monitoring & evaluation

for social entrepreneurs

about this guide

Monitoring and evaluation can help you to assess the effectiveness of a project in achieving its objectives and to measure the project's impact. Monitoring and Evaluation are critical elements of any project (although often forgotten), and to get them right you need to build them into the project from the outset. They are important for internal stakeholders (e.g. staff and volunteers) - to celebrate successes and highlight areas that need to change - and for external stakeholders (e.g. funders, government, media) - to provide them with confidence that the project is having a positive impact and thereby attract further support.

Social entrepreneurs and their projects vary enormously and therefore require quite different approaches to evaluation. This guide will take the reader through definitions and the main stages of the evaluation process. It will demonstrate that process using one case example. It will also offer further information on online evaluation tools for social entrepreneurs interested in learning about what and how to evaluate. There is no one correct way to monitor and evaluate: each social entrepreneur has to decide for herself/himself the most important areas to evaluate and how best to carry out an evaluation.

This guide aims to tackle monitoring and evaluation by:
- clearly defining the terms
- explaining why they are important
- detailing the steps involved in conducting a monitoring and evaluation programme
- suggesting ways to report results

definitions

Although monitoring and evaluation work hand-in-hand, with both used to assess the progress of a project/programme/award towards achieving its objectives, and the terms are often used interchangeably, they are not the same thing. It is important, therefore, to recognize the difference between them.

Monitoring involves assessing efficiency in reaching your direct, easily quantifiable or short-term objectives. It consists of the collection and collation of facts expressed in terms of pounds used and numbers/volumes produced. For example, number of jobs your project created, number of community members who benefited from your project, cost per project user, or amount of extra funding your project attracted.

In addition, try and look for external comparison data as a tool for checking if your progress is 'good enough' – real data or proxies published by the government, NGOs or academics on subjects similar to those affected by your projects/activities.

The monitoring data you collect usually falls into two categories:

- **Input indicators:** the resources (financial, human, technical, intellectual) put into an activity
- **Output indicators:** the tangible and direct products these resources have achieved

Evaluation involves assessing your effectiveness in reaching the medium to long-term and often difficult to quantify objectives in connection to your target beneficiaries (individuals/communities/organizations). It consists of the collection and collation of facts and the views of your target beneficiaries expressed in terms of increases or decreases in their skills, behaviour, knowledge, and level of functioning. For example, improved confidence or increased practical experience of your project users; improved social networks in the target local community.

The evaluation data you collect should be distinguished into two categories:

- **Outcome indicators:** intended, specific and short-term differences made to target beneficiaries
- **Impact indicators:** intended (or unintended), fundamental and medium to long-term differences made to target beneficiaries

why is monitoring & evaluation important?

Monitoring and evaluation is important to enable you to:

Satisfy stakeholders and encourage support for your work

- Current or potential funders want to know that their money has/will be well spent in line with agreed objectives and milestones.
- Support from other stakeholders such as sponsors or government will often depend on your ability to prove that you have done what you said you would and that the project has measurable impact.
- People working on the project (including you) want to know that the effort they put in is worth it.

Comply with regulatory and legal requirements

- The law and regulatory bodies and users may require you to maintain accurate records of income, expenditure and assets. If you are a registered company, you will need to submit accounts to Companies House at the end of the year. If you are a registered charity, you will need to report to the Charities Commission at the end of the year.
- If you are a registered charity, Trustees need information in order to ensure legal responsibilities are fulfilled and to understand what is going on with a project / programme. Budgets, monthly cash flow projections and regular reporting against an agreed annual plan are the key means of control.

Learn from past mistakes and make improvements

- Monitoring and Evaluation helps you identify what didn't work and why, as well as steps for improvement and future development.

when should monitoring & evaluation be done?

Monitoring and evaluation is one of the first things to consider when you're setting up a project, not the last. You shouldn't leave it to the end, but often that's exactly what happens: you may begin to think about monitoring and evaluation only when a sponsor or funder requests you to do them in their contractual agreement with you; or you might think that by leaving them until the last minute you will have the maximum number of beneficiaries and volume of services provided to report as proof of your achievements. These reasons are wrong: you need to consider and know from the start what you are going to monitor and evaluate and how, so that:

- You can gather the right information
- At the right time
- With as little use of precious resources as possible

how should monitoring & evaluation be done?

There are many methods for monitoring and evaluating but they can generally be divided into three main groups:

- **Quantitative methods** – that provide you with numerical information about your project, organisation, or beneficiaries. You can get this information by, for example, using a 'questionnaire': this is a list of multiple choice questions, each having several possible answers that the reader can choose from.
- **Qualitative methods** – that provide you with the views of or stories from the key people involved in and benefiting from your project. You can get this information by using face-to-face or telephone interviews.
- **Mixed-methods** – that provide you with a mixture of numerical information and stories about your clients. This involves using a mixture of the quantitative and qualitative methods mentioned above.

Which method you choose for monitoring and evaluating your project or organisation will depend on:

- Why you are monitoring and evaluating in the first place?
- What information you want?
- How you will use the information when available?

You will need to spend some time up front thinking about answers to these questions, reflecting on your aims, objectives, and expectations. This is absolutely crucial for making sure that your monitoring and evaluation will be useful and rigorous.

key steps

This section explains briefly the main steps involved in monitoring and evaluation. We'll use an actual case example (Breakfast Clubs) at the end of this section to demonstrate these steps.

1. Define aims and set targets

Decide what you want to monitor and evaluate. Come up with the questions you wish to be answered by your clients, staff or any other stakeholders - it is important for you to reflect on why you're monitoring and evaluating and to come up with a set of clear questions to be answered. You might also want to think about setting targets that you want to meet or exceed.

Your questions need to focus on two things:

- The objectives of your project. Ensure your project objectives are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely, and set targets accordingly.
- The achievement of a combination of inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

2. Gather data

Make sure you collect the required and relevant information from the right people in the right way:

Right information

Define your sample size (the number of people you gather information from) well and appropriately. As a general rule, if you have less than 30 beneficiaries, you should try and collect data from all of them. If you have more than 30 you should collect data from at least 30 to ensure any trends you identify from the data are meaningful. As this number increases you should increase the number of people you sample. For example, if you have about 1,000 beneficiaries, you should try to gather data from at least 100 of them in order for your data to be significant and meaningful.

Make sure the type of data you're gathering is relevant to what you and your funders expect from your project. For example, some funders may be happy with just having the number of beneficiaries helped by your project. Other funders, however, may ask for more specific and comprehensive information on the actual benefits and impacts of your project.

Right people

Ensure you gather your information from the right people. It may not be solely the beneficiaries of your project that you need to approach. For example, if your project is based in a school and aimed at school-age children, you may need to gather information from the school teachers and the parents in order to get a fuller picture of how your project is impacting the children.

Once you have clarified the right people to be approached, inform them and give them advance notice, making sure you have their clear consent before you proceed. Reassure them of confidentiality. Inform them of the rationale for asking evaluation questions and allay any fears that they are being "assessed" personally.

Right method

Develop appropriate ways of gathering data. There are a number of ways you can use for gathering information from your clients, staff or other stakeholders:

- Self-completed questionnaires
- One-to-one interviews
- Group interviews
- Site-visits
- Content analysis of relevant documents
- Case studies

There is no one right method and you may eventually use more than one way of data-gathering. See Appendix 1 for a brief discussion of questionnaires and interviews, the two most commonly used methods, and how to use them.

3. Analyse findings

When you are trying to understand what the gathered information is telling you, it's important to go back to your original aims and questions.

- Did you achieve your expected targets?
- Were the targets realistic and right?
- Were the methods used for gathering data appropriate?
- Do your project aims and objectives remain valid, or do they need revision?
- Are your findings and conclusions plausible and coherent?
- If you have determined any causal links in your conclusions, what might you do to verify that the link is real and not simply a chance occurrence?
- Is it clear how the findings were identified from the data gathered?
- What went well with the project? What were the strengths?
- What did not go well with the project? What were the weaknesses?

4. Reporting on your findings

As you are planning your monitoring and evaluation programme you should create a reporting timetable and set-out what you will report at each point.

When reporting monitoring data, ensure that you organise and present the data clearly. Use charts and diagrams if appropriate to show trends. When reporting the outcomes of an impact evaluation, ensure that the outcomes are clearly related back to the stated objectives of the project. Below are some suggestions of what a reporting timetable could look like.

Example reporting schedule

Monthly	Share key monitoring outputs with management team. e.g. performance against budget, user numbers etc.
Monthly/ Quarterly	Report key monitoring outputs to trustees and/or Board members, e.g. management accounts, performance against key targets.
Half Yearly/ Yearly	Report conclusions of outcome evaluations to external and internal stakeholders, e.g. funders, sponsors, trustees, beneficiaries.
Annually	Formal reporting and accounts submitted to Companies House (if you are a registered company) and to The Charity Commission (if you are a registered Charity). Annual report to summarise progress on the project circulated to all stakeholders.
Three Yearly	Conduct an independent impact evaluation by contracting an external evaluation expert (this can usually be expensive and is normally only conducted by larger organisations). Alternatively, conduct an internal impact evaluation yourself by using your existing human resources.

5. Case example: Breakfast Clubs

Let’s consider an example project to see the steps involved in setting up a monitoring and evaluation programme, and making sense of the information gathered.

Project aim: To improve school children’s eating habits and concentration levels in lessons through the provision of nutritious breakfast clubs in schools across the UK.

Examples (not exhaustive)			
Input indicators	**Output indicators**	**Outcome indicators**	**Impact indicators**
Step 1: Set clear and measurable objectives. Set time-boundaries for achieving these			
Keep admin costs to less than 30% of total project spend.	Set-up 4 breakfast clubs in Tower Hamlets by the end of 2005.	Improve the concentration levels of children in morning classes.	Develop life-long healthy eating habits in children.
Step 2: Set up data gathering systems and processes and start to gather data			
Set-up budgets and accounting systems to be able to separate out admin cost from project cost.	Keep records of all of the clubs that you are working with and the date that they started. You could keep a copy of a letter to the Head of the school confirming that the club has successfully opened.	Prepare a simple questionnaire or interview template and sit down with teachers to assess whether they think that the children who attend the breakfast clubs are concentrating better in class. Keep a record of quotes - these can be very powerful.	Conduct annual follow-up questionnaires and interviews with children over the ensuing 10 years to assess changes in eating habits and attitudes. Set criteria for what constitutes healthy eating and score participants against these. If possible, compare a group who attended breakfast clubs with a control group.
Step 3: Check the validity of data gathered			
Sense-check information to see if it seems reasonable e.g., if admin costs are very high check whether the costs are correctly categorized?	Are the clubs actually up and running rather than just agreed in principle – do they have attendance registers?	Are all questionnaires being completed in the same way e.g., handed out to participants or conducted as interviews?	What other factors are influencing eating habits and attitudes?
Step 4: Look for patterns in the data and draw conclusions from these			
Summarise financial data highlighting performance against the specific targets that you set	Summarise the number of clubs and date of opening	Summarise interviews and questionnaires from teachers and children. Try to make direct links between attendance at the clubs and improved concentration. Try to account for other influencing factors.	Look for trends in the stories told during interviews. Look for patterns & differences in the data collected in questionnaires. If you were able to set up a control group, compare the data from this group with data from the clubs and try to identify any significant differences between them (using statistical tools where possible). Try to filter out and explain other influencing factors.

appendix 1: questionnaires & interviews

Below is a brief discussion of questionnaires and interviews, the two most commonly used methods for gathering data.

1. Questionnaires

Questionnaire design

Design of the questionnaire can be split into three elements:

- Determine the questions to be asked
- Select the question type for each question and specify wording
- Design question sequence and overall questionnaire layout

The questions you’ll be asking will depend on who you’re asking and what information you’d like to get from them. Here you have to think creatively as well as explore what questions others have asked who run similar projects to yours.

Do not clutter the questionnaire form with unnecessary headings and numbers. However, it is good to ensure that the questionnaire has a title and a brief introductory statement. Contact and return information should be included on the questionnaire, irrespective of whether addressed envelopes are provided; these can easily become separated.

Lay out the questions and answer choices neatly and attractively. Try to be consistent in aspects such as wording. Avoid using lots of lines, borders and boxes since these can make the page look too cluttered. A key factor that affects the response rate is the length of the questionnaire: questionnaires perceived as long will deter respondents.

Use a good legible font. Make good use of italics and bold types, but be consistent.

If you’re relying on the respondent to complete the questionnaire, begin with questions that will raise interest. Try to keep the flow of the questionnaire logical and simple; avoid complex branching.

Question types

There are different types of questions you can use in your questionnaire. For example, open vs. closed.

- Open questions can be useful because they give the respondent the chance to tell you more information. Open questions, however, elicit a whole range of replies of varying lengths and articulation, making it more difficult to compare replies meaningfully.
- Closed questions provide several pre-written answers for the respondents to choose from. This makes comparison less difficult, but you have to make sure the pre-written answers are broad and exhaustive enough to satisfy your objectives and respondents’ needs.

Wording questionnaires

- Be concise and unambiguous; make questions brief and clear; avoid jargon.
- Avoid double questions, for example, "do you think the British should eat more healthy food and exercise more?".
- Avoid questions involving negatives, for example, "are you against a ban on smoking?".
- Avoid leading questions, for example, "do you agree with the majority of people that banning smoking in public places is good?".
- Allow for privacy and do not ask questions which may offend. If you need to ask some personally searching questions, it helps to explain as much as you are able about your research to the respondent, both at the beginning and throughout the questionnaire.
- If you make promises of confidentiality, comply with such promises. However, it might help to explain what is meant by confidentiality rather than just give a blanket reassurance. For example, "your responses will be treated with confidence and data will be presented in such a way that your identity cannot be connected with them".
- Consider involving your clients in designing the questionnaire to ensure that questions are appropriately constructed and understood.
- Test (pilot) the questionnaire on a small sample of your respondents. The aim is to detect flaws in your questioning and correct these prior to your actual survey.

Self-completed questionnaires

In addition to the above considerations,

- E-mailing questionnaires can be quicker and provide higher returns, but you need to ensure that all respondents have access to a computer.
- Handing the questionnaire to the respondents and getting them to complete it on the spot can ensure a good response rate.
- Send out three to four times as many questionnaires as you would like returned, as response rates can often disappoint.
- Ensure Data Protection Act regulations are complied with before issuing questionnaires.

2. Interviews

Interviews are a means of gathering data from your clients, staff and other stakeholders about their experience since using or being involved in your project. Stories and statements obtained during interviews can qualify and give context to numerical data gathered through questionnaires. Interviews are thus as equally important as questionnaires for telling you if you and your project are making a difference.

Interviews can be 'semi-structured' with a number of questions for all interviewees in order to gather information on the same issues from all of them. These questions can be relatively 'open' and allow interviewees to choose how to answer them. This will tell you what they find important and interesting without you pre-judging this.

There are a number of considerations to bear in mind before you decide to use interviews:

- If your clients have a low literacy level, interviewing them would be better than giving them a questionnaire since the interviewer can make sure the questions are understood.
- Whilst interviews can be time-consuming and costly, they often give you in-depth information on how exactly your project is helping your clients.
- Group interviews, if facilitated well, can lead to in-depth discussions. However, some of your clients may not feel comfortable criticising the project in a group situation.
- If different interviewers are involved, particularly in large-scale evaluations, then you have to ensure some consistency across all interviews. You can, for example, design an interview template to be used by all interviewers.

It is up to the interviewer to customise interview questions to clarify or focus what is being asked and to meet the individual circumstances of each interview. Such as:

- Paraphrasing the questions to use language with which you and your interviewee(s) are more comfortable
- Varying the order in which you ask questions
- Referring to previous answers when asking later questions – "you told me that … is there anything to add about …"
- Tailoring the interview to the person being interviewed – e.g. not asking them questions to which they cannot know the answers.

appendix 2: further information

Below are some suggestions if you're interested in free online monitoring and evaluation tools and databases. They are not exhaustive, so please use them as pointers for further exploration.

Online Tools

First Steps in Monitoring & Evaluation

www.ces-vol.org.uk/files/Monitoring_evaluation.pdf

A booklet developed by the Charities Evaluation Services for particularly small projects and voluntary organisations with little or no experience of monitoring and evaluation.

Enterprise Development Impact Assessment Information Services

www.enterprise-impact.org.uk/informationresources/toolbox.shtml

Offers a comprehensive evaluation toolbox including things like: 'how to design an evaluation on a shoe string'.

The Research Initiative on Social Entrepreneurship (RISE)

www.riseproject.org

A research project at Columbia Business School whose mission is to study and disseminate knowledge about the markets, metrics and management of for-profit and non-profit social enterprise and social venturing. It has a useful Reports section which includes a comprehensive report on social impact assessment methods and a 'diagnostic toolkit' – identifies points of relative strengths and weaknesses – for a social venture.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) Primer

http://sroi.london.edu/resources.html#public

The SROI Primer is a web tool designed to introduce how to measure social outputs, outcomes and impacts, and to use SROI approach to valuing some social impacts in monetary terms. The Primer is a result of collaboration between London Business School and the New Economics Foundation.

New Ways of Measuring

www.neweconomics.org/gen/new_ways_top.aspx?page=845&folder=137&

Part of New Economics Foundation's website, new ways of measuring gives a useful list of most recent and tested approaches to evaluation. It's a good place to start with if you're shopping around for evaluation techniques.

Your Project & its Outcomes

www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/programmes/ypf/assets/ypf_outcomes.pdf

A step-by-step guide prepared by Charities Evaluation Services for the Big Lottery Fund to help grantees and award winners describe the outcomes their projects are aimed to achieve and how to show they've been achieved.

Measuring Impact: A Guide to Resources

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/asp/uploads/uploadedfiles/1/455/measuringimpactguide.pdf

A guide prepared for the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) that aims to offer direction to anyone in the voluntary sector interested in measuring impact. It gives a comprehensive analysis of some of the available approaches and tools for impact measurement.

CIVICUS Civil Society Toolkits

www.civicus.org/new/content/civtoolkits2.htm

Provides free (more lengthy) toolkits to help civil society organizations. Includes one on Monitoring and Evaluation.

Online Databases

Compendium of Assessment and Research Tools (CART)

http://cart.rmcdenver.com

This is a database which provides instruments for measuring attributes associated with youth development projects and programmes. The website includes thorough descriptions of various tools, research instruments, and guides for those interested in evaluating the effectiveness of school-based youth development activities.

Measures for Community Research Database

www.aspenmeasures.org

A collection of measures used to evaluate outcomes for the following topic areas: Community Building, Economic Development, Employment, Education, Housing & Neighbourhood Conditions, Neighbourhood Safety, Social Services, and Youth development. The site features descriptions of primary data collection instruments, interview protocols, and self-assessment guides.

Project Star

www.projectstar.org/star/library/new%20library.htm

This is an AmeriCorps State/National Direct website. It provides links to sample data collection tools by topic area. Topics include Community Strengthening, Health, Literacy, Member development, Environment, Tutoring, Youth Activities, and Mentoring.