YORK Consulting

Oldham and Rochdale Housing Market Renewal

Evaluation Techniques: "How to Evaluate" Guide

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1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

"How to Evaluate"

1.1 York Consulting LLP (YCL) was asked to carry out an evaluation of the Cohesion Counts projects and produce an Evaluation Techniques: "How To Evaluate" Guide in May 2009. The evaluation of the Cohesion Counts projects was carried out from May 2009 to January 2010.

1.2 This "How to Evaluate" Guide provides an overview of the projects involved in the Cohesion Counts Evaluation and provides guidelines, developed from YCL's experience as evaluators, for projects or programmes to undertake their own evaluation (Section 2). The guidelines aim to provide projects and programmes with the opportunity to reflect on how they could structure their own evaluation. The information provides helpful suggestions and hints on what evaluation should cover as well as things to watch out for.

1.3 The guide also includes reflections on the successes and challenges experienced through using the specific types of evaluation activity chosen for the Cohesion Counts evaluation (Section 3). Some of the evaluation methodologies used are outlined in Section 2, the examples and reflections given in Section 3 build on the methodology suggestions and offer some real-life examples of how they were implemented and what lessons the evaluation team learnt.

1.4 The findings from the evaluation activity were based on a quantitative and qualitative methodology which consisted of questionnaires, surveys, face-to-face and telephone consultations, mood boards, scenario testing, online blogs and forums, secondary and primary data. Those involved in the evaluation included funders, stakeholders, project deliverers, community members and project participants.

1.5 This report has been produced on behalf of Oldham and Rochdale Housing Market Renewal. The study team is very grateful for the guidance and support of all those who gave up their time to engage with the reflective learning process. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Oldham and Rochdale Housing Market Renewal.

What is “Evaluation”?

1.6 There are many similar definitions and explanations of "what evaluation is" available in widely recognised literature which studies evaluation both as a concept, and as a tool. Each definition, and in fact, each evaluation is slightly different, some explanations given by recognised authors on the topic define Evaluation as:

“…a specific type of research activity, which is closely related to applied research. The emphasis is less on theoretical development that on practical implications. Usually (although... not always) evaluation focuses on the aims of a program and investigates to what extent the intentions of the program providers are being realized. An evaluation report will comment on the effects of program provision on those involved in receiving or delivering it and usually indicate potential future directions. Evaluation thus implies a judgement of the worth or value of a program”

Irene Hall and David Hall; Evaluation and Social Research: Introducing small-scale practice[1]

“….the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualization, design, implementation, and utility of ... programs."

Rossi and Freeman: Evaluation: A systematic approach[2]

[1] New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

[2] Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications, 1993

Types of Evaluation

1.7 The HMR Cohesion Counts Evaluation focused on Impact Evaluation whereas other types of evaluation you may encounter or wish to undertake look at consider a different type of evaluation. There are a number of different evaluation approaches which can be taken; some of the main types are detailed below[3]:

- **Impact Evaluations** look beyond the immediate results of policies, instruction, or services to identify longer-term as well as unintended program effects. In contrast to outcome monitoring, which examines whether targets have been achieved, impact evaluation aims to answer the question: how would participants' perceptions/behaviours/thoughts/feelings have changed if the intervention had not taken place? This involves counterfactual analysis, which looks to undertake a comparison between what actually happened and what would have happened if participants had not been involved in the project. This type of evaluation can help to answer key questions for evidence-based policy making including what works, what doesn't, where, why and for how much?
- **Summative Evaluations** study the immediate or direct effects of the program on participants. The scope of an outcome evaluation can extend beyond knowledge or attitudes and can also look to examine the immediate behavioural effects of programs. Summative Evaluations are usually ex-post and they are concerned with the results of an intervention, similar to impact evaluations they also consider the total impact and the unintended or unforeseen effects of an intervention, but combined with the overall objectives – financial spend and outputs for example.

[3] NB This is not a finite list, it just provides an overview of the most common types which you might come across. Further detail on alterative types of evaluation will be available from recognised literature and sources on the internet.

- **Process Evaluations** describe and assess the structures, procedures, operations, materials and activities within a scheme or program. Examination of materials is likely to occur while programs are being developed, as a check on the appropriateness of the approach and procedures that will be used in the program. This type of evaluation looks to answer questions relating to “what is going on?” analysing the way the activity operates to help with interpreting outcomes and inform future planning. The main purpose is to establish how the project works in practice and achieves what it does.
- **Project Evaluations** involve looking at the project as a whole, including establishing how successful it was against its outputs, targets, milestone, outcomes and financial spend. This can include investigating the impacts the project had on participants, communities and wider beneficiaries. Time is spent speaking with those involved in the project to establish lessons learnt, best practice and sustainability in relation to how the project/activity itself ran.

1.8 The distinction between the different types of evaluation is not absolute, for example a summative evaluation may have influence on the future development of projects and the different approaches frequently overlap, or join together through a programme’s lifetime.

Cohesion Counts HMR Projects

1.9 The Cohesion Counts evaluation involved six community cohesion focussed projects. This “How to Evaluate” report considers the lessons learnt and common findings arising from all the projects.

Good Relations Oldham – Conflict Awareness Training Project

1.10 The final focus of this project was to deliver a Conflict Awareness Training course in modular chunks to the committee members and workers at the Arc Centre in Alt. The evaluation explored the impact of the training on relationships between volunteers, committee members, user groups and on the personal development of participants. The evaluation activity for the Conflict Awareness training involved pre-questionnaires and post questionnaires with participants, along with face-to-face consultations at the end of the training to discuss their experiences.

Groundwork

1.11 This project aimed to bring together people of different ages and backgrounds in order to find common ground, break down barriers and perceptions and change behaviours. Young people were brought together through sporting and dance activities and older people from Alt were encouraged to become volunteers, to work with the young people. The aim was that disengaged young people and residents would be attracted to the project and that, by being involved, relationships would form and perceptions and behaviours will change, impacting positively on community cohesion. The project focussed on engaging young people in dialogue, in order to talk about the issues they experienced in the area. This happened on an informal basis, before, during and after each sporting activity.

1.12 The evaluation activity was focused on baseline questionnaires with volunteers and young people. Follow-up questionnaires to explore changes over time, face-to-face consultations and creative evaluation sessions (involving mood boards and scenario testing) were undertaken at the post-evaluation stage.

Philosophy for Communities

1.13 Contour Housing Association was commissioned to carry out philosophy sessions with residents of Alt in Oldham and Kirkholt in Rochdale. The overall aim of the sessions was to contribute towards improving community cohesion on the two estates. This project had completed upon commission of the overall Cohesion Counts evaluation. Previous evaluation activity included questionnaires, Blog activity and consultations.

Spiral Dance

1.14 The project aimed to raise awareness of issues around community cohesion and hate crime, break down barriers between different social groups and help to change negative stereotypes and preconceptions. The aim was to achieve these objectives through creative activity working with participants from the Lower Falinge Estate in Rochdale. The project included a target group with diverse cultural backgrounds, different age ranges and abilities.

1.15 Evaluation activity included pre and post questionnaires to explore changes over time with participants, along with attendance at the final training session and face-to-face consultations with them about their experiences and real-life examples.

1.16 Spiraldance have considerable experience of using creative evaluation techniques. York Consulting worked closely with the project to complement existing techniques employed by the project, offering suggestions for example on the use of Video Diary Rooms and scenario testing.

Additional Projects included within the Evaluation

First Choice Homes Oldham

1.17 First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) were planning to carry out a project to bring together residents of Alt, Limeside, Clarkwell, Hollinwood and Glodwick with the aim of using philosophical enquiry to promote rich, meaningful discussion around relevant topics between the different groups. The project aimed to impact positively on community cohesion across these areas by changing perceptions and behaviours among participants.

1.18 Unfortunately this project was unable to continue after the evaluation was commissioned as a result of internal restructuring; however some of the lessons learnt about evaluation and engaging community cohesion projects have been included within this report.

Linking Communities – Limeside and Clarkwell

1.19 The linking project was established by FCHO and Contour and ran from 2006-2008. The project was initiated by FCHO, who have some housing stock in Clarkwell. The project proposed to make links between the Asian/British Bangladeshi residents of Clarkwell and the White British residents in Limeside. The project used philosophy sessions to bring the two communities together and work towards building friendships and changing perceptions of each other's cultures.

1.20 As part of the Cohesion Counts work York Consulting was asked carry out an evaluation of the long-term impacts of this project which ran from 2006-2008. There had been no formal evaluation carried out of this project, and therefore there was no benchmark or baseline to work from. Although it was reported that informal participant interviews were carried at the end of the project, there was no documentation of this. Evaluation activity included face-to-face and telephone consultations with participants of the projects and analysis of secondary information.

2 EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGIES

2.1 Our view is that each definition of evaluation, and indeed each evaluation, will differ slightly, however there are a number of comments steps which can be taken to evaluate. In this section we present one approach that could be taken to evaluate a project or programme. The following key areas are covered:

- Evaluation Process;
- Benefits of Evaluation process;
- Good Practice: Embedding Evaluation; and
- Steps to Effective Evaluation.

Evaluation Process

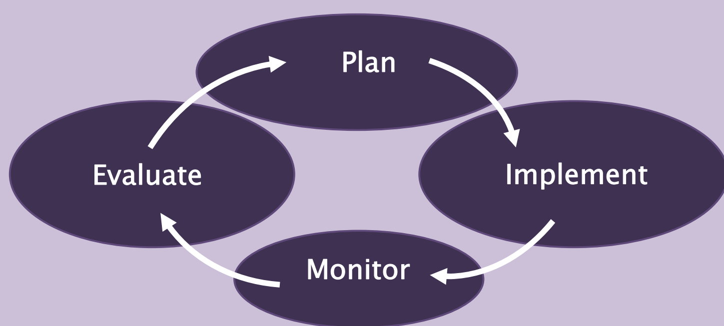
2.2 Evaluation should be a **positive learning experience.** It is an opportunity to demonstrate effective performance and achievement of initiatives, projects, programmes or activities. It is also a way of identifying opportunities and developing solutions to recognised needs, and a process by which those lessons and successes can be disseminated to others to continue the cycle of learning. Evaluation is quite simply an essential part of everyday life as well as an integrated element of the management process.

2.3 Evaluation can **often** have a negative connotation. This tends to be when it is an enforced activity which has to be undertaken to satisfy the needs of others, for example as part of funding requirements. When this is the case evaluation is often viewed as a "tick box" exercise, an approach which is not conducive to effective and meaningful evaluation. Evaluation can sometimes been seen as an audit of activity and individuals may actively shy away from engaging in processes which they perceive to be technical or complicated.

2.4 Effective evaluation is **key to the continual development** of community cohesion activity and is an **integral part of the learning and improvement or**

“management” cycle. Consideration of evaluation at an early stage can **give your project an edge**; as it provides a framework to analyse your projects' performance in an objective and analytical way. This in turn generates data to support good practice and lessons learnt which can then be used by projects and programmes as solid evidence to support future funding bids. **Diagram 1** highlights how evaluation can contribute to a cycle of continued learning and development.

Diagram 1: MANAGEMENT CYCLE



Benefits of the Evaluation Process

"Good evaluation involves being clear about objectives, and a willingness to look for better ways of doing things. Used properly, evaluation leads to better decisions by policy makers and managers. It provides a framework for rational thought and the use of limited resources"[4]

2.5 You are likely to find that the overall benefit of evaluation to your organisation is more than the sum of its parts. For example individual activity, such as recording output and finance information can be interesting and valuable. However, when combined with other evaluation activity such as additional primary research –this quantitative data can be put in a visible context, and people can really see the impact that the work has had.

Hypothetical example:
Quantitative Data: Output – 5 people engaged in a Conflict Awareness Training Course with 5 sessions undertaken over 5 weeks; cost £500.
Qualitative Data: By speaking with the course attendees, information is uncovered which details that they have used their skills in the community centre where they volunteer. As a result people who use the venue where the course attendee volunteers now feel more safe and secure, and believe that if a situation involving conflict should arise then they feel confident that the volunteer can resolve it efficiently,

2.6 The process of evaluation brings with it a series of hidden benefits for projects, stakeholders, funders, beneficiaries and individuals engaged in the process. Some of these benefits are outlined in **Table 2.1** below.

[4] Please note quotations used throughout this "How to Evaluate" Report have come from a variety of sources, including consultations for the Oldham and Rochdale Evaluation; our wider evaluation experience and common well known terms of reference used.
They are used to illustrate the points being made in the overall sections and do not necessarily reflect a particular stakeholder, evaluator or beneficiary from the Oldham and Rochdale Pathfinder response to the information being discussed.

Table 2.1 Benefits of the evaluation process

- Enhancing shared understanding – e.g. staff and stakeholder groups;
- Supporting programme delivery – build evaluation into delivery e.g. integrated monitoring, participants monitor own progress;
- Increasing engagement of stakeholders, residents and beneficiaries – participatory, self-evaluation, self-determination;
- Develop culture of a learning organisation for both projects and funders/stakeholder agencies – individual organisational development;
- Extended learning – through sharing and disseminating best practice and lessons learnt with other projects and organisations.

Good Practice: Embedding Evaluation

2.7 Evaluation works best when it is valued and demanded by both projects and stakeholders who recognise the benefit it can have in developing a learning culture within organisations. **The collection of information does not need to be additional to the standard information collected or a burden.** Evaluations designed *ex-post* (after the activity or project has already finished) can often be expensive and time consuming to generate the necessary information needed to evidence impact.

2.8 Evaluation designed *ex-ante* (before the project starts, or whilst it is in its early development stages) has the opportunity to build these mechanisms into individual programmes. The result is that information required for evaluation is generated on an on-going basis as part of project delivery. This is the approach taken to the Oldham and Rochdale HMR Cohesion Counts Evaluation and it was shown to be more effective and less likely to meet with resistance. The Cohesion Counts projects were aware of the information required from the very beginning and why it was important to be collecting data and feedback as the project went along.

2.9 It is possible to evidence impact ex-post; it relies on using secondary evidence to baseline your findings or retrospectively asking beneficiaries to measure subjectively their personal distance travelled. However, this analysis and the conclusions arising from them will be highly subjective and will be subject to a number of strong caveats which clearly explain the difference between baseline data and ex-post findings.

2.10 All evaluations should have a clear purpose and rationale. They have to be more than a collection of one-off individual project activities. They must ultimately link back to the fundamental strategy of your organisation or overarching aims, as with the Cohesion Counts Community Cohesion projects. If links are not made early on; valuable synergy and focus will be lost.

2.11 **Developing an Evaluation Culture** has to be set from the top and cascade down through the organisation. Oldham and Rochdale had a designated evaluation manager who linked with both the projects and the evaluation team to ensure there was a triangle of support and communication between all the necessary parties. This meant that there were efficient and effective lines of communication which ensured that projects, HMR and the evaluation team knew what activity was going on, when it was happening and why it was happening i.e. what the evaluation activity was aiming to measure.

2.12 When evaluation does not work, it tends to be because it is viewed with 'an insurance policy mentality'. In this situation evaluations are conducted just in case somebody might ask the question, or because it is a condition of accessing the funding. When this happens typically there is minimal interest in the results and it is a question of 'what is the minimum we can get away with?' It is therefore important to ensure that at a strategic and operational level there is clear commitment to evaluation.

Steps to Effective Evaluation

2.13 We have looked at the important role evaluation can take in project delivery and development, and at what stage evaluation should be undertaken in order to generate effective and efficient results. We will now consider how to develop evaluation within a project.

2.14 A number of key questions can help develop a focus for the evaluation issues. **Table 2.2** below highlights some of these questions and the approach which can address them.

Table 2.2 Key Questions	
Question	***Approach***
What are we trying to achieve?	*<u>Objectives</u>* E.g: Oldham and Rochdale Cohesion Counts Overarching Objectives included: Aim 1: to improve residents' satisfaction with the neighbourhood in which they live; Aim 2: to improve resident's sense of belonging to their street, neighbourhood and Borough.
How do we measure achievement?	*<u>Outputs and Outcomes</u>* E.g. Pre and Post-questionnaire questions collecting data on: Aim 1: Increased numbers of questionnaire respondents/project participants who are satisfied with the neighbourhood in which they live Aim 2: Increased numbers of questionnaire respondents/project participants who feel that they belong to their street, neighbourhood and Borough.
Where are we now?	*<u>Baselines and Targets</u>* E.g. Pre-Questionnaire responses to questions: Aim 1: How satisfied are you with your neighbourhood as a place to live? *Possible responses: Very Satisfied; Fairly Satisfied; Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied; Fairly Dissatisfied; Very Dissatisfied; and Don't know.* Aim 2: How strongly do you feel you belong to your street, neighbourhood and Borough? *Possible responses: Very*

	strongly; Fairly strongly; Not very strongly; Not at all strongly; and I don't really think about it.
How do we know we are getting there?	*Milestones and benchmarks* E.g. Recorded anecdotal responses from participants, or a mid-term evaluation questionnaire which updates the baseline questions.

2.15 We outline six manageable steps to undertaking an evaluation. These steps are also outlined in **Diagram 2** below:

- Step 1: Understanding and Developing Overarching Aims and Project Objectives;
- Step 2: Developing and Understanding Evaluation Methodology;
- Step 3: Managing the Process;
- Step 4: Collecting Evidence;
- Step 5: Interpreting Data; and
- Step 6: Reporting and Disseminating.

2.16 Each of these stages are discussed further in this section, with diagrams and lessons learnt, good practice and experience from the evaluation team highlighted at each stage. Quotations are also used. These quotes have come from a variety of sources, including consultations which YCL consultants have conducted over York Consulting's 21 year history.

Diagram 2: Evaluation Steps

Project Development Stage

- It is good practice to set an evaluation framework at the project appraisal stage

Step 1: Understanding and Developing Overarching Aims and Project Objectives

Evaluation Planning Stage

- There are many different types of evaluation – you need to be clear about what is to be achieved from the evaluation
- Decide on whether to undertake internally or commission externally

Step 2: Understanding and Developing the Evaluation Methodology

Management of the Evaluation Process

- A good understanding of evaluation issues helps effective management of the evaluation
- If the process is not managed this can impact on the quality of the results you receive

Step 3: Managing the Process

Step 3: Collecting Evidence

Step 5: Interpreting Data

Learn and Improve Stage

- The whole purpose of evaluation is to understand, learn and move forward
- It is important to think about what the outcomes of the evaluation mean for future delivery or activity

Step 6: Reporting and Disseminating

2.17 Thus far we have concentrated on the necessary culture and strategic infrastructure which needs to be in place to support evaluation. We now go on to consider the approach to conducting an evaluation. We have identified generic steps that should be observed in the design and implementation of any evaluation.

Step 1: Understanding and Developing Objectives

2.18 Step 1 involves the development of an evaluation framework which will define the focus for the evaluation activity. An evaluation framework is a structured way of showing what activity is to happen, why, when and how the evaluation activity should occur. Aims and objectives give focus to a project and specify what is to be achieved. Evaluation should be considered early in the project’s development when objectives are set.

2.19 Objectives should describe what a project is aiming to achieve not how the project will achieve it. There is a distinction between an Impact Aim and a Project Objective. An Impact Aim is the overall outcome which is to be achieved by the project objectives, for example:

- Project Objective: By engaging residents from particular areas in opportunities to meet with different groups, ethnicities and ages and work together, help to break down barriers of perceptions and stereotyping.
- Impact Aim: Improve resident’s perceptions of their neighbourhoods and develop a greater sense of Community Cohesion.

2.20 Once these have been established the overarching purpose of the evaluation is to assess if in fact the objectives have been achieved.

> *“Setting objectives is about strategically planning the direction of the project.”*

"Without objectives how can we be clear about what we are trying to achieve?"

2.21 An important element of developing an effective evaluation approach is to have systems in place to ensure the governance processes support, challenge and embed the evaluation within ongoing activity. Governance processes are the way in which an evaluation is managed and steered.

2.22 A Steering Group is one way of ensuring governance processes are strong and the evaluation is well managed. Steering Groups can help keep the focus of the evaluation and the projects on track, address any issues, provide solutions to any problems and are an overarching guide to the evaluation throughout its lifetime.

2.23 By way of an example as to how the governance process of a project or programme could be structured Table 2.3 outlines who could be involved in a steering group.

Table 2.3 Who is involved in the steering group?	
Project executive/manager	It is crucial that this person is fully involved, to ensure that there are links between the organisation's strategic aims, the project activities and the evaluation.
Strategy Team/Evaluation Co-ordinator type role	This individual's specific job title may differ from the examples given here, but in essence there should be an individual with experience in or knowledge of evaluation who can help at this stage and throughout the evaluation.
Senior manager	To include a strategic perspective
Project Partner(s)	Depending on the nature of the projects
Project staff	This will depend on the size and complexity of the project, but can help to improve

	ownership.
Consultants (if applicable)	While they are strictly working for the steering group, creating a team approach can help to deliver added benefits, such as helping to build internal evaluation capabilities within projects.

Step 2: Understanding and Developing Evaluation Methodology

2.24 Establishing clear objectives and governance processes help form solid foundations on which the evaluation can be built. The project or programme now know ***what* they are to measure against** (the objectives) and who is guiding the overall process (the governance structure). Step 2 is now about establishing ***how* they are going to measure progress** against the objectives set.

2.25 **Table 2.4** builds on Step 1 and identifies the key areas of focus projects should consider when designing the evaluation methodology.

Table 2.4: Questions to consider on designing an evaluation methodology
Focus of activity • style of approach - developmental or end-results focused? *I.e. does your evaluation want to look at lessons learnt as the project went along, or are you focussed on the overall impact at the end of the activity?* • are there particular aspects of the project you wish to focus on? *E.g. Best practice, lessons learnt, new activity being trialled?* • do all aspects require the same intensity of evaluation? *I.e. what do you wish to focus the evaluation on? Lesson learnt, individual impacts, community impacts, distance travelled?*
Which issues are most important? • value for money; • process issues; • impact;

- cost effectiveness;
- additionality;
- good practice;
- attribution.

Key factors

- size of project (is the project large?)
- priority / importance (is the project of strategic importance?)
- innovation of project (is the project innovative?)

2.26 When developing a methodology to evaluate different types of projects, including community cohesion, it is important to:

- be aware of the types of evaluation techniques available;
- understand some of the issues associated with certain techniques; and
- critically assess different methods to establish which will be the most appropriate for the project and the impacts you are seeking to measure.

2.27 The specific techniques used in evaluation methodology can be grouped under seven headings:

- meetings;
- preparation;
- secondary research;
- primary research;
- analysis;
- workshops; and
- reporting.

