Measuring Outcomes: Monitoring and Evaluation

Every organisation is different and will require different methods to monitor and evaluate their work. However, there are some general principles that are applicable to every organisation, and it is important to think carefully about how your organisation can demonstrate the impact you are having.

What is Monitoring & Evaluation?

**Monitoring** is the routine scrutiny of the activities and progress of a project. It is used to check whether your project is on track and should highlight any deviations or unexpected occurrences. These unexpected occurrences can then be incorporated into your project or changes made to correct them, if that is what is needed. **Evaluation** is determining the success of a project in meeting its objectives.

It is important to keep a check on the work you are doing to ensure it is meeting the original aims of the organisation and not becoming side-tracked. For example, if your organisation is to support those with mental health issues to get back into the workplace, you need to measure whether the work you are doing is achieving that. If it isn’t then you can re-evaluate what you are doing and maybe try a different method. Funders also wish to see that you are doing what you said you would do with the funding provided and meeting the targets stated in an application, so they will ask for details of your monitoring and evaluation plan.

There are different terms that are linked to monitoring and evaluation:

* *Inputs:* Resources used to run a service.
* *Outputs:* The numbers produced.
* *Outcomes:* The changes that are achieved as a result of efforts undertaken.
* *Impact:* The outcomes that could have an impact on an individual, organisational, neighbourhood or policy level.
* *Quantitative:* Readily monitored in numerical form (for example – numbers completing a course) – *These are your inputs and outputs.*
* *Qualitative:* Often concerned with ‘soft’ factors such as confidence, morale, wellbeing etc. It is less easy to measure and needs to be tailored to suit the project. *These are your outcomes and impact.*

Useful tips:

* Decide how you will monitor and evaluate a project BEFORE it begins, not once it has started
* Decide WHAT you want to measure
* Make sure information is collected regularly and consistently and everyone records it in the same way and stores it in the same place
* Be aware of data protection laws - don’t collect unnecessary data about a person - and store any data securely
* Ensure you get consent and anonymise where possible. Most of the time you don’t need specific identifiable details about a person
* Monitoring should be in proportion to the activity e.g for a one-off training event a simple evaluation form will suffice, but a training course over several months will require more in-depth monitoring
* Keep it manageable, not time-consuming and laborious
* Make sure you can analyse the results effectively
* Ensure you have mechanisms to monitor unexpected/negative outcomes as well.
* Build flexibility into the monitoring system
* Make sure you don’t duplicate data collection
* Make sure the monitoring is accessible. For example, if using questionnaires, how will you assess people who are illiterate, don’t speak English as a first language, have sight impairments etc….?

Examples of monitoring tools:

* Questionnaires
* Interviews: face to face/phone
* Case studies
* Observations
* Focus groups
* Simple numerical collection such as numbers attending groups/training etc….
* Sign in sheets
* Before and after questions e.g. what level of understand did a person have before the training, what level of understanding do they have now, after training
* Paid-for tools such as Star Standard