

## Stakeholder survey 2017

### Short report

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ESS's biennial stakeholder survey 2017 was conducted between December 2016 and February 2017. It comprised 13 questions giving a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. This is ESS's 5<sup>th</sup> survey.

The **headlines** are that ESS is successfully supporting evaluation, bearing in mind the proviso that the survey sample is small and self-selecting. The survey gives ESS evidence that it continues to serve third sector organisations, funders and others very well but there are some areas that could be improved.

**A note of caution** – although the make-up of the respondents reflects the stakeholders we work with the sample is small. We supported 533 organisations in 2015/2016 – 430 third sector organisations and 103 funders. It should be remembered that this is a self-selecting sample and therefore the answers may have a positive bias. We tried to mitigate this by making the survey anonymous although people had the option to forego this if they were willing to be contacted for further information. 13 people left their contact details.

#### 1. Who responded to the survey

82 people answered the survey. This is a very slight increase on the 2015 survey (79). This year 79 answered it via SurveyMonkey, 3 via a pop up appearing on the ESS website Homepage

64% (53) work in third sector, 10% (8) for a funder organisation, 17% (14) for public sector including Scottish Government and 9% (7) worked for other organisations including Universities (4% n=3)

Respondents had interacted with ESS through (in order of quantity):

- website
- workshop/training
- newsletter
- conference or event
- face to face support
- working group/learning set
- telephone/email support
- far fewer have followed us on social media, were a member of Scottish Third Sector Research Forum, had advice on evidence for policy and practice or stated another interaction.

#### 2. About ESS

97% people said they would refer others to ESS (74/76) and 86% had referred (69/80).

When asked to describe ESS in three words the most used words were: supportive, helpful, knowledgeable, professional, friendly, practical, experts, approachable and innovative.

All words were very positive and most endorse that we are meeting our values, ethos and approach. The only word which we would see in a negative light was 'jargon' which was cited by one person who had also used 'Professional' and 'Knowledgeable'. The "wordle" below is of all the words used.



Answers to later questions echoed respondents' appreciation for our approach and values, for example,

"Authentically works with and for third sector organisations; connects and partners with others; shares knowledge and give advice while respecting where people are starting from and their own skills and assets; holds to its values". (Q.12 Comment 45)

"I appreciate the friendly approach that encourages participation in a non-threatening way". (Q.12 Comment 6)

"Clarifies and simplifies. Friendly approach which is robust but not presented in an overly academic way or with excessive jargon". (Q.12 Comment 11)

90% (74/82) strongly agreed or agreed that ESS supports third sector and funders to measure and report on their outcomes. 10% (8/82) didn't know or said it didn't apply to them.

94% (75/80) strongly agreed or agreed that ESS aims to make evaluation valuable, relevant and proportionate. 6% (5/82) didn't know or said it didn't apply to them.

Comments made were often about our training, resources and tools:

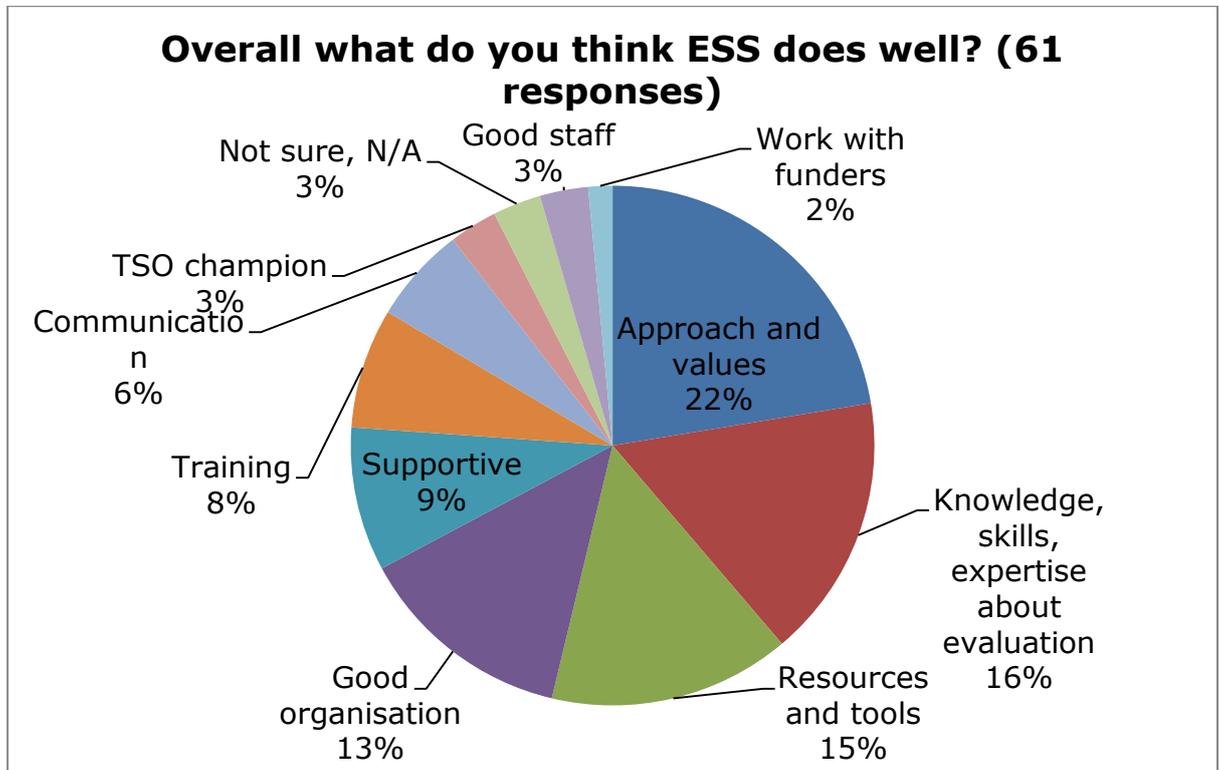
"ESS provides cheap, accessible training presented in an inclusive atmosphere in 'simple' language" (Q.5 Comment 9)

"Attended an ESS workshop or two a number of years ago and found it hugely helpful. I have been accessing materials and information from the website ever since. Lots of great tools to evidence impact" (Q.5 Comment 11).

“The content of the training course was excellent, and promotes monitoring & evaluation as a positive thing to be doing”. (Q.5 Comment 14)

“Incredibly useful to have so many materials available online and through training to meet the needs of really varying organisations”. (Q.5 Comment 10)

### 3. What does ESS do well?



61 comments were made about what ESS does well. Respondents commented on our approach, our knowledge, skills and expertise in evaluation, our resources and evaluation tools, our support, good staff, training and communication, and commented on ESS as a good organisation.

22% made comments in line with our ethos, values and approach; using words such as ‘jargon free’, ‘making evaluation accessible’, commenting on our ‘friendly’, ‘approachable’, ‘non-threatening’ approach, that we ‘do what we say we will do’, we ‘respond promptly to people’, we ‘collaborate well’.

“Makes evaluating fun and provides good food for thought and encouragement to use different evaluation methods, rather than the same old dreary word document case study.” (Comment 36)

“Provide helpful, easy to use and thought provoking resources” (Q.13 Comment 13)

“ESS also communicates well with TSOs”. (Q.13 Comment 36)

“We've always received excellent service from ESS, going all the way back to our initial involvement back in 2008/9!” (Q.13 Comment 61)

"You are great at giving small organisations the knowledge and confidence they need to address these questions and design an approach that works for them." (Q.13 Comment 55)

A few respondents commented that ESS works with organisations from where that organisation is in their evaluation journey:

"Knowledgeable and experienced staff working enthusiastically from wherever TSOs are in their evaluation understanding and journey" (Q.13 Comment 7)

"Support to our organisation has been vital over the past few years. They have guided and supported us in evaluating projects from beginning to end. We sing their praises wherever we go! Q13. Comment 3)

#### 4. What ESS could do better

36% (n=15) said nothing could be improved. 17% (n = 7) of respondents said they had no suggestions or they felt it unnecessary to comment on any improvements or stated it was not applicable to them. 19% (n = 8) respondents gave complimentary comments with no suggestions of improvements.

"I have been delighted with the support we have received" (Q.12 Comment 13)

64% (n = 27) of respondents made suggestions of improvements. These were

- about ESS **communications** – accessibility, use of technology and different formats
- increasing **reach** and awareness - "Would like to see that influence reach wider audience and stakeholders" (Q.6 Comment 1)
- "why doesn't ESS work with Statutory sector"
- working locally – hold local events (not just in Edinburgh or Glasgow)
- messages for funders – "persuade more funders to pay for training"
- strategic issues – "become more influential and high profile"

#### 5. Our communications

This year we asked particular questions about our website and publications. These elicited many complimentary comments and some suggestions of improvements we could make.

##### **Our website**

All except one respondent agreed or strongly agreed (excl. 10 don't know) that:

- They can easily find information they need on our website
- The website helps them to access evaluation resources
- The website helps them to understand evaluation better

They said:

"Excellent bank of resources, great to have access to this open source approach". (Q9 Comment 8)

"I think the website is excellent and have used it on several occasions. I have recommended the site to former colleagues south of the border as well." (Q.9 Comment 9)

"Like the website, v easy to navigate and find resources" Q.9 Comment 12)

However, several respondents said there was a lot of information on the website and perhaps this could be sorted better or presented in different formats such as videos. For example,

"Sometimes finding resources to help with a specific interest can be challenging if you don't know the document to look for" Q.9 Comment 3)

"Content is great but layout is too cluttered - perhaps better framing it by audience and what they are looking for e.g. new to evaluation, want to read up on reports, looking for training?" (Q.9 Comment 6)

"I find the website a bit overwhelming - too much text, too many different colours and underlined text". (Q.9 Comment 7)

"You might think of using short videos - tasters and short learning points. Needn't add this to site, could just link to a YouTube channel. I think a big current trend is that people (especially young people) learn how to do stuff through YouTube." (Q.9 Comment 10)

## Our publications

We asked respondents if they knew and used our latest publications (listed in the table below).

82% (53/65) know one or more of these publications and 24% knew all (16/65). Of those who knew them, 80% **used** one or more whilst 30% were using all of them.

Number of times a particular publication was named:

Evidence for Success	15
Evaluation Method Sheets	13
A Stich in Time?	13
Collaborating with academics	8
Why bother?	6
From the source to the sea (published Nov. 2016)	4
Support guides (which were not listed)	3
Breaking the pattern (published Sept. 2016)	2

## How publications are used

Respondents told us they used our publications to:

- **Inform their own evaluation work/practice**, to think about varied ways of evaluation and for new ideas and as reference material.

"I have used them to inform the way I work in my organisation and also to provide content when I talk about evaluation and outcome specific pieces of work"

"Tend to dip in and out for new evaluation ideas"

"Use them over all our service areas, different learning in each"

"I use Evidence for Success and Evaluation method sheets and find them very helpful in encouraging out the box thinking and varied ways of evaluating"

"Found evidence for success and collaborating with academics useful and picked up ideas for my own work that I've put into practice"

"To check out potential methods when planning work" (Evaluation method sheets)"

- **Help with reporting writing**

"I have used in support of my work and practice and to evidence the professionalism of the reporting that I am responsible for"

- **Share with other/support others with evaluation**

"I've used the ESS support guides (particularly the logic model section) many times - to support colleagues with project planning and design"

"Signpost staff to some as part of ongoing L&D"

"Stitch in Time and Evidence for Success - share with colleagues who are not familiar with third sector work"

- **They refer others to the publications**

"I also refer applicants and grant holders to ones which I think might be of use or interest to them, particularly those produced by the KTN and the 'outcomes and indicators' helper sheet."

"Useful reminders / prompts when thinking about evaluation myself and to refer others"

"I also flag these for others to go to and make use of"

"Evaluation method sheets (referred organisations on to these)"

"A stitch in time (referred commissioners on to this)"

- **With funding**

"From source to sea - I will use to aid future funding bids and will evaluate to see if the outcomes named are occurring"

- **In collaboration or working in partnership with others**

"Collaborating with academics (used with recent joint research projects)"

"Collaborating with academics has been very useful in supporting/improving the relationship with our evaluation partner"

Throughout the survey respondents spoke favourably about our resources – the design, content and dissemination.

"ESS publications very digestible, engaging and relevant. Methods sheets are a great format." (Q10 Comment 24)

"I use Evidence for Success and Evaluation method sheets and find them very helpful in encouraging out the box thinking and varied ways of evaluating."  
(Q10 Comment 41)

"I do know of these publications and use them when explaining evaluation"  
(Q10 Comment 43)

When asked how to improve our publications 17 (from 40 comments) respondents either didn't think the publications needed improvement or didn't know, 4 respondents commented positively:

"I like the balance of text/design/illustrations from the publications I have read. I find the links to other pieces of work/evidence/case studies etc. very useful to delve deeper where appropriate". (Comment 10)

"Keep doing what you are doing" (Comment 7)

"The layout and content always well presented" (Comment 15)

"They are usually well designed and presented, and usually a reasonable font size". (Comment 25)

Of the remaining comments there was a mix of compliments and criticisms about the content, design and dissemination and website. Generally there were more complimentary remarks about the content; there were some comments about the need to improve/update the design and suggestions to improve dissemination.

Suggestions to improve the design were:

- Add more professional look (1)
- To improve reach improve tone of design (1)
- Design could be updated (1)
- Perhaps make them a little shorter? (1)

"Useful - From source to the sea. Of some use - the content of A Stitch in time? but dislike it because of design tone (amateur)" (Q.10 Comment 44)

And to dissemination:

- Reach wider audiences
- Email resource lists
- Using keyword tagging
- E-books instead of PDFs

"Dissemination - consider wider audiences, not just those from the projects or on steering groups - who are we not reaching and why". (Q.11 Comment 18)

"Regularly flagging up the list of publications through email (for example)".  
(Q.11 Comment 20)

"More user-friendly search function for finding resources - e.g. keyword tagging" (Q. 11Comment 13)

"Publication of the guides as an e-book instead of a PDF could be useful..."  
(Comment 32)

"Email them out to contacts list - I would be happy to receive links to these by email" (Q.11 Comment 40)

"I've only really used the support guides. I don't really have time to read full documents in case they are useful. I tend to come to your site looking for refreshers and reminders of things I've picked up from workshops. I want small bits of information I can just jump into, "the difference between objectives, outputs and outcomes", "How to select your indicators"... etc." (Q10 Comment 60)

There were some comments about accessibility of our publications.

"Always use clear print guideline - SAIF Scotland" (Q. 11Comment 34)

"Easy Read versions for people and organisations that need this" (Q.11 Comment 1)

## **6. Evaluation practice**

The majority of respondents are always or sometimes using learning from evaluation to:

1. To improve services (54% Always, 32% Sometimes)
2. To articulate the difference made (54% Always, 28% Sometimes)
3. Plan for the future (53% Always, 32% Sometimes)
4. To enhance reports (47% Always, 30% Sometimes)
5. To convince people about the need for the service or organisation (44% Always, 27% Sometimes)
6. To feed into organisational reports such as annual reviews (39% Always, 39% Sometimes)
7. To attract funding (39% Always, 22% Sometimes)

## **7. Relationships between funded and funder organisations**

Overall there is less agreement about funded organisations' confidence to tell funders about things not going to plan and most agreement about funders being more interested in the difference funded organisations make rather than the cost benefit. However funders are more likely to agree that they use TSOs evidence and that they make it easier for TSOs to tell their story and set outcomes within realistic timescales than would TSOs.

Third sector organisations were far less likely to agree that funders used their evidence; 58% (n=37/52) of TSOs didn't think funders used TSO evidence or didn't know. Nearly equal numbers of TSOs agreed and disagreed that they were confident to tell their funder about when things haven't gone to plan (41% (n=22) agreed and 39% (n=21) disagreed).