2.28 The full list of techniques shown in Diagram 3 below should be regarded as a menu of options. In selecting the specific techniques you wish to use in your evaluation, you should be selecting the evaluation methods that are best suited to answering the evaluation questions. By fully establishing what you want to find out from the evaluation, as in Table 2.4, you should then consider how you will achieve this using the techniques in **Diagram 3.**

2.29 As an example, a number of the evaluation techniques in Diagram 3 were used in the Cohesion Counts Evaluation. For example to evidencing impact against Aim 1: *to improve residents' satisfaction with the neighbourhood in which they live* the evaluation used techniques including:

- Pre and Post Questionnaires with participants to ask how they felt about their area before and after the project;
- Face-to-face consultations with participants which asked what things were like living in their neighbourhood, and what impacts if any they felt being engaged in the Cohesion Counts project had had on their lives; and
- Mood Boards which established what participants liked and disliked about their areas.

2.30 As a further example, to measure impact against Aim 3: *to improve residents' perceptions of living in communities mixed by age, tenure, property types, areas of the neighbourhood, and social and ethnic backgrounds*; the Cohesion Counts evaluation team undertook additional activity including:

- Focus Groups with participants which asked what it was like living in their communities including where people came from different backgrounds and where both older and young people lived;
- Scenario Testing (further detail is available in the Section 3 of this report) with participants which looked at how they and others would react to and engage with people of a different ethnicity, age or from a different area to them; and
- Face-to-face consultations with residents, parents and community members which asked about the impacts the projects had had on their community as a result of engaging with the activities.

Diagram 3: BUILDING BLOCKS OF EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

MEETINGS

Consider the need for preparation, travel and post meeting actions

PREPARATION

Develop project frameworks and evaluation questions, considering what you want to measure. May also include developing performance indicators

SECONDARY RESEARCH

- Analysis
- Literature Review
- Economic Impact

PRIMARY RESEARCH

- Observation
- Telephone Interview
- Postal Questionnaire
- Case Studies
- Consultations
- Benchmarking
- Focus Groups
- Mood Boards
- Scenario Testing
- Real time "Accompanied Shop"
- Interactive Media – Blog, Forum, Video Diary
- Face to Face Interviews
  Options inc. Family Group, Paired, Individual depending on subject

ANALYSIS

Interpretation and critical assessment of results from surveys and desk research.

WORKSHOPS

Technique for testing ideas, getting feedback and involving wider groups of individuals.

REPORTING

Involves drafting, final report and presentation of findings

Step 3: Managing the Process

2.31 Once you have developed the evaluation methodology there are a number of approaches to **managing an evaluation project** which are important to consider. A well developed and coherent set of objectives with the right evaluation methods implemented to monitor progress against the objectives can be hindered if the overall evaluation is not well managed. Step 3 looks to offer some suggestions and guidance on how to manage an evaluation.

> *"Management is about being aware of all relevant issues and equally being prepared to deal with the unexpected."*

2.32 It is critical to identify a key contact at a strategic level who remains in constant contact with the projects and/or consultants. Equally there should be designated lead contact for the projects and/or the consultants. This is necessary as it:

- ensure problems can be raised quickly and do not get left until the next steering group meeting; and
- gives the steering group, projects and/or consultants a clear named contact who can refer them to others and/or take action to resolve specific blockages.

2.33 **Table 2.5** offers some suggestions on how you can choose to manage the evaluation.

Table 2.5 Approaches to managing an evaluation project

- **Project Manager manages process** – if this is a review, being undertaken by an internal evaluator or relatively small evaluation. This would happen where evaluation is taking place internally, i.e. the project is undertaking self-evaluation. This should only be used in certain cases otherwise it may lack accountability (having someone to report to) and independence.
- **Designated Evaluation Manager external to the project** – this should be

someone who has links into, or is actively involved in the Steering Group. They will be able to keep both the consultants/projects informed and also provide a link back into the Steering Group. This person can be viewed as an independent advisor to both the strategic and operational individuals involved, and if used effectively can help generate positive and effective communication between strategic personnel, projects and if appropriate consultants.

- **Internal steering group** – this is likely to consist of project manager, strategy team representative and a senior manager. This will generally be a small team of people but because of the positions they hold the group ensures that decisions are more broadly based. A record should be made of meetings although these do not have to be formal minutes.
- **External steering group** – this is likely to take place in larger partnership projects and in addition to those mentioned above may include external stakeholders such as local authorities, project managers, agencies with a strategic or operational involvement and voluntary organisations etc.

2.34 Effective management of the evaluation process is about communication, awareness and ownership as detailed in **Table 2.6**. These are three elements of evaluation management that can help the entire process to run more smoothly and enable evaluation to have a real impact for both funders, in implementing learning and development, and projects in understanding the impact their work can have on individuals and communities.

Table 2.6 Communication, Awareness and Ownership

- communicate results, especially of formative (real-time) evaluation to ensure ongoing learning;
- involvement of staff and other stakeholders provides a number of advantages:
  - positive PR;
  - improved communication and co-operation;
  - greater ownership of results; and

- avoidance of a ‘blame culture’.

Step 4: Collecting Evidence

“Avoid information overload”

2.35 All evaluation requires the generation and collection of evidence. This is the part of the process where it is very easy to become overwhelmed in the pursuit of any and all types of information that might be relevant. Step 4 builds on the processes you will have undertaken earlier in the development of the evaluation. We have outlined some key ideas about how to collect evidence and the different approaches used to do this.

2.36 It is good practice to establish a monitoring and evaluation framework for your project early at the project development/appraisal stage. A monitoring and evaluation framework will detail what outputs, outcomes, milestones and data is to be collected, when is to be collected and by what evaluation method – e.g. primary research through telephone surveys with participants. In doing this the evaluation will be focused in on the data you wish to collect – for example the Cohesion Counts evaluation activity was focussed on the overarching objectives which underpinned the projects.

2.37 Data or information relating to the project falls into two generic categories – primary and secondary data.

- **Primary data** effectively has to be created and generated through surveys and consultation; for example the mood boards and questionnaires used within the Cohesion Counts evaluation activity.
- **Secondary data,** or desk research, already exists in published reports, , borough, area or national wide surveys, studies and databases, for example the supporting information received for the Limeside and Clarkwell Linking Communities project and the Philosophy for

Communities information that was incorporated within the YCL Cohesion Counts Impact report.

Methods for Collecting Information – Secondary Research

2.38 This involves the review of secondary sources and is an essential starting point for any monitoring and evaluation framework. It may include:

- Baseline studies: projecting forward from this you may be able to establish a baseline which can be updated to show distance travelled against the original figures recorded at the beginning of a project;
- Interim evaluations: undertaken for your project or even similar projects;
- Other research: commissioned nationally or by other agencies;
- Management information (MI): both from funder required MI Systems and project specific Management Information.

Table 2.7 Tips on Desk Research
• Check out research undertaken by organisations which have links to the project area you are working on.
• For example Community Cohesion information can be found from Institute of Community Cohesion; DCLG and Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Survey Data from borough, area or national surveys such as Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder; and data from crime surveys, ASB surveys etc.
• Do a web search on key terms.

