

Resources for **small groups**

Monitoring and evaluation

All voluntary groups will have some targets they aim to achieve. These can be quite broad, such as who your group aims to benefit or what it aims to achieve (as set out in your constitution) or more detailed, such as numbers of users for a particular service (as might be included in a funding application).

Monitoring and evaluation are used to check whether you are meeting your aims.

Why do it?

A well-thought-out system of monitoring and evaluation can take relatively little amounts time to administer and potentially can bring considerable benefits. For example, it can:

- help you to be more effective in meeting the needs of your users and members;
- allow you to demonstrate to all concerned that what you do is a success, which is good for motivating volunteers, staff, users etc.;
- enable you to show that your group has learned from previous projects and that you have a track record of continuously improving the work you do;
- help your group attract funding: you will be able to demonstrate to potential funders how effective your current projects are and that you have effective procedures for measuring the success of projects;
- help prevent others from imposing their systems on your group: if you have your own system of monitoring and evaluation you may be able to use this rather than having to adopt one devised by a funder, which may or may not fit with the way you work.

Where to start

Monitoring and evaluation is about looking at how well you meet your overall aims and the specific aims for each activity that you do. Therefore a sensible starting point is to review your aims and activities and remind yourself of exactly why your group exists and why it does its activities.

Identifying relevant indicators

Indicators are those things which show how successful you are in the work that you do and in achieving your aims. These usually fall into two categories:

- *Outputs*: these refer to the immediate results of a piece of your work, e.g. the number of people who attended a training course, the number of telephone calls received, the production of a new information leaflet etc.
- *Outcomes*: these are more about the impact of your work in the longer term, the difference you made to the people who used your services, e.g. the increased confidence or skills of those people who attended a training course, telephoned your helpline or used your information leaflet.

Setting realistic targets

You need to come up with targets for both outputs and outcomes which, if met, would indicate that your work has been successful. In the case of outputs, this tends to be fairly straightforward, e.g. you set a target for the number of people who will use a particular service. Targets for outcomes tend to be more complicated, but would be about measuring the change on a particular community, area or individual as a result of the work of your group.

In the case of both outputs and outcomes, the targets you use should be SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic and
- Timed.

Collecting information

You will need to devise methods for collecting data on the indicators you are using. Some of this will be “hard” - numbers - and some will be “soft” - what people think and feel.

For outputs, they might simply involve record-keeping, e.g. how many people you worked with, the number of telephone calls received etc. For outcomes, they might involve sending questionnaires to service users, or interviewing them about the impact of your work or even collecting information about changes in the community at large.

You will need to analyse the data you have collected to evaluate your work and produce a report. This typically will include details of:

- the targets you originally set and whether you met them;
- some kind of explanation as to why you were unable to achieve any particular targets; and
- what you have learned as a result of the project and what you might do differently in the future. In this way, you are including ideas on how you could improve your work in the future.

