



Background

BIG's Community Libraries programme provided funding to help libraries consider new ways of working and to improve accessibility and service provision. Evidence from MLA's recent evaluation of the programme shows that the changes have not only made a significant impact on users, issues and services, but also a difference to a great many individuals' lives. In a changing political landscape that particularly focuses on efficiency and social impact, libraries are encouraged to build on their work to date and capitalise on the opportunities available. To demonstrate their vital place in the heart of communities, and to future-proof themselves against spending cuts, libraries need to be able to measure and quantify the impact they have on individuals and communities. This evidence is essential if key stakeholders and decision-makers are to be positively influenced.

BIG's event looked at a variety of tools and techniques for measuring impact, such as case studies, evaluation data, Social Return on Investment calculations and social media statistics. Below is a list of considerations and tips to help demonstrate the value of libraries, suggested through table discussions and presentations during the event held in October.

Tools

- ▶ The Generic Learning Outcome or Generic Social Outcome framework can help demonstrate impact of activities on individuals and how these contribute to shared government priorities.
- ▶ Creative ways of gathering feedback from customers, for example, an evaluation tree or models such as Outcomes Star, can also help. Consider what will work best for your community/activity, for example, visual versus written tools. You could start with one element of a tool, and expand as confidence grows.
- ▶ Look at ways to measure soft outcomes as early as possible in the activity planning process. Establish base-line data at the start of a project/activity where possible.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) model

- ▶ SROI can demonstrate value for money and the impact services have on various agendas. It helps you translate the value of the soft outcomes you're delivering into a monetary value.
- ▶ SROI offers a framework to look at the relationship between the money spent and outcomes achieved and can help identify what is added value compared to what might have occurred naturally.

Social media

- ▶ A cost-effective marketing tool that can draw attention to a library and its services, and the impact made on people's lives, through sites such as Twitter and Facebook. The media may pick up on things where there is momentum gathered online.
- ▶ It can provide the library with a human voice and opportunity to engage with users/non-users.
- ▶ Libraries without access to social media could volunteer themselves as a pilot for the council's new media presence.
- ▶ Sites could be used to facilitate volunteer networks.
- ▶ Google Analytics can provide statistics on site use, which could demonstrate value for money.

Wider agendas

- ▶ Linking to other agendas, for example employability, culture or wellbeing, could raise the library's profile with councillors, strengthening their position by meeting a variety of needs and being 'relevant'.

Partnerships

- ▶ Cross-boundary partnerships and pooled resources could strengthen library provision.
- ▶ It could offer additional opportunities to measure impact/library use (for example, PLUS surveys).
- ▶ Evaluation findings could be disseminated via partners to influence wider stakeholders.

Shared facilities

- ▶ Co-locating with other services or becoming a multi-purpose facility could change community perceptions of the library and increase awareness of services, drawing in new users.

Impact

- ▶ Tracking services and the impact they deliver can help libraries to refine their service offer.
- ▶ Personal stories demonstrating the impact on individuals' lives can be more powerful than numbers, and provide SCAMPS* with convincing evidence.
- ▶ Monitoring impact could be incorporated into staff or volunteer roles.

Volunteers

- ▶ Using volunteer help to deliver services, contribute to decision-making or provide support that enables staff to focus on other things, including evaluation, could make a big impact to libraries in a cost-cutting climate.

Engaging the community

- ▶ Providing services relevant to the community can earn community support and recognition.
- ▶ Demonstrating the positive impact community engagement has may encourage wider adoption within council services and position the library as a role model or mentor to others.

Hearts and minds

- ▶ Talking and listening to the community can cement local relationships and deliver essential services that are valued and defended.
- ▶ Libraries are encouraged to evidence and shout loudly about the good work they do.

Training and Development

- ▶ Staff and volunteers may need ongoing support to develop the skills required to use evaluation tools or social media.

- ▶ Consider whether evaluation or data capture could be an integral part of staff roles – perhaps as part of identifying customer needs (alongside supporting and meeting those needs).
- ▶ Evaluation can impact positively on staff motivation where individuals are set targets, and understand the reasons behind why an activity is being carried out.
- ▶ Projects with an underspend might consider using funds to support workforce development in this area.

Communication

- ▶ Recognise your successes and shout about them as widely as possible. This can help make the library indispensable to the community and council. (See 'Social Media'.)

* SCAMPS – Sceptical councillors and Members of Parliament (John Holden)

Sources of support and further information:

www.inspiringlearning.gov.uk/toolstemplates/genericsocialresearch.mla.gov.uk/case-studies

www.outcomesstar.org.uk

soulrecord.org

www.rickterscale.com

www.proveit.org.uk

www.participationworks.org.uk/topics/young-inspectors

www.toynbeehall.org.uk/page.asp?section=000100010001000800060002§ionTitle=Evaluation

www.homelessoutcomes.org/choosing_an_outcomes_tool.aspx

Social Return on Investment (SROI):

www.sroi-uk.org/

There's lots of information about SROI (support, guidance, training, networking) at The SROI Network website. Here is the page called 'How can I get support?'

www.thesroinetwork.org/content/view/91/72/

New Economic Foundation run SROI training

www.nef-consulting.co.uk/en/page_147.html

Eilis Lawlor, SROI expert and trainer

eilis.lawlor@gmail.com

Training is also available from the Charities Evaluation Service. See Assessing Change: Developing & Using Outcomes Monitoring tools

www.ces-vol.org.uk/downloads/assessingchange-740-748.pdf

Monitoring and Evaluation Resource guide

www.ces-vol.org.uk/index.cfm?pg=315

Your Local Business Link may also run training

www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/layer?topicId=1074400185

Additional information:

Here is a link to 'Engaging Young People in Evaluation and Research'

www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/er_res_engaging_young_people_uk.pdf

Further self-evaluation guidance and help, plus tools for measuring soft outcomes

www.reachingcommunities.org

A second edition of the Institute for Volunteering Research's 'Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit' has now been launched. Details at

www.volunteering.org.uk/shop/viat

Handouts provided at the event – please contact us if you need copies:

- ▶ Promoting your project (BIG) – an overview of marketing approaches
- ▶ Sustainability Beyond Continuation Funding + Beyond BIG – life after lottery funding
- ▶ Understanding Self-Evaluation (BIG) – a guide to planning for Self-Evaluation; how to do it and why it's important
- ▶ Social Media Case Study – Orkney Library www.facebook.com/pages/Kirkwall-United-Kingdom/Orkney-Library-Archive/185386170641
- ▶ How can libraries best demonstrate value as costs come under pressure (John Holden) – explores who needs what information and value for money.
- ▶ New challenges facing libraries in post election Britain – the need for a customer led revolution (Shared Intelligence) – transcript of presentation at the 'Libraries Change Lives' conference, September 2010.

And don't forget:

www.facebook.com/BIGCommunityLibraries