Evaluation Support Guide 3.3
Report Writing

Evaluation can help you to work out what difference you are making through your services or activities. **Evaluation Support Guide 1.1** helps you to clarify your aims, outcomes and activities and **Support Guide 2.1** helps you to use indicators to measure your progress.

This guide looks at how you can report on the impact of your work. You may be asked to write different types of report, such as: a paper for a committee, brief updates for supporters, accounts for OSCR (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator) or a full programme report for funders.

You may find it useful to first write a core internal self-evaluation report. You can then use this as a source of material for individualised reports to specific funders, service level agreement managers, or to develop publications and material for your website.

This guide sets out the elements that you should include in a core internal self-evaluation report, excluding the finance section (for guidance on writing financial reports see the OSCR website www.oscr.org.uk.) This guide is based on our report template which you can download from our website. You do not need to follow our structure or use the suggested headings when drafting your report. However, if your report contains all these elements then you can be reasonably confident that you have covered all you need to.

You should write your reports in plain English. You can find advice in *How to write reports in Plain English,* which you can download from the Plain English Campaign website (www.plainenglish.co.uk).
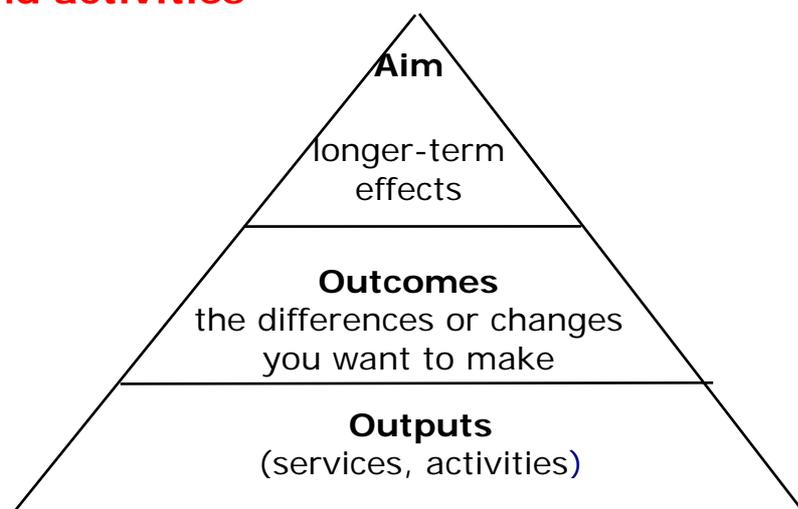
Getting ready to write your report

Before you start, it is useful to ask yourself:
- Do you have all the information you need? (You can download a report writing planning tool from our website to help you think about this)
- How much analysis of material do you still need to do?
- Have you set aside enough time to draft, check and edit the report?
- Are people you might need to check things with, or ask for more information, going to be available to help?
- Are you clear on the audience, purpose, message and focus of your report? The language, style, level of detail and tone of your reports will depend on these – our **Support Guide 3.2** *Writing Case Studies* looks at these issues.
- Do you have a structure for your report? (This may change as you begin writing but it will help you organise your thoughts and the material).

If you are inexperienced or lack confidence in report writing, you could build in some extra time for someone more experienced to give feedback on your draft.

Project aims, outcomes and activities

These sections of your report are the same as the three elements of your CES Planning Triangle (otherwise known as the Weaver's Triangle, see **Support Guide 1.1** *Clarifying your Aims, Outcomes and Activities*). If you have one of these you can easily cut and paste your aims and outcomes into the report. You may need to set out your activities in more detail, particularly if you deliver a range of services.

Aim

longer-term effects

Outcomes
the differences or changes you want to make

Outputs
(services, activities)

If your aims and outcomes are not easily available then you may have difficulty in writing your report!

You will probably find it easy to write about your activities. So this section of the report can become quite long. Think about the overall balance of the report and its purpose. A funder will want to know about the impact of your work, while a project doing similar work to you, may be more interested in your activities.

You may find it useful to add in some of the targets that you have set at the start, for example:
- *Deliver training on drug and alcohol awareness to 200 school pupils.*
- *Support 30 people in befriending relationships with volunteers.*
- *Run 38 weekly drop-in sessions for those recovering from mental ill health.*

Headline achievements

These are your most important facts! Think carefully about the key points you want people to understand about the difference you are making. You only need a few short sentences. The shorter and simpler the better - staff and Board members can memorise them to advocate for your organisation. Or a funder may start to tell other funders about your achievements!

Don't overload this section with output delivery statistics – it should be about the headlines only. Remember to emphasise your outcomes!

"Fifty of our clients secured new jobs or training after finishing our course" is a headline achievement.

"We secured funding for three more years from the Big Lottery Fund, this means we can sustain our service to those most in need." Although this is vital to the future of your organisation, it is not really a headline.

Outputs: main facts and figures about our activities

In this section you should set out the details of the services you have delivered and the activities you have carried out. You are likely to have some statistical information and the material can become very dense. Think about how you can make it easy for the reader to identify the key information at one read. Here are some things to think about:

Bullet points and lists – these are helpful because they:
- split information up into manageable bits;
- present material quickly; and
- can be more easily read than dense paragraphs of information.

However, if you include a lot of lists, the reader may skim over them and miss important information.

Pie charts and graphs – These can illustrate data very quickly. They need to be easy to understand, so don't make them too small to read or overload them with detail. You may already have produced some of these from your analysis or you can create simple charts using Excel. If you use a lot of pie charts and graphs, your report can become too long and the reader can lose track of what they need to focus on. It may also not be possible to fit these into a funder's standard report format. Normal guidance is to explain everything that is represented in a chart or graph in words. This can make reports even longer, so think carefully about what you really need to explain or illustrate.

Tables – A table is a simple alternative if a graph or chart isn't suitable. A table can display information clearly and logically, so long as you keep the structure simple and don't use unnecessary words. It is useful to include a column/row for your targets in a table, not just the outputs you deliver. You may want to add in a column/row to explain any difference between the target and actual output, as illustrated below. This can help readers to find answers to their questions without needing to read more of your report or ask you for this information. However this will only be possible if the issues are easy to understand.

Example table

Activity	Target	Actual	Reason for difference
Deliver training on drug and alcohol awareness to school pupils.	200 pupils	256 pupils	Larger pupil groups worked with than anticipated.
Support people in befriending relationships with volunteers.	30 people supported	26 people supported	Staff long term illness delayed training so lost potential volunteers
Run weekly drop in sessions for those recovering from mental ill health	38 sessions per year	27 sessions run	Asbestos discovered in our building so had to relocate office for 18 weeks, difficult to find suitable alternative venue for drop in.

Outcomes: what did we achieve?

When writing about outcomes, you need to give three levels of information:

What happened overall - the numbers who achieved the outcome, for example:
"We worked with ten young people on issues of self-esteem. Over the year, eight of them showed an increase in self-esteem."

Particular changes - progress in relation to specific indicators, for example:
"Four participants were reluctant to speak out in the group and had poor eye contact with others at the start of the project. After 12 weeks they were taking a more active part in discussions, eye contact had also increased; this showed a clear improvement in their confidence and comfort in the group"

Individual journeys - more specific illustrations of success or challenges in individual cases, a mini case study, for example:
*"When we first began working with young man **C** he was getting into fights every weekend, was regularly picked up by the police drunk in the street, was ambivalent about getting a job, regularly smoked dope and dabbled in other drugs. It was difficult to win his trust and very slow going. During the course of our work he began to recognise the impact of his alcohol and drug consumption on himself and others. After 18 months with the project:*
- *he is almost drug free and has moderated his consumption of alcohol,*
- *he has not been picked up by the police for 7 months,*
- *he organised a football session in the park with group members that has turned into a regular weekly fixture for involving other project participants*
- *he is waiting on a place at college to get the qualifications he missed through bad behaviour and truanting at school"*

All types of projects may use each of these elements to explain their outcomes, though the emphasis in each case may be different. For example:
- a project that supports six young people with severe disabilities towards an outcome of living independently, may emphasize individuals' personal stories.
- an advice agency that offers debt and money advice towards the outcome of reducing poverty, may emphasize the overall picture - they have increased income into households by £260,000 - and then give one or two individual stories to show how this happened.

It may not be always be possible to give precise numbers in relation to outcomes or it may not make sense to talk about numbers. For example:
"Most of the parents we worked with showed improvements in practical skills. The biggest areas of improvement were in knowledge about healthy eating and cooking skills."

However, such statements need a context and evidence to back them up. A critical reader could ask:
- How many parents were involved?
- What sorts of knowledge or skills have been acquired?
- What evidence of this is there?

If you wish to express your outcomes in this way, think about what else you need to show or tell the reader to back up your statements. You may find it helpful to add in typical quotes or visual evidence here.

If you have statistical information, you can present it in the form of bullet points, pie charts, graphs or tables (see page 3). Think about which is the best way to get your point across.

Example

Employment results
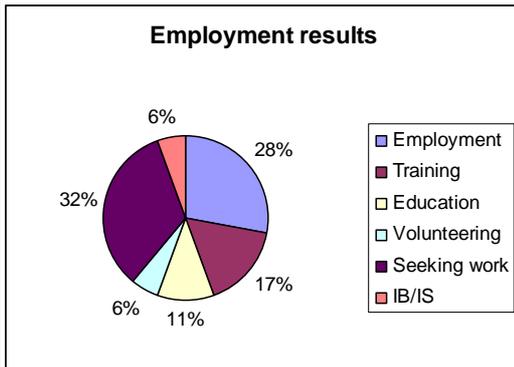
The pie chart is clear when in colour, but may not work so well in black in white. Also, while the project seems successful in getting people into work or training, the numbers involved might be very small so percentages may be misleading.
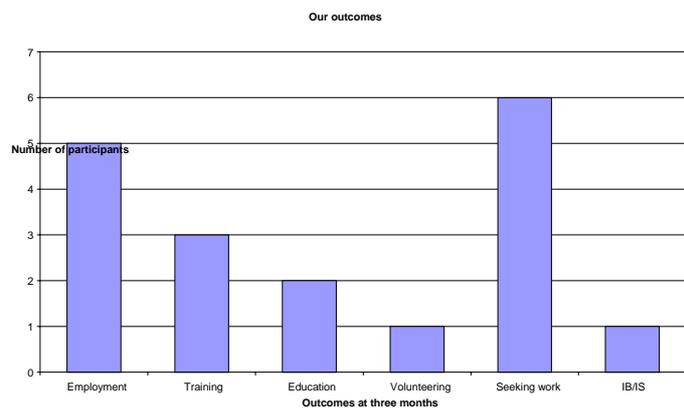
What stopped the outcome being achieved and why?

You may have met unexpected challenges or not have achieved all your outcomes. While you may not wish to share these facts with those outside your organisation, you need to think about what slowed your progress, for example:

- Staff vacancies
- Activities that did not deliver the outcomes you hoped (eg a residential that was less successful)
- Personal issues outside your control (eg a family bereavement or a participant going into prison)

Case studies and quotes

Case studies or quotes can help readers to understand your work. They add a different perspective to the report and let readers hear directly from your service-users and volunteers. Read our **Support Guide 3.2** *Writing Case Studies* to find out more.

What next? Learning for the future

Many reports focus on accountability. However, you should not forget what you have learnt from your work. You may find it useful to read **Support Guide 4.1** *Using What you Have Learned from Evaluation*.

Summary of how evidence was collected

This can be a useful section to show how you collected your data and the systems you use internally. Some funders ask for this specifically, for example in the form of a Monitoring and Evaluation Action Plan. You can download a template action plan from our website.

You may want to include examples of questionnaires, surveys, observation schedules or other tools that you use to collect the information. If you list or include copies of a tool make sure you use the information gained from it in your report.

Other points to think about

Headings – You can break up long pages of text with sub headings. You will need to make these different from your main headings, e.g. a different font or *italics*. If you break your report into sub-sections, the reader can find it easier to focus on what is most important to them.

Executive summary - Instead of a 'headline achievements section' you may want to have a short executive summary. This can be particularly useful if your report is quite long. It can help the reader to pick out key information easily, especially for any reports that they in turn need to write!

Colour – Colour can draw attention to key points or facts, which is great if you have the capacity to do full colour printing. However, the effect will be lost if the report is reproduced in black and white. You can use different fonts, **bold**, underline and *italics* to emphasize different parts of the report, but be consistent in how you use font styles and sizes.

Images –Images, visual tools and other graphics can make a report more engaging for the reader. You can use 'before and after body maps' or evaluation wheels to show outcomes (see **Support Guide 2.2** *Visual Approaches*). You may need to explain some images to make their relevance clear.

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 or 0131 243 2770. For other Evaluation Support Guides please visit our website: www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk