

# how are you doing?

## A guide to self-evaluation

How to tell if you're making a difference:  
A basic guide for voluntary organisations



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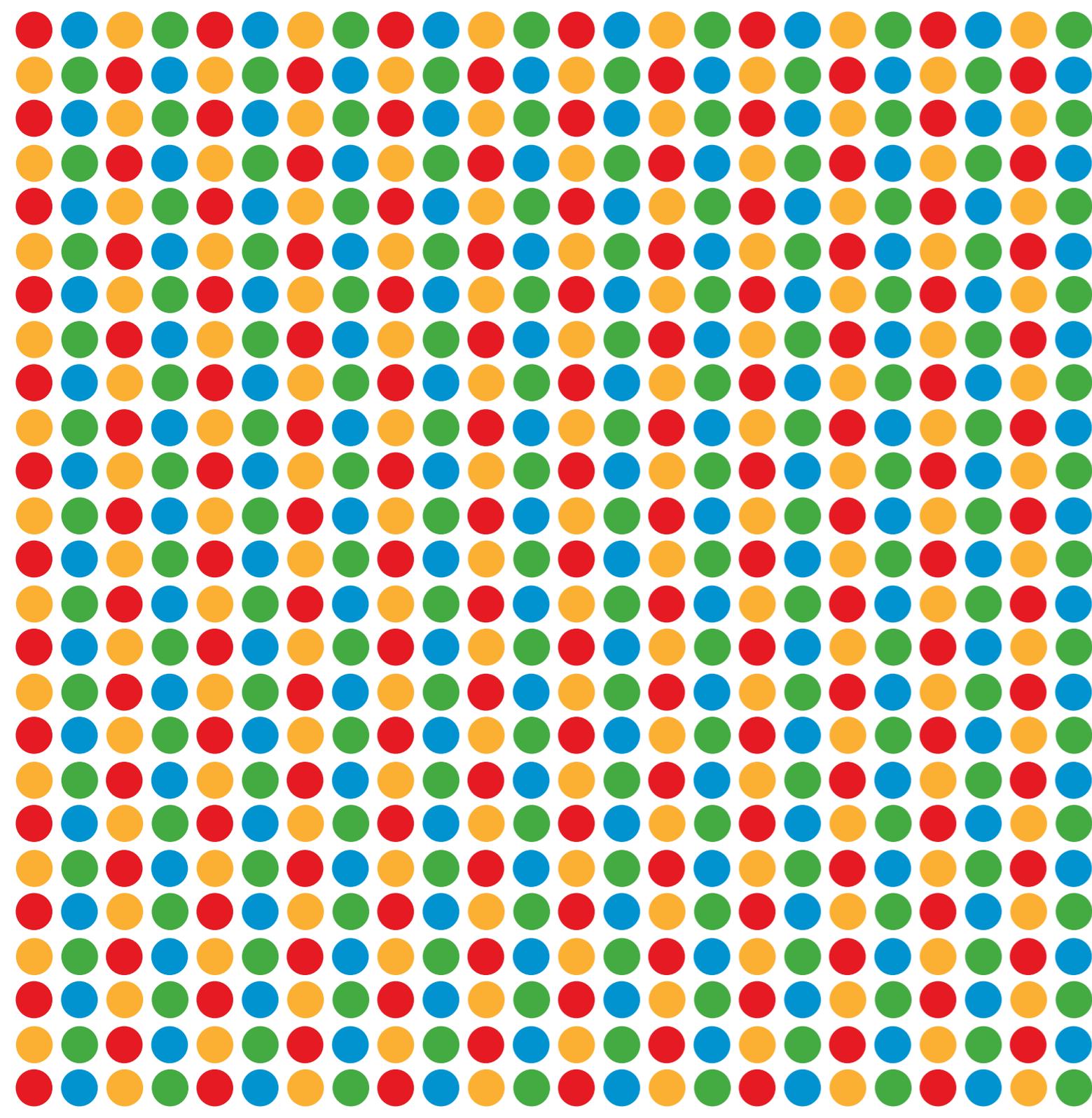
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A basic guide for voluntary and  
community organisations





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# Introduction

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This guide has been written for the voluntary and community organisations that we fund that work to help disadvantaged children and young people across the UK.

We are aware that for many organisations in the field self-evaluation can seem like a difficult or burdensome activity and the purpose of this guidance is both to stress how immensely helpful self-evaluation is to everyone involved, and to offer accessible and straightforward assistance on how to go about it.

It has arisen from a long-term programme of training on how to do self-evaluation that we offer to some of the organisations we fund. Those organisations are normally in receipt of two or three year funding for salaries from BBC Children in Need and are invited to a one-day training course which helps them learn how to evaluate what difference they are making to children and use the results to report back to us on the use of the grant.

We know from the feedback given to us by organisations who attend that they find it an invaluable aid, not just in evaluating, but also in planning their work effectively.

We would like to thank Charities Evaluation Services for running more than 25 seminars a year across the UK on our behalf.

Thanks to all who helped in the production of this guide, and thanks also to the very many organisations that participate in the trainings and contribute their enthusiasm and experience.

