

Analysing information for evaluation



This guide looks at how you can analyse the information you have collected and stored. See [Support Guide 4.1](#) to find out how to use what you learn from evaluation.

What we mean by analysis

Analysis doesn't have to be scary. It's simply about identifying your evidence, piecing it together, and coming to conclusions about what happened and why.

Evidence can come from a range of sources such as feedback (formal and informal), observations, internal records, awards/standards (formal assessments) and external statistics.

Your findings will help you improve your planning and your work as well as helping you report to funders.

Evaluation works best when you can build it into your day to day work. Don't wait until a report is due; make time to analyse information as you go along. If you do this, you break the work up into manageable chunks and can use any learning to improve practice right away. For example, you may take some time individually or as a team after a session, event or particular piece of work to make sense of what worked well and less well and what you learnt.

Remember you don't have to report on everything in great detail. It's helpful to pick out the top story lines for each audience with some examples to illustrate. Outcomes are the **changes** or **differences** you expect your project to make.

For example, your headlines for a funder might be:

8 out of 10 gained new skills. Those who didn't tended to be older and more experienced.

- **Mary (16) had never cooked before, she was confidently making a two course meal.**
- **Jack (68) was already confident, but enjoyed the chance to share his skills.**

For potential service users the headline might be:

8 beginner cooks learned something new at our classes

- **'It was easier than you think and saves money too'**

In practice it may have taken you quite a bit of analysis to reach your conclusions, but readers don't need to see all of your workings. If they are interested, they can ask for more detail.

In this guide we focus on the process of analysis – how to make sense of often quite messy bits of information.

We refer you to more detailed support in our making sense sheets and other guides. See [Evaluation Support Guide 3.2 – Writing case studies](#), [Evaluation Support Guide 3.3 - Report writing](#) and [Evaluation Support Guide 4.1 - Using what you learn from evaluation](#).

The process

You need to:

- 1. Get ready**
- 2. Turn information into evidence**
- 3. Make sense of your findings**

1. Get ready

You need to:

- a) Decide your question/s**
- b) Decide who needs to be involved**
- c) Gather together relevant information**
- d) Set aside space and time**

a) Decide your question/s

Decide what questions you want to answer by analysing your evidence. Common questions are:

- What difference did we make?
- Who did we make the most difference to?
- What helped us to make that difference?
- What have we learnt?
- Which activities were the most effective or most important?
- What unexpected things stopped us or helped us to make a difference?

b) Decide who needs to be involved

Even if one person has the main responsibility, it is good to involve others in analysis. This might include service users or volunteers (bearing in mind confidentiality).

Getting other people involved:

- increases their ownership of the evaluation process
- helps them to understand how you will use the information they provide or gather and why you need to collect it in the first place
- gives you different perspectives
- increases understanding of what information needs to be collected

See [Why bother involving people in evaluation? – Beyond feedback](#) for more guidance on how to involve service users in evaluation.

c) Gather together relevant information

Check who has relevant evidence and where it is stored (for example in spreadsheets, case records, cupboards or a database).

You might need different bits of information to answer different questions. For example, you might need details of who used which services to identify which activities were the most effective. You might need feedback from service users about what they liked or what worked for them in order to identify what helped to make the difference.

d) Set aside space and time

You need a quiet space and uninterrupted time to read and make sense of the information you have collected. Analysis might not be scary, but it can be messy! You might need space to spread your evidence out. You might also need pens, a spreadsheet, Post It® notes etc to help with your analysis.

2. Turning information into evidence

You need to:

- a) Identify the relevance of different types of information**
- b) Find out what each type of information is telling you**
- c) Combine the different types of evidence**

a) Identify the relevance of different types of information

You might have a range of different information for the same outcome. For example, for an outcome around increased confidence in cooking, you might have a scaled questionnaire, observation notes, photographic evidence of meals cooked and casual comments noted down.

b) Find out what each type of information is telling you

Broadly speaking there are two types of information and you analyse these differently:

Numbers: also known as *Quantitative* information. For example:

- how many people are referred
- how many you have supported
- how many achieve outcomes
- how many activities you have delivered and for how many people
- the answers to scaled questionnaires

Non numerical information: also known as *Qualitative* information. This can be about what people say, hear or experience. For example

- quotes
- photographs
- art work or creative responses

You analyse these different types of information differently.