Methods for Collecting Information – Primary Research

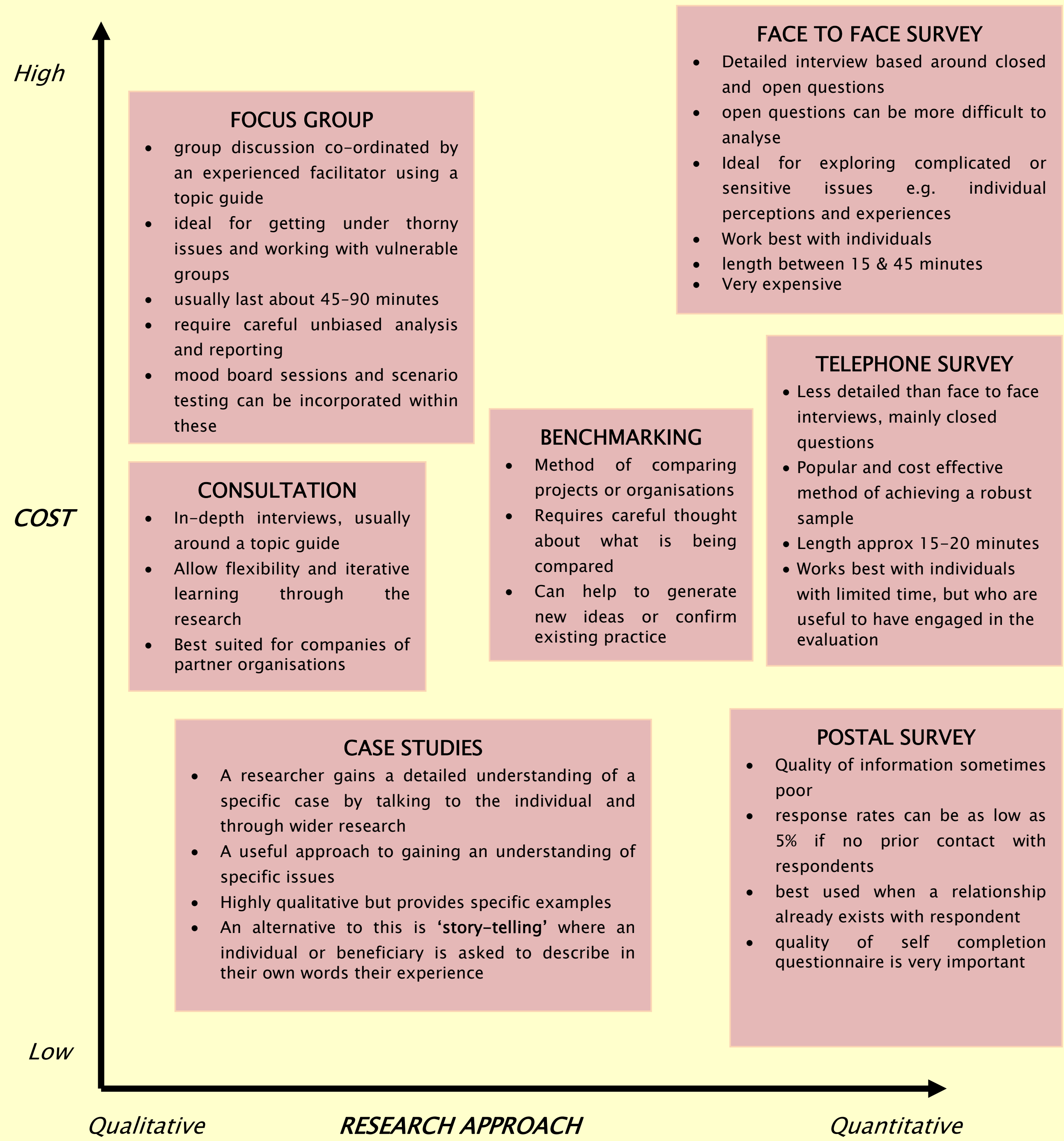
2.39 There are many ways of collecting primary data; these are outlined in **Diagram 4** below. Key factors to consider are cost and the nature of the data collected. A balance must be struck between what is required to answer the evaluation questions and the cost of undertaking any given approach.

Cost. It is fair to say that you generally “get what you pay for”. In research terms a greater investment will deliver greater detail and generally will be more robust – giving greater confidence in the results.

Nature of research. Research data can be:

- **Quantifiable** (or quantitative) which means that responses can be expressed as numbers or percentages to some degree of reliability;
- **‘Softer’** (or qualitative) which is more flexible, can capture greater detail and add depth of understanding to quantitative data. While precautions can be taken to avoid bias, they cannot be generally regarded as statistically valid.

Diagram 4: Evaluation Methodologies



2.40 Each approach to collecting evidence has its own merit and each method for collecting evidence should be built around the information you are seeking to obtain. **Table 2.8** below provides some hints and tips on different methods and the traditional issues and best practice elements that can arise out of the different approaches.

Table 2.8 Hints and Tips for Evaluation Techniques
Response Rates. Telephone and postal surveys can often have low response rates. With a good questionnaire and organised follow-up it should always be possible to achieve upwards of 60%. Below 60% it is essential to test for non-response and self-selection bias. It is also crucial to ensure you understand your client group, good structuring and tailoring of questionnaires to suit your audience can help to improve response rates.
Sampling. Where your target group is large avoid the temptation of surveying the whole target population. A stratified (controlling for key characteristics) sample of between 20% and 30% is often enough. If the numbers of those involved are small, as they were with the Cohesion Counts Projects then surveying all those involved is likely to produce the most reliable results.
Piloting Questionnaires. If possible and feasible within timescales and budgets questionnaires should be tested on a small number of target clients (possibly 5-10, or more if surveying larger numbers) to check that they work i.e. generate the required information, check the wording of questions to ensure people understand them.
Interviewee Benefit. In the case of some client groups you may need to tempt them e.g. prize draw – shopping vouchers etc, or with refreshments as used for some of the Cohesion Counts activities. There is a counter argument to this which states that involvement may be biased and individuals could feel inclined to feedback positive impressions, irrespective of genuine opinion, because of the incentives being offered.
Respondent Fatigue. When designing any survey tool always check what similar, recent work may have taken place with your target group. Always be aware that the quality of information depends upon the consenting participation of

Table 2.8 Hints and Tips for Evaluation Techniques
respondents. **Longitudinal Surveys.** Longitudinal surveys are employed where it is important to monitor the performance of a client group over a period of time. A good example would be a longitudinal survey of a Youth Study Programme which follows the experiences of groups of sixteen year olds through to the age of twenty-four assessing patterns of behaviour in destination after they have been engaged in such a programme. They are complex to implement and require significant expertise in research design and application, but can provide great research benefits by showing clear progression and long term impacts. Simple processes can help make longitudinal surveys easier to implement. For example keeping up-to-date contact details of participants wherever possible and ensuring participants are engaged throughout the programme lifetime initially and are aware they will have follow-up consultations will help the process run much more smoothly.

Step 5: Interpreting Data

2.41 Analysis is often the most difficult and challenging aspect of the evaluation. It is important to recognise that definitive answers are hard to find. Evaluation is like a jigsaw – you need to get enough pieces to see the picture but not necessarily get all the pieces. In most evaluations there is no one single answer, but rather a whole range of outcomes, some of which you will not have anticipated.

2.42 Step 5 suggests approaches to analysing the data. It also looks at how to provide ways to interpret the data which will detail how far progress has been made towards the objectives set.

> *"Data data everywhere and not a thought to think"*

2.43 By focusing on the questions that need answering, the evaluation should maintain an analytical perspective. This will avoid a situation where the evaluators are being led by the volume of information generated and have to spend considerable time sifting through lots of information to find the most relevant data.

2.44 It is crucial to develop a set of questions which you want to answer with the data you have gathered. Examples of these are given in **Table 2.9**. Some of these questions will develop from the project and overarching objectives, others will evolve throughout the evaluation.

Table 2.9 Questions which might be asked as part of an evaluation

- have you met aims and objectives?
- should the programme continue?
- are the objectives measurable?
- is the programme cost-effective?
- where has there been impact from programme activity?
- is the targeting of the programme appropriate?
- is the scale of the programme appropriate?
- can improvements be made in management of the programme?
- is the programme effectively monitored?
- are partnership arrangements satisfactory?
- is there evidence of clear added-value?
- which activities (both evaluation and project) were the most successful at generating impact?

2.45 Seek to **identify examples of Good Practice** through the analysis process and focus attention on them.

2.46 **Controlled and careful use of qualitative data can be very helpful** in identifying key issues and highlighting best practice. They can also be used to back up quantitative findings and add depth to evaluation findings. For example the use of specific quotations which support identified findings will help to liven up a report and make it more interesting to read.

Example: Using qualitative data

<u>Groundwork: Overarching Objective 1: To improve residents' satisfaction with the neighbourhood in which they live</u>

There was a increase in the number of teens/young people who were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live. At the pre-questionnaire stage 52.5% (n=21) were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live, this increased to 90% (n=27) at the post-questionnaire stage.

"I wouldn't normally go on kick-pitch, Groundwork make it more fun" (Young Person, Groundwork Evaluation Activity Visit September 2009)

Step 6: Reporting and Disseminating

> *"If the findings are not well communicated then it does not matter how much effort went into the analysis it will be regarded as a poor report."*

2.47 Reporting and dissemination is a critical aspect of evaluation. The theory and analysis may be excellent, but if the style and approach to reporting are wrong then any potential benefit of the evaluation may be wasted. Step 6 provides a process for projects to work through to enable them to demonstrate to their reader the impact against objectives that the project/programme's work has had.

2.48 It is likely that there will be multiple audiences for the report and it is vitally important that you **consider the audience** you wish to engage. Audiences might include:

- other projects;
- senior managers;
- local government;
- local partners;
- strategy contacts in the local or national networks;
- participants/community members; or
- voluntary and third sector organisations.

2.49 While it may not be possible to tailor a report for all potential audiences, you should be able to focus on your core audience. Some organisations, such as funding bodies, may expect a specific format.

2.50 Clearly breaking the reporting process down into sections and spending time on developing a reporting outline and structure will make the report writing process more straight-forward.

Develop a draft report

Depending upon the agreed approach set out in the evaluation specification you may use either of the following:

- produce an outline document of issues;
- produce a near-final version.

It is critically important that you agree with your internal customers and the projects or consultants involved what is expected and exactly how it will be handled.

2.51 Reports should always include a summary or executive summary. This will force the key issues to the surface and will be a useful tool for dissemination purposes. The report structure below considers a standard project evaluation, looking at activity and impact.

Table 2.10 Outline Report Structure	
Executive Summary	Brief resume of the evaluation focusing on the conclusions and recommendations
Introduction	Outline of the project • in descriptive form • through aims and objectives • dimensions of project inputs and expected outcomes
Methodology	Summary of the evaluation plan, if this is highly detailed it should be put in the appendices
Analysis of information	Include key analysis tools e.g. desk research, surveys, case studies
Key evaluation findings	Undertake necessary calculations to establish net and gross outputs and impacts

	Learning – positive or negative
Conclusions	As a result of the evaluation what are the principal issues which have been identified?
Appendices	Detailed statistical tables or analysis Methodology details and response rates to surveys

2.52 In writing an informative report there are also simple steps which can be taken to make the report more coherent:

Attention to detail
Remember diagrams and tables can be used to express ideas, and pictures of activity can help enable the audience to engage with the evaluation activity and the findings.
Ensure that the basics are up to scratch such as:

- spelling;
- grammar;
- consistency;
- abbreviations;
- page references.

It is good practice to ask someone to quality-check the report before release.

2.53 Often, not enough thought and attention can be given to dissemination. In fact it is a critical point at which a report can end up 'on the shelf'. There needs to be a dissemination strategy to ensure that conclusions are understood and recommendations are considered and acted upon.

2.54 If designed and implemented well then the findings should be useable and useful to a wide range of key stakeholders. A number of innovative methods can form part of a dissemination strategy:

- report;
- website;
- leaflet;
- networking event;
- workshops;
- presentation;
- CD ROM;
- video.

2.55 Take on board any recommendations that you can directly influence yourself. Remember **actions speak louder than words,** if you show a positive attitude to the results it will present a clear picture to operational and strategic partners that the evaluation is feeding into future developments.

"Walk the walk, don't just talk the talk"

2.56 Be prepared to accept any development areas as well as successes that are identified in the evaluation. Senior management can only act on what they are aware of, so ensure findings are disseminated to strategic and senior partners as well as projects and programmes. Utilise the key findings for future bids or extensions to the project. Remember, although this process is called evaluation it has involved considerable research which you can use to the advantage of your project and the wider learning networks you are engaging with.

"The ultimate test of success of an evaluation is the extent to which it precipitates change and extends learning/best practice through positive action."

3 SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES OF COHESION COUNTS METHODOLOGIES

3.1 The Cohesion Counts Impact Evaluation provided an excellent opportunity to develop practice, experiment with new approaches and undertake learning through doing. We utilised a number of different evaluation methodologies, some of which have been discussed in Section 2. In this section we reflect on what worked well and what we will take away from the evaluation as positive learning experiences.

Monthly Update Emails

3.2 ***Summary:*** Monthly update emails were used as a way of keeping in regular contact with project managers. They also enabled the evaluation team to identify ongoing learning and best practice through the life of the programme. At the beginning of each month an email was sent to all Cohesion Counts project leads with five common titles:

- Project activities over the past month;
- Issues that have arisen and solutions found;
- Lessons learnt and best practice;
- Feedback/quotes from individuals, groups, staff members; and
- Any additional information.

3.3 ***Successes:*** Project managers filled in their responses each month and sent them back to the evaluation team. This was an effective method of gathering real-time information on what projects had learnt, project activities and picking up their thoughts and reflections crucially *at a specific time point*.

3.4 The monthly update emails were found to be an excellent way of contributing to the projects' reflections on learning and practice as they went through the process. Often when evaluation activity is focussed at the end of the project people can forget issues that arose and successes they experienced throughout the project's lifetime. The emails were a useful vehicle for the team to add additional reminders, prompts or requests – such as final evaluation activity.

3.5 The monthly update emails also enabled the team to track lessons learnt and explore how projects had grown and developed over time. They were a good source of information for real-time quotes and reflective learning. These monthly update emails are now being used in other studies the evaluation team are undertaking.

3.6 ***Challenges:*** Although projects generally responded quickly and with little prompting, there were some occasions when projects did not have the time to complete the emails. This sometimes led to ad-hoc responses and gaps in information. Had this methodology been the only one employed, or had responses only been considered at the reporting stage, this would not have been as useful a tool. By acting on the information as it is emailed back interesting points made by the projects in the update emails can be picked up quickly. A short conversation with projects then can help to gather further detail there and then, which can help to paint a fuller picture.

Questionnaires

3.7 ***Summary***: The evaluation included pre and post questionnaires with respondents for a number of the projects. The questionnaires were designed with the overarching evaluation and project objectives in mind and measured impact and distance travelled against these aims.

3.8 ***Successes***: Questionnaires were kept short and concise – often no longer than 2-3 sides of A4. The evaluation wanted to keep individuals engaged until the end of the questionnaire in order to get complete answers at all stages. The questionnaires provided some extremely useful data on distance travelled and are a well tried and tested approach to gathering opinions and reflections on activity.

3.9 ***Challenges***: By keeping the questionnaires short and quantitative focused (there were very few open questions) it only provided some very two dimensional responses at times. However, with the Cohesion Counts evaluation qualitative consultations were also undertaken with residents whilst they were filling in the questionnaire. These informal discussions helped the team delve a little deeper into certain responses participants made on their questionnaires.

3.10 Another one of the main challenges in using anonymous individual questionnaires is that different cohorts of participants were interviewed at the beginning to those at the end. This was due to the nature of the projects, with participants dropping in and out of the activity. This meant that changes in perceptions and responses to the questionnaire could not readily be linked to the projects as differences in opinions could be down to the individual completing the questionnaire at the time.

3.11 Consultation fatigue was one key challenge in using the questionnaires. For example in one of the projects the same people were engaged in numerous community cohesion activities and therefore were at risk of being "over-evaluated". Keeping questionnaires short and simple, explaining to respondents how that information can help shape the developments and learning arising from the projects can help to reduce consultation fatigue and keep participants engaged.

Blogs/Forums

3.12 ***Summary:*** As part of the evaluation activity a Blog and Forum page was set up for respondents to reflect on the projects and make comments about their experiences.

3.13 ***Successes:*** The Blog and Forum were both set up for free using two different providers. The Philosophy for Communities project used its own Blog and had a number of respondents who used it to feedback about their experiences.

3.14 ***Challenges:*** Despite promotion and awareness raising by the projects (through active discussion during their projects and including the web address on project marketing material), the response to the Cohesion Counts Evaluation Blog and Forum set up by the evaluation team was extremely poor. The Blog for P4C was used by participants but not as much as was anticipated.

3.15 On reflection it is clear that this method does not work for all individuals. Facebook, Twitter, Bebo and Blogging are all used in today’s society, but on closer inspection the virtual world of online discussion and profiles is not accessible to all as many of the residents have no personal access to a computer. The lessons learnt from the Oldham and Rochdale experience indicates that hard to reach and disadvantaged groups may have very little access to this medium or choose not to engage in such evaluation approaches.

3.16 One possible solution to encourage engagement with this type of medium is where projects can take laptops with internet access along to activities and support participants to “Blog” their thoughts before, during or after the session. This will obviously not be possible for projects based outside, for example Groundwork’s sports sessions, but can work for a project like P4C which is based in a community centre. It is also important, however, if using this approach to consider what information you are trying to get out of the evaluation technique. Blogging is commonly thought of as a real-time, voluntary exchange of information – people will “Blog” what they think and feel in their own time, a little like natural conversation, or making ad-hoc comments. Therefore projects and evaluators will have to be careful to ensure participants do not feel pressured into making comments on a Blog or Forum, and that they engage because they feel they want to say something.

3.17 Free blogging and forum services can be of benefit for community groups and projects with limited resources, however there can be a number of limitations. It is important to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of using Blogs and Forums over other evaluation methods. For example whether to utilise free services or incorporate costs within budgets to ensure the project has complete control over the service. It is also important to ensure that these methodologies are not used in isolation and that they compliment and add to activity being undertaken elsewhere.

Focus Groups

3.18 ***Summary:*** The team spoke with participants whilst they were engaged in the project activities. Information taken from the pre-questionnaires and the Monthly Update Emails was used as a basis to investigate further into the impact the project's activities were having on participants and local communities.

3.19 For example the update emails indicated that residents were pleased that the young people Groundwork were working with had something constructive to do of an evening. Through the focus groups the evaluation team as the young people what else they would have been doing had they not been involved in the Groundwork project. The Team also spoke with residents and asked what impact it was having on their neighbourhood to have the young people engaged in positive activities.

3.20 ***Successes***: Focus groups can provide a wealth of qualitative feedback from a range of individuals. A good sized group of people (around 8) can enable positive discussion and can stimulate further investigation into responses. Focus groups that are well managed can generate considerable debate. Enabling focus group participants to be open and honest about their opinions can produce high quality quotes and comments which can be used to further validate more quantitative findings.

3.21 ***Challenges:*** Focus groups can be an excellent opportunity to gather group opinion on a subject matter; however they can be influenced by stronger characters who voice their opinions louder than others. Facilitating a focus group is a skill. The focus group facilitator has a key role in ensuring that all members of a focus group have the opportunity to have their say without making quieter individuals feel like they have been "put on the spot". Projects and Evaluators have to choose an appropriate individual to deliver the focus group. One of the project workers who participants know well could help to get them engaged and open up, but in this situation, as with any of the evaluation methodologies, if a project worker were to deliver the session there is a risk of bias responses. This could happen if participants feel they cannot critique the good and the bad of a project if the worker is the one asking them the questions, and the project worker would have to ensure that they do not only elaborate on the positive comments participants made but also discuss the negative ones.

3.22 Focus groups should be held where the target audience feel most comfortable. Our focus group for Groundwork's evaluation was held with the group sat on the pavement by their local kick pitch. The young people were engaged and felt comfortable answering questions and were perhaps more open and honest than they would have been in a more formal setting.

One-to-one Consultations

3.23 ***Summary***: One-to-one consultations were carried out with a range of individuals. This included parents, residents, young people and those delivering the projects. Specific organised consultations were also carried out with programme managers and stakeholders. Semi-structured topic guides were used and consultations focussed on experiences of the programme.

3.24 Semi-structured consultations enabled the evaluation team to ensure they same types of questions were being asked of all consultees. This allowed common findings to be drawn from across the projects.

3.25 ***Successes:*** The one-to-one consultations generated some excellent quotations and really added depth to the quantitative data. Individuals had an opportunity to speak with the evaluation team and offer unbiased and confidential viewpoints on their experiences and views on the impact of the projects. One-to-one consultations are a good methodology to use when discussing sensitive questions. Participants are likely to be more open and honest speaking with one person, providing they feel comfortable and assured that the responses they provide will be treated with respect and in confidence.

3.26 Consultations were carried out both face-to-face and over the telephone. By taking a more flexible approach (i.e. face-to-face, telephone, out of office hours) to engage with different groups, it enables the evaluation to involve many different consultees without the process becoming too onerous. This is an extremely important element to evaluation; it has to be flexible and respond to the needs of the participants and the projects in order to obtain high quality information.

3.27 One of the most important things to remember when using any type of consultation method is to highlight to them that the information and statements they provide are completely confidential. It is also considered good practice to offer consultees the opportunity to consider their responses after the consultation and provide them with contact details should they wish to add further detail, or retract anything they mentioned at a later date.

3.28 ***Challenges:*** Individuals may feel hesitant about speaking to a researcher on one-on-one basis. To over come this also consider speaking with a smaller group, involving 1-2 of their peers. This may create a situation where the individuals feel more confident to voice their opinions.

3.29 Within the Cohesion Counts evaluation there was a risk that a one-to-one consultation could descend into a critique of all the negative elements of their neighbourhoods/neighbours/ children/private lives. It is important to generate interaction with consultees but there needs to be a steady steer on the consultation to ensure that it covers the points the evaluation wants to uncover.

Video Diaries/Reporting

3.30 ***Summary:*** A couple of the projects involved in the Cohesion Counts Evaluation used "Big Brother" type diary room feedback opportunities. During some of the post-evaluation sessions the activity was filmed by an outside third party for the Cohesion Counts dissemination of lessons learnt and best practice.

3.31 ***Successes:*** Young people in particular really engaged with the camera and were keen to get involved and have their say. The Diary Room experience can provide a level of confidentiality (people forget they're talking to someone and see it as an anonymous individual) and can encourage some individuals to be more open and honest than perhaps they would be using other methods.

3.32 ***Challenges:*** As with focus groups, strong characters who engage well with the medium can influence how the rest of the group interact. Media equipment can make some people withdraw into themselves as they become extremely conscious that they are on camera. Using the material in the right circumstance and for the right groups is crucial. Participants who are engaged in a project which is dealing with extremely sensitive and personal issues may not interact as well with this methodology due to the nature of the issues they may be addressing through the evaluation activity.

Mood Boards

3.33 ***Summary:*** The evaluation team used Mood Boards (or they can also be termed ‘graffiti walls’) sessions with of young people to explore their perceptions of their local area. Two large A1 size boards were placed on the wall, one for dislike, the other for like. Materials were provided (including pictures, drawings, pens, highlighters, cartoons, words, phrases and post –it notes) for participants to write or draw their own images on.

3.34 ***Successes:*** Mood Boards are a fantastic way of engaging a wide range of people, they are a fun and interactive tool which once barriers and initial inhibitions are broken down, can really engage and inspire individuals to participate fully. The participants who used the Boards in Oldham and Rochdale produced some vibrant and reflective Mood Boards; please see an example below taken from the Cohesion Counts evaluation:

3.35 Mood Boards can help to break down barriers by giving people the opportunity to express what they think or feel through pictures. They can be used to facilitate discussion amongst a group and also provide a useful visual aid in reports to highlight messages.