**Sheila Jane Malley**  
BBC Children in Need

# Making a difference to Children in Need

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The BBC Children in Need Appeal aims to make a positive difference to the lives of disadvantaged children and young people. We want to make grants to voluntary organisations that can really change things for the children they work with.

It is not always easy to tell which applications, of all the thousands we read, are going to make that real difference to children. Applications tend to tell us a lot about the activities for which a grant is required, but not very much about what those activities are meant to achieve for children. It seems to be much easier to think about doing things, than it is to think about the results of doing.

Again, after the grant is spent we receive a report that tells us all about activities - the play scheme, the youth club, the community work, the counselling - but hardly anything about what effect these activities had for children.

Perhaps we should take it for granted that these activities did make a difference, but we don't actually know. Sometimes we ask ourselves whether the organisations themselves actually know, for sure. Do they have evidence, or are they just guessing?

The only way they, and we, are going to know for certain is through evaluation. Evaluation is simply comparing the 'before and after' picture to see what difference has been made. Professional evaluation by outsiders can be useful but it is expensive and need only be necessary in exceptional circumstances. For most purposes, organisations should be doing their own evaluation. This is called **self-evaluation**.

Are you making a difference?

# Self-evaluation

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If your organisation is serious about making a difference, self-evaluation is a must. It should be an essential ingredient of the way you work because it is the only way to ensure that you are on the right track.

Self-evaluation helps you to:

- Develop a better project.
- Get valuable feedback as you go along.
- Change things that don't work before it's too late.
- Collect information required by a grant-maker.
- Prove that your project works well.

We promise you that it is well worth doing and we have written these guidelines to steer you through the basics.

As with any new skill, like driving a car, it seems difficult at first but eventually it becomes almost second nature and you will wonder why you thought it was so mysterious.



- We will explain self-evaluation through eight basic steps.
- We will show flip chart examples of how to record your decisions.
- We will show you how to tackle a written report.
- We will provide you with case studies to look at.
  1. The Longlake Rural Youth Group.
  2. The Denver Under Fives.
- We will show you how to identify targets and collect information.
- We will give you the occasional Hot Tip.
- Finally, just in case you get totally hooked and want to become experts, we will provide you with a reading list.

These are not perfect examples of how to do things because no-one is perfect. They are just to give you some idea.

# Before you begin

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## 1. Planning comes before doing

Time spent on planning is time well spent if you plan thoroughly first, the doing will be much easier, and less time will be wasted as you go along.

Time spent on steps 1 - 7 in these guidelines will help you to clarify your thinking before you actually start the “real” work. When you have finished steps 1 - 7, you will of course realise that thinking is the real work!

- In future, think through steps 1 - 4 before writing a grant application. Your application success rate might benefit dramatically.

## 2. Do it in a group

Don't do self evaluation on your own. Self-evaluation should draw on the ideas, opinions and perspectives of a number of “stakeholders”.

Stakeholders are people who have a vested interest in the work you are doing. They might be staff, volunteers, trustees and management, parents, young people themselves and, perhaps, a teacher, community worker or health visitor.

A group of between five and eight people is ideal. If the group is too big, proper discussion becomes difficult to manage. If it is too small it gets starved of ideas. Remove yourselves from distractions such as the phone and organise tea and biscuits to keep you going.

- Involve anyone who is crucial to the success of the work so that they get to understand the work thoroughly and become better motivated.

## 3. Give it time

You must set aside generous blocks of time for working through the steps that follow. Perhaps as much as half a day for each step. A little less if you have already done a lot of thinking about your work; a little longer if you haven't.

Gasps of horror? But this really is not long to think about a piece of work that may take up to three years to complete and cost thousands of pounds. Most of us would happily take weekends or months to plan a wedding or buy a new car.

- A good chair or group leader will save time by allowing everyone to have their say, summarising well and moving things on to a decision.

## 4. Be Clear

Many a good idea has failed because the people involved don't agree how to go about it. Sometimes they don't even know that they don't agree yet they wonder why they all seem to be pulling in different directions.

- Start by getting everyone who is involved to write down, in one or two sentences, what the aims of the project are. Do you all agree?

**It is very important that all those working on a project agree on the basic principles. The self-evaluation process ensures that they do.**

# Before you begin

The following exercises will give all those involved with the work a clear and shared understanding of:

1. What difference you want to make to the children's lives.
  - Your aims
2. How you will know you are making that difference.
  - Your signs of success or indicators
3. What you will do to meet your aims and make a difference.
  - Your objectives
4. How you will plan those activities. How often? How many children?
  - Your targets
5. Collecting information on your targets.
  - Your evidence
6. Collecting information on your indicators.
  - More evidence
7. How to use the information you collect to check your progress.
  - Monitoring
8. How you will assess the overall impact or value of your work.
  - Evaluation

The basic steps you need to know

# Introducing case studies

It is always helpful to know how others approach self-evaluation.

We have two case studies for you to use as examples.

1. One, the Longlake Rural Youth Group is used in stages throughout the guide to demonstrate each of the eight basic steps.
2. The progress of the other, Denver Under Fives, is described in full on pages 28 - 37.

## Longlake

The Longlake Rural Youth Group is managed by a group of eight - a local community worker, a teacher, two young people, three parents and a retired shopkeeper.

They came together through mutual concern about the young people hanging around the playground in the local housing estate. These young people were getting into trouble for vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Longlake believes part of the problem, is that there is very little to do in the area. They do organise a drop in youth club in their own premises, but it is not very well attended. They now have a grant to employ a youth worker whose task is to change things.

We will show you how Longlake tackled the eight steps that follow. We have had to be fairly brief so we include only two of their three aims, and have cut short some of the ideas on collecting information.

# Eight basic steps to self-evaluation

## Step 1 - What difference you want to make to the children's lives

### - Your aims

#### Introduction

We assume that you have already done everything possible to understand the problems you are attempting to do something about - **a needs assessment**. If you don't know what the "before" picture looks like you won't be able to compare it with an "after". So, you should take the trouble to find out what the problems really are.

- Don't "guess": get this wrong and all your work will be based on false assumptions.

#### Group Work

Having done everything you can to understand the children, their problems and needs, you must ask yourselves what difference you want to make to their lives? Remember, at this stage we are not interested in activities or services. We want to know what differences you want to make. These are your **aims** and they should be clear and realistic.

#### Discuss this together:

You will all have ideas that you have never shared or written down. Those ideas are often quite different - better to know this now than later! Get rid of anything describing what you are going to do - think only of the end result.

**Try to be clear:** An aim such as "to make them happy" is too vague.

**Try to be realistic:** Aims like "prevent children being hurt from divorce" are too ambitious!

- Brainstorming is a good way to generate ideas. Cover a huge piece of paper with the group's ideas. Then go back and underline the ones you want to take seriously.

What difference do you want to make?

#### Conclusion

You might then end up with one difference you want to make, or two, or even three.

#### These are your aims -

Aims are a statement of what you want to achieve. They are the reason for your project's existence. Check that they are clear and realistic. Write them up on a flip chart.

#### Longlake - Step One

Longlake's aims are:

1. To involve the young people in constructive alternatives to vandalism.
2. To improve their self - esteem and sense of responsibility.

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## Step 2 - How you will know that you are making that difference?

### - Your indicators of success

#### Introduction

This next part is probably the most difficult because it is like working backwards. You need to imagine what your “after” picture will look like.

You know the difference you want to make for children. But what will it “look like.”

Let’s take an example from everyday life. You want to get fit. So, that becomes your aim. Now, how will you know you are fit? What might your signs of success be? You are slimmer, you can walk to work without feeling exhausted, you have more energy. These changes are what will indicate to you

that you are achieving your aim of getting fit - which is why they are known as **indicators**.

Your signs of success or indicators will help you to decide what to do. If you know where you are going it will be easier to get there! To return to our example, if you know that a “fit you” means a “slimmer you” it is easier to decide that you must watch what you eat. Although it might be more difficult to actually do it.

#### Group Work

Look at the aims you wrote on the first page of your flip chart. Take them one at a time and ask yourselves “How will we know we are making that difference? What will it look like? What changes (in the children or in the environment) should we look for?”

These are the **indicators of success** for your project.

- If you find you are having a problem with indicators, it may be because the aims you have written on your flip chart are unrealistic or vague. Go back to them and make sure that they are as clear as you can make them.

If you reword your aims, write them on another page of your flip chart. Then ask your questions again. “How will we know we are making that difference? What indicators should we be looking for?”

#### Conclusion

Write your indicators of success on the next page of your flip chart.

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## Step 3 - What are you going to do? What activities will you organise?

### - Your objectives

#### Introduction

Your objectives are the practical things you will do to achieve your aims. At last we are looking at doing. We are seeing what services and/or activities you will provide to achieve each of the aims you have identified.

#### Group Work

This is a creative process so don’t go for the very first idea you hit upon.

Consider a number of different ways of achieving your aims and discuss the pros and cons of each, including how many staff or volunteers will be needed and what that will cost.

Make sure that activities are designed to achieve the aims you have identified. They should not unnecessarily duplicate other services in the area. They should be relevant to children and young people, and of high quality. They should be affordable.

- Objectives should be **SMART** - **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**imed.

#### Conclusion

Write on your flip chart, under each aim, what you are going to do.

These are your **objectives**.

### Longlake - Step Two

Longlake's indicators are:

1. Less vandalism in the area.
2. Young people get involved in new activities.
3. They take some responsibility for the estate.

### Longlake - Step Three

Longlake's objectives are:

**Aim: To involve young people in constructive alternatives to vandalism.**

1. To provide a programme of challenging activities led by responsible and qualified adults.

**Aim: To improve their self-esteem and sense of responsibility.**

2. To establish a task force of young people to take responsibility for cleaning up and improving the estate.

### Step 4 - How you are going to plan those activities - Your targets

#### Introduction

This exercise will help you to set targets for each of your activities or objectives. Targets are never, ever vague. They are specific and usually expressed as numbers or dates. For example, "10 sessions", "50 children", "by March", "3 times a week". The numbers make these targets measurable. You don't have to argue about the result, you can count it. (But only if you keep good enough records - that comes later).

Setting targets is an important part of planning. You might want to provide activities or services for all 200 children on the local estate, but that may be impractical. Be **SMART!** Setting **S**pecific and **M**easurable targets is a way of making sure that your objectives are **A**chievable and **R**ealistic and **T**imed.

- Grant applicants often try to impress by overstating the number of children they help. This could backfire if it raises questions about the quality of the work or the impact on individual children.

#### Over to you

Targets aren't simply plucked out of the air. They have to be worked out sensibly, in order to balance two crucial, and sometimes contradictory, things:

- To do enough for each child to make the difference you want to achieve.
- To be cost effective.

#### Conclusion

So, think carefully about your targets and, when you are agreed, write them on your flip chart against each objective.

# Monitoring

## Longlake – Step Four (a)

Longlake's targets are:

1. To plan at least 6 challenging activity sessions by March.
2. From March to hold weekly activity sessions.
3. To attract at least 10 young people to each session.
4. To involve at least 40 young people in regular activities by the end of year 1.

## Longlake – Step Four (b)

1. To identify at least 6 leaders willing to establish a Task Force.
2. To hold first meeting by April.
3. To involve 30 young people in the Task Force.
4. To clean up the estate by the end of the year.
5. To achieve a 50% drop in vandalism by the end of 9 months.
6. To make vandalism a rare occurrence by the end of 2 years.
7. To agree a programme of improvements by the end of the year.
8. To carry out improvements in year 2.
9. To maintain the changes in year 3.

The first four steps have helped to clarify your aims and objectives, with indicators and targets to keep you on track. The next three steps (5, 6 and 7) will help you to develop a system of monitoring. It is very important to do these steps as part of your planning and before the actual work begins

Basically, monitoring is a checking process that keeps you on the right track. It helps identify problems at an early stage and allows you to make adjustments. It is not enough to rely on your instinct alone to know if you are on the right track or to spot all problems as they occur. It is not enough to imagine that everything is fine as long as no one actually complains. People don't like to complain. They might feel that "something is better than nothing", and don't want to appear ungrateful.

Monitoring will give you what instinct won't. It will give you facts and figures, evidence and real insight. Monitoring provides valuable feedback from users or beneficiaries and helps you make good decisions. It will help you to achieve what you set out to do.

There are two parts to monitoring:

- Collecting the right information  
– Steps 5 and 6
- Checking that information as you go along  
– Step 7

# Collecting the right information

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Collecting information requires us to be organised and systematic. That doesn't come naturally to everybody. Some people prefer to act on "gut feelings". These have their place, but information is evidence and can be shared with other people. With it, you can learn from your mistakes, make the necessary adjustments and keep on track. Without it you are in danger of drifting with the tide. You need to collect information that tells you if:

- You are meeting your targets  
- **Quantitative information**

Quantitative information is mostly a matter of recording "hard" facts, usually in the form of numbers. That is why it is sometimes referred to as "number crunching". It is very important but number crunching alone, without qualitative information, is not enough.

- You are achieving your indicators of success  
- **Qualitative information**

Qualitative information is about changes in the way that children feel and behave. This cannot be expressed in numbers. But, since these changes are what your work is really all about, they are very important indeed. Collecting information on them is more to do with feedback and observation. The secret is to do it in a structured way and to write it down.

- The important thing is to be systematic in the way you collect and record information so that you can make proper comparisons. That means keeping records on a regular basis: every day, every week or every month. In reality, you will find it sensible to keep some types of record on a daily basis, some on a monthly basis and some on a half-yearly or annual basis.

## Step 5 - Collecting information on your targets - Your evidence

### Introduction

This is mostly about recording things such as names, frequency, numbers, and dates that are linked to the targets you identified. For example:

- How many children attend each project session.
- How many times each child attends project sessions.
- The number of disabled children attending.

This kind of information is usually recorded in registers, log books, databases, membership files etc. It is very important to be systematic and regular and to record things on the spot rather than relying on your memory to do the recording after the event.

### Group Work

As a group you will need to decide:

- What information you need to collect.
- How you are going to collect it.
- How often this will be done.
- Who will be responsible for it.
- How you will use the information.

You might find it helpful to look at our case study on page 28.

### Conclusion

Write up on your flip chart what you have decided about collecting information on targets - **Quantitative information**

Collect your information regularly!

## Longlake - Step Five

Longlake will collect information on targets (see step 4 on p.15) by:

### ● Programme of activities

1. Keeping careful attendance registers for each activity.

### ● Task force

1. Recording the young people involved.
2. Recording the number of new vandalism incidents every 6 months.
3. Recording the number of young people attending Task Force meetings.

## Step 6 - Collecting information on your indicators - More evidence

### Introduction

This is about recording those changes in behaviour and attitude that you identified when you were working on your indicators of success. These could be changes like:

- Whether the children are less quarrelsome.
- Whether they can concentrate for at least five minutes.
- Whether they are more willing to try new things.

Collecting information on these things is not as easy as collecting information on numbers but it is far easier if you have managed to identify some very specific indicators.

The methods you will use to collect this kind of qualitative information are observation, feedback, discussion groups, surveys, questionnaires. You can think up your own imaginative ways of doing things. But, whatever you do, you must do it regularly and systematically. If you're stuck, try to get free help from the research department in a local college.

- Finding out about how to collect qualitative information could be delegated to one or two enthusiastic people who could do the research and report back to the group. Their reward will be valuable professional knowledge that will look good on their CV.

### Group work

For each indicator of success you have identified you should show at least one good way of recording progress. In doing so, you should be clear about how each chosen method will work in practice. There is no point choosing feedback as a method if you're not absolutely clear how you will get the feedback and whether it will be worth having.

- Surveys and questionnaires are the most difficult methods of all, unless your organisation is very experienced, or can get good advice.

### Conclusion

Use your flip chart to make a list of the information you are going to collect on your signs or indicators of success (see step 2 on p.13) and how you are going to collect it.

### Longlake - Step Six (a)

Notes on collecting information on indicators:

#### **Vandalism**

A “before” picture of vandalism from a survey of the estate with photos, written descriptions and recorded interviews with police and residents.

An “after” picture at end of years 1 and 2 using the same methods. All to be done by young people with help of youth worker and research student.

#### **Getting involved in new activities**

A “before” picture created by a survey by young people on the estate, using a checklist of activities, including a catch-all heading called “other”. Ask young people to tick those they have tried. Repeat every 3 months.

### Longlake - Step Six (b)

Young people invited on a monthly basis to tell the Youth Worker about successful and unsuccessful activities. Youth Worker to keep careful notes about what did and didn't work.

#### **Taking responsibility for the estate**

Weekly diary kept by Youth Worker to record any evidence that young people are taking more responsibility for the estate.

A photographic record of all improvements made and written notes about how long they last.

### Step 7 - How to use the information you collect to check your progress - Monitoring

#### **Introduction**

This is about monitoring, which is simply checking your progress as you go along to ensure that you are on the right track.

Checking your progress on a regular basis allows you to identify problems at an early stage and to make any necessary adjustments to what you are doing.

The most important thing is to establish a regular pattern. The pattern will change depending on what you are looking at. If you want to know whether the youth club is attracting young people, you might check attendance registers every week.

But checking for changes in behaviour can only be done every few months, or even longer.

It's the regular pattern that counts. So get the pattern going on a weekly, monthly, or six monthly basis, depending on what you are looking at and what is sensible and realistic.

#### **Group Work**

You will need to check or monitor the information you collect on your targets and on your indicators of success. This will help you to identify problems at an early stage and to put things right. In other words, this will help you to “fine tune” the project and get the very best performance out of it.

You need to think about what you are going to check and how often you are going to check it.

- Don't be too impatient. Some things take time to get established. Don't keep pulling up the plants to inspect the roots. But whatever checking you do, do it regularly.

#### **Conclusion**

Write on your flip chart how you are going to check your progress.

### Longlake - Step Seven (a)

- Longlake checked progress by:

#### **New Activities**

- Every week - check numbers attending.
- Every 3 months - check how many activities each young person attended and follow up those attending only once.
- Discuss Youth Worker notes on successful and unsuccessful activities.
- Annually discuss results of survey and progress made.

#### **Task Force/Vandalism/Taking Responsibility**

- Monthly meeting to discuss information collected and progress made.
- Annual meetings to include young people, residents and police reps to look at evidence.
- Assess progress and discuss next steps.

# Evaluation

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Towards the end of your grant you will want to look back and judge how well you have done overall. This is evaluation. It involves asking yourselves "Did we achieve our aims? What difference have we made?"

It is like comparing those before and after pictures, only it is based on evidence rather than on personal opinion.

Because of the work you have done, you will have a sound basis on which to make useful and informed judgements.

#### **You will have**

- Clear and realistic aims and indicators of success.
- Objectives for each aim together with targets for each objective.
- Lots of carefully collected information, which you have monitored on a regular basis.

All that hard work and time spent in planning will now pay dividends. The last exercise you will have to do, at the end of your project or the period of your grant, is to meet up to look at the evidence.

# Writing the report

## Step 8 - Comparing the "before" and "after" pictures - Evaluation

With all their evidence assembled, your group should meet for a 'post mortem' and this time they deserve chocolate biscuits with their tea!

The kinds of questions you should now ask yourselves are:

- Did the work achieve all its objectives?
- Did its activities run as planned?
- Which activities worked well and why?
- What didn't work and why?
- Did the work achieve the aims it set out to achieve?
- Did the work lead to any unexpected results?
- What lessons have been learned?
- What is the future of the work?

We are not providing a flip chart example for this piece of work, but the answers to these questions will form the basis of a written self-evaluation report. You may be required to do this as a condition of your grant. But, even if you don't have to, it is well worth doing.

- Use your findings for feature articles, news stories, your annual report, grant applications, press releases, your AGM and training events.

By now, your report has almost written itself! There is no one right way of doing it but here are some headings you could use.

- **Your organisation and its aims** (two sentences).
- **Background to your project**
  - With a short description of the needs or problems that you identified.
- **Your aims**
  - What you set out to achieve (step 1).
- **Your objectives**
  - What you did (step 3).

- **A description of how you monitored the project**
  - Your indicators of success (step 2).
  - Your targets (step 4).
  - What information you collected (steps 5 and 6).
  - How you kept a regular check on progress (step 7).
- **Your conclusions, i.e.;**
  - How well you did overall.
  - What lessons you learnt.
  - What needs to be changed.
  - If your project is going to continue and how.

At an early stage find someone in the group who enjoys writing reports or is prepared to have a go. They can keep notes as they go, making it easier for all of you.

Write a great report!

# A few last words

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Proper planning and self-evaluation is hard work and time consuming but it pays off in the end. You will be so much clearer about your project and your work. You will work more productively as a team. You will collect valuable information. You will not only make a difference, but you will be able to show you've made that difference.

But don't let this end as soon as your funding has run out! Self-evaluation is not something to be done just in order to satisfy those tiresome grant-makers.

As we said, at the beginning, self-evaluation should be an essential part of the way you work, throughout the whole of your organisation. Self-evaluation is the only way to ensure that you are achieving results and making a real difference.

# Case study

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## Denver Under Fives Introduction

Denver Under Fives have been involved in running play activities on the Denver Estate for nearly five years. They have a management committee of eight - a health visitor, a grandmother and six parents. The project has three part-time staff.

Quite honestly, they feel a bit jaded. They work very hard but they don't feel as if they are making much difference to anything except giving parents a bit of a break now and then.

They got involved in self-evaluation after being awarded a three-year grant by BBC Children in Need Appeal. Self-evaluation was a condition of that grant.

They decided to involve all their staff (including the new full-time person made possible by the grant), and three of their management committee, in the self-evaluation process.

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### Aims

Denver Under Fives had just one major aim:

- To give the 119 under fives on the Denver Estate a better start in life.

### Indicators of success

Denver Under Fives spent hours discussing indicators, without immediate success. They wrote down dozens of ideas including things such as “they grow into better adults”. This started arguments: “How on earth are we going to know if they grow into better adults?” someone asked.

They got on better when they started to talk about how they would give their own children a better start in life. This led them to realise that they needed indicators that covered the health, education and emotional development of children.

They decided to ask some local doctors and teachers (they had their own health visitor on the team) what they thought would give children a better start in life. They divided up the work between them and met again the following week. They now had loads but they couldn't do everything so they decided on the following indicators because they were achievable:

- Regular attendance of children in pre-school activities.
- Children read, or are read to, every day.
- Children eat fruit and vegetables every day.
- Parents understand the importance of listening and talking to their children.

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### Objectives

Denver Under Fives looked at their aim and discussed what activities they would need to set up to achieve that aim. They found this quite difficult, probably because that aim was rather too vague. But their indicators were very clear indeed, so they cheated a bit and used those to plan their activities to meet their aims which were to:

- Organise a variety of pre-school activities (objective 1).
- Run a children's reading club and library (objective 2).
- Start a parents club to encourage good parenting skills (objective 3).
- Liaise with health visitors and teachers (objective 4).

### Targets

Denver Under Fives had never set targets before and it was more difficult than they imagined. For example, although they were very used to running pre-school activities, they were now into discussions about making a difference by giving children a better start in life. They decided that activities could only make a difference if they were of a very high quality and the children attended on a regular basis. Once? Twice? Three times a week? They hit a problem of resources. If they wanted to encourage each child to attend the playgroup three times a week, they couldn't possibly afford to run enough sessions to cater for all the 119 children on the estate.

They had to choose between quality and quantity. They went for quality and for making a difference. If things worked well and they could show they had made a difference, they could apply for more money to expand their services.

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### They had to revise their aim

Their new aim read “To give 50 under fives on the Denver Estate a better start in life.” The targets they eventually came up with were:

#### For objective 1

- To run eight supervised play sessions a week, each catering for up to 20 children on a pre-booking basis, on the condition that each child is booked in for three play sessions a week.
- By September, to identify and publicise other local pre-school opportunities in the area.

#### For objective 2

- To establish a Saturday morning reading club for children accompanied by a parent (to get parents interested in children’s books, in the hope they will read to the child at home).
- To organise a rota of at least 15 volunteer readers and library organisers by July.

#### For objective 3

- To run two club sessions a week, attracting at least 25 parents to each.
- To attract each participating parent to at least one club session a month.

#### For objective 4

- By September, to identify health visitors, teachers and others involved with the estate’s under fives.
- To invite them to monthly joint meetings, starting in October.

#### Monitoring

Denver Under Fives knew they needed to collect information on their targets and on their indicators of success in order to monitor their progress.

#### Monitoring targets

First of all, they tackled their targets. What information did they need to collect, and how often, in order to tell whether they were meeting their targets? And what would need to be monitored regularly?

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They ticked their best ideas.

- ✓ Attendance registers for each play session. **Daily.**  
**By playleader.**  
Attendance registers for the reading club.
- ✓ A signing-in book for the reading club (name and age).  
**At each session.**  
**By volunteer-in-charge.**  
A list of all the children on the estate.  
A list of all the children on the waiting list for the project.
- ✓ Names, addresses, ages of children attending the play sessions. **As they enrol.**  
**By co-ordinator.**
- ✓ Names, addresses, ages of children attending the reading club.
- ✓ Records of children with special needs, diets, disabilities. **As they enrol.**  
**By co-ordinator.**  
A register of parents attending the reading club. (Too patronising?)
- ✓ A signing in book for parents at the club. **At every session.** **By club leader responsible.**
- ✓ Names, addresses, phone numbers of volunteers.  
**Maintained by co-ordinator.**
- ✓ A diary to record activities that took place. **Maintained by co-ordinator.**

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They then discussed how they would monitor this information, and why.

#### They decided to

- Check play session attendance registers each week, on a Friday, to ensure that children were attending three times a week. They would sort out problems of non-attendance on a monthly basis.
- Check the reading club's signing in book every two months to see: How many children have attended altogether (breadth of interest)? How many have attended more than four times (depth of interest)?
- Check the parents' signing-in book at the end of every month to ensure that each parent attends at least one club session a month and, if not, to (very tactfully) find out why.
- Finally they decided to review all their activities after six months to determine what was working well and what was not and to make any necessary changes.

#### Monitoring Indicators

The Denver Under Fives looked back at their indicators of success. How were they going to find out if they were making any progress with these? They took them one at a time. Through discussion, they realised that they occasionally had to add further things to their list of objectives or targets in order to make sure they would make the difference they wanted to make. That is why it is important to do this thinking and planning **before** starting on the actual work.

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- **Regular attendance of children in pre-school activities.**

Well, this was fairly easy since it was covered by the information collected on targets. But they would also encourage the children to tell them about what else they do outside the home e.g. reading club, swimming, one o'clock club etc. Each child would be encouraged to keep a picture diary on a weekly basis.

- **Children read, or are read to, every day.**

Denver Under Fives came up with a number of ideas and decided upon the following:

- Checking the reading club signing-in book.

- A reading time at each play session three times a week (to be added to the objectives).
- Check with parents at the club. Provide a reading list and ask them to keep a record of every book they read to their child.
- Ask children what they read yesterday, at every play session. Or get them to tick the picture of a book in their diaries if they did some reading the day before.

- **Children eat fruit and vegetables every day.**

Provide children with fresh fruit at every play session (add to objectives). Bring in nutrition experts to talk to parents (add to objectives). Ask both parents and children to record fruit and vegetables eaten by the child daily on a wall chart.

- **Parents understand the importance of listening and talking to their children.**

This was the hardest of all. How to check understanding without making people sit an exam? Thinking about this helped them to think more clearly about what would happen at the parents club. As well as talking about nutrition and encouraging parent to read to their children, they must get over the importance of listening and talking. They agreed a number of ways to do this, including outside speakers, work on language development, hiring educational videos,

parents discussions. Then, rather than checking on the parents' understanding of the importance of listening and talking to their children, perhaps they should check if they were doing more listening and talking to their children and change indicator accordingly. How to get at this?

### They decided

- At the beginning of the year, to ask parents to estimate how many times they listened and talked to each of their children for at least five minutes at a time, on something that interested the child.

The Denver Under Fives also plan to ask the local primary school if they would find a way to evaluate the children who eventually leave the Denver Under Fives to start full-time schooling. They would like to establish whether there is any significant difference between these and other children's behaviour and performance in the intake year.

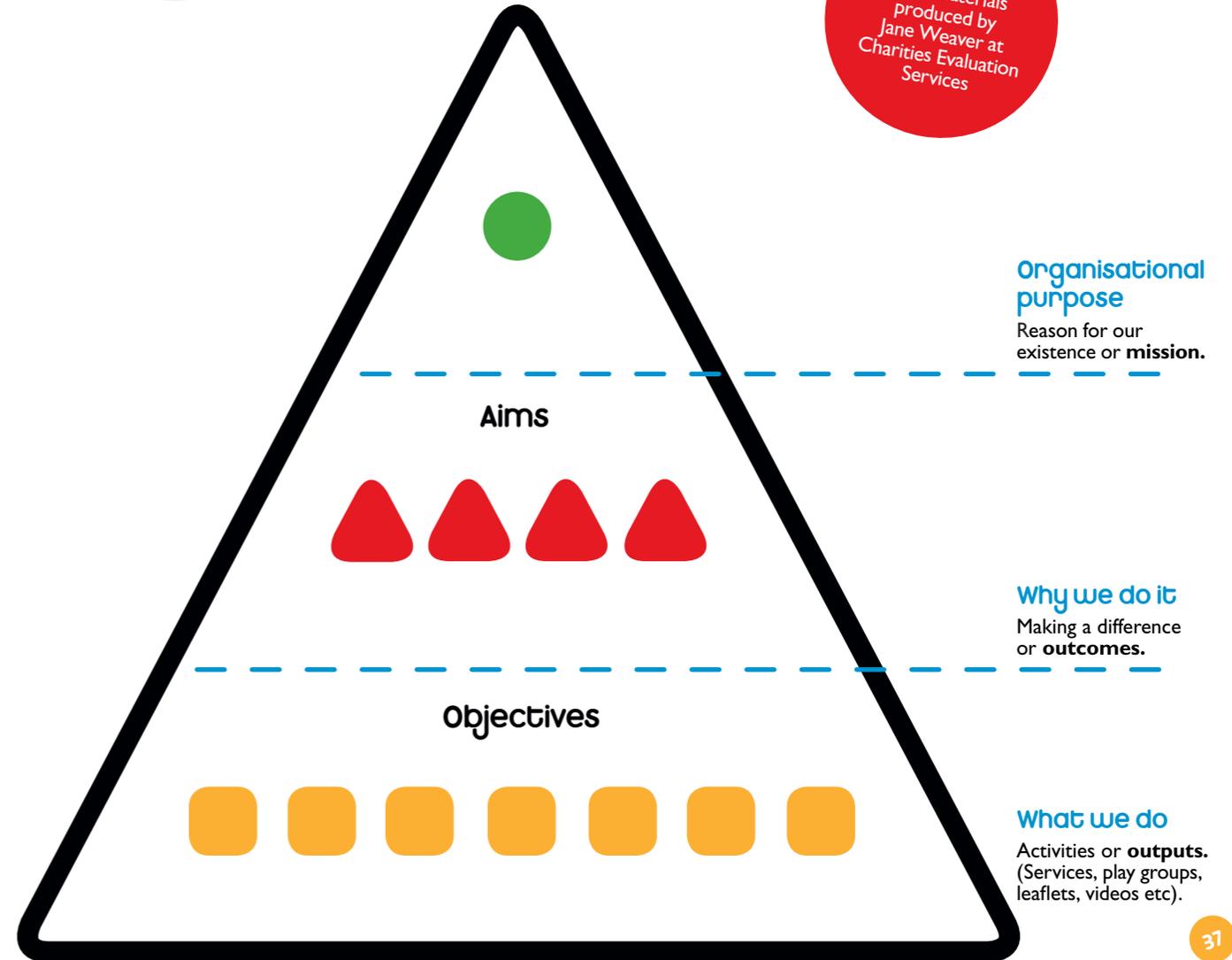
### Conclusion

The Denver Under Fives found self-evaluation to be hard work, difficult in places, but well worth the effort. They discovered how important it is to do all the planning before starting to do things because this had led them to modify their aims, to add some new objectives and change one of their indicators as they thought things through.

They now feel that they have a much better understanding of where they are going and what they are doing. They made some mistakes but they learned a lot as they went along and felt more motivated and more in control, as a result.

## CES Planning Triangle

Adapted from materials produced by Jane Weaver at Charities Evaluation Services



# Reading list

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## First steps in monitoring and Evaluation

Published by Charities Evaluation Services

## Practical Monitoring and Evaluation

By Jean Ellis  
For Charities Evaluation Services

(A little pricey but full of useful stuff)

## Charities Evaluation Services

has a series of 9 discussion papers:

1. The Purpose of Evaluation
2. Different ways of Seeing Evaluation
3. Self-Evaluation
4. Involving Users in Evaluation

5. Performance Indicators: Use and Misuse

6. Using Evaluation to Explore Policy

7. Outcome Monitoring

8. Benchmarking in the Voluntary Sector

9. Assessing Impact

## Everyday Evaluation on the Run

By Y Wadsworth  
An Australian publication available from publishers, Allen and Unwin, in London

(We haven't read this but CES highly recommends it as a hands-on guide)

## Some useful websites

**Evaluation Support Scotland**  
[evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk](http://evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk)

(Among other materials they have a handy guide to report writing)

**Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI)**

[ceni.org](http://ceni.org)

**Charities Evaluation Services**

[ces-vol.org.uk](http://ces-vol.org.uk)

**The Big Lottery**

[biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://biglotteryfund.org.uk)

(Some useful evaluation materials. Try their leaflet on using questionnaires and surveys if you are planning a survey)

# Useful addresses

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## England and General Helpline

BBC Children in Need Appeal  
PO Box 1000  
London  
W12 7WJ

**Tel: 020 8576 7788**

## Scotland

BBC Children in Need Appeal  
BBC Scotland  
G10, 40 Pacific Drive  
Glasgow  
G51 1DA

**Tel: 0141 422 6111**

## Wales

BBC Children in Need Appeal  
Broadcasting House  
Llandaff  
Cardiff  
CF5 2YQ

**Tel: 029 2032 2383**

## Northern Ireland

BBC Children in Need Appeal  
Broadcasting House  
Ormeau Avenue  
Belfast  
BT2 8HQ

**Tel: 028 9033 8221**

## Charities Evaluation Services

4 Coldbath Square  
London  
EC1R 5HL

**Tel: 020 7713 5722**

# Notes

