Strategic Plan 2019-23

1. Mission and vision

Evaluation Support Scotland works with the third sector and funders so that they can measure and report on their impact and use learning to improve practice and inform policy.

In 8 simple words: We help charities demonstrate the difference they make.

Our vision: people in Scotland's third sector have the knowledge, skills and support to evaluate, reflect on, and learn from their work.

We promote self-evaluation. By learning how to evaluate their own activity and outcomes, organisations discover what works and what does not and can make use of that learning. Self-evaluation (and evaluation generally) should be valuable, relevant and proportionate.

2. Background section

This section is a brief summary drawn from ESS evaluation and consultation. More documentation is available.

2.1 Context and need

ESS came into existence in May 2005. At the time the third sector told us they lacked confidence, skills and time for evaluation. There was little focus on outcomes or on evaluation for learning. Reporting to funders was often not useful for either funded or funders.

In 2019, these needs and challenges still exist for some. However, ESS's stakeholder surveys and our evaluation tell us that the third sector is more comfortable with outcomes and evaluation. Many now use appropriate evaluation methodology and want support with more complex issues, such as understanding what is "good enough" evaluation or analysis of evidence.

Many funders have decisively made the shift to outcomes and now place a strong emphasis on "what are you learning?" as much as, or more than accounting for money spent. However, some funders have yet to make that shift.

The context for third sector evaluation is, in some ways, positive. We have evidence that organisations with good evaluation have a competitive edge. Scottish Charity Regulator research shows that a major factor in public confidence in charities is evidence of impact. Scottish Government has a focus

on outcomes and has national and local policies to engage the third sector and make use of its learning.

However, some organisations' day to day experience is that funding is getting tougher. Organisations in funding crisis can find it hard to focus on evaluation and learning.

2.2 Our past impact

During the period of the 2015-19 strategic plan we worked with over 1,200 organisations: 80% were third sector organisations and the rest were public sector and funders.

A very brief summary of our impact over the last four years:

- ✓ Our website, workshops, tailored support and events have led to improved evaluation skills or systems across the third sector in Scotland
- ✓ Our evaluation support accounts with funders have enabled organisations to access support they could not otherwise afford and led to improved reporting to their funders
- ✓ We have helped funders and funded to work together better and learn from each other
- ✓ Our thematic programmes have generated better understanding of outcomes and improved measurement in areas such as health and social care integration, citizens' advice, preventing violence and abuse, physical activity and the work of local and national third sector intermediaries
- ✓ Our specialist tools have led to improved understanding of evaluating prevention and policy influence, more use of service user experience as evidence, better involvement of service users in evaluation, and increased collaboration between third sector and academics.

3. What we will do during 2019-23: activities

Our logic model at the end of this Plan sets out the need we address, our areas of work and the outcomes we plan to achieve. All this activity is dependent on funding (see Section Eight).

We have **six roles**:

1. We support the third sector to plan and do evaluation, involve service users and embed evaluation in their organisation.
2. We share good practice and ideas about how to do evaluation and tackle tough problems and barriers.
3. We work with funders to support third sector evaluation and to evaluate their own work.
4. We work with groups of third sector organisations to develop common outcomes, methods or evidence in a particular area.
5. We support the use of third sector evaluation and evidence to improve practice and influence policy.
6. We enable intermediaries to support or train others on evaluation.

We will continue to meet the needs of smaller third sector organisations or those that are at the start of their evaluation journey. On top of this we will deliver more "advanced" support for organisations that want it. We will look to find solutions to emerging evaluation tough challenges.

The **"core" work** that makes us distinctively ESS is

- Provision of advice by email or phone (enquiries service)
- Delivering *Let's Evaluate* workshops and tailored support
- Delivering evaluation support accounts (ESA) with funders, providing free support to the third sector and brokering good relationships between funders and funded
- Sharing evaluation and evidence resources, good practice and key messages through our website, newsletter and social media.

We expect to **continue and develop**:

- New resources and advice on emerging "tough" topics in evaluation (such as evaluating prevention)
- Other evaluation support activities, including whole organisation tailored support, new (advanced) workshops, webinars and biteables
- Peer support and networking about evaluation and third sector evidence
- New thematic programmes to agree common third sector outcomes, methods and evidence in particular areas
- Advice to decision-makers about third sector evaluation.