3.36 For example the mood board above is one group's reflections on what they liked about their area. The Mood Board below is what they did not like about their area. Without going into any further analysis it can clearly been seen that there are more pictures and images on the first mood board than the second, showing there are more things the group liked, than disliked, about their area.

3.37 If you should have the time and resources to engage participants beforehand and inform them of what you wish to discuss at a Mood Board session, there is also possibility that participants could be encouraged to bring along their own information or images to use on the boards. For example, if your project is a long-term one which has made physical changes to an area, asking participants if they have any pictures of their local area over time which they would like to bring along to stick onto the Mood Boards can add much more to the session. By personalising the information on the Mood Boards it can help to further engage those involved in the sessions and can add real depth to the information and overall picture presented at the end.

3.38 ***Challenges:*** Keeping the group on track is important throughout a mood board session. There is a careful balance between enabling groups to feel ownership of their mood board, and policing it extensively to ensure they are answering the question set and that as an evaluator you achieve what you want to from the session.

3.39 At times the evaluation team had to keep reminding the group what the mood boards were to represent. This requires that more than one person facilitates a mood board session, no matter the group size. As a minimum two people will be needed, one to work with the group at the materials table to discuss their responses and what they want to put on the boards, which one (like or dislike in our example) and why. The other should work with the individuals when they are putting the images onto the boards to again check why they have chosen that image, what it represents and how does it answer the question being set.

3.40 Mood Boards can be difficult to interpret for evaluation reporting, if additional notes are not complied throughout the exercise. By having one individual working with the group and another talking to them as they add the images onto the boards, this helps provide accurate and reliable interpretation and analysis of the results at the reporting stage.

Scenario Testing

3.41 ***Summary:*** A number of the overarching objectives were focused on participants’ perceptions and behaviours towards different groups of people e.g.

- Aim 3: To improve residents’ perceptions of living in communities mixed by age, tenure, property types, areas of the neighbourhood, and social and ethnic backgrounds; and
- Aim 4: To improve relationships within neighbourhoods between residents mixed by age, tenure, property types, areas of the neighbourhood and social and ethnic backgrounds.

3.42 It can be difficult to pick up individual perceptions through any of the other methodologies discussed above as the topic area can be quite contentious and a delicate area to cover with other traditional methods. Mood Boards can help with this but for the purpose of the Oldham and Rochdale impact evaluation the team built on an approach used in previous studies.

3.43 A scenario was developed (see below) which was read out to the participants. This scenario looked to investigate perceptions and opinions about different people in the participants’ neighbourhood or area. Participants were asked several questions about their attitudes and perceptions and they filled in their responses on smaller A3 type mood board. These boards had a picture in the middle which depicted the person discussed in either scenario 1, 2 or 3.

<u>Scenario testing – York Consulting December 2009</u>

Phil, Kat and their 6 friends are hanging around outside their shops on a Wednesday night at about 8pm, chatting loudly and playing practical jokes on one another. Phil's younger brother is with them and he keeps annoying Phil so they keep shoving one another. The rest of the group are laughing at them and just generally messing around.

We want you to imagine the three situations below and let us know:

A. How Phil, Kat and their friends would feel and what they would think about Joan/Raja/Leon?

B. How you think Joan/Raja/Leon would feel and what would they be thinking about Phil, Kat and their friends?

C. What would Phil, Kat and their friends do and what would Joan/Raja/Leon do in this situation?

D. What would your project say Phil, Kat and their friends should do? What would you say Phil, Kat and their friends should do?

Scenario 1) Joan is 87 years old and is coming to the shop to pick up a pint of milk for her cat and her crossword magazine. Her eyesight and hearing are going and she can't walk very well without her stick.

Scenario 2) Raja is in his late 30's and has forgotten to pick up an ingredient his wife asked him to get on his way home from the job centre, as she's making a traditional Indian dish for tea. Raja and his family of 8 moved to the area about 3 months ago and he doesn't really know anyone.

Scenario 3) Leon 19 lives in a different estate to the one the friends live in and was just passing through on his way home from work. He doesn't normally come to Alt but he wanted to get some chocolate so as he was passing, he decided to park his car on the curb and just nip into the shops.

3.44 ***Successes:*** As with the mood boards, having pictures which showed the person being discussed helped to focus the young people on the individual in question. Also by using a third party (the group of friends) in the scenarios the participants could detach themselves from the immediate situation and reflect on how others would react, rather than immediately consider how they themselves would act in the scenarios. Once participants had reflected on how the anonymous group of friends would think and react, the evaluation team asked participants how they themselves and their group of friends would act in each of the scenarios to gather personal reflective perceptions.

3.45 This type of evaluation method provides an alternative and creative way of engaging with younger project participants in particular. The story-telling and role play element allows them to link back to their own experiences and reflections without consciously thinking about it.

3.46 ***Challenges:*** As with the mood boards it is important once again that detailed notice is taken of the direction the activity is going in. It is also crucial that the facilitator ensures that participants understand the questions and reflect on their own impressions as well as those they perceive other people have.

4 CONCLUSION

4.1 Evaluation can be a **positive learning experience**. It provides a way to demonstrate performance and achievement of projects and activities; and it can also be a way of indentifying opportunities and demonstrating effective solutions to problems. Effective evaluation is **key to the continual development** of project and programme activity. It is an **integral part of the learning and improvement cycle** which helps organisations to become more efficient and have greater impact on their target participants. Consideration of evaluation at an early stage can **give your project an edge**. It provides a framework to analyse your projects performance in an objective and analytical way and can give useful data to evidence the impact your work has, which can be used in future funding applications.

4.2 There are a number of key elements which if thoughtfully taken into account can provide a quality framework and approach from which to develop an evaluation:

Table 4.1: Evaluation Steps	
Project Development Stage • effective evaluation takes place at an early stage in project development • by setting good solid foundations which clearly establish how the evaluation will run, it can help the entire process to run more smoothly throughout	Step 1: Understand and Develop Overarching and Project Objectives
Evaluation Planning Stage • there are many different types of evaluation – you need to be clear about what you want to achieve • decide on how to undertake the evaluation – internally or externally	Step 2: Developing and Understanding Evaluation Methodology
Management of the Evaluation Process • the quality of the evaluation can be influenced at many levels	Step 3: Managing the Process Step 4: Collecting Evidence

	Step 5: Interpreting Data
Learn and Improve • the whole purpose of evaluation is to move forward in terms of performance and understanding	Step 6: Reporting and Disseminating

4.3 In addition to the guidance there are always lessons which can be learnt and best practice which can be gained from any evaluation activity. Experienced evaluators use every opportunity to gain further ideas and solutions to the process of establishing impact, value for money and the effectiveness of projects and programmes.

4.4 Evaluating softer project outcomes, such as Community Cohesion, is often thought to be a daunting process. Organisations can be unsure how to measure impact, and wonder whether it is possible to actually measure impact against softer outcomes. Evaluating Community Cohesion activity can use the same tools and methods as would be undertaken for any other programme or project evaluation. By taking these first steps to evaluating softer Community Cohesion activity and setting clear and coherent frameworks for doing this a clearer understanding develops around the impact such work can have on soft and hard outputs and outcomes.

4.5 There are a number of different organisations and places that can provide guidance and assistance on evaluation, both as a broad topic and in relation to community cohesion specifically. Example of some of these organisations are listed below and offer an excellent example of how disseminating best practice and lessons learnt can really start to expand the boundaries of understanding and active engagement in evaluation:

- United Kingdom Evaluation Society (UKES)
  http://www.evaluation.org.uk/resources.aspx
- Institute of Community Cohesion (ICoCo)
  http://www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/home

- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG); http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation; http://www.jrf.org.uk/