More detailed information is in our 'Making Sense' sheets:

[See Making Sense: Analysing qualitative information](#)

[See Making Sense: Analysing quantitative information](#)

c) Combine the different types of evidence

Now you want to combine the different kinds of evidence to see if it answers the question you set. For example, if you want to know to what extent you have achieved a particular outcome, you can map your evidence against your outcomes and indicators. You can use a template like the one below.

| Outcome | Indicator | Evidence | Learning |
|---|--|--|--|
| Participants have increased cooking skills | Frequency of cooking Complexity of dishes | Scaled questions 8/10 more skilled 5/10 a lot more skilled Observations 1/3 cooking simple dishes 1/3 cooking more complex dishes Casual feedback They are learning from each other 8 people increased skills | 2 were already good cooks. Although not target audience they helped others to feel enthusiastic about cooking. |

Combining evidence allows you to check the findings from one source against another (for example participant questionnaires against feedback from referrers). It might confirm or challenge your findings. This is called *triangulation* and involves looking at

something from different angles. If you find difference stories emerge from different types of evidence you need to dig deeper and find out why.

3. Make sense of your findings

You need to:

- a) Draw conclusions in relation to your question**
- b) Check your findings with other staff and service users**
- c) Identify and note any gaps in evidence**

a) Draw conclusions in relation to your question

For example, if your question is: 'Have you achieved your outcomes?', answers might be:

Yes, definitely: we have enough evidence that we are making a difference for most of the people we work with.

Partially: this may be that you are achieving outcomes for some, but not all. In this situation, you need to find out more about the factors that are causing this. For example: does your service work better in one location than another? Or for older people rather than younger?

I don't know, we lack evidence: you need to find out why you lack evidence. For example, maybe:

- you have set the wrong outcome
- you need to do more work to achieve the outcome (for example by changing your practice or working with another organisation)
- you need to collect more or better information

The evidence is contradictory: can you dig deeper and find out why? For example, can you ask service users what they think, perhaps by running a focus group?

We have evidence of unexpected outcomes: Think about **who might be interested in these outcomes and** whether you want to start working towards and measuring them routinely.

b) Check your findings with other staff and service users

If you can, it's a good idea to sense check your findings with others, such as colleagues or service users. They may have a different perspective on what the evidence means or may have other information. Getting other people involved can also help them to see how you make use of the information you have collected. This can motivate them to give you the information that matters.

c) Identify and note any gaps in evidence

No one has perfect evidence for all their outcomes, but it's helpful to judge how good that evidence is and to see if you can improve your methods next time around.

In reporting, it's also good to be clear about the limitations of your evidence, for example you might not have got feedback from all your service users, but you have done your best to get as many as possible. Better to 'identify the thin ice, rather than skate on it'.

Where to go for more support

[Making Sense: Analysing qualitative information](#)

[Making Sense: Analysing quantitative information](#)

[Making Sense: Analysing as you go](#)

[Guide to reflective practice: how to analyse and act as you go](#)

[Method sheet: Change Record Template \(to record any changes you make as you go\)](#)

[ESS Support Guide 2b Storing Information](#)

[Stats and stories](#): for how to get better at collecting and combining a richer mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence

What next? Reflection, learning and action

As you analyse your material, you will form opinions, test your assumptions and learn. This will help you understand the difference you are making and consider changes or improvements. However, there is no point in analysing material if you are not going to act on it. See [Support Guide 4.1: Using What you Learn from Evaluation](#).

You can download all our **Evaluation Support Guides** free from our website.

For evaluation help and advice, or if you need a copy of this guide in another format, please get in touch.

info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk



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