We are looking for **opportunities to do (more of) the following**:

- Advanced offers to the sector including support to:
    - Apply and share evaluation findings for learning
    - Help you make a judgement about whether your evidence is "good enough" for your work and context
    - Involve service users more in evaluation and use their voices and experiences as evidence
    - Help you get others in your organisation on board such as volunteers or trustees
    - Learn how to analyse evaluation data
    - Use technology for evaluation and reporting.

- Work with others, such as improvement agencies and third sector intermediaries, to share learning from and about evaluation and so influence the system in which third sector organisations work.
- Train the trainer on evaluation.

4. The change we want to make (our outcomes)

The change we intend to make through our support is that third sector organisations have improved skills to evaluate for themselves. They will put in place appropriate evaluation systems for their organisation that they can use day to day.

By improving their skills and developing better, more embedded evaluations organisations will then generate evidence about their impact and will understand more about **how** they achieve impact (or not). This in turn means they will learn and improve and therefore deliver even better work to achieve their own missions. They will also be better able to communicate their impact and share their learning with funders and policy-makers. This will help funders and policy-makers better understand third sector impact and in turn help them make better decisions about funding or policy to benefit people and community. Our activities will lead to funders improving the way they support and make use of funded organisations' evaluation and learning.

Our logic model contains some simply worded outcome statements that we will measure to check that we are making the difference we want to make and contributing to better third sector impact.

5. Our learning priorities

We have set priorities about what we want to learn 2019-23. We aim to gather and share this learning as we deliver the activities in our logic model.

We want to **learn more about …**

1. What "advanced" support looks like for the sector by offering and testing different models and creating a pathway for organisations so they can identify what "advanced" means for them.

2. How to embed evaluation in organisations and what the barriers are.

3. How to help organisations determine if their evidence is good enough evidence – what evaluation quality looks like.

4. How to do peer learning well and the role peer learning plays in supporting evaluation in the sector

5. How to work with funders and funded together to share learning with each other and enable funders to use evidence better

6. How to create and support situations for people to be more honest about what doesn't work.

7. The barriers to involving service users in evaluation and how to overcome them

8. The role of trustees and (other volunteers) in evaluation including in ESS.

And by 2023 we want to have a good sense of the breadth and quality of the use of and commitment to self-evaluation in the sector overall.

6. How we work

1. We are accessible. We use plain English. We are friendly. We work in a way that meets the different needs and abilities of people and organisations.
2. We work collaboratively with organisations, combining their expertise with ours to generate evaluation approaches they can own, develop and run with.
3. We use different and creative ways to engage people in evaluation. We promote a wide range of evaluation tools.
4. We are a centre of expertise on self-evaluation in the third sector and we share what we know.
5. We work in positive partnership with others, sharing our learning and adding value to the expertise of others. We provide effective platforms to share evaluation evidence.
6. We promote a culture of learning within ESS. We seek feedback from everyone we work with so we learn from our successes and weaknesses and get better at what we do.
7. ESS is a good place to work. We support and develop our staff and trustees so that they can fulfil their roles and feel valued.

7. Summary of our assumptions

Our logic model lists our underpinning assumptions. Two key assumptions are:

- Bringing people to share and learn together leads to better evaluation and learning. Learning together dismantles barriers between funders and funded. We need to continue to explore when peer learning works best.
- It is legitimate for us to work with the public sector in its role as a third sector funder. It is not our role to undertake broader public sector improvement work, although we should work with other agencies that have that role.

8. Resourcing

At the start of this plan (2019), we have a team of ten staff (8.7 full time equivalent) and annual income of around £400,000. Our ambition is to maintain this level of staffing and income for the duration of the plan. No funding is guaranteed for the four years, however, so we will need to be flexible and be ready to respond to emerging needs. We are most confident about securing funding for our "core work".

In broad summary we will generate income through:

- Grant funding from Scottish Government (this also helps us achieve outcomes to benefit the third sector)
- Evaluation Support Account contracts with funders

- Contracts with funders and others for specific thematic programmes
- Commissioned in-house workshops
- Paid-for tailored support for third sector organisations.

