LEEDS INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM RESOURCE PACK

SECTION 7 – MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Introduction

This section on **Monitoring and Evaluation** is part of an 8-pack series of resource materials that has been produced by the Leeds Infrastructure Consortium. For further information, please go to www.leeds-ic.org.uk.

When you start a project you plan it carefully. Monitoring and Evaluation is about measuring that you are meeting that plan, and if you are not, finding ways to make changes to keep you on track.

You need to collect information about your services and activities; test them to make sure they give you the information that you need; check that the methods you use to collect that information works; evaluate the information to see what it tells you; look for ways to improve on your performance; and start the cycle again, but collecting more, perhaps different information.

Where to start?

Whether you are a new or a more established group you will need to monitor and evaluate your activities or services.

There are different ways to do this and these will depend on your group and what you want to achieve. Monitoring and evaluation is a good way to bring members of your group together and get them involved. It can keep people motivated and ensure they feel valued and can see the value of your work. Not only that, most funders require you to do it.

The aim of this guide is to give you some ideas about how you might go about monitoring and evaluation.

1. DEFINITION

Let's be clear what we mean:

Monitoring: the routine and systematic collection of information against a plan. The information might be about activities, products or services, users, or stakeholders or about outside factors affecting the organisation or project. Or put simply, collecting evidence that you have delivered what you said you were going to deliver.

Evaluation: making judgements about the value of any component part of an organisation or its products, services or benefits, or about the organisation as a whole. Again put simply this means some form of report or document where you look at what you have done to see if other people could learn from it or could you have done some things better.

So why is it important?

From a funder's point of view, it allows them to see that the money they gave you has had a benefit, and you have delivered what you told them you were going to do in your application.

For an organisation, it has a lot of benefits - not least that if you get it right funders don't ask for their money back! It allows you to keep track of where your project is and where it might go next. Some of the benefits are:

- learning from your experience and using this learning to help your organisation develop and improve
- responding to the changing needs of users
- making sure that what you are doing is what is needed by users
- understanding your project better - the strengths and weaknesses
- using your limited resources as effectively and efficiently as possible
- demonstrating your successes to others
- enabling staff to reflect on the difference their work is making - this can be very motivating!

2. MONITORING

The recommended approach to monitoring is a simple and straightforward one, involving four key stages. This broad framework provides a useful structure for addressing the challenge of monitoring and evaluation, particularly for groups that are inexperienced:

Stage 1: Plan and prepare

Here organisations or projects need to make sure they are clear about their work: identifying the outcomes or changes they are looking to achieve and the outputs that will help them make this happen. They can consider their resources to carry out monitoring and evaluation (skills, knowledge, funds) and make sensible decisions about what they are going to monitor and evaluate. It is not necessary to monitor everything at once, or to measure everything over a very long time (like a year). You could do some monitoring with spot checks and a week long collection of specific data.

Stage 2: Monitor and evaluate

During this stage, the organisation or project can put their monitoring and evaluation plan into action. They will use the planned methods to collect information, collate it over a period of time, and to analyse it.

Stage 3: Pilot the project

Test out the methods you have decided on and check that they are going to give you the information you need. You may find you have to change a question, or that users do not understand part of a question.

Stage 4: Review and use information

This stage is all about learning from experience and drawing useful conclusions about the way forward for the organisation or project. What has gone well - can you build on successes? Where has work been less successful - can you learn from mistakes and change things in order to work more effectively?

Some of the key words in Monitoring and Evaluation are

Outputs - all the detailed products, services and activities actually provided for users. In other words this can be a simple counting of numbers,for example, the number of people who turned up to an event or the number of newsletters you sent out.

Outcomes - all the benefits or changes that happen for the users as a result of your outputs/activities. This one takes a bit more thought. It is really about what you hope to achieve by running your project, for example: a reduction in levels of obesity or an increase in self confidence for participants of a group. These are more difficult, but not impossible to measure.

Impact - is much broader, sustained and long term change. It will usually involve changes that are brought about by a range of outcomes, and as a result of action by a number of agencies. Not all impacts will be wholly attributable to your work and it is never safe to claim that. But if your work has helped to reduce obesity by teaching people how to exercise more and eat healthily, and you can prove that for your area, then claim it as your contribution to the impact. Unfortunately, the terms Impact and Outcomes are sometimes confused and used inter-changeably.

