

We suggest four ways you might act on your learning (but you may think of others). They are:

- Celebrate
- Improve
- Plan
- Influence

Celebrate

Celebrating successes can motivate staff and volunteers, especially when the day-to-day work is challenging.

Acting on your evaluation to celebrate can also:

- Enable service users to recognise their achievements.
- Connect staff across the organisation so everyone can see how they fit in and contribute to the organisation's impact (including administration staff).
- Spot your own good practice (what you do well to achieve positive outcomes) so that you keep doing it.

Improve

It's unlikely that all your activities have worked perfectly. You might identify learning through evaluation about what is **not** working so well and why. You should then act on that by making changes to improve your activities or stop doing things that are less successful.

You can embed learning from evaluation by using it to inform staff and volunteer induction and training, and referring to it in support and supervision and staff meetings so that staff and volunteers can improve and maintain best professional practice.

By acting on what you've learned through evaluation to improve your work you also show service users you listen to them. This helps show them you value their feedback and encourages them to engage in future evaluation because they can see it's worthwhile doing so.

Example: A local community centre runs an IT training course for local people. A self-evaluation showed that people, who weren't at that level anymore, came back to do the course year after year. Some participants were really looking for more advanced help but this course was their only option. Others didn't mind repeating the same course because they liked the reassurance and practice.

Acting on the learning: *they worked with a local college to create a supported pathway from the community centre to more advanced courses at the college so people could easily progress. They also set up a peer support group for people who had completed the beginners course but wanted to stay in touch.*

Plan

When you are planning for the future, whether it's writing next year's operational plan or developing a new 5 year strategy, it's wise to start by looking back at past learning in order to make evidence-informed decisions about your future.

For example, you might look at learning from evaluation to help you plan what you should keep, stop or start doing.

Influence

Your learning from evaluation might be of interest to others outside your organisation. You can act on it by using learning to:

- Tell decision-makers what works in addressing needs and achieving outcomes
- Support others to use your learning in their work (not reinvent the wheel)
- Develop new partnerships to meet service user needs, identified through your evaluation, that you can't meet yourself.

For help on how to share your learning with others please see our [Sharing your learning workbook](#).

You should, of course, also use evaluation to help make your case in funding applications – for example by using evaluation to explain:

- what you are asking funders to pay for has already been proven to achieve outcomes, or
- why you need to make activities last longer or be more in depth to achieve outcomes, or
- why something new is needed.

Example: A youth work project, working in several schools in a council area to increase the life skills and confidence of young people, tracked young people's progress through a system of "levels of achievement" that young people developed themselves. Evaluation showed that the project itself worked and showed the added value of involving young people in the programme design and evaluation.

Acting on the learning: They presented learning from the evaluation at a schools conference to show how to involve young people in development programmes. They used evaluation evidence to get funding from other council areas to run similar programmes in their schools.

[More help](#)

If you would like ESS to help you identify and acting on your learning from evaluation then please get in touch (contact details below).

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For evaluation help and advice, or if you need a copy of this guide in another format, please get in touch.

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