Evaluation can help you to work out what difference you are making through your services or activities. Before you can choose the best methods to find out whether you have achieved what you set out to do, you need to develop outcomes (see Evaluation Support Guide 1.1: Clarifying your Aims, Outcomes and Activities) and indicators (see Support Guide 2.1: Developing and Using Indicators).

This guide covers some of the more traditional methods for collecting information for your evaluation: questionnaires, interviews and group interviews (focus groups) and gives advice on how to use them.

Just because these are traditional methods does not mean that they are the best or only ones. You need to think about the context you work in and the most appropriate methods for gathering information from your users and other stakeholders. You can find out more about other approaches to evaluation in Support Guides 2.3 Visual Approaches and 2.4: Technology.

Evaluation often works best when you can integrate evaluation activities into your day to day work. You should aim to build evaluation into what you do, rather than adding it on at the end. There is no ‘one way’ to evaluate your work. You can be creative and choose the approach that seems to fit best to your context and what you do.

The examples in this guide use different methods to evaluate the same project. There are whole books written about questionnaires and interviews - this guide is just a brief introduction.

**Questionnaires**

A questionnaire is a form that includes a list of questions that ask people to give their views and opinions. You can use questionnaires to collect information about whether people know about your services; whether they like your services and what difference your services have made to them.

Examples of questionnaires include:
- feedback forms for service users
- before and after quizzes to assess what people have learned or how their attitudes have changed
- exit surveys to find out what users think about the services they have received when they are ready to move on from your service

You can hand out questionnaires, send them by email or post or use an online questionnaire package such as Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com).
Advantages
✓ you can collect a lot of information from lots of people in a short time
✓ you can get information anonymously which may encourage more open answers

Limitations
✗ overused, so people have questionnaire and survey fatigue
✗ easy to ask the wrong questions
✗ the response rate can be low
✗ a dislike of form filling or low levels of literacy in English can be a barrier to response

The most common mistake that people make with evaluation questionnaires is that they do not ask the right questions. Your questions should relate to your outcomes and indicators.

Tips for success:

• Keep the questionnaire short – ideally on one piece of paper (you can use both sides if you need more space).
• Try the questionnaire out on a few people before you use it to check that the questions make sense. This is called piloting.
• Do not ask leading questions such as ‘How good is the service?’
• Use a mix of closed and open questions. Closed questions give a selection of answers to choose from, using tick boxes. Closed questions are easier to answer and to analyse but the limited answers may lead to an oversimplified response. Open questions require people to give an answer in their own words. This takes them longer to do and is harder to analyse but gives a richer response.
• Scales can be useful. You can use numbers (for example, choose a number from 1 to 5) or smiley and sad faces.
• If you use a postal questionnaire, make sure you use stamped addressed envelopes (or freepost) and give a date by which replies must be received. Try to offer incentives or rewards for replying.
• Decide whether you need to get information from everyone who uses your services, or whether you can select a sample.

The following example questionnaire shows different ways of asking questions. Note how every question is designed to ask questions about the outcomes and indicators.

Example: The North Edinburgh Healthy Living Centre aims to improve the diet of local people. Their volunteer run food co-op provides affordable, high quality fruit and vegetables and their Speedy Chef cookery demonstrations help people learn how to prepare cheap, healthy meals. They also provide information on the nutritional content of the food they sell. They want to find out if they have helped their users to improve their diet. They do a short questionnaire which been designed by users, to ensure that the format and the language are simple to understand. (See next page)
The North Edinburgh Volunteer Food Co-op wants to know what you think of our service. Please take 2 or 3 minutes to complete the 12 questions on this form. Your answers will help us to improve the service. Your answers will be confidential. Please place your completed form in the box on the counter.

Q1 How often do you visit the food co-op? ☐ today is my 1st visit (go to Q9) ☐ twice a month ☐ once a month ☐ every week

Q2 On average, how many times a week do you eat fresh fruit?

Q3 If you have children aged between 6 and 16, on average, how many times a week do your children eat fresh fruit?

Q4 Do you (and your family) eat more fresh fruit than before you started shopping at the co-op? ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ don’t know

Q5 On average, how many times a week do you eat fresh vegetables?

Q6 If you have children aged between 6 and 16, on average, how many times a week do your children eat fresh vegetables?

Q7 Do you (and your family) eat more fresh vegetables than before you started shopping at the co-op? ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ don’t know

Q8 Have you attended any of our Speedy Chef classes? ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ don’t know

If yes, did you try any of the recipes at home? ☐ yes ☐ no

Q9 What do you think of the quality of our fruit and vegetables?

Q10 How do our prices compare with other local shops?

Q11 On a scale from 1 to 5, how affordable are our prices? (with 1 being very affordable and 5 being very expensive)

Q12 Do you have any suggestions on how the food co-op could provide you with a better service?

Thanks for your help!
Interviews

Interviews are similar to questionnaires except that a trained interviewer asks the questions and records the person’s answers. The questions are set out in an interview schedule. The interviews can be formal or informal and can be done face to face or by telephone. You may choose to record the interview either on audio tape or video (see Support Guide 2.4 for advice on how to use audio and video technology). This allows you to play the interview back so the people who were interviewed can check they are happy with what they said.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ no literacy skills needed by the person answering the questions</td>
<td>× it takes time to interview people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ no form filling</td>
<td>× more vulnerable users may find it difficult to give answers if they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ the interviewer can explore in more detail any answers that need more</td>
<td>interviewed by a person who provides them with a service (but you could ask</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information or clarification</td>
<td>a colleague to interview them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ good for collecting in-depth qualitative information</td>
<td>× it may be more difficult and take more time to analyse the answers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with questionnaires, the most common mistake that people make with interviews is that they do not ask the right questions. Your questions should relate to your outcomes and indicators.

You can involve a small group of service users in developing the questions and conducting interviews with other users. You may need to offer training in interview skills and other support.

Tips for success:

- Make sure that the questions are clear and unambiguous.
- Use a mix of closed questions, where you supply a selection of potential answers to choose from, and open questions, where people can answer in any way.
- Decide if you want to get information from everyone or a sample.
- Be clear about the degree of confidentiality that interviewees can expect, especially if you are only interviewing a few people.
- Try the questions out on a few people first. This is called piloting.
- If you are recording the interview, make sure you practice using the equipment before you start the interview.

Group interviews

You can carry out a group interview (often called a focus group) with a small group of people who either already know each other or who come together especially for the interview. A group interview is made up of a series of topics
or issues that the person running the group wants the participants to discuss. A topic guide is used (see the example on the next page).

You can organise a group interview specifically as an evaluation activity or more informally as part of an existing group activity.

### Advantages
- ✓ no literacy skills needed by the person answering the questions
- ✓ no form filling
- ✓ less time intensive than individual interviews
- ✓ good for collecting in-depth, qualitative information

### Limitations
- × getting people to the group and getting there on time, can be a challenge
- × not good for exploring sensitive, confidential issues unless trust has been established in the group
- × qualitative information may be difficult to analyse and take more time to analyse

Group interviews usually last between 45 minutes and 90 minutes. It can be helpful to have two people running the group. You need to keep notes about what people say. The people running the group need to keep the participants focused on the issues that are being discussed, and to refocus the discussion if participants go off at a tangent. A focus group is running well when participants are discussing the issue rather than just answering the questions.

**Tips for success:**

- Give the participants information in advance about the times, venue and any expenses or incentives they will be offered.
- Offer refreshments to put people at ease.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves to the group if they do not already know each other.
- Use the topic guide to keep moving the discussion on when issues have been addressed to your satisfaction.
- Do not let one person dominate the group; encourage less vocal people to offer their views.

### Example of a topic guide

**Introduction**

My name is ... and my colleague’s name is ... Thank you for coming to this group interview to help us at the North Edinburgh Food Co-op to know what people think about the service we offer. In a minute, we are going to ask you some questions about the food you buy at the co-op and what types of food you eat at home. We will write down your answers. But first we will ask you to introduce yourself, saying your name, how long you have been using the food co-op, and who else stays with you. Your answers will be used to help us write a report, but your names will not be used. Is that OK?
**Topic guide (continued)**

1. How did you first hear about the food co-op?
2. How often do you visit the food co-op?
3. How often do you and your family eat fresh fruit? (explore what types of fruit, and who eats what etc)
4. Do you (and your family) eat more fresh fruit than before you started shopping at the co-op?
5. How often do you or your family eat fresh vegetables? (explore what types of vegetables people eat, how they are cooked, and who eats what)
6. Do you (and your family) eat more fresh vegetables than before you started shopping at the co-op?
7. Have you attended any of our Speedy Chef demonstrations? If so, what did you think of them? Have you used any of the recipes at home?
8. What do you think of the quality of our fruit and vegetables?
9. How do our prices compare with other local shops? Are they affordable?
10. Do you have any suggestions on how the food co-op could be improved?

**Thanks for coming!**

**What next?**

Now that you have gathered all this information, you need to know what it means, so that you can use it to evaluate your work. For more information: see **Support Guide 3.1: Analysing Information for Evaluation**.

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If you need advice about evaluation, or would like a copy of this guide in large print, Braille or audio, please contact Evaluation Support Scotland on [info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk](mailto:info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk) or 0131 243 2770. For other Evaluation Support Guides please visit our website: [www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk](http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk).