

Evaluating your Work to Improve Access to Nature



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About this resource

This resource has been designed to support those working in nature spaces to evaluate their work in an accessible and inclusive way. It is intended to be an introductory guide that provides the information needed to get started with evaluation. At the end of the document, there are links to sources of information that may help you to develop your evaluation practice further.

What is evaluation?

Evaluation involves using information to assess and understand the performance of a project or organisation. This information may be gathered from monitoring activity or other sources.

Evaluation involves answering questions such as: What did we do? What difference did we make? What did we learn?

Why does evaluation matter?



Prove

To prove that your project/work has made a difference



Improve

To identify ways in which it could be improved

There are two purposes of conducting an evaluation: to prove that your project/work has made a difference and to identify ways in which it could be improved. Often the aim is to do both, but the amount of focus placed on each will influence the decisions made when planning and conducting the evaluation.

Key terms

Definitions of terms that are commonly associated with evaluation are below.

Evaluation

Assessing and understanding the performance of a project or organisation based on data from monitoring or elsewhere.

Monitoring

The systematic collection of data to check progress, for example, against agreed plans.

Quantitative data

Numerical information; information that can be counted and measured.

Qualitative data

Non-numerical, descriptive information (e.g. text, images, video).

Outputs

The results of your activities. For example, the number of people recruited to a programme, the number of grants awarded, or the number of qualifications gained.

Outcomes

What happens as a result of the outputs – the consequential changes. These may be changes in knowledge and/or skills, attitudes and/or behaviours.

Note: Outputs and outcomes are often confused, but they are distinctly different.

Impact

The long-term, significant and lasting change brought about by a project/programme of work. This may be positive or negative.

Process evaluation

A process evaluation documents the process of delivering a project and how it operates. It enables you to identify what is working well and what could be improved. If you are only concerned with measuring outputs, then you only need to conduct a process evaluation.

Impact evaluation

Impact evaluations assess the effects of a project. They are more difficult to conduct. They involve evaluation of processes, because you need process information to understand outcomes and impact.



Evaluation approaches

Effective evaluations often involve gathering both quantitative and qualitative data (called a mixed-methods approach) and participatory methods.

Participatory evaluation is a collaborative approach to evaluation that actively involves key stakeholders (particularly those whose lives are affected by the work being evaluated) in all or some aspects of the evaluation process. Key principles that underpin this approach include engaging a wide range of stakeholders, to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented; stakeholders being active partners in the process; and collaborative design and decision-making.

Theory of change

A theory of change is essentially a story about how an organisation creates the difference it wants to make. Theories of change focus on connecting activities with impact and provide a foundation for strategy, evaluation and communication.

A theory of change can be developed for an organisation's work overall and/or for a specific project.

New Philanthropy Capital have created a comprehensive guide to developing a theory of change: [Theory of change in 10 steps](#).

Designing and conducting an evaluation

The process of designing and conducting an evaluation can be broken down into four phases:

Planning

Deciding on the evaluation approach to be used and designing data collection tools



Data collection

Gathering the information you need



Data analysis

Making sense of the information gathered; considering what your evaluation findings mean and what you can learn from them



Sharing findings

Creating communications to share your evaluation findings with stakeholders

What to measure

To gain a good understanding of the difference made, it is important to measure both outputs and outcomes. For example, changes to the physical environment at your site and your organisation's communications would be outputs (the results of your activities). These may include the installation of paths; changes to path surfaces; installation of noticeboards; and additional information, such as video tours, being available on your organisation's website.

The change brought about by altering the physical environment or communications (the outcomes) may include:

- Changes in visitor/user numbers
- Changes in the diversity of visitors/users
- Changes in the extent to which people feel that they belong within the space
- Changes in the number of people who state that they intend to visit the site again.
- Positive feedback from visitors and staff on the alterations made.

It is important to make sure that you are able to capture information about any negative outcomes, as well as positive outcomes (e.g. through providing rating scales that range from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' within surveys and using non-leading questions). It is also helpful to design your data collection tools in a way that enables you to learn about any positive outcomes that you did not expect (e.g. through asking open questions and inviting people to share any additional feedback that is not related to a previous question at the end of a survey).

How to measure: Data collection methods

Once you have established what you want to measure, the next step is to identify the best way to collect this data. There are a range of options to choose from. Data collection methods such as surveys and interviews are likely to be familiar as they are used widely. More creative methods are increasingly being used. A large proportion of these are arts based.

Creative data collection methods

Creative data collection methods include:

- Artistic workshops (e.g. painting; drawing; collage)
- Using photography (e.g. photo elicitation; creating a photo diary)
- Creating zines (small magazines)

People may find it easier to engage with, and share their views and experiences through, creative data collection methods. They can, therefore, provide a more accessible way for them to take part in an evaluation.

Creative data collection methods can be used alongside more traditional methods to gather the data you need. For example, a zine making workshop could be followed by an interview, during which the individuals who took part in the workshop are asked to explain why they chose the images they selected for their zine.

These methods can also provide a wide range of options for sharing your evaluation findings (e.g. through an art or photography exhibition). Again, this can help to make your evaluation findings more accessible and engaging.

Accessibility and inclusion

Accessibility and inclusivity are key to planning and conducting ethical and high-quality evaluations.

In the context of undertaking an evaluation:

Accessibility means ensuring that everyone can participate in the evaluation process. This means removing barriers that might stop people from being able to access information about the evaluation or contribute their perspectives. It involves designing data collection methods and materials that can be adapted to meet individuals' needs.

Inclusion means valuing and including diverse experiences and perspectives. Inclusive evaluations seek to engage with people who have a wide range of viewpoints, including people from underrepresented or marginalised groups. This leads to more nuanced and richer insights that better represent the difference your work has made.

Evaluations that fail to consider diverse needs and perspectives risk perpetuating bias, excluding marginalised groups and resulting in inaccurate insights. Whereas accessible and inclusive evaluation practices can:

- lead to more robust and useful findings
- create greater trust and engagement from participants and wider stakeholders
- promote social justice.

Barriers to engagement with evaluation

The barriers people face to engaging with evaluation can be categorised into three groups:

Accessibility of information and data collection tools

The perception that their views will not be considered to be important

Concern about who will see their feedback and how it will be used

Evaluations can be designed in a way that helps to remove these barriers to engagement (see our top tips for accessible and inclusive evaluations below).

10 tips for accessible and inclusive evaluations

Here are our 10 top tips for designing and conducting accessible and inclusive evaluations:

1

Communicate that accessibility and inclusion are important to you

Communicate your commitment to conducting an accessible and inclusive evaluation to the people you are seeking to engage. You can demonstrate this commitment through stating it explicitly, and through your choice of language and communication style, as well as the actions you take during the evaluation process.

2

Consider co-production throughout

Co-production involves evaluators and individuals with lived experience working together and sharing power and responsibility from the start to the end of a project. Co-production may involve identifying priorities, co-design of data collection methods and co-delivery of evaluation activities. Involving Experts by Lived Experience can enhance the quality of the evaluation and help ensure that the evaluation findings contribute to positive social change. It is important to consider potential power imbalances between evaluators and people with lived experience, and to allocate sufficient time to do co-production well.

3

Focus on individual needs

It is important to balance the quality of the data you collect with the needs of those involved in your evaluation. Anticipating possible requirements and ensuring your practices address these prevents the responsibility being on individuals to inform you of their needs. Invite people to communicate their requirements and consider the conditions that will support them to do this throughout the evaluation process.

4

Offer flexibility

Offering flexibility promotes participation and ensures everyone can contribute. Inclusive practices include providing a range of options for ways in which people can share their views, such as via an online survey, completing a paper survey, or a conversation. Offering individual interviews as well as focus groups can accommodate those who would prefer to engage outside of a group setting.

5

Consider creative approaches

Creative data collection methods may be more accessible and inclusive than traditional methods such as questionnaires. If people are able to engage more authentically with these methods, they can yield stronger evidence and more accurate data. Examples of creative approaches include drawing, collage, diaries and journals, mapping, and theatre.

6

Design activities to enable independence

Design activities that enable people to have a sense of ownership and as much independence as possible. Factors to consider include whether people will face any barriers to accessing the location of, and tasks involved in, evaluation activity. If someone requires assistance to share their views, ensure that the information that has been recorded is accurate by communicating it back to them.

7

Provide information in multiple formats

Provide information about the evaluation and the evaluation findings in multiple formats. For example, these might include an Easy Read version, a large print version, an audio version or a British Sign Language (BSL) video of written content. Use Plain English* and consider the accessibility of font type, text size and colour contrast. Ensure that digital content is compatible with screen readers and includes alt text for all images.

*Plain English is a communication style that uses clear, concise language and simple, everyday words to help ensure that the reader can understand the information being shared quickly and easily.

8

Focus on a small number of questions

Focusing on gathering only the essential information from people can prevent them from feeling overwhelmed. Consider whether it would work well to spread data collection over time, so people can focus on answering different questions at different times. To gauge how many questions to ask, consult those whose views you wish to capture.

9

Embed evaluation into the core activity

Embedding evaluation into the core activity promotes engagement and helps prevent it being regarded as an “add-on”. This approach can foster greater trust in the evaluation, enhance the experience of those sharing their views and result in data that is of a higher quality. Creative approaches can be embedded into core activity particularly effectively.

10

Test approaches

Accessible and inclusive methods can enhance engagement with evaluation. However, not all methods will be suitable for the audience you want to reach. It is important to seek feedback on the methods you are considering and using. Involving the people whose views you wish to gather in the design and development process will result in a more inclusive evaluation.

Further reading

[Participatory evaluation](#), BetterEvaluation

[Creative methods](#), New Philanthropy Capital

[Inclusive research resources](#), including an inclusive research and evaluation checklist, Activity Alliance

[Equitable Evaluation: An introduction](#), New Philanthropy Capital

[Evaluation resource hub](#), The UK Evaluation Society