Until recently, funders have tended to be interested more in outputs - what services or activities a project has spent the money on. But increasingly, Government Departments, local authorities and other service commissioners now want to know more about the outcomes of organisations' activities and projects. Outcomes are the "difference" an organisation or project makes to the lives of users. This may happen quickly or come about over a period of time, but the essential element is change. Outcomes usually involve words that indicate a change: reduced, increased, improved, developed, expanded etc. An outcomes approach will be important for organisations in future.

3. DEVELOPING INDICATORS AND TARGETS

An essential part of a monitoring and evaluation plan is to set some appropriate indicators: specific, observable characteristics that can be measured or assessed to show the quality or quantity of aspects of the organisation or project, or the results of its activities. Indicators are the signs that give you information about your project's progress and success. Output indicators are fairly straightforward - how many, how often etc - and tend to reflect quantity. Outcome indicators need a bit more thought, as they will be providing the evidence that change is occurring - the quality aspects. You will be monitoring the indicators to demonstrate the outcomes. Some examples:

- Outcome: users have increased knowledge about availability of benefits
- Indicator: benefit take up increases

- Outcome: users are better able to budget and mange money effectively
- Indicator: fewer users need to access the emergency funding available

- Outcome: users have increased opportunities to find paid employment
- Indicator: users are attending more job interviews

Having identified the indicators, you then need to assign targets to them. These specify the level and quality of activities and achievements that an organisation or project expects. For example, in the first six months of the project 20 fewer people will need to access the emergency fund. On your evaluation you can explain why you did or did not reach the target. Often targets will be needed when making a funding application and they can help with work planning, both for the project as a whole and for individuals. It is important that you set your own targets - those imposed by others may not be sensible or realistic.

4. OTHER USEFUL WEBSITES

http://www.navca.org.uk/localvs/lio/measuringeffectiveness: a guide on measuring effectiveness
http://www.improvingsupport.org: plenty of useful information
www.ces-vol.org.uk: Charities Evaluation Service, details about training / further information
http://www.biglearningzone.org.uk/: this is the Big Lottery's guide to outcomes but has great information that is of use to all groups

LEEDS INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM RESOURCE PACK

SECTION 7a – HOW TO MONITOR

Introduction

This section is part of an 8-pack series of resource materials that has been produced by the Leeds Infrastructure Consortium. For further information, please go to www.leeds-ic.org.uk.

1. INFORMATION COLLECTION METHODS

There are many ways to collect the information needed to monitor and evaluate a project. Think about what fits your organisation or project (and the users) best. Don't forget that in many cases, some useful information may already be available: the organisation doesn't need to collect this again. Some of the techniques are:

Feedback forms
Short evaluation forms can be really effective in gathering ideas and responses quickly and easily. The problems can be that people may tell you what they think you want to hear. If given a form after a training lesson people often will answer scaled questions i.e. 1 to 6 but fail to answer the more in depth questions because it will take too much time.

Questionnaire or survey:
This is a really easy option, but remember there are a number of issues, for example:

- How many questionnaires will you need to send out to get a reasonable response?
- Is English or literacy an issue for your participants?
- If you use scales (e.g., 1 to 5) in the questions, can people sit in the middle?
- Are your questions neutral so you don't accidentally bias the results?

Focus groups
Gather together a few people to discuss a clear set of issues or ideas. This can take a bit of organising and you need to be careful to capture the ideas and comments. Always worth recapping and checking on what has been said.

In depth interviews
Time consuming but can gather a lot of really useful material. Make sure you plan your questions carefully, train you staff or volunteers to LISTEN to the answers and talk to a range of people, and check with the participants by reading back their answers, that you have captured their meaning properly.

Observation
Take photos, videos or make notes on what you see. Be clear and make sure you are collecting the information that is important. You should also remember to tell people that you are doing this and what the information is to be used for. Many projects insist on having participants sign a waiver on this and do be careful photographing children or vulnerable people without the correct permissions.

Diaries
Ask people to keep a record of their experiences. If your project lends itself to this it's a great way to gather information to support case studies.

Case studies
Focus on a detailed exploration of a small number of examples of your work with users - make sure you pick ones that focus on the main objectives of your project.

Evaluation workshops
Get people together and use practical activities to gather feedback and monitoring information on your work. Children can be asked questions about their favourite activities and can express that by jumping on or off coloured mats. Groups can be asked to draw pictures or write short pieces to show what their vision of the future of the organisation might be.

2. FEEDBACK FORMS

These have an immediacy that is often useful. You can ask a group that has just used your services to say what they think about them, or you can collect information over a longer period with a similar form. Feedback forms are usually shorter than questionnaires and less detailed, but could use some of the same systems – even numbered scales, clear questions, space for comment in text boxes. You may want to use pictures instead of numbers in a scale, for example, smiley faces or weather symbols as people readily recognise the meaning of these, and they can help people who do not read well.

See the enclosed example feedback form for a suggested template.

3. QUESTIONNAIRE / SURVEY

The first question to ask before start to design a questionnaire is

What information do I need to know?

- Who will be completing it?
- Will you ask people to complete the survey anonymously?
- Will you have different groups of people to complete it – users, funders, staff, other stakeholders etc
- Do you want to know about their feelings about your services or what service they actually use?
- Will you ask open questions for them to complete.. “What I like about the service…” or get them to tick boxes. Tick boxes are easier to quantify when you come to analyse the results but qualitative questions probably tell you more about how the service is perceived.

Often if you send out a questionnaire the return rate is very low, 5% is often considered very good. One method to increase this take up is to allocate staff or volunteer time to sit with users and go through the forms with them (this may also work where English is not the first language). This does have some drawbacks as users may give you the answers they think you want rather than what they really think. Training for volunteers and staff is important to maximise the level of trust your clients have in the person asking the questions, leading to more honest, unbiased answers.

You need to ask yourself how many questions will be enough? This is a fine balance between too many, with the risk of no-one completing the survey, and too few which could lead to there not being enough information to do a good analysis. Piloting a questionnaire is a good idea and you may find supplementary questions you need to ask or questions that do not give you the kind of answers you need and have to be re-written.

It is also good to pick a scale that does not have a mid point (4 or 6 choices not 5). This stops people choosing the easy option of the neutral middle ground. With an even number of options they have to approve or disapprove. Again, it might be worth thinking about using pictures instead of numbers in a scale.

It is generally best to write different kinds of questions in the survey and to be sure you can quantify most of them, but have at least one box for free text for extra comments that might be quoted in your final report. To get the best out of your questionnaire you may need to repeat it some time later and compare the results.

See the enclosed example questionnaire for a suggested template.

4. FOCUS GROUP

A focus group is a group of people invited to come and talk together informally about their experience of the service or product you produce. In setting up a focus group you should take into consideration:

- The skills of your staff or the person running the meeting. They must be able to make everyone feel safe and comfortable about sharing ideas.
- The people invited. These should be people who have used the service or product and can be counted on actually saying something about the service in the meeting. If they do not it is the job of the person running the meeting to make them feel comfortable enough to share.
- The time you set for the meeting. It should suit your users.
- The place of the meeting. It needs to be comfortable for them to relax and share honestly what they think.
- Refreshments. Alcohol is not appropriate.
- The ground rules. These need to be explained to everyone so that they feel safe in sharing their experiences or comments
- What information you want to gather and what questions you want answers to

After the group has met you should produce a report which sets out who attended the group, what issues were identified, specific examples and quotes if appropriate, a conclusion and what happens next.

5. INTERVIEW

An interview, in this context, needs to have a set of appropriate questions that every interviewee is asked. There could be a small section for additional comments, but these are more difficult to evaluate (subjective) but useful as interesting comments to include in your final report. Interviews can be recorded on paper as they happen or taped or videoed (with client's permission). Note that transcribing (typing them up) taped interviews always takes much longer that you expect!!

Interviewer
Name/ Case number
Which part of our service(s) was used?
How often? Are you part of a group session?
Did you originally ask for one to one counselling?
Would you use other services if we were able to provide them: individual counselling? Drop in days to meet other clients and workers? Coffee mornings?

Thinking about your current counselling:
What are your feelings about:
· The room used
· The time you come
· The length of the session
· The counsellor's knowledge
· The content of your sessions

Service User interviews

Semi-structured interview questions

Each question below can be followed up/expanded as required. If the interviewee says something that you feel merits more discussion then do explore with further questions. Each interview should last approximately 20 -30 minutes but may be less according to the interviewee.

Introduce topic – e.g. I am here today to find out how you feel about the project and how it works for you. Use this time to chat about general pleasantries so they become familiar and comfortable. Ensure interviewee knows why they are being recorded – i.e. for transcription.

Stress confidentiality of data.

Questions

Q1. Who do you like to talk to most here at project? (establish role of named person)

- Why do you like to talk with that person the most?
- What sort of things do you like to talk about?

Q2. Do you like the way staff communicate with you?

- If yes, what's good about it?
- If no, what's wrong/what doesn't work?

Q3. Do you have the opportunity to talk to staff here at the project?

- What kinds of things do you talk to the staff about?
- Do you think they listen to what you say?
- Do you think they have time to listen to you?

Q4. Do the staff talk to you about things happening here at the project? E.g. activities and events

Q5. How do you feel about the level of support you get here at the project?

Q6. Are you able to take part in the activities here at the project?

- If yes, what do you do and how do staff help you?
- If no, why you don't take part?

Q7. If you have a problem can you talk to staff about it?

Q8. Do you think that staff are interested in your problems and take time to listen to them?

Q9. What would you change about the project?

- Offer a choice beginning with 'nothing"– include more time, more people, conversation groups, news groups, more activities, special help

Q10. Apart from staff do you talk to anyone else here?

Q11. Do you have a say in how the project is run? (e.g. facilities, food, activities)

- If yes, can you give any examples?
- If no, why not?

Q12. Finally, is there anything else about the project you would like to talk about or tell me about?

6. OBSERVATIONS

When doing observations, especially of children and young people, you will have to have permission from the individuals concerned or their parents. If this involves using a camera or video then you will need to get permission in writing for the process and will need to define *very clearly* how the images will be used. Written permissions need to be stored for years unless the images are destroyed – as a check on how they can be used.

Observations can be done in different ways. It is important to define what you want to find out from the observation. The behaviours of observed children/young people/individuals can be recorded in a logbook, captured on video tape or in photographs. Usually video and photographs are accompanied by some explanatory text.

Examples

- Looking at the body language of someone giving a short presentation.
  Do they look confident? Do they have specific habits that could be corrected (wringing their hands, swaying, not smiling etc)?
- Watching to see what toys a specific child chooses to play with and how they interact with other children and staff.
- Seeing how a group works together to solve a problem. Is there a leader? Does everyone contribute? How do they tackle the task?

Example Observation Form

Project __________________ Staff Member ___________________ Date_________

Group or individual observed ____

Observation	Analysis	Future Action

1. Recording is most useful when done shortly after the session, to capture accurately what happened and why.

2. Record names or code names and link these to your database or list of members/contacts, so you can monitor individual progress.

3. The left hand column records **what** happened, in terms of behaviour and relationships, more than activity. This should be accurate observation, not judgemental conclusions. While the 'activity' context is important, **what** people did, said or how they behaved is what you should focus on. The purpose is to:
• Create accurate records of work done
• Develop records of group and individual changes
• Record examples of circumstances and incidents in youth work
• Establish data on local conditions and influences

4. The middle column is for your perceptions or speculation on **why** things happened in the way that they did. These may relate to a change in the group dynamics as someone arrives or leaves, an intervention from a worker or actions taken by a young person (or member of the public in relation to the group). The purpose is to:
• Understand and learn from experience
• Interpret cause and effect
• Note possible risks in future work

• Refine approaches
• Communicate with co-workers

5. The right hand column is to record your thoughts on future action, to act as a reminder and to share information within the staff team. As well as any actions you may want to record, try to capture how your approach to this group or individual may need to change or continue, in the light of your current thinking.

6. Conclusions reached should be recorded in brief. These will need reviewing over time and during supervision to gauge their accuracy and relevance.

7. DIARIES

These can be an easy way for people to keep a record of their experience of your project and provide very personal feedback. They can use this record to help them fill in questionnaires, take part in interviews or focus groups and provide the basis for detailed case studies.

8. CASE STUDIES

Case studies allow you to focus on a detailed exploration of a small number of examples of your work. You need to get permission from a group or person to use them as a case study. Even if you have this permission, it is usually better to make them anonymous. The person or group being discussed could be designated with Group A or Person B or you could change the names and some of the less critical data (age perhaps) to protect their identity.

You should include background information on the subject of the case study, their circumstances before taking part in your project, what your project did and what involvement you had with the subject, the results of your project's involvement and, if appropriate, quotes or photographs to support your findings.

9. EVALUATION WORKSHOPS

These are a way to gather information from people using practical activities. For example, you could ask groups to write short pieces about their experience of your organisation or how to improve things. Children can express their views about activities in a fun, practical way. It may be appropriate to use techniques from other methods, for example, observations or carrying out short interviews, to help you record the results.

LEEDS INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM RESOURCE PACK

SECTION 7b – PRODUCING EVALUATIONS

Introduction

This section is part of an 8-pack series of resource materials that has been produced by the Leeds Infrastructure Consortium. For further information, please go to www.leeds-ic.org.uk.

This method uses a series of questions to be asked when producing an evaluation and was originally designed for an external evaluator to use to measure the results and challenges of a project. It could however be used internally, if the evaluator writes it up objectively. Each question could then provide a section of a written report. However, the process of the evaluation is more important than producing an end document - unless your funder requires you to have a written report.

Summary:
1. Vision and aims of the project
2. History of the project
3. The people involved
4. The Activities
5. Management
6. Finances and Fundraising
7. Wider context
8. Feeling the Story
9. Assessment, options and recommendations
Taking the Evaluation further
Checking your impressions- activities for a forum

1. Identifying vision and aims

Question: What is our story?
It is essential to start from the vision or aims of the group. Many grass roots groups are not good at telling others what they do or why they do it. This is often in spite of being very good at what they do. Most groups know what and why they do things but often they will not have any written vision or aims. Sometimes the vision is held by a few people, the founders of the group or key personnel. A group cannot be evaluated unless you can measure what has been achieved against what the aim was.

The group must be able to recognise these aims. Some groups will give their aims as a list of all the different activities that have sprung up over the years in an ad hoc way because of individual initiatives and available funding. These aims are tricky because they don't spring from the fundamental vision of the project. So try to simplify the aims into a phrase that encompasses everything they do.

2. History of the project

Question: What is the history of the project?
This is the core of the evaluation process. By listening to people together telling their story the heart and soul of the project is revealed. This can be achieved quite simply by asking the group when the first germ of the project began to grow, proceeding to when it actually started, going through key events before bringing it up to the present. Trying to get people to be precise about dates will make everything much clearer for everyone.

Going through this process is likely to bring up other issues -- particularly those ones people might prefer to keep hidden. These issues can be discussed at the time or noted and picked up later. Often you just have to let it flow.

3. Identifying people involved

Question: Who is involved in the project?

In grassroots groups ***people*** are always the key and will always be the most important influence on the progress of the project. What is important is the culture of the group - what things are considered most important and what methods are considered acceptable. Discerning the culture of the group or conflicting cultures within the project is a key task for the evaluator. Understanding the culture of the group often helps you make sense of the overall story.

It can be helpful to divide the people involved into three groups:
- The key individuals who really own the project
- Other individuals working or volunteering in the project
- Partners and others involved in the project but outside it

This will give you a good idea of who you're going to need to contact during the evaluation. This contact can take different forms:
- Individual interviews. Face-to-face or by telephone.
- Interviews with two or more people. This can be helpful when there are clear groups of people e.g. committee members, volunteers etc
- Group interviews, maybe using a workshop type approach
- Questionnaires. Maybe in different forms for different groups. Remember to make these as simple as possible, preferably of the tick box variety with space for people to write comments if they want. Using a variety of different methods will help in what is called triangulation - seeing the same issue from different perspectives. This is a crucial technique which should be used throughout an evaluation.

4. The activities of the project

Question: What we do we do?

Most mainstream evaluations seem to concern themselves with this dimension of the project -- what are the outputs. These are important, of course, but grassroots projects often find them difficult because they do not have the resources or organisation to conduct rigorous monitoring of their work. They just get on with doing what they're doing. This is why they are often good at producing results - they do not have bureaucracy 'getting in the way'.

Nonetheless, the evaluator will need to get a clear idea of what the project does.
The following methods are useful:
- Listing all the activities that are the responsibility of the management group. Get a rough idea of which workers and volunteers deliver these and who uses them.
- Visit activities when they are taking place.
- Examine such records as do exist and try to interpret what they mean! Look for ways of supplementing these existing records e.g. reports, minutes, fundraising applications.

Are there any ways of determining the effectiveness of the activities? The following can be considered:

- Questionnaires which should be as simple and to the point as possible
- Participant observation at activities
- Individual interviews with users
- Group interviews with users
- Records of some form which indicate how users have developed through their involvement in activities or in consequence of them (case studies, participant comments etc)

5. The management of the project

Question: How do we manage the project?

Understanding the management of a grassroots project is at least as important as evaluating what it does because management is often what grassroots projects really struggle with.

A basic management chart is a good place to start. However, these very rarely tell the whole story. Questions like - who actually runs things? How are decisions really made? Where do workers get their support from? - asked in the context of the management chart will often be revealing.

Sometimes management charts are very misleading. Occasionally a project is, in practical terms, managed by an individual. In this case the chart counts for nothing but only the individual workers' and volunteers' relationship to the dominant individual.

Information that tells you about the management of the project:

- In minutes and reports
- To whom is the project management group responsible? A church management group, an umbrella group or the Charity Commission?
- What are the grievance and disciplinary procedures - if any?
- Are lines of responsibility and accountability clear or confused?

Your pervading question should be: how are things really being managed here?

6. Finances and fundraising

Question: How is the project funded?

Money tends to be the overriding concern for grassroots community groups. Lack of funding and insecurity of funding are almost always what the groups feel they need help with. Evaluation helps them into a position where they are more likely to be successful in fundraising.

However, sometimes the changes necessary in order to make fundraising more successful can easily mean the group moves away from the culture and ethos which makes it what it is. This is the dilemma which faces all grassroots groups. Do we remain small, struggling and authentic or do we become more professional?

For an evaluation you will want to look at the following aspects of the project's finances and fundraising:

- Accounts. Most projects often have reasonable accounts even when other aspects of administration are fairly chaotic. If accounts are chaotic this needs to be sorted out. You will also need to satisfy yourself that there is no evidence of financial mismanagement and corruption.
- Financial practice. There should be written rules about how money is managed. It is important to identify unsafe practices such as the signing of unwritten cheques.
- Develop a funding history -- this generally closely maps the overall history of the project.
- Is funding secure or is it only short-term with no likelihood of renewal?

- Look at funding applications. Why have they succeeded? Why failed?
- Is training in fundraising needed? Or do they just need to get down and do it? Or are there fundamental problems in getting funds?
- If there are fundamental problems what are the causes? A problem with the quality of work being done? A problem in documenting and writing it up? Or is the work fundamentally difficult to fund?

Generally you need to be a bit stricter in areas concerning finance. Proper financial procedures are a safeguard that every project needs.

7. The wider context of the project

Question: What links are there to other projects or communities?

Some projects are good at networking, others remain introverted and isolated. Similarly, some projects are deeply aware of their community, whilst others simply do their own thing regardless of what the community's real needs are. It is important to get some idea of how well-connected a project is. The following questions are worth asking:

- What other projects and agencies is this project aware of?
- What is its understanding of its local community?
- Is it connected with any local forum?
- How much is the project meeting a unique need? How is it fitting into other provision?

You may identify other external organisations, projects and agencies that will be able to give you some perspective on this project.

8. Feeling the story.

Question: What do people feel about the project?

The exercise consists quite simply in asking people to say, in turn, what they enjoy about the project, what their sorrows and hopes are, and what they feel are the threats to the project. These can be simply recorded on flipcharts, as people make their contributions. It is an exercise which helps people to tell their story, not so much in narrative form, which they have done during the history session, but in the language of feelings.

This exercise can be used with different groups.

9. Assessments and recommendations

Question: How does an outsider see the project?

People tend to think that evaluations are all about recommendations and immediately turn to this part of the report. The process of evaluation is the most important part, but, nonetheless recommendations have their part to play.

In the final report try and write it in an objective manner i.e. without making overt judgments. This provides the freedom to tell the story as you see it without getting into the complexities of how good or bad it is. But you will be expected to make some kind of assessment and this can be done in a separate section. It may be best to separate these assessments into their constituent parts.

Don't write:
The youth club itself is well-run and enjoyed by the young people but its management can be chaotic and the participation of young women is limited.

Do write:

- Youth club nights are well-run by a well motivated staff
- All the indicators showed that young men enjoyed the youth club
- Young women find the club too male orientated and their attendance has declined
- The management tends to be chaotic unnecessarily increasing stress for workers and occasionally meaning important things don't happen

This gives a series of clear points which can be systematically addressed.

Recommendations

It is not always necessary to give any recommendations. They won't necessarily be very useful and could be seen as both critical and unenforceable.

The management committees of most grassroots projects tend to have big weaknesses and it is only really useful pointing out clear problems which they can solve e.g. the worker would benefit from having one member of the committee who was her line manager rather than everybody doing it at different times!

Training tends to be intimidating for grassroots groups unless you can point them very specifically to training that will be useful for them (and maybe give them some idea of how to fund it).

99% of grassroots groups are struggling for funding so the suggestion that more funding is needed is probably the worst thing you can say to them. It is better to help them be realistic with the money that they have got.

Options

One of the best ways to help the group engage with an evaluation is to present them with some options which they can genuinely choose between. You may be pretty sure they are never going to choose some of the options but even so putting them into the position where they can make that choice will probably do them a lot of good!

For example:
The problem of the male dominated youth group might be solved by the following options:

1. Concentrate on running a good boys club with male orientated activities
2. Recruit female volunteers who can work with the young women during club nights
3. Set aside one night as girls only
4. Seek to work with the council youth worker with a specific brief for working with young women

Taking the evaluation forward

Having gone through these questions with the group, you need to spend some time writing it up and reflecting. This should lead you into identifying what further work you need to do. This often requires another meeting with your key contacts so make sure you have collected together necessary telephone numbers to allow you to arrange visits etc.

You will generally find yourself wanting to undertake some of the following activities (some of these are repeated from above):

- Visiting the group's activities
- Preparing questionnaires for workers, volunteers and users
- Arranging interviews with key people in groups
- Telephoning others with a perspective on the project
- Examining the project's documentation and records.

These can all be drawn up into a timetable which will give you a good idea of how long the evaluation is going to take. It is always a good idea to keep in regular contact with your key contacts, checking out intuitions, asking questions for clarification and developing the relationship. The more they are involved in the evaluation the more meaningful and useful it will be for them.

Project staff and volunteers can be more involved in certain aspects of the evaluation, especially talking with users about their feelings concerning the project. This can cut down the work you have to do and develop the sense of an evaluation which includes everyone. In this case there will need to be some direct contact with users from you, just to ensure that uncomfortable stories are not being suppressed!

How to check and present your results to the group.

Forum - bringing it all together

In some projects it can be appropriate to run a forum for everyone involved in the project at the end of the evaluation process. This gives you the opportunity to check out some of your emerging perceptions of the project and to involve everyone in the process of the evaluation.

Possible activities for the forum:

- Get everyone to stand in a line in order of how long they have been involved with the project
- In threes encourage people to share what is their best memory of the project. Get people to share some of these with the whole group
- Combine threes into sixes and get those sixes to write down their joys, sorrows, hopes and fears on a flipchart sheet divided into four
- Put these flipchart sheets up around the room and give people time to look at them all
- Plenary: draw out common themes and issues. Move into a general discussion.