

# What has ESS ever done for us?

## Funder survey 2017

### Introduction

Our support to funders has always been an integral part of our work at ESS and we have developed our support, resources and partnership programmes over the years in response to funders' common evaluation challenges. In 2014 The Robertson Trust partnered up with ESS to support a number of activities that would help funders to explore evaluation challenges together.

Our funder learning programme since then has enabled a spectrum of funders to share learning about supporting grantholders with evaluation, how to measure the impact of their funding, and how best to use the evidence of that impact.

In July we sent a survey out to everyone who had attended activities within the funder learning programme since 2014 to find out:

- 1) **What difference we have made *and***
- 2) **What funders want from the reports they receive.**

This summary highlights key findings and learning points that help us know where we have made a difference, how we can continually improve our support, and funders' priorities about how they use evidence.

*"We changed our evaluation procurement process which now has a greater focus on the people doing the evaluation and how they will engage with our grantholders and participants."*

This summary doesn't include feedback on all ESS's work with funders, solely the activities supported by the Robertson Trust grant and our open programme of funder workshops. **25** funders responded to the survey. We were very pleased by the volume and quality of responses but also acknowledge that the views expressed are a sample and may not represent other funders' opinions. In total we have worked with 120 people from 57 funding organisations since 2004.

### Key learning points

- Respondents enjoyed and appreciated the trusted space ESS provided and facilitated
- The majority of respondents found the opportunity to problem solve and learn together most useful
- Most respondents said they learnt something new and did something differently as a result of our support
- 23 out of 25 respondents would recommend ESS events to others (the other 2 were maybes)
- Respondents scored 'knowing our funding made a difference' as what they most want to know from the reports they receive.
- Most respondents are interested in exploring practical harmonised approaches to funding and reporting expectations.

## 1) What difference have we made?

Since 2014 **120** funders from **57** unique funding organisations (including Scottish Government and local authority commissioners) have attended one or more ESS activity within the funder learning programme. These activities included:

<b>8</b>	Workshops and masterclasses	<b>4</b>	Roundtable discussions / seminars
<b>3</b>	Conferences / events	<b>1</b>	Learning set
<b>2</b>	Funder bulletins	<b>3</b>	<a href="#">Reports / resources</a>

From the 25 people that responded to our survey:



**23** out of **25** said yes they would attend something similar again and would recommend ESS to others  
**2** said maybe



**1** enjoyed the event but didn't take anything specific away



**20 learnt something new**  
*"The opportunity to hear from, and learn from, other people doing similar work and experiencing similar challenges. Other people's experiences can provide insight or solutions that you haven't thought of or considered in sufficient depth."*



**16 did something differently as a result**  
*"The resources available from the workshop and on the website have been extremely useful with my work. I use them regularly and direct colleagues to the website."*



**17 valued the networking**  
*"Very useful examples of different ways evaluation can be built in to your organisation - and interesting to see how other participants deal with similar issues (i.e. time / resource constraints)."*



**8 changed a system or process**  
*"We changed our evaluation procurement process; it now has a greater focus on the people doing the evaluation, how they will engage with our grantholders and participants."*

We asked:  
What did you find most useful?



16 people said sharing knowledge and practice around evaluation with other funders and problem solving together



8 people said improving their understanding of a specific evaluation challenge or approach



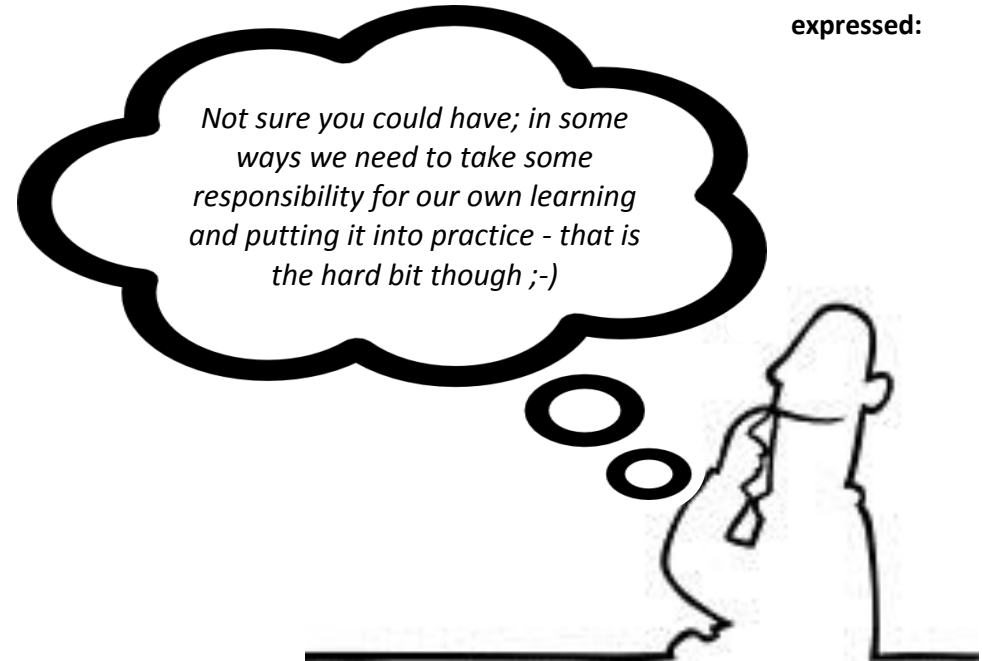
4 people said the structure of the event they attended – enabling good discussion, a helpful mix of participants and useful resources.

How could we have supported you better?

3 people made suggestions:



1 funder expressed:



## 2) What do funders want from the reports they receive?

At ESS we champion useful and proportionate reporting. Gathering evidence of difference made, making sense of the information, and then communicating the key learning in a report should be useful for funders and funded alike. We promote the principles of [harmonising reporting](#) and have used this survey to gauge funders' priorities and ask what further work needs to happen to continually improve funding relationships.

The survey asked people to rate the following statements with either: very important, important, quite important or not important in relation to what they most want to get out of the reports they receive. The following are in order of importance (with 1 being most important) according to the sample of funders in the survey responses:

1. Our funding made a difference
2. We can use the information to support other funded projects
3. We can make better funding decisions
4. We can use the evidence to influence practice
5. We learnt something important
6. We got good value for money
7. We can use the evidence to influence policy
8. We can report clearly to our trustees

All the statements had a majority response of either very important or important with 'our funding made a difference' the clear winner with **21** out of **25** funders selecting 'very important'.

*"Explore the idea of "harmonisation" beyond funders themselves. Organisations report to funders, but also to other regulators. Looking at way of better harmonising across this sector would be very useful."*



In an open question we asked:

What would you like to explore or develop with other funders that could help nurture positive funding relationships?



10 funders said further opportunities for peer sharing and learning would be helpful.

*It's always helpful to explore other funders' experience and practice. Things change over time, so you can never do this too many times!*

*Continue to promote an open dialogue between different funders, acknowledging the challenges in the sector and the important role funders play in supporting organisations.*



5 respondents talked about exploring opportunities for co-funding and joint approaches to reporting.

*Explore easy ways of jointly investing in good work*

*"Engage in terms of shared application and reporting processes where possible"*

*Joint funding opportunities and how these might be established and delivered in practice (given the very different ways that decisions are made by funders at committee/trustee level)*

**Other suggestions for funders to explore included:**

*"Principles of intervention / theories of change and practice around a) place based funding, and b) asset-based approaches."*

*"More about how funders have influenced policy and practice."*

*"Core funding and impact measurement."*

**This summary of the findings from our funder survey are evaluating:**

#### **EVENTS**

Shifting a Gear

[Funderfest](#)

Funders and Funded in Harmony

#### **ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS/SEMINARS**

Influencing Practice

Collaborative Funding

Funders Give More than Money

Walking the talk

#### **WORKSHOPS**

[Small and Simple](#)

[Does Capacity Building Make a Difference?](#)

[Adding Up Outcomes](#)

[Evaluating Together](#)

Walking the Talk

Small Grant Big Impact

[Getting the Best from External Evaluation](#)

Getting the best from your grantholders

#### **LEARNING SET**

Walking the Talk

#### **RESOURCES**

[Walking the talk](#): How funders measure their influencing policy and practice activities

[Funders and funded in harmony](#): Where are we now?

[Getting the best from external evaluation](#): Principles for funders

#### **OUR THANKS ☺**

A huge thanks to all of you that took the time to do this survey and provide us with very useful feedback. We welcome your thoughts and suggestions at any time so stay in touch.

A massive thank you to The Robertson Trust for all the support and encouragement you have given us.

Thanks also to RS MacDonald Trust and the Big Lottery who have been so hospitable and provided us with free space, refreshments, and admin support.

Thank you also to the Scottish Grantmakers for including and promoting our funder learning programme with theirs, and for giving us the opportunity to speak at their annual conference.