

Understanding self-evaluation: A guide for projects supported by the Big Lottery Fund

What we understand by self-evaluation and what we expect of projects carrying out a self-evaluation

Read these pages alongside the monitoring and evaluation section of your programme guidance notes.

Self-evaluation has many benefits for you and your project. **It highlights your achievements as well as your areas for development**, and helps you to progress towards your project outcomes. It gives you useful information to report to current or potential funders, and it helps you to improve the way you run your services.

Many organisations and groups receiving grants from the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) will plan and carry out some form of evaluation of their project. We encourage you to self-evaluate and to budget to cover this activity. For some funding programmes, we require projects to do self-evaluation as a condition of our grant.

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1. What we mean by self-evaluation

At the Big Lottery Fund, we define self-evaluation as:

the evaluation of a project that is **carried out** or **commissioned by those running the project**. It involves them collecting and using data to answer their own questions concerning the quality, value and direction of their work and to manage their performance.

Next: Why self-evaluation is important for projects

2. Why self-evaluation is important for projects

Self-evaluation takes time and effort but it enables you:

- to explore the reasons why things are (or are not) working well and make changes so that you can better achieve your outcomes.
- to gather information that will help you report to funders and others about how your project is performing and how you've adapted it to changing circumstances.
- to identify good practice and help other projects to improve the way that they work by publicising your evaluation findings.
- to build a culture of reflection and analysis within your organisation that helps people to improve the quality of their work.

Next: When self-evaluation is compulsory

3. When self-evaluation is compulsory

The requirement for self-evaluation varies across our programmes and our expectations will be outlined in your programme guidance notes. We encourage all our grantholders to do self-evaluation for the benefits it brings to them.

In some cases, we actively promote self-evaluation within a programme, by making it a compulsory requirement. The reasons for this include the following:

- To help project workers develop their skills, learn from their experience and make changes and improvements
- To contribute to wider learning about the impact of different interventions;
- To identify innovative approaches and successes
- To help projects be sustained through identifying what works and what doesn't, and recording achievements
- To gain a greater understanding of the impact and effectiveness of large grants
- To gain a more detailed picture of how programmes work in different countries.

BIG may ask you to share some of your self-evaluation information with us so that we can learn from your experience. Self-evaluation reports may also be required at application stage if you are asking BIG to fund existing projects. Again, your programme guidance notes will clarify the process that relates to your project.

Next: How self-evaluation relates to programme or thematic evaluations commissioned by BIG

4. How self-evaluation relates to programme or thematic evaluations commissioned by BIG

The Big Lottery Fund regularly commissions large evaluations across many projects. These studies may focus on particular funding programmes or themes that run

across different programmes. This wider evaluation is similar to a self-evaluation in purpose, although its scope is different. **The Big Lottery Fund uses the findings from these evaluations to improve the ways we fund and the ways we work, and to influence policy making and practice.** The evaluation of our funding also helps us to be publicly accountable for the funding decisions we make.

BIG evaluations, which sometimes run over several years, usually include case studies. This means that our evaluators may wish to speak to you about your project to gather learning for the wider programme. The benefits of being involved as a case-study are that you will be able to see independent findings about the worth and quality of your project, as well as understanding how it compares to other case study projects.

Our wider evaluations may also request the use of your self-evaluation findings to analyse particular issues or themes or ask you to capture data at the start of your project (baseline data) and throughout the life of your project. We are increasingly finding ways for projects within a programme to collect standard data (for example through surveying their users with an identical questionnaire). This allows you to compare your work against that of others doing similar activities or aiming for similar outcomes.

Any data that you provide for BIG evaluations will be anonymised by the external evaluators and held separately from the information requested by us for grant monitoring and management.

Next: How self-evaluation relates to monitoring

5. How self-evaluation relates to monitoring

Monitoring involves the routine collection of information against a plan agreed between you and the funder at the start of your grant. The monitoring process at BIG focuses on progress towards achieving your project outcomes. This progress is marked by stages, called 'milestones', with projects having timescales for reaching each milestone. This process is different from self-evaluation.

Evaluation goes further and deeper than monitoring. **Evaluation explores how and why certain outcomes were achieved** (or not, as the case may be). It also looks at issues of quality and worth, most importantly asking: What has been the value and significance of the project to those it was intended to affect (and others who have been affected)? It may also identify additional and unanticipated outcomes of the project.

One way of making the distinction between monitoring and evaluation is to consider them in the context of a car journey:

Monitoring collects information on matters such as average speed, distance travelled, fuel consumption and whether the journey is following the pre-planned route and is on time.

Evaluation addresses questions such as whether the route followed was the best one, whether it might have been better by train and whether the journey was worth undertaking in the first place.

1991)

(Scottish Homes,

Next: Planning your project self-evaluation

6. Planning your project self-evaluation

If you are beginning to think about planning your self-evaluation, here is some advice to get you started:

7. Deciding who should conduct your self-evaluation

8. How BIG can help you

9. How much work should you put in?

10. Who should you ask for their views?

11. What to include in your self-evaluation

12. Who else can help?

7. Deciding who should conduct your self-evaluation

It is up to you to decide whether you want to commission an external evaluator or carry out self-evaluation using your own project team and resources. Or you might prefer to use a mixture of both approaches. The benefits of each approach are as follows:

Advantages of doing self-evaluation yourself:

- You and your staff have in-depth knowledge of how your organisation works
- You are sensitive to the needs of your project and its users
- It enables your staff to learn new skills
- It actively encourages reflection and learning by those involved, which is more likely to lead to change in your organisation
- You will save on project costs

Advantages of commissioning an external agency to do self-evaluation:

- The evaluation will take up less staff time

- Interviewees may talk more freely
- External evaluators may find it easier to identify areas of weakness
- It avoids conflicts of interest as the evaluators are independent
- Specialists will have evaluation skills
- The end result may be seen as more objective/credible by others

Next: How BIG can help you

8. How BIG can help you

Projects will receive guidance from BIG staff on how to self-evaluate (for example through programme briefing events or programme guidance) or will be directed to local sources of help for advice and assistance. See the section Who else can help for information on specialist support services and guidance from other organisations.

For some programmes, we use consultants to support projects' self-evaluation throughout the grant. This may include:

- email support
- telephone help lines
- customised websites
- written guidance
- workshops and seminars for training and networking, and
- one-to-one assistance in selecting evaluation techniques and methods, arranging participation and consultation, designing research materials, analysing and interpreting data and presenting findings

The Big Lottery Fund publication: *Explaining the difference your project makes: a BIG guide to using an outcomes approach* (Burns, S and MacKeith, J, 2006) also has some relevant chapters for self-evaluation entitled: 'Measuring progress' and 'Learning from your outcomes'. This guidance can be found at:

http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/index/evaluationandresearch-uk/ga_explaining_difference.htm

Next: How much work you should put in?

9. How much work should you put in?

The time and effort you should put into self-evaluation will depend, in part, on your resources. Your programme guidance notes give information on the percentage of your budget that can be allocated to evaluation. Larger projects should be able to carry out a more extensive piece of work while smaller projects may need to focus on

a few key things they want to find out. You can also include data that you've collected as part of your monitoring.

Next: Who should you ask for their views?

10. Who should you ask for their views?

We encourage you to plan and conduct your evaluation so that it brings in the views of a range of your stakeholders – for example project users or beneficiaries, staff, community representatives, statutory authorities, and sponsors/funders. If you're a smaller project with more limited funds, you may be better to concentrate on getting more in-depth information on the impact of your project on its key users.

As part of our work with young people, we have carried out research into ways of involving young people in evaluation, entitled "Engaging young people in evaluation and consultation" (2005). Many of the same guidelines apply to other groups.

Next: What to include in your self-evaluation plans

11. What to include in your self-evaluation plans

When you apply to certain programmes, you will be asked to provide details of your plans for self-evaluation. Programmes with two-stage applications, for example, may require a brief outline at stage one and more detailed proposals at stage two.

When we look at your self-evaluation plans, we are interested in the answers to the following questions:

For outline evaluation plans

- Does the evaluation have a clear aim?
- What questions will the evaluation answer?
- Are these questions linked to the project outcomes?
- Is the scale of the evaluation proportionate to the size of the project?
- Who will be involved in managing and carrying out the evaluation?
- How will the findings from the evaluation be used?

For detailed evaluation plans

- If the work is to be commissioned, is there an evaluation brief and how will the work be commissioned?
- If project staff carry out the work, do they have the necessary skills and will any support or training be provided?
- Will baseline data be collected at the start of the project and, if so, what will this consist of?

- How will the evidence be gathered? In other words, what will be the research methods?
- How will local stakeholders and people who use the project be involved?
- Will the evaluation build on or link in with other research?
- What are the costs of the self-evaluation? How were they calculated?
- How will the evaluation be used? What plans are in place to feed emerging lessons back in to the work and direction of the project?
- What outputs will the evaluation deliver? How will reports or other results of the evaluation be communicated and acted upon?

Next: Who else can help?

11 Who else can help?

Resources for self- evaluation: General guides and Support Services

We have listed here a number of organisations that **specialise in offering advice, information, training and consultancy on self-evaluation**. While several organisations focus on one of the countries of the UK, their materials are often just as relevant to projects operating in other parts of the UK or internationally.

If you want to find evaluation resources relating to a particular theme or type of activity (for example, health and well-being, environment, learning and skills, sport, sustainable development), it may be helpful to visit the websites of other lottery funders and relevant government departments (national and regional) – and find their web pages on research, analysis, evaluation or performance. These may also be useful if you want to set your project evaluation in the wider context of national policy and trends.

Other potential sources of information for your evaluation include: university research centres that specialise in specific areas; private research or consultancy organisations which publish their tools or support materials; national or regional voluntary sector organisations; local authority research departments; and voluntary and community groups that have produced and published evaluation reports on similar projects to your own.

General guides and support services

General Guides and support services

Charities' Evaluation Service <http://www.ces-vol.org.uk>

Paul Hamlyn Foundation www.phf.org.uk

Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) www.ceni.org

Evaluation Support Scotland www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk

Evaluation Trust www.evaluationtrust.org

Improvement and development agency www.IDeA.gov.uk

Volunteering England www.volunteering.org.uk

Volunteer Development Scotland www.vds.org.uk

Social Work Inspection Agency www.swia.gov.uk

Survey Monkey www.surveymonkey.com
Blake Stevenson www.blakestevenson.co.uk/biglotteryfund
Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) www.ceni.org
UK Evaluation Society www.evaluation.org.uk
Joseph Rowntree Foundation www.jrf.org.uk
Improving Support www.improvingsupport.org.uk

Topic specific guides/toolkits

National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) www.navca.org.uk
Arts and Humanities Research Council www.ahrc.ac.uk
Arts Council England www.artscouncil.org.uk
Alcohol Concern www.alcoholconcern.org.uk
Homeless Outcomes www.homelessoutcomes.org.uk
BBC Children in Need www.bbc.co.uk/pudsey
National Children's Bureau NCB www.ncb.org.uk

Future resources/toolkits under development

National Children's Bureau NCB www.ncb.org.uk
Improving Support www.improvingsupport.org.uk

General Guides and support services

Charities' Evaluation Service <http://www.ces-vol.org.uk>

The Charities Evaluation Service has published a comprehensive guide to monitoring and evaluation aimed at voluntary and community organisations. The final section of the guide is a practical tool kit providing tips and templates for analysing data and data collection tools. The guide is available from Charities Evaluation Services, 4 Coldbath Square, London EC1R 5HL – cost £33.50.

2. Ellis, J (2005). *Practical monitoring and evaluation: a guide for voluntary organisations*. London: Charities' Evaluation Service

The Charities' Evaluation Service website lists many other guides under its 'Monitoring and Evaluation' section. These can be searched by approaches and methods or by sector.

Paul Hamlyn Foundation www.phf.org.uk

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation in association with the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) have developed a very easy to use pack designed to introduce front line workers and volunteers from the voluntary and community sector to evaluation and report writing. It provides creative and participatory methods for self evaluation. The pack is now available from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation website (see link above) as a free download.

Thompson (2007) *Evaluation Resource Pack*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation and NIACE.

Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) www.ceni.org

As part of a three year project on Evaluation Training and Development funded by the Big Lottery Fund, CENI have produced a guide designed to help organisations through the process of self-evaluation, breaking it down into a set of logical steps and stages with particular focus on identifying and measuring outcomes.

CENI 2008. *Prove and Improve: A self-evaluation resource for voluntary and community organisations*. Belfast: CENI and Big Lottery Fund.

Evaluation Support Scotland www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk

In collaboration with Befriending Network Scotland and Scottish Mentoring Network, Evaluation Support Scotland commissioned a pack to support projects to undertake monitoring and evaluation for themselves. The pack has been developed to provide a set of processes and tools that befriending and mentoring organisations can adapt and use to monitor and evaluate their work.

Kennedy, McKenzie and Wilson (2006) *Befriending and Mentoring Evaluation Resource Pack*. Befriending Network Scotland, Scottish Mentoring Network and Evaluation Support Scotland

Evaluation Trust www.evaluationtrust.org

The Evaluation Trust has produced a toolkit for use by community and voluntary organisations. It contains advice on different methods and how to apply them, as well as resources, such as visual aids. The complete document can be downloaded from the website.

Improvement and development agency www.IDeA.gov.uk

In collaboration with the LGA, IDeA has developed guidance to assist partnerships in developing a self evaluation of their locality. This is designed to help members agree an assessment of their own performance and to identify where focused attention and improvement is needed to achieve local priorities.

IDeA (2009) *Locality self evaluation guidance for partnerships*. London: IDeA and LGA

Volunteering England www.volunteering.org.uk
Volunteer Development Scotland www.vds.org.uk

With a grant from the Global Services Institute, Center for Social Development, Washington University St. Louis, organisations in the UK and Sweden have developed a toolkit to enable organisations to assess the impact of volunteering on all key stakeholders - the volunteers, the organisation, the beneficiaries, and the broader community. Organisations can use the toolkit to assess a wide range of impacts, from the skills development of volunteers to the economic value of volunteering organisations. The toolkit can be ordered through either Volunteering England or Volunteer Development Scotland at £35 for non-members or £30 for members.

(2009) *Volunteering impact assessment toolkit*

Social Work Inspection Agency www.swia.gov.uk

The Social Work Inspection Agency has recently published a guide that enables social work services to carry out self-evaluations. Although it is primarily for social work services, it has clear relevance to social work or social care services provided in multi-agency and multi-disciplinary partnerships and in integrated teams.

Survey Monkey www.surveymonkey.com

Survey monkey is a free on-line survey tool designed to enable anyone to create on-line surveys quickly and easily. You can also pay to create more complicated surveys and to access the tools to analyse the results (otherwise you have to analyse by hand). Evaluation Support Scotland, for example, found this survey tool a really simple way of getting useful feedback about its activities and outcomes

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Topic specific guides/toolkits

National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)

www.navca.org.uk

Measuring Effectiveness was a joint project between NACVS and Charities Evaluation Services (CES), the aim of which was to produce a self-evaluation toolkit that would enable the CVS network to improve its monitoring and evaluation activities and to share the information in a comparable and consistent way.

- NACVS and CES (2002) *Measuring effectiveness: A self-evaluation toolkit for the national network of Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS)*. London: CES.

Arts and Humanities Research Council www.ahrc.ac.uk

The Arts and Humanities Research Council has developed guidelines for the arts and humanities community. They offer tools and techniques for use throughout the process.

- Arts and Humanities Research Council: *Understanding your project: a guide to self evaluation*.

Arts Council England www.artscouncil.org.uk

The Arts Council England has an information sheet, available on-line, which suggests some approaches to self-evaluation for artists and arts organisations.

Arts Council England (2007) *Self evaluation*. London: Arts Council England.

Alcohol Concern www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

The Alcohol Outcomes Spider is an outcomes tool for alcohol agencies to measure the key outcomes of their work with alcohol service users. The manual provides alcohol agencies with the necessary guidance, forms, etc to introduce the spider into their practice. The guide costs £11 and can be ordered through the website.

- Burns (2005). *Alcohol outcomes spider: scales and guidance notes*. London: Alcohol Concern

Homeless Outcomes www.homelessoutcomes.org.uk

This website is published by [Homeless Link](#) as part of its [outcomes programme](#) which began life in 2001 under the leadership of the [London Housing Foundation](#). It aims to provide a one-stop resource for homelessness agencies who are interested in taking an outcomes approach to their work and includes detailed information on the [Outcomes Star](#) tool for measuring the outcomes of work with homeless people.

MacKeith, Burns and Graham (2008) *The Outcomes Star: supporting change in homelessness and related services*. London: London Housing Foundation and Triangle Consulting.

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Future resources/toolkits under development

National Children's Bureau NCB www.ncb.org.uk

NCB (funded by BIG) is currently developing a self-evaluation toolkit for use by Third Sector organisations to evaluate their activities. The toolkit will present a range of methods and models for evaluating participation work, include and recommend other appropriate tools and approaches to best meet the needs of the diversity of organisations within the Third Sector, and promote the involvement of children and young people in evaluation. In addition to tools assessing process issues, the toolkit will include methods or approaches for measuring and recording impact, including outcomes for young people, staff/volunteers, organisations and the wider community. An accessible 'how-to' guide will accompany the toolkit to demystify evaluation and promote the use of appropriate tools.

Improving Support www.improvingsupport.org.uk

Improving Support brings together practical resources and learning for third sector support providers. The Performance management work stream led by Charities Evaluation Services will promote resources that help providers assess and demonstrate the outcomes of their work.