We will prioritise work that will:

- Cover its costs
- Achieve positive ESS outcomes
- Generate transferable learning.
- Produce a strong story about ESS's impact that is easy to communicate

9. Measuring the success of this Plan

We have our own separate evaluation plan. We measure our outcomes using indicators and a range of methods. We measure our performance using a **traffic light balanced score card**. We produce an annual self-evaluation report and report publicly in our Trustees Annual Report and Annual Review. We have an up to date risk register and regular opportunities for stock taking.

Measuring the success of this plan will focus on:

- Are we doing what we said we'd do? (activity targets)
- Are we delivering our support in line with our values and customers' needs?
- Are we making the difference we planned to make?

More specifically we will be successful if:

1. We have clear evidence of achieving the outcomes in our logic model. If we haven't made a difference, we know why and learn for the future.
2. Organisations we have worked with are evaluating without us.
3. We have worked with varied third sector organisations (within our available resources). Varied means organisations of different size, type and location in Scotland, and on different places on their self-evaluation journey.
4. We know more about what need we are NOT meeting and how we might go about meeting it if we had the resources (or who else might meet that need, in some cases in partnership with us)
5. We have continued to add value to, and are connected to other sources of support on evaluation and learning including third sector intermediaries, regulators and improvement agencies, and academia.
6. ESS is well governed, is a good place to work, has a strong reputation, is financially healthy and is responding flexibly to the changing context.

Evaluation Support Scotland

April 2019

Scottish Charity SC036529

Evaluation Support Scotland Logic Model

Situation

Third sector orgs need to measure and report on the difference they make so they can learn, improve and show their contribution to local, national and funder specific outcomes.

However, many struggle with confidence, skills and systems to do so well and appropriately. Requirements from funders and others can get in the way of evaluation for learning and improvement.

Funders can also face challenges in evaluating their own impact.

Decision-makers can find it hard to use third sector evaluation evidence to improve policy and practice (and so improve outcomes for people

ESS roles

We support the third sector to plan and do evaluation, involve service users and embed evaluation in their organisation.

We share good practice and ideas about how to do evaluation and tackle tough problems and barriers.

We work with funders to support third sector evaluation and to evaluate their own work.

We work with groups of third sector organisations to develop common outcomes, methods or evidence in a particular area.

We support the use of third sector evaluation and evidence to improve practice and influence policy.

We enable intermediaries to support or train others on evaluation

We deliver these roles using the following ...

Core

- Enquiries service
- *Let's Evaluate* workshops
- Website, guides, newsletter, twitter, blogs
- Evaluation Support Accounts
- Tailored support

Other

- Webinars, biteables
- Other workshops (tailored for funders, advanced)
- Peer networking (events)
- Learning sets
- Forums & working groups
- Advice to decision-makers about third sector evaluation
- Research/scoping studies
- Conferences & roundtables

Outcomes

Third sector and funders are **better able to evaluate** [KNOW]

Third sector and funders have **better evaluation systems** [DO]

Third sector, funders and decision-makers are better able **use evaluation evidence** [USE]

Third sector and funders are better able to **embed evaluation** in their organisations [EMBED]

Decision-makers better understand **third sector contribution**

Third sector and funders are better able to support others on evaluation

Third sector designs **better activities**

Contributing to our charitable purpose

The third sector in Scotland is more efficient and effective. Evaluation is used to improve the delivery of services for public benefit throughout Scotland

Assumptions

- Self-evaluation can lead to learning and improvement.
- Good self-evaluation systems are those that are embedded into every day practice, and are relevant and proportionate.
- Improving understanding between funders and funded organisations is critical to developing evaluation and reporting systems that work for both parties.
- If we can bring together the right people in a given field or area of interest, we can heighten and share our collective learning.
- Self-evaluation can generate good (enough) evidence to improve practice and influence policy.
- Making evidence-informed decisions improve outcomes for people and communities.
- ESS can't work directly with all organisations but we can make a wider different by "reaching the reachers", influencing key funders and sharing learning from our work.
- Improving public sector evaluation capacity (valuable though that is) is not ESS's job unless there's a direct benefit to the third sector (because of our charitable purpose).