GETTING BETTER ALL THE TIME!

A SELF HELP GUIDE TO EVALUATION

Prepared for Leonard Cheshire International by Alice Bradley

Evaluation acknowledges people's achievements and hard work. Success is a great motivator.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The pictures in this manual are taken from W*here There Is No Artist,* an Intermediate Technology Publication by Petra Rohr-Rouendaal (1997). We gratefully acknowledge the printed permission to reproduce these pictures in this non-commercial training manual which is for use in countries of the South.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to ***Getting Better All The Time!*** a self help guide to evaluation. This manual has been written for senior staff and managers who have responsibility for leading others through the evaluation process. It will be of interest to people involved in small or large scale evaluation of services, programmes or projects. It is intended both as a 'read alone' manual and as a group training text. We have been selective in our content. Too much information distracts from the main task and too little leaves you with too many unanswered questions. We have tried to strike a middle course, in the assumption that your interest in evaluation will lead you on to read other, more detailed books.

You might be wondering about the title of the book, *Getting Better All the Time!* We have chosen this title for two reasons. The first is that the more you get involved in evaluations, the better you become at being part of one. We all know that practice makes perfect – as long as it's the right kind of practice! But the second reason for choosing the title is even more important than the first. Evaluations are done for one main reason – to improve the quality of whatever is being evaluated - the service, the programme or the project. You will find that we continually come back to this point throughout the book. An evaluation is only worth doing if it makes a difference to the lives of the people using the service or involved in the project or programme.

The very word 'evaluation' can make even the toughest person tremble! It reminds us too keenly of school examinations or inspections. But it needn't be like this, as we hope to show in this manual. An evaluation should be a *partnership* between everyone involved, not an inspection or a test. The *approach* we suggest is *participatory* evaluation. This means that everyone has an active part to play.

Reasons for writing the manual

Leonard Cheshire International (LCI) has an International Training and Development (T&D) Programme which provides support to Cheshire services in many different countries. In March and June 2000, respectively, there were two important events in the life of the T&D Programme in Africa: the evaluations of the programmes in East and North Africa (covering Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda) and Southern Africa, (covering Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe). Throughout the manual, we use examples from these two evaluations, as well as other examples, some real and some fictional.

Our reasons for writing the manual are:
- To share our own experiences of evaluation;
- To encourage colleagues in services, projects and programmes to make evaluation an integral part of their work;
- To support people in the move towards full participatory evaluation.

Contents

The manual is in six units, as follows.

Unit 1, ***Understanding Evaluation***, invites you to think in some detail about the whole experience of evaluation. We use the following questions to explore the topic:
- What do we mean by evaluation?
- Why is evaluation important?
- What should be evaluated?
- When should evaluation occur?
- Who should carry out the evaluation?
- How should we evaluate?

This first unit lays the foundation for the rest of the manual.

Unit 2, ***Getting Started with Evaluation,*** deals with the initial preparation which sets the evaluation in motion. In it we cover the following topics:
- The decision to evaluate;
- Getting started;
- Communicating with people taking part in the evaluation;
- Devising terms of reference;
- Deciding on evaluators;
- The team leader or coordinator;
- Clarifying expectations.

In Unit 3, ***Developing an Evaluation Plan***, we explore these issues:
- Why you need an evaluation plan;
- The structure of the plan;
- The planning process.

Unit 4, ***Gathering and Managing Information***, covers the following topics:
- Useful methods for gathering information;
- Getting information from documents;
- Recording information;
- Ongoing review of information;
- Analysing information.

Unit 5, ***The Written Report,*** provides guidance on:

- Who should write the report;
- Making the report meaningful;
- The structure of the report;
- The importance of participation in report writing.

Unit 6, ***Moving Forward,*** is about the different ways in which evaluation findings can be used to improve the quality of the service, project or programme which is being evaluated. The topics in this unit are:

- Reporting back to different audiences;
- Interactive methods of reporting back;
- Reporting back at a distance;
- Interesting ways of presenting information;
- Action planning;
- Learning from experience.

Throughout each unit you will find activities. These will help you reflect on what you have just read. They might also lead to other questions or issues which you need to explore.

At the end of each unit is a 'Self Test' page which acts as a review of the unit just completed. If you find anything you are not clear about, go back through the unit until you find some answers. Make sure the other evaluators also have a grasp of the important issues.

How to use this manual

No book provides all the answers and this one is no exception. You'll have noticed we describe it as a *self help guide.* This is because it should help guide you and your colleagues through all the different stages of the evaluation without dependence on an outside 'expert'. You already have in your grasp many of the skills and much of the knowledge you need. This manual will help you make the most of them and show you how to organise yourself, and lead your colleagues, so that you get the best out of the evaluation experience.

Getting Better All The Time! is not like a novel, so don't try to read it all at one sitting. You need to take your time with it. You should use it like a reference book, coming back to it time and time again. Here are some suggestions for how you can use it most effectively:

- Read it over a period of time to help you understand more about evaluation; when you have completed a unit, try the self-test to see how much you remember.
- Use it when you are preparing for an evaluation and keep 'dipping into' it as you need to during the evaluation.

- Use it as a training aid when you are helping others to understand more about evaluation; you can either give them a copy of the book, or photocopy sections and use them for group study purposes.

- Use extracts when you are working with services planning or preparing for an evaluation.
- Use it when you are encouraging people in services and programmes to evaluate what they are doing.

Adapt it and select from it as you need to in your own situation and for your own purpose.

Language usage

One final thing before you get started on the first unit. Certain basic values are implicit throughout this manual and are at times highlighted and explored in the context of a particular discussion. These values include sensitivity to other people, equality, consideration and respect for others, as well as basic human rights for all. The language we use in the manual reflects these values. There is no absolute consensus on language usage internationally, in relation to these issues, but there is broad agreement.

For reasons of gender equality, we use the words ‘she’ and ‘he’ alternatively in examples throughout the text, as appropriate.

UNIT ONE: UNDERSTANDING EVALUATION

Introduction

Nobody starts on a journey without knowing where they are heading, do they? It's the same with evaluation. In order to get to the destination, it's important to be clear about where you're going. The aim of this first unit is to give you the opportunity to think about evaluation in some detail before embarking on the journey.

'Which way now?'
'I thought you knew where we were going!'

We use the following questions to help you on your way:

- What do we mean by evaluation?
- Why is evaluation important?
- What should be evaluated?
- When should evaluation occur?
- Who should carry out the evaluation?
- How should we evaluate?

On a journey, it's good to have a companion – or several companions – to talk to and share experiences with. The same is true of evaluation. It doesn't make any sense to do it on your own. So, we finish off the unit with a section on the ***participatory approach*** to evaluation.

What do we mean by evaluation?

Let's begin with a story.

The Get Ahead project has recently been given funds to buy a new jeep, which they are all delighted about because the other one is pretty old. However, it still has some life left in it, so they feel they should get something for it in a trade-in for the new vehicle. Joseph, one of the senior staff from the project, is arguing with the man in the dealership, because he thinks the price being offered for the old vehicle is too low. He knows the dealers will do it up and sell it for a much higher price.

'That's all it's worth,' says the dealer, 'Look at it – dents and scrapes on the body, lights not working and the engine's clapped out.'

'When I asked you to value it,' says Joseph, 'I thought you were an honest man – I didn't think you would cheat us!'

And so the argument goes on. What we're concerned with, however, is not the price being offered, but the process the dealer is going through in order to value the car. He has an idea or picture in his mind of the ideal jeep – a brand new one - and he is measuring the reality of the old jeep against that picture, in order to put a value on the old vehicle.

It's easy to put a value on a car, because it's a concrete and straightforward object. It isn't so easy to put a value on something less tangible, such as how effectively a service is providing for its client group, for example. But there are similarities in the process, which this story serves to illustrate. When we evaluate something – a service, a project or a programme, for example, - we assess it against certain ideas of what it should ideally be like. We do this in order to come to some conclusion about how effective and efficient the service, project or programme is in achieving what it set out to do.

In fact, in a much more informal sense, evaluation is something we all engage in as part of our everyday lives. For example, this statement about a colleague: '*Louise looks awful again today – she shouldn't be doing that other job after work,'* is based on the belief (value) that Louise's second job interferes with her ability to do her first job properly and that she should be more committed to the first job.

And '*Children today are much too outspoken!',* is probably based on a value system that holds that children should be quiet, not speak out and probably that they have no right to an opinion.

In order to evaluate anything we need something to measure it against. We need ***standards*** or ***criteria*** which describe how the service, project or programme should be performing and what it should be achieving, if it is doing the job properly.

Fortunately, with most services, projects and programmes, there is some help at hand. This help comes from the statements that tell us what the project, service or programme is trying to achieve. Services often express these as ***mission statements*** *or c**harters.***

In projects and programmes, statements of intent are usually expressed as ***aims*** and ***objectives**,* rather than charters or mission statements. For example:

Example of aims and objectives

A pilot project has been started in Clusuranham province. The **aim** *of this pilot project is to improve mother and child health in fifteen villages in the area.*

The ***objectives*** *are:*
1. *To appoint ten additional health workers;*
2. *To develop a training programme and training materials dealing with mother and child health in the first three years of the child's life;*
3. *To train the ten new health workers and the fifteen existing ones, using the new training programme;*
4. *To monitor the effects of the training on the work practices of all health workers.*

You can see that these aims and objectives are based on certain beliefs:
1. The belief that training will improve the work practices of the health workers (We can deduce this from the objectives);
2. The belief that better work practices will improve the health of mothers and young children. (from the project aim).

These beliefs, in turn, are based on the following values:
- The value of good health;
- The value for mothers of having access to people who can provide them with information about health care;
- The value of training as a tool for improvement;
- The value of having trained health workers (the assumption is that this will improve health care in the villages).

Imagine you were asked to evaluate this mother and child health project after it had been in operation for some time.

You could begin by using the project aim and rephrasing it as a question:

Has there been an improvement in the health of the mothers and the children in the fifteen villages?

In other words, has the project achieved its overall purpose?

In order to measure or assess this, you would need to have information about what the health of the mothers and children was like before the project started. You would then need to decide exactly what is meant by '*improvement*', so that you could have a way of measuring improvement.

You could use the *project objectives* to help you formulate other questions.

For example:
1. From objective 1, your question would be: Have ten new health workers been appointed?
2. From objective 2: Has a new training programme been produced?
3. From objective 3: Have new training materials been produced?
4. From objective 4: Have all the health workers been trained using the new programme?
5. From objective 5: How has the training affected their work practices?

These questions would help you get the information – or evidence – you need to form an opinion. Let's stop and think about what information you would look forin order to answer each question.

ACTIVITY 1
Read through the five questions once more.
For each question, what *evidence* would you look for to see if this had happened?
Which question would be the most difficult to answer?

Comment
The last question is the most difficult, isn't it? For all the others, you could actually *see* something: the new workers, the new training programme and materials, the statistics showing you how many health workers had been trained.

But question five is a bit more complicated. You'd have to start asking yourself additional questions in order to get the information you require. For example:

- What exactly do we mean by 'work practices'?
- What criteria or standards can we assess their work practices by?
- What were their work practices like before the training programme?

We can see from this that:

Some aspects of a service, a project or a programme are more difficult to evaluate than others.

<u>*Aspects that are **easier** to evaluate:*</u>

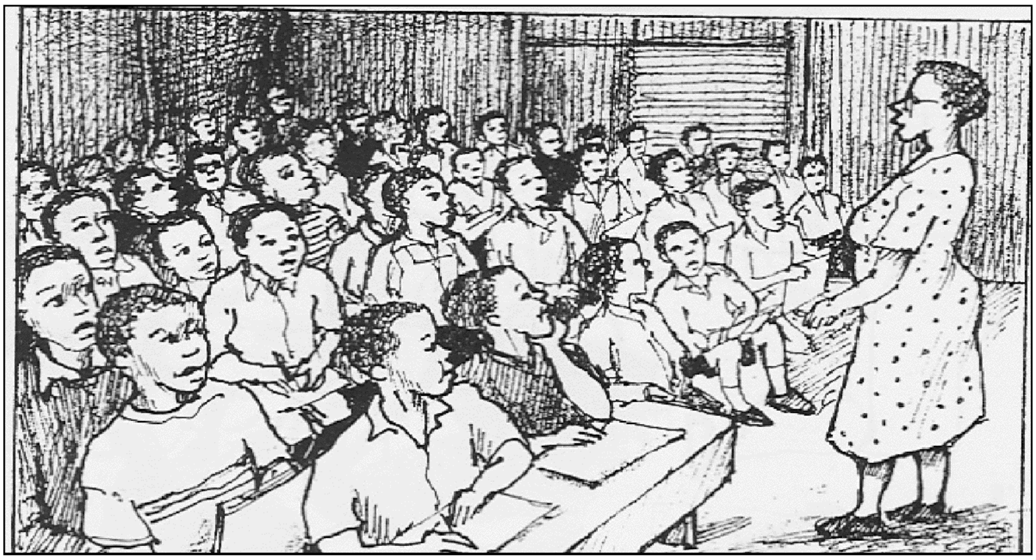
- Aspects to do with *number or duration*, such as how many, how often, how long, e.g., '*How many* health *workers are there now?' 'How many were there before the programme started?'*
- Aspects that are *visible* and can be observed, such as a product, or an observable change, e.g., a malnourished child gaining weight.

<u>*Aspects that are **more difficult** to evaluate:*</u>

- Those concerned with *process* are more difficult to measure, e.g., the process of staff recruitment; a staff development programme.
- The *performance* of individuals or groups of people is difficult to measure.

For example, how well does this community worker interact with the mothers' group and what are the benefits of her work for the mothers?

- Outcomes that are *not visible* are also difficult to measure:



Such as improvements in the quality of teaching in a school, for example.

- It is also more difficult to measure the *impact* of a project, programme or service on those involved.

The improvements in a child's life when she is finally able to go to school, for example.

In evaluation we should make sure we include:

- ***process, performance and impact as well as aspects that are easier to measure;***
- ***non-visible outcomes as well as visible outcomes.***

Developing indicators as aids to evaluation

One way of evaluating these aspects that are more difficult to measure (process, performance, impact, and non-visible outcomes) is to develop ***indicators*** which tell us whether changes are happening or not. Indicators are *clear statements of what we should be able to assess, observe or measure* if progress is happening. They tell us what kind of *evidence* to look for. They're a bit like signposts along a road which we can check to see if we are going in the right direction.

We can use project objectives to help us develop indicators. This is illustrated by the next example.

Example

Job-train *is* a project designed to *improve employment prospects for disabled people. The project* objectives are defined like this:

1. To provide skills training for the target group;
2. To provide loans for people to start up their own businesses;
3. To set up an employment agency which will help people to get jobs on the open market.

Imagine you were asked to evaluate the impact of this project. You would need to develop indicators for each objective. For the first objective, you might have the following indicators:

- Skills training courses have been established;
- Disabled people have successfully completed these courses;
- Disabled people have successfully completed mainstream skills courses in their own locality;
- The skills people are learning are appropriate for the local employment situation.

Once you have developed indicators for all three objectives, you could then use the indicators to help you develop your measurements further. For example, it is not enough to know that courses have been established. If it's only two courses in five years, this might be very poor value for money. You need to know how many courses have been established and whether this number justifies the amount of money that has been spent on this part of the project.

You also need to know how many people have successfully completed these courses. If thirty people have completed the courses successfully, and only two have failed to complete them, that sounds good. If thirty have completed and twenty four have failed to complete, that sounds pretty poor.

The indicators, and the information you obtain by using the indicators, only make sense in relation to everything else in the project, e.g., the resources available, the amount of money spent, the length of time the project has been in operation, and so on.

One piece of good news is that, the more practice you have in developing indicators, the easier it becomes!

Look back to our earlier example of the pilot project in the Clusuranham province. (page 7). In this project, we could develop indicators for *measuring improvements in the work practices* of the health workers.

For example, we could use the following indicators to find out if there are any improvements in their work practices and to measure the extent of any improvements:

- How often they visit each of the families they are responsible for;
- How long they spend with each family;
- What exactly they do when they are there: how much information they give the mother; how much time they spend finding out about the health of the mother and child; whether they examine the child and the mother;
- How they deal with problems.

This would enable us to:
- compare their performance as health workers now with how they used to do their job and see if there are any changes.
- compare the health of the mothers and children now, to their health before the project started.

Our next task would be to decide if the changes (improvements) are the result of:
- the improved work performance of the health workers,
- something else which has nothing at all to do with the project – improved sanitation in the villages, for example.

Clear statements of aims and objectives
One of the difficulties you may encounter in evaluation is *the lack of clear service, project or programme aims and objectives*. Some services, programmes and projects may only have general descriptions of activities. They may have given little or no thought to what they are trying to achieve. Many services have been started in direct response to an identified need and have had no reason or opportunity to sit down and think through what their purpose is.

If you find yourself in this situation, you have to work with service or programme providers, and other stakeholders, to help them clarify their purpose and then to specify this in terms of clear aims and objectives.

You can use guided discussion, asking questions which will help people think through what they are trying to achieve. For example:
- What kinds of activities are you involved in?
- What have you achieved over the past three (or five years)?
- What do you hope to achieve in the next three years?
- What are your priorities?

Only when service, project or programme aims and objectives have been clarified can you make a start on evaluation.

It is essential that service, programme or project aims and objectives are clarified before the evaluation starts – otherwise how do you know what you are supposed to be evaluating?

Evaluation, if done properly, is a fairly time consuming exercise. The more complex a project, programme or service, the more demanding will be the evaluation process. The evaluation of a service or project in one location serving thirty people will be less complicated and demanding than a project involving five countries and a client group of five thousand.

Whatever the size or complexity, the basic principles remain the same. So, in answer to our initial question at the beginning of this section, 'What do we mean by 'evaluation', we could answer:

Evaluation is a process by which we can assess a service, project or programme against clearly defined criteria in order to ascertain whether the service, project or programme is achieving what it is intended to achieve.

Why is evaluation important?

When we identify strengths and successes as a result of evaluation, we give recognition to the people concerned and acknowledge their hard work and achievements. We show them they are valued for themselves and their work.

Success is a great motivator, so people are energised and spurred on in their work.

Evaluation gives us an opportunity to stop and think about what we are doing and how well we are doing it. It is a chance to take stock. It enables us to identify and understand problems and deal with them before they get out of hand.

Evaluation also gives us an opportunity to find out why some things are working and others aren't. It helps us identify strengths and weaknesses and enables us to make changes in the right direction.

Evaluation helps us decide whether our own investments and those of other people – of time, energy and money – are worthwhile, and achieving what is needed.

Could we be spending this money in a more effective way? Have we lost sight of where we are supposed to be going? Why are we doing things this way? Should we be doing them differently? Do we need more staff, more resources, or can we use our existing staff and resources in a more efficient and productive way?

Without regular evaluation, we could find ourselves again and again in a 'crisis management' situation, where we only act when a major problem or crisis occurs. But problems have a way of recurring and repeated crisis management is exhausting. Crisis management is a *reactive* approach, where we are forced to react to whatever is happening and have less control over events than we should. It is far better to be able to identify problems or weaknesses before they develop into crises. Evaluation enables us to anticipate or avoid potential problems by being *proactive* and planning ahead.

Evaluation also enables us to share the benefits of our experience. It can help us avoid the classic situation of 're-inventing the wheel'. We learn from other people's experience and they learn from ours. We can apply their learning to our situation and avoid making the same mistakes. We can use their experiences to move forward more quickly than we might otherwise have done. Cumulative experience and learning is one of the most productive ways of effecting positive change.

Evaluation is important because it gives us an opportunity to:
- ***take stock;***
- ***identify strengths and weaknesses;***
- ***learn from experience;***
- ***share this learning;***
- ***acknowledge the achievements of people who are often overlooked;***
- ***deal with problems before they become entrenched;***
- ***avoid a crisis management approach to work;***
- ***clarify the aims and objectives of our work.***

What should be evaluated?

It is not always easy to decide what to evaluate. Should we concentrate on certain aspects of a service, project or programme, or should we evaluate everything?

Read the fictional example on the next page and decide what you would do in this situation.

Example
Rayfield is a service for disabled children and adults. The managers have to decide whether they should evaluate the whole service, or concentrate first on the adult component of the service, which is having some problems. One of their objectives is to help the adults resettle into the community. An evaluation of this service component would be useful to show them where their strengths and weaknesses lie and what changes need to be made.

On they other hand, they want to find out how well the service is catering for the children in its care, and how they can get more children into school, so should they evaluate only that part of the service providing for children?

What would you do? It's not easy to answer, is it? The plain fact is that we sometimes have control over what we evaluate and we sometimes don't. Let us explore this fact a bit more.

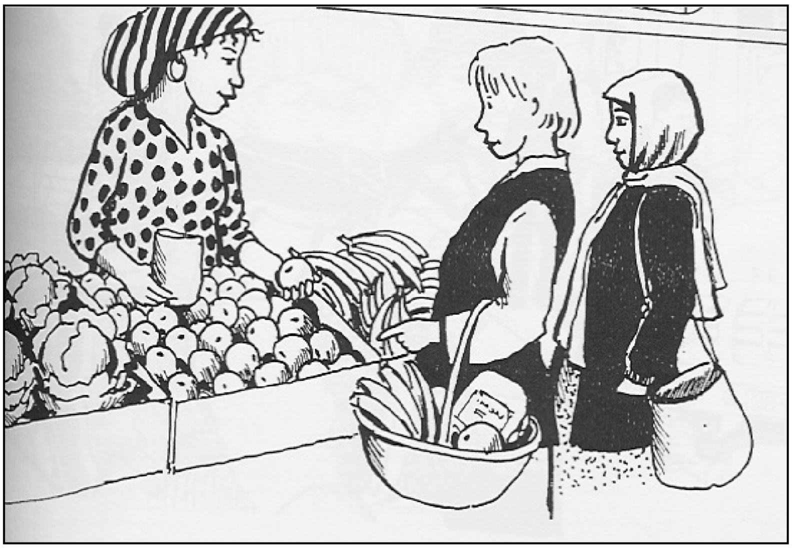
Evaluations for outside donors
A project or programme which is funded by an outside donor will usually have an evaluation requirement built in. And, in general, the entire project or programme will need to be evaluated.

Evaluations of large-scale programmes or projects
Common sense tells us that, if a programme spans a wide area and many countries, it would be impossible for the evaluators to meet absolutely everyone involved or visit every single venue. In this situation, every aspect of the programme or project can still be evaluated, but by means of ***sampling.***

Sampling means selecting a number of places, people, activities and venues, which are *representative* of all the places, people, activities and venues involved in the project, service or programme. If a project includes both rural and urban areas and the evaluators only visit cities, this would not be a representative sample. If a service is for both children and adults, and only adults are consulted in the evaluation, this is not representative.

The evaluators don't have to visit every location or meet every single participant. They can visit a ***representative sample*** of the venues, read through *samples* of the reports and policy documents and meet a *representative sample* of all the different stakeholder groups.

Just as the women in the picture don't have to taste all the oranges. They can have a *sample,* which will give them an idea of what the rest taste like. Then they'll be able to make judgements about *quality* and *value for money*.



Evaluations of only some elements of a project, service or programme
Sometimes, (as in the example given in the box above) we need to evaluate only the *priority* or *essential elements* of a service, project or programme, rather than the entire thing. For example, we might want to find out how well a programme caters for children under five, or adults over sixty, rather than the whole age group.

To summarise this section:

What we evaluate depends on:

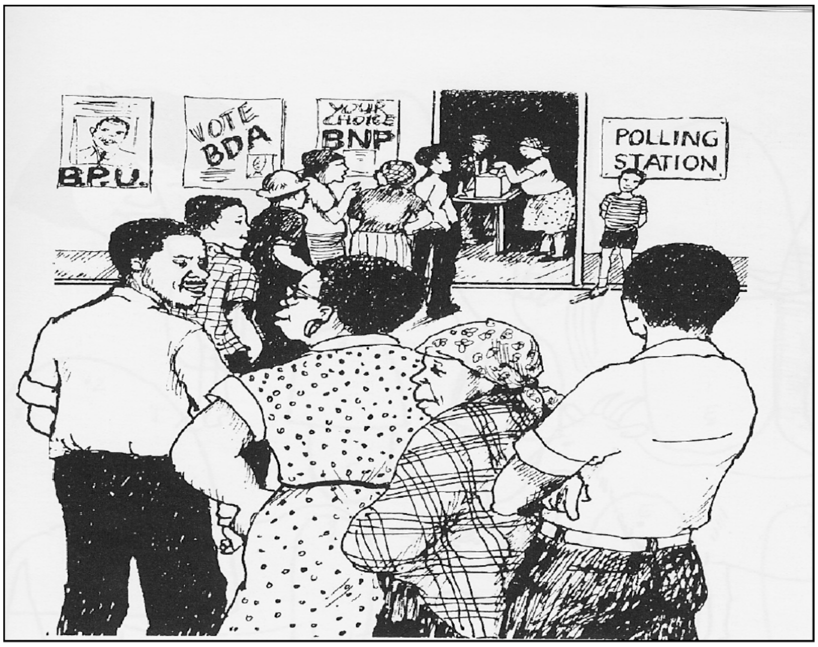
- ***Why the evaluation is taking place;***
- ***How the information will be used.***

We can evaluate:

- ***Every aspect of a project, programme or service;***
- ***Only specific or essential parts of a programme, service or project.***

Sampling enables us to assess different aspects of a service, programme or project without measuring every single component.

When should evaluation occur?



'We didn't choose the best week to have our country-wide evaluation, did we?'

In this manual, we are concerned with the evaluation of **services, projects** and **programmes.** Projects and programmes funded by external donors may specify from the outset when the evaluation will take place. This can be any of the following:

- On completion of the project or programme;
- At both the mid-term stage and at the end;
- At a specified time interval if the programme is ongoing.

Sometimes an external donor has to make a decision about whether or not a *programme* should continue, and uses an evaluation to help inform this decision.

Projects are always time-limited, generally of three or five years' duration, so it is fairly easy to decide when evaluation should occur. This is usually mid-term and on completion.

Services are very different from projects or programmes. For one thing, they are ongoing. Also, they are often self funding. Thus it is usually up to the service managers to decide when is the best time for evaluation. As a rule of thumb, it is good policy to have a full-scale evaluation of a service, or group of services, every five years. In the intervening period, the services should have periodic reviews which will feed into the five yearly evaluation. Smaller services might decide to hold evaluations more often - every three years, for instance.

Monitoring
However, this doesn't mean that no sort of assessment should be going on within the service during the period leading up to the evaluation. All good services should have ***monitoring systems and processes*** which enable them to keep a check on what is happening. By monitoring we mean ongoing record keeping, regular reviews of progress and periodic checks of the different aspects of a programme, project or service.

Ideally, ***monitoring systems*** should include the following:
- Statistical information, such as numerical records;
- Biographical information about clients which is informative but which does not intrude on people's privacy;
- Development records which track progress of different aspects of the service;
- Details of any major problems or events;
- Records of individual progress.

Monitoring processes should involve:
- Regular meetings to review progress and development;
- Regular record keeping;
- Periodic reviews of different aspects of the service.

Projects, programmes and services should be evaluated regularly. The timing will depend on individual circumstances.

Projects are best evaluated mid-term and on completion.

Ongoing programmes and services should be evaluated at least every five years. Shorter term programmes should be evaluated more frequently.

Monitoring systems and processes should be used in services, projects and programmes to keep a regular check on progress and developments. These should feed into more formal evaluations.

Believe it or not, these women are involved in *monitoring.* Of course, they wouldn't call it monitoring, just keeping an eye on how well things are growing. Can you see any similarities with the monitoring of services, projects and programmes?

Who should carry out the evaluation?

This depends on several things. For example:

- Why the evaluation is being done and who it is for;
- Whether it is a *service* or *group of services*, a *project* or a *programme* that is being evaluated;
- Whether it is a small scale evaluation, a medium scale evaluation, or a large scale evaluation.

You might use people from within the service, project or programme as your evaluators, i.e., ***inside evaluators***.

Or you might have ***external evaluators*** from outside the programme, project or service. External evaluators can be from the same country as the project, programme or service, or from another country.

Often, you find that a combination of both ***insiders*** and ***externals*** is used.

We can illustrate this further by using some fictional examples.

Example 1

The National Board of Management in Venturaland (an imaginary country) manages a number of residential services for disabled adults throughout the country and wants to find out how good these services are. They ask Florence M., a well-known and well-respected university lecturer, to evaluate the services against a number of criteria(indicators) relating to quality. She is required to report back to the Board on completion of her evaluation.

Example 2

Saskalia is a residential service in a small country town. Three years ago they started an outreach programme for mothers and their multiply disabled children in a rural area, about eighteen kilometres away from the town. This project involves education for the children and income generation for the mothers. The manager of the residential service now wants to find out if the programme is going well. He sets up a small review team, himself and three members of his staff, who spend two days with the mothers finding out what they think of the programme.

Example 3

The Arazese government (from another imaginary country) has been funding a five year project for disabled children in both rural and urban areas in Canzanolia (also imaginary!). The project is being run by the Canzanolian government. Written into the project proposal is an end of project evaluation to be carried out by a team of four people, two from non-government organisations (NGOs) in Canzanolia and two from NGOs in Araz. The aims of the evaluation are to find out whether the project has been successful in achieving its objectives and what lessons have been learned which can be used to keep the project going after the funding ceases. The evaluation will take three weeks. The evaluation team plan to meet representatives from the different stakeholder groups and to use different methods such as discussion, role play and other participatory activities to collect the information they require. The final report will be made available to everyone involved – the families involved in the project, staff and managers as well as donors.

Example 4

Onward!! is a Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) in a township of a major African city. It has been in existence for twelve years. It has been successful in many respects, but, however much they talk about it, they continue to have difficulty getting women to join the organisation. They decide to undertake a review of their activities and operations to see if they can find the reasons why women are not joining. They plan to do this themselves without involvement from anyone outside the DPO.

ACTIVITY 2
Read through the four examples once more. In each of the examples, who are the evaluators?

Comment
In example 1, there is one evaluator, an external, who is a national of the country.

In example 2, there is a team of evaluators, all internal to the organisation.

In the third example, there is a team of four externals, two from the country running the project and two from outside the country.

In the fourth example we have an internal team (insiders) once more.

Let's think about the advantages and disadvantages of using inside and external evaluators.

Advantages of using insiders

- They are very familiar with the project, service or programme and won't have to spend time getting to know it;
- They are known by the people in the project, programme or service and may be trusted more than externals;
- They are more likely to be aware of the intricacies of procedures and problems;
- They know what is important to the people involved.

Disadvantages of using insiders

- Because they are very familiar with the project, service or programme, they may have a blinkered view of it;
- They are known by the people in the project, programme or service and may be mistrusted or disliked by some;
- They are more likely to be aware of the intricacies of procedures and problems and let this get in the way of the evaluation;
- They may be biased;
- They may resent any input from external members of the evaluation team.

Advantages of using external evaluators

- You can be selective about who you choose;
- You can get someone with skills which complement those of the insiders;
- You can get someone with wide experience of evaluation across different areas;
- The evaluator is unlikely to be biased towards any aspect of the programme or service;
- The evaluator will be unaware of internal politics;
- It might be easier for her to deal with conflicts since she doesn't work in the situation.

Disadvantages of using external evaluators

- It can be difficult to find the right person;
- You might have to rely on other people's suggestions of who to choose as an evaluator;
- It could be costly, especially if the person is considered to be an 'expert';
- He will be limited by his lack of knowledge of the project, programme or service;
- He might be unfamiliar with customs and culture if he is from another country;
- It will take him time to get to know other evaluators;
- He might not speak any local languages.

The evaluations of the LCI T&D programmes in Southern, and North and East Africa, referred to in the introduction to this manual, used a combination of insiders and externals, which is what many evaluations tend to do nowadays.

Using an evaluation team

In the participatory approach to evaluation, it essential to have a team. The best teams include external and inside evaluators.

Using consultants as external evaluators

Here are some tips for the selection of consultants as evaluators:

- Make sure you are fully aware of cultural implications if you are choosing people from another country;
- Ask around, especially from colleagues who are used to evaluations;
- Read the consultant's past reports;
- Invite consultants to make proposals of how they would contribute to the evaluation;
- Check the consultants' CVs to see if they have the necessary experience;
- Get a feel for their overall workload and assess whether they are able to adhere to the required time limits.

Cultural considerations

If you are using external evaluators from outside the country, you will need to take account of cultural considerations and ensure that the evaluators are fully aware of what is required. For example:

- When it is and isn't acceptable for men and women to mix;
- Problems with younger people questioning older people;
- Standards of dress;
- Polite and impolite ways of addressing, and interacting with, other people;
- Where people sit in relation to those who are older or more senior;
- 'Losing face' in front of others;
- Sitting, standing or moving in ways that give offence;
- Dietary considerations;
- Inappropriate physical contact;
- Inappropriate modes of conversation, e.g., raising your voice, arguing;
- Ensuring that respect is given to the right people in the right way;
- Neglecting to invite people who are important locally.

Using several evaluation teams

In fully participatory evaluations, which are large scale, you might have a number of teams working in different locations, under the guidance of a coordinator. They come together at the beginning to plan the evaluation and towards the end to organise the reporting back processes.

Advantages of the team approach to evaluation

- The work is shared;
- You can check your observations and opinions with others and get consensus;
- You can divide up the tasks and get them done more quickly;
- Different people can take responsibility for different aspects of the evaluation;
- Different individuals bring a wider range of experience, greater knowledge and additional skills to the task;
- You are likely to end up with a more balanced evaluation.

Disadvantages of the team approach to evaluation

- Individuals in the team might not work well together;
- Some members might be more competent than others and end up doing the most work;
- More powerful members might dominate;
- Too much time can be wasted in discussion;
- Some team members might let their own perceptions and interpretations of events influence their judgement;
- It can be difficult to get people together to plan properly and effectively, especially if they come from different parts of a country or region;

- The evaluators might use different languages from one another and from the stakeholders they are consulting. Experienced translators are then required and they may not be available.

Right, this is definitely the last time we go through these evaluation objectives! If they're not right now, they never will be!'

We can sum up this section like this:

The decision about who should evaluate a project, programme or service depends on the purpose of the evaluation, the situation and the circumstances.

Unless the evaluation is very small-scale and involves something particularly sensitive, it is better to have at least one external person involved.

A team approach to evaluation is always better than using one individual.

In participatory evaluation it is essential to have a team approach. You might have one team or you might have several teams working on different parts of the evaluation or in different locations.

I'd no idea the team approach was so much fun!'

How should we evaluate?

Go back to page 21 and read through the four fictional examples of evaluation again.

These four examples have some things in common. In their evaluations, they all want to:

- find out how things are going;
- know how they can plan for the future;
- find out how they can make improvements.

But the similarity ends there. Did you notice that they all use a different approach to evaluation?

In the first example, the evaluation was organised by the people at the senior levels of the service, the National Board of Management. They asked *an external evaluator* to conduct the evaluator. We don't know exactly how Florence went about the task, but it sounds as though it was probably a pretty *formal exercise* – a sort of *inspection* of the services, where she observed what was happening, how staff were doing their jobs and what conditions were like for service users. Perhaps she questioned both staff and service users. Of course, she may have used a more *participatory approach,* by getting people together, either in mixed groups of both staff and service users, or single groups of staff only and service users only. They might have had free and frank discussion. But somehow, from the tone of the situation, we would doubt this.

We know that *she had to conduct the evaluation on her own*, not with a team. So she had no-one to compare views with, to chew over problems or to clarify anything she wasn't clear about. She was asked to *report back directly to the Board,* not to prepare feedback for the different people involved – the staff and service users, for example. You might wonder also, whether a university lecturer is the right sort of person to conduct a review into residential services.

In example two, the process is *less formal and less structured*. There is a more general purpose – to see how well things are going. It sounds as though the process was *participatory*, as long as the mothers were able to express themselves freely and did not just feel that they had to give the answers the manager wanted to hear (which often happens, especially if the people involved are dependent on the funding)!

The third example illustrates the kind of situation we usually think about when we hear the word 'evaluation'. A large scale project and a *formal evaluation*, carried out over a *specified period of time*. A *team approach*, with both 'external evaluators' (the members from the donor country) and '*outsider-insiders'* (nationals of the country where the project is based, but not from the agency running the project). They use a variety of participatory activities and give feedback to everyone. So we can say that their approach is *partially participatory.* It would have been even more participatory if some of the project stakeholders - the families of the children, the staff and managers - had been included as part of the evaluation team.

The final example is one of *self evaluation*. A specific problem to be investigated and the evaluation being undertaken by people from inside the organisation. A *team approach*, *probably participatory*, as this would be the most sensible way to do it. However, since they have already been unable to solve their problem, perhaps some external input would have been useful as a catalyst.

Understanding the participatory approach to evaluation

To round off this first unit, a few additional thought about the participatory approach to evaluation. The words 'participatory' and 'participation' have become buzzwords, used to describe all sorts of approaches and activities, sometimes just to be seen to do what is right! So let's think about what a *participatory approach* really means.

By definition, 'participatory' implies *taking part*, rather than being an onlooker, or on the receiving end of something. A participatory approach to evaluation has the following characteristics:

- All of the stakeholders (i.e., the people with an interest or involvement in the project, programme, or service) are represented, either as evaluators, or in the groups that are consulted;
- All stakeholders have opportunities to express their opinions freely and frankly;
- The opinions they give are their own opinions, or those of the people they are representing; they do not only give the answers the evaluators, or anyone else with a vested interest, wants to hear;
- The evaluation process is as open as is possible; this means that the evaluation team use a variety of *facilitative* methods which encourage people to give their opinions freely;
- The methods used are ones which cover a variety of options, use open questions and encourage discussion and debate;
- Where possible, stakeholders are used as evaluators;
- All opinions are respected and given equal weight;
- The evaluation experience is seen as a learning process for all concerned, and not as a judgement on the actions or work practice of certain people;
- Participation is used in as many stages of the review or evaluation process as possible – from initial planning to feedback and action planning for further development.

We can think about *participation in evaluation* as lying along a line, or ***continuum**,* like this:

Participation continuum for evaluation

Inspectorial evaluation	______________________________	*Fully participatory evaluation*

At the left hand side of the continuum, we have the *inspectorial* type of evaluation, which is totally hierarchical. At the other end we have the fully participatory evaluation, which is a true partnership.

It is important to recognise that it is not always possible to include all stakeholders in the evaluation team, or in the process of giving feedback. Distance, time and funding constraints often prohibit this. And sometimes people are just not ready for full participation, and must be led to it gradually. However, in the kind of work we are involved in, participatory evaluation is the most appropriate way of doing things and something which we should continually aim for and work towards.

Sometimes, also, donors dictate how an evaluation is to be conducted and prefer a more formal, inspectorial type of approach. In these instances, it is up to the people involved in the evaluation to work with donors to try to help them understand how much more satisfactory it will be to engage in a more participatory approach.

Strengths of the participatory approach to evaluation
The participatory approach is very much in line with the basic principles of our work with disabled people and their families***, equality and empowerment***. It helps us work towards:

- Advocacy and self advocacy, through which service users can make their voices heard;
- New and better opportunities for disabled people;
- Ways of dealing with the factors which cause inequality and oppression;
- A balanced view of events and circumstances which takes account of different voices;
- The full involvement of stakeholders in developing and implementing action plans;
- Greater influence for stakeholders in making change happen.

The participatory approach can also have some weaknesses, especially if it is not done properly. We outline them below, to help you guard against them.

Weaknesses of the participatory approach to evaluation

- The voices heard do not always represent the views of everyone; sometimes the strongest people push themselves forward and neglect the views of those who are less able to speak up;
- Sometimes the information gathered is so varied that it is difficult to make sense of it or reach a balanced conclusion;
- Sometimes, 'tokenism' happens, instead of true participation; this is where someone is put forward as a representative, so that participation seems to be happening; however, this person is not listened to, is afraid to speak out or does not have the skills or the personality to make a full contribution to the process;
- The stronger and more experienced members of an evaluation team might dominate;
- It can be difficult to find the right mix of people for an evaluation team.

Some of these weaknesses are also found in other approaches to evaluation. The answer to most of them is:

- Be aware of the possibility that they might happen and make plans to avoid them;
- Plan well and thoroughly so that you can anticipate any potential problems.

Use the third activity to help you think about the participatory approach in greater detail.

ACTIVITY 3
Write a brief description of the service(s), project or programme that you are planning to review or evaluate – not more than three short sentences.
Now list the stakeholders. Will any of these stakeholders be on the evaluation team? If yes, who? If no, why not?

What kinds of problems do you anticipate in consulting the different stakeholder groups?
What plans will you make to overcome any problems which arise?

What kinds of problems can you anticipate might happen in your evaluation team? List them.
How can you plan so that:
- You might avoid these problems?
- You might overcome them if they arise?

Comment
Your answers will depend very much on your own situation, but you may have said some of the following things:

Problems in consulting all stakeholders:
- You might not have access to representatives from all stakeholder groups;
- Stakeholders might have other responsibilities and be unable to meet you;
- Evaluators might have language problems;
- Some participants might find time a problem;
- It might be difficult to find consultation methods suitable for all stakeholders.

Overcoming problems:
- Communication should specify who the evaluators want to meet;
- Make sure timing is convenient;
- Go out to meet people who cannot come to you;
- Check out languages and organise interpreters;
- Train someone else to run consultation sessions or help participants run them on their own;
- Have a wide variety of activities ready.

Problems with the evaluation team:
- Some team members might not understand what is required of them;
- Some team members might feel intimidated by the externals;
- Someone might dominate the team;
- Some people might not take their fair share of the work;

- Discussions might go on for too long;
- Evaluators might not be able to agree.

Avoiding the problems:
- Make sure there is enough time for people to prepare themselves or be trained for the evaluation;
- Make some ground rules about respect for one another and valuing all opinions;
- Allocate the work fairly and have a good leader who will deal with anyone not doing his or her share;
- Have cut-off points for discussions.

Summing up the participatory approach, we might say:

The participatory approach to evaluation means:
- ***that all stakeholder groups are represented at all stages of the evaluation;***
- ***that all are free to give their opinion;***
- ***that all opinions are given equal weight.***

Self- test for unit one

By reading this unit and doing the activities, you should have acquired a good background knowledge of evaluation as a *process,* designed to help improve the project, programme or service which is under review. Try the *self test* on the next page to find out how much you remember. There is a great deal of information in this first unit, so you will probably have to look back at different sections to refresh your memory.

SELF TEST FOR UNIT ONE

Use these questions to check whether you remember the main points in unit one. Answer them by yourself first and then check back with the summary presented in each section.

1. What do we mean by evaluation?

2. Why is evaluation important?

3. What should be evaluated?

4. When should evaluation occur?

5. Who should carry out the evaluation?

6. How should we evaluate?

Now discuss your answers with the other evaluators. If the evaluation team is not yet together, try to find a colleague to discuss your answers with.

UNIT TWO: GETTING STARTED WITH EVALUATION

Introduction

In unit two we examine the early stages in evaluation, starting with the decision to have an evaluation and working our way through the activities involved in planning for the evaluation. The unit is organised into seven sections:

- The decision to evaluate;
- Getting started;
- Communicating with people taking part in the evaluation;
- Devising terms of reference;
- Deciding on evaluators;
- Selecting a team leader or coordinator;
- Clarifying expectations.

The decision to evaluate

In a donor sponsored project or programme, or a programme with long-term goals, evaluation is usually built in from the beginning. This makes some aspects of the evaluation easier. For example:

- The aims and objectives are often – although not always - more clearly specified. This makes it simpler to decide what is to be evaluated;
- The timing of the evaluation is usually identified;
- The evaluation approach might also be specified.

If it is a service or a self sustaining project which is being evaluated, evaluation is less likely to have been built in, especially if the service or project has grown naturally out of an identified need to which local people responded with the minimum of planning.

In more traditional services and projects, the decision to evaluate is usually taken by senior managers, be they staff or members of a governing body.

In self–help projects (started and run by the group themselves), the decision is usually taken by those who are in more senior positions in the organisation – the executive committee, for example.

The more democratically run the organisation, service, project or programme, the more likely it is that grass roots members will be involved in the initial decision. Some situations lend themselves more easily to full participatory evaluation than others.

For example:

Example

There is a Cheshire community programme in Pakistan, started by people in their own neighbourhood, which is still in its infancy. There is wide membership of the steering group and a variety of activities for families with disabled children, the children themselves and disabled adults. The programme committee undertakes a yearly review and presents a progress report. When the time comes for a more rigorous evaluation, it will be fairly easy to build in full participation because stakeholders are already fully involved in what is happening. Training community members as evaluators is a natural progression.

In a few countries, some Cheshire services are run by disabled people, with a minimum of assistance from the national organisation. Self evaluation, with support from an external evaluator, would be easily initiated and could help the services plan the direction they wish to take in the future.

Reasons for evaluation

The usual reasons for an evaluation are:

- Managers of an organisation wish to report their progress to supporters;
- An organisation intends to take a change of direction, expand the service or start a new branch, and needs information on which to base the plans;
- There might be problems in the project, programme or service which have to be identified and dealt with;
- The decision to evaluate might be imposed by government or a funding body;
- Evaluation might be a regular part of service, project or programme procedures.

The reasons will have a strong bearing on the information required. Evaluations usually have to answer the following kinds of questions:

- What are our strengths and weaknesses as an organisation?
- What direction should we be taking in the future?
- Should we continue with this programme, or close it down?
- Are our goals and aspirations in line with what project participants or service users want?
- Why is this project not achieving its goals?
- What is at the root of the problems we are having and how can we solve them?
- How much progress have we made since our last evaluation?
- Are where we should be at this stage in the project?
- Are our priorities still valid or have they changed?

However, the people who make the decision to have an evaluation are not always clear about what they want. Sometimes they have a vague idea or feel that an evaluation would be useful. It is essential, therefore, that the evaluators clarify what the expectations are, in order to avoid misunderstandings.

The initial step in any evaluation is making the decision to evaluate. This decision can be taken by any number of people.

The more participatory the service, project or programme, the more participatory the decision. Participatory decisions are preferable to those made by one or two people because they are more representative of all those involved in the service, project or programme.

There needs to be agreement among the managers and stakeholders of the service about the reasons for evaluation and its aims. These should be written down so that they can be referred to later, e.g., when drawing up terms of reference.

Getting started

The second step in the planning process is acting on the decision to evaluate. At this stage, communication with all those involved is crucial. In a truly participatory evaluation, all stakeholder groups will be involved from the beginning, and will be part of the decision making process. In reality, people are often told that there is to be an evaluation, and expected to cooperate. We can use the participation continuum from unit one again to see how different approaches to evaluation mean different levels of involvement for stakeholders.

Participation continuum for evaluation

Inspectorial evaluation	______________________________	*Fully participatory evaluation*
Being told to cooperate		*Being invited to participate at all stages*

Level of involvement of all stakeholders

You will see that the inspectorial evaluation (on the left) has only ‘cooperation’, while the fully participatory evaluation has full participation of all stakeholders.

Remember, the more participatory the evaluation, the longer it will take to get it underway, especially if participants are scattered over a wide geographical area.

Communicating with people taking part in the evaluation

Good communication with all participants is essential. People need to be consulted about:

- The most convenient time to hold the evaluation;
- The information they would like to obtain from the evaluation;
- Any questions or anxieties they might have about the evaluation;
- Any problems they will experience in being part of the evaluation;
- Any suggestions for how the evaluation should be conducted.

Once details have been agreed, participants in the different localities (assuming the evaluation is not just taking place at one venue) need to be clear about:

- The dates of visits and the number of evaluators they should expect;
- If accommodation has to be arranged for visiting evaluators;
- Arrival times and whether evaluators need to be met;
- If transport is required;
- If they are expected to bear any costs;
- What resources are required;
- Which groups of people evaluators are hoping to meet;
- Any special requirement of any evaluator.

If representatives from all stakeholder groups have been involved in the decision making and planning, these arrangements will have been negotiated, but it is always wise to double check.

Example

In the programme evaluations held in Southern Africa, and N&E Africa, which are referred to in the introduction to this book, stakeholders in the different services were given the objectives of the evaluation and asked to organise a programme for the evaluation team which would ensure that the team would meet representatives of all stakeholder groups. How they did this was left entirely up to them.

At the beginning of their visit to each country and service, the evaluators spent time talking to representative groups about their expectations of the evaluation. Thus they were able to deal with misconceptions, explain the boundaries of the evaluation and tell stakeholders which expectations they could take on board.

In some situations, those making the decision form a ***steering group*** to get the evaluation underway and oversee the process. Some members of the steering group may go on to be evaluators. The steering group provides a good opportunity for participation from the beginning of the evaluation, through including representatives from all stakeholder groups.

The role of the steering group at the planning stage is to:
- Take the actions necessary for getting the evaluation going;
- Clarify the reasons for, and expectations of, the evaluation;
- Define the Terms of Reference (TOR);
- Select the evaluators;
- Communicate with all those who will be involved in the evaluation, and analyse their responses; make sure this is taken into account when the evaluation plans are being drawn up;
- Decide on the budget and other resources required for the evaluation;
- Deal with any problems which arise.

If possible, the chair of the steering group should be a service user or project or programme participant, as they are the ones most affected by the project, programme or service. In reality, this might not be possible, especially if the service, project or programme is run along traditional lines and participation is new to those concerned.

The steering group may stop functioning once planning is complete, handing over to the evaluators, or they may continue to oversee the whole process. This will depend very much on the type of evaluation, the location of the steering group and the scale of the evaluation.

To sum up this section:

Once the initial decision about evaluation is taken, it must be acted upon to keep the momentum going. The actions which follow should include:
- ***Communication with, and input from, those who will be involved in the evaluation;***
- ***Forming a steering group to organise the early stages of the evaluation;***
- ***Making decisions about who should conduct or lead the evaluation.***

Services, projects and programmes which are run on participatory lines are more likely to hold evaluations which include evaluators from all stakeholder groups.

Devising Terms of Reference (TOR)

Terms of Reference – TOR for short – give guidance to the evaluators on what they need to find out during the evaluation. TOR should specify objectives. They may also include reasons why the evaluation is occurring and make suggestions about the approach required.

Sometimes TOR are devised by the people who are responsible for initiating the evaluation. In fully participatory evaluation, the production of TOR is a team effort.

In the Southern Africa evaluation, for example, the TOR were devised by the staff team responsible for running the project which was being evaluated. They were assisted by an outside consultant who encouraged them to take another look at the TOR and decide whether they were clear enough and as specific as possible. Would they enable the evaluation team (which included the leader of the staff team) to obtain the information required? On completion of this process, their TOR looked like this:

i) *To assess the project focus, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and benefit in relation to different stakeholders.*

ii) *To assess whether the main aims and objectives of the project have been met, with particular reference to staff training, self reliance and service development.*

iii) *To review the methods/interventions employed by the (project) team and make recommendations for how these could be further developed and extended.*

iv) *To identify lessons learnt and make recommendations for core activities on which the (project) team could focus in the next phase.*

v) *To examine the impact of the support offered to the project team at service level, nationally, regionally and internationally.*

vi) *To examine the extent to which the (project) team is networking with other organisations, assess quality and benefits of networking, identify how this collaboration can be enhanced.*

ACTIVITY 4

Look back to Activity 3 on page 30 where you described the service, project or programme which you are evaluating. Try writing some TOR for this evaluation, being as clear as possible in your expectations and requirements.

Comment
How did you get on? It's not as easy as it looks, is it? It is worth spending time on TOR, because they can help clarify everyone's expectations of the evaluation. Check the clarity of your TOR by asking yourself these questions:

- Do the words used in the TOR describe as clearly as possible what is to be done?
- Have we specified the objectives of the evaluation?
- Have we included all the programme, project or service areas or activities that need to be evaluated?
- Do we give any indication of the type of approach that should be used?

Terms of reference (TOR) should specify the aims and objectives of the evaluation, indicate the approach to be used and the areas to be covered. It may also be necessary to provide background information on the service, project or programme being evaluated.

TOR are used most often when a service, project or programme commissions an evaluation from external people. However, it is a good practice to prepare TOR for any evaluation as it reminds people of why the evaluation is being done and the outcomes which are expected.

Selecting evaluators
If you are in the position of selecting evaluators, here are some points to bear in mind:

- It is always better to have a team of evaluators rather than an individual;
- It is usually better to have at least one external person on the team; the only exception might be an extremely sensitive situation where the involvement of an outsider would make things worse;
- Make sure there is a balance in terms of men and women, cultural perspectives and professional or technical skills;
- Team members should be fit for the task, i.e., they should have the knowledge skills and experience necessary for the job and not just be chosen

because they are known, have an important position locally, or don't charge too much;

- Stakeholders often value having an external person on the team, especially if this person has a widespread reputation and considerable experience;
- If possible, have people on the team who are familiar with all the local languages; where this is not possible, ensure that good interpreters are made available;
- In a fully participatory evaluation, the team is more likely to be a *coordination team* who train the participant evaluators, rather than the ones who actually conduct the evaluation themselves.

The best evaluators:

- ➢ Are *good communicators*;
- ➢ Are fully informed about the *requirements of the evaluation* and the *reason why it is being done*;
- ➢ Are able to make *critical judgements* without bias;
- ➢ *Commit themselves* to the task and invest the necessary amount of time and energy;
- ➢ Have *highly developed skills of sensitivity* to a wide variety of situations;
- ➢ Are fully informed on *current issues* which are critical to the lives of service users and programme or project participants, e.g., disability issues; gender issues; poverty issues; child rights issues.
- ➢ Are *aware of their own limitations* and of the *limitations of the team*;
- ➢ Are also *aware of the limitations and boundaries of the evaluation* exercise, so that they do not raise any false expectations.

Example*: knowing the limits of the evaluation*

When the team was carrying out the E&N Africa evaluation, they were asked by one service why they would not authorise higher salaries for the staff. They explained that they were not responsible for making decisions about staff salaries and suggested that staff might like to discuss this issue with their managers.

They then encouraged the staff to think about others issues directly related to the evaluation of the regional project. While they were concerned that staff were unhappy with their salaries, they acknowledged three important facts:

1. *That they did not have the background knowledge required to make any judgements about salaries;*
2. *More importantly, that they were not responsible for making decisions on, or comments about, salaries;*
3. *That they needed to explain this clearly to the staff members involved and then move on.*

They were aware, nevertheless, that dissatisfaction with salaries might have an effect on the commitment of staff to their work and that this might have to be taken into account when the evaluation report was being written.

The best evaluators are good communicators. They put people at ease, are good listeners and encourage others to contribute to discussions.

The choice of evaluators will depend on the approach being taken, but bear in mind:
- ***A team approach is better than having one evaluator;***
- ***It is better to have a combination of insiders and externals;***
- ***The team should be balanced in terms of skills and experience.***

The team leader or coordinator

In most teams there is one person who acts as team leader or coordinator. This role is crucial and can influence the success or failure of the evaluation. The responsibilities are:
- To lead everyone – the team and all other participants - through the different stages of the evaluation process;
- To make sure that the necessary planning and preparation have taken place;
- To coordinate all aspects of the evaluation exercise;
- To keep the team on target and ensure that timetables are being followed;
- To organise and oversee the report writing and the feedback.

Fortunately, the leader or coordinator doesn't have to do it all on her own – remember she's part of a *team!* At different times in the process, she delegates certain tasks to others. Delegation is essential in order to make use of the different skills of the team members.

Nevertheless, leadership is a pretty demanding task. The team leader should be highly skilled. Most important of all are her *people skills.* She might have all the qualifications, knowledge and experience in the world, and be an expert at almost everything, but if she lacks ‘people skills’, she’ll get nowhere.

By ‘people skills’ we mean:
- *Sensitivity* towards others.
- *Being a good listener.* Being able to *judge when to take the lead* and when to stay back and let someone else have the opportunity to lead.
- Being able to *recognise and respect the skills of the people in the team* and make good use of them.
- Having the ability to help all members of the team *blend so that they work well together as one team*.
- Being able *to make decisions* and to know when the time has come for the decision to be made;
- Having a good grasp of the *overall picture* in order that the necessary coordination can occur and that the team doesn’t lose sight of the objectives;
- *Having good time management skills* and the ability to help other people manage time well and appropriately.

In summary:

Good teamworking requires a wide variety of skills, qualities and experience. The team leader or coordinator is crucial and has a strong influence on the quality and outcomes of the evaluation.

Clarifying expectations.

The evaluators have to make absolutely certain from the beginning that they are clear about what is expected of them. If they don’t, they risk going off in the wrong direction, failing to get the information required, wasting time, money and effort and disappointing people who participate in the evaluation and have expectations that things will change because of it.

The purpose of the evaluation can usually be clarified by asking questions like:
- Why have you decided to have an evaluation?
- What exactly do you hope to find out from the evaluation?
- What will you do with the information from the evaluation?
- What do we need to do to make sure we do a good job for you?
- Who should we talk to in order to get this information?

In the course of clarifying what is expected of them, evaluators sometimes find opportunities to make suggestions about how the evaluation could be more participatory.

To sum up the final section in unit two:

Evaluators should be clear of what is required of them and should be fully aware of their responsibilities. They can clarify the purpose of the evaluation by asking appropriate questions. This sometimes gives them the opportunity to suggest a more participatory approach to the evaluation.

Self test for unit two

The self test for unit two is on the next page. It will help refresh your memory about the topics we have covered.

SELF TEST FOR UNIT TWO

Use these questions to test yourself on the points discussed in the second unit.

1. Who usually makes the decision to hold an evaluation?
2. What are some of the reasons why such a decision is made?
3. What kinds of actions usually follow this decision?
4. What is meant by ‘Terms of Reference’ and why are these important?
5. What guidelines should be followed for the selection of evaluators?
6. How can evaluators ensure they are clear about what is expected of them?
7. What are the main responsibilities of the evaluators?

UNIT THREE: DEVELOPING AN EVALUATION PLAN

Introduction

In this unit we move on to the next stage in the evaluation exercise: developing a detailed plan which will enable you to obtain the information you require. We discuss:

- Why you need an evaluation plan;
- The structure of the plan;
- The planning process.

Why you need an evaluation plan

The key to a successful evaluation is good planning. If you get this right, everything else should follow.

People who are unaccustomed to structured planning sometimes find it difficult at first, possibly because they're used to doing most things verbally. In something as complex as evaluation, it is essential to start writing things down from the beginning. There are several reasons for this:

- It provides you with a record of what has been said;
- It enables you to show other people what is being planned;
- It is easier to remember if you write things down;
- You get into the habit of 'thinking on paper' and don't lose your train of thought;
- It is easier to compare ideas if they are written down;
- It is quicker to review previous work if it is recorded.

Get into the habit of writing things down!

There are several useful ways of recording things when planning for an evaluation:

- By making individual notes as discussion progresses;
- By asking people to take turns at making notes;
- By using flipcharts or large pieces of paper to record the main points of discussions;
- By writing the main points on cards or small pieces of paper (the benefits are that these can easily be re-organised into priorities).

In true participatory evaluation, there may be evaluators who have not learned to read and write. For example, many disabled people have not had the opportunity to go to school and so have had no chance to learn. In this situation, there are alternative ways of doing things.

- Using a tape recorder, if you have access to one;
- Using pictures and symbols to record what has been said;
- Asking someone who has learned to write to do the recording for the team and then feed back what has been written.

The structure of the evaluation plan

You need a well worked out structure for your evaluation plan, which should include the following areas:

- The objectives of the evaluation;
- An outline of the kind of information you need to collect;
- Details of where and how you will get this information;
- Places you will visit and people you will need to meet;
- Decisions on how you will communicate with participants prior to and during the evaluation;
- Dates of the different visits and other activities;
- Details of how you will record the information;
- An outline or structure for the evaluation report;
- Details of how feedback will be organised and given, and to whom;
- Notes on how the evaluation findings will be used;
- Details of who has to do what and by when;
- Any other details which are specific to your evaluation.

Developing the plan

Once you have decided on the structure, you need to work your way through each section, deciding what it entails. In the next part of this unit, we suggest how you might do this. We also give you some tips which should help make the whole process easier.

The objectives of the evaluation.
These *evaluation objectives* are different from the objectives of the project, programme or service you are evaluating. For example, supposing one of the objectives for a project on inclusive education is:

'To introduce a component on disability into the mainstream teacher training curriculum.'

One of your evaluation objectives might be:

'To ascertain whether a component on disability is now included as part of mainstream teacher training.'

In other words, this particular objective in this evaluation is to check out whether the objectives of the project have been achieved.

Assessing whether service, project or programme objectives have been achieved, or are on the way to being achieved, is often one of the objectives of an evaluation.

It is important for you, and the people you are leading through the evaluation process, to be clear about the difference between *service, project or programme objectives* and *evaluation objectives.*

In order to define your evaluation objectives, you will need to use information from:

- The aims, goals and/or objectives for the project, programme or service, or the mission statement or charter.
- The TOR for the evaluation;
- The discussions you had with those who made the decision to have an evaluation;
- The reasons why the evaluation is happening and what is expected of it.

In some evaluations it will be fairly easy to work out the objectives from these documents and discussions, because the aims and objectives of the programme, project or service will be clearly stated and quite explicit. But in others it will be more difficult. TOR might be vague, there might be no written aims or objectives, no mission statement or charter. It may be that the people requesting the evaluation are not exactly sure what they want from it. You may remember that we discussed, in unit two, the importance of clarifying programme, project or service objectives and TOR during the planning stages of the evaluation.

It is important to get your evaluation objectives as precise and accurate as possible, because they will affect everything else you do in the evaluation.

The next activity will help you to think about this in more detail.

ACTIVITY 5

Read through the following objectives which have been defined for different evaluations. Which of them will the evaluators need to make more precise?

Objectives:

1. To find out whether the project has improved the lives of women in the five villages.
2. To assess whether children's rights are being upheld.
3. To assess the effectiveness of the programme in decreasing the number of school drop-outs.
4. To examine the outcomes of the women's literacy programme.
5. To assess the coverage of the immunisation programme.

Comment

Objectives 1 and 2 are pretty vague: 'improved the lives' is a wide open phrase, isn't it? And 'children's rights' are pretty complex. It would be much better for the people doing these evaluations to spend more time discussing what they mean, breaking the objectives down further and being more specific.

Objective 3 gives us a better lead. We know that the evaluators have to find out how many drop outs there were before the programme started and how many there are now. They then have to find out whether any improvement is due to the programme, or to something completely different.

Objective 4 clearly specifies 'outcomes' as the things that have to be measured. The evaluators will also have to identify the exact kinds of outcomes e.g., Numbers attending the programme? How many people have learned to read?

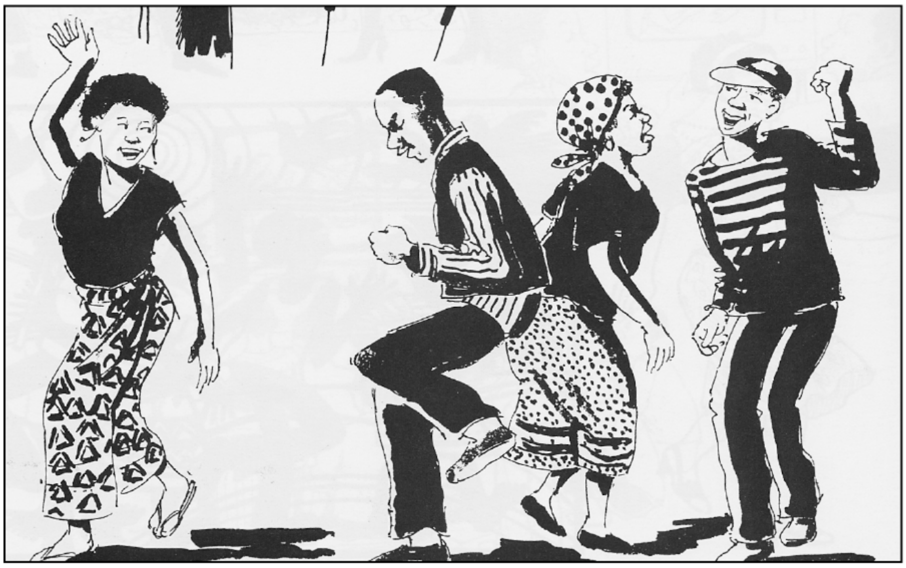
Objective 5 is very straightforward. It's only about coverage, nothing else. We would assume that there are other related objectives about effectiveness etc. But the objective needs to be more precise about the area referred to: i.e., in a town, district or country.

The example below illustrates the importance of ensuring that evaluation objectives are as precise as possible and are measuring the right thing.

Example

In one programme, staff training workshops were popular because they gave people from different areas a chance to get together, to have time away from work, to go shopping and to get better food than they did in their own service. However, the training made little or no impact on their work practices, because they had neither the resources nor the staff ratios to put it into practice.

In this situation, an evaluation objective which said, 'To assess staff satisfaction with the programme' would be useless. What is needed is 'To assess the impact of the staff training programme on the work practice of the participants.' This would enable the evaluators to make the point that the training is irrelevant in its present form, because it bears no resemblance to the reality of their working conditions.



'I love these workshops, don't you? You learn something new every time!'

The objectives for an evaluation should be:

- ***Stated as explicitly as possible;***
- ***Measurable, or easily translated into measurable indicators;***
- ***Relevant to the evaluation, i.e., they should enable you to get the exact information you need.***

What kind of information will you need to collect?
Obviously, this will depend on the type of evaluation you are doing and the objectives you have defined. In general, developmental evaluations, i.e., those designed to help make changes and assist with the *development* of a programme, service or project, require both *quantitative* and *qualitative* information.

Quantitative information
Quantitative information includes statistics, e.g., the numbers of people who have been involved in something; the number of times something has happened; the length of time it has taken to do something; the age ranges of people involved; averages; how many people fit into each category, e.g.,
For example:
- *How many children have enrolled in school since the project started? How many have dropped out? What is the average number of years the children have stayed in school?*
- *How many people have attended the training course? How often has the training course run? How many women attended? How many men?*
- *How many staff are trained? How many untrained?*

Much of this type of information will probably have been gathered by the service, project or programme as part of their monitoring procedures and will be available in their records, e.g., attendance registers, periodic progress reports. You will therefore be able to obtain some of it by reviewing their documentation.

Qualitative information
Qualitative information is associated with words like *How well? How effective? What impact? What has happened as a result? How satisfied? How do people feel? How was this done?* It is about *process, procedure, performance, activities, approaches,* and *outcomes that are not able to be counted.* It also relates to people's *opinions, attitudes, beliefs and experiences.*

For example:
- *What changes have happened in the village as a result of this project?*
- *How have disabled people's employment prospects improved as a result?*
- *How much more aware are parents about the opportunities available to their disabled children?*
- *How have health workers benefited from the new training programme?*
- *What impact has the improved sanitation had on the health of the mothers and children?*

You will see that quantitative information is much easier to obtain and record than qualitative. For this reason, we have to analyse qualitative information a bit more and work out some way of measuring and recording it. An example illustrates this.

Example
In the Southern Africa evaluation, one of the aims of the T&D project which was being evaluated was 'To promote and support the empowerment of disabled service users.'

The evaluation team had identified as one of their objectives: 'To find out whether the project goals have been achieved.'

This meant they had to find a way of measuring how much empowerment (personal and economic) of service users had occurred as a result of the project. Not easy!

What they did first was to look at the project proposal to see what was meant by 'empowerment'. What should happen to show that disabled people had become empowered? They then worked with the staff member responsible for that aspect of the programme – herself a disabled person – and asked her what evidence they should look for. What might they see that would indicate that empowerment had happened or was happening? She gave a number of 'indicators' which would show them whether empowerment was or was not happening. What started as a qualitative statement was turned into quantitative indicators:
- *The number of service users who had attended her courses and meetings;*
- *The number of service user committees which were in place in residential services;*
- *The number of service users who were on management committees;*
- *The number of service users who had obtained employment;*
- *The number of service users who had attended skills training courses;*
- *The numbers of service users who were employed by Cheshire services.*

The team realised that they could get most of this information from records and other documents. However, they still needed to develop more indicators for 'empowerment' (the extent to which the courses were responsible for any empowerment which had occurred, for example) and talk to a representative sample of service users in the six countries they were visiting as part of the evaluation exercise. For the team, it was a first step towards specifying what information to look for and record.

It is important to remember that numbers don't tell you about people's feelings and the changes they have experienced, so you have to find ways of describing these in your evaluation.

You will need to collect both quantitative and qualitative information in the course of your evaluation. You will have to specify indicators which will help you to measure qualitative changes, but also find descriptive ways of dealing with information which cannot be quantified.

Where will you get the information you require?
There are three main sources from which to gather information:
1. People;
2. Places;
3. Written documents.

Meeting people and visiting places to gather information
The number of places you visit will be determined by:
- The size of the project or programme;
- The number of services;
- The geographical spread
- The amount of time at your disposal.

In a small-scale evaluation you should be able speak to everyone involved. The more extensive the evaluation, the more difficult it will be to do this. You will have to select *samples* of venues, people and activities.

You will remember that we discussed sampling in unit one. You might want to look back at page 16 and refresh your memory. If samples are carefully selected, so that they are representative of the whole project or programme, the evaluators learn almost as much as if they had visited every venue and spoken to all stakeholders.

Example
When the evaluators in E&N Africa were choosing their sample:
- *They selected people from all sectors in the organisation: service users, family members, administrators, care staff, managers and Board members;*
- *They decided to visit all five countries involved in the programme because each was different in several significant ways;*
- *They chose a mix of rural and urban areas; they chose samples of both children and adults;*
- *They included people from other organisations concerned with disability, so that they could have some checks and comparison;*
- *They selected people who were heavily involved in the programme and those who were not so involved.*

The samples you choose will strongly influence your findings; so choose carefully and make sure they are representative of all stakeholders.

Getting information from documents

The documents you might use include:

- The project or programme proposal;
- Annual reports;
- Previous evaluations;
- Mission statements, charters, policy documents, brochures and leaflets about services;
- Training plans and reports;
- Staff work plans;
- Letters relating to specific events, developments or problems;
- Visit reports;
- Surveys;
- Progress reports;
- Organisational charts and plans;
- Budgets reports and plans;
- Statistical papers such as attendance records or analyses of numbers involved;
- Work diaries;
- Minutes of meetings;
- Documents from other groups or organisations which have relevance, e.g., legislative documents, government bills.

You cannot possibly read everything connected with the project, programme or service – you would end up drowning in paper! You should choose *sample documents* which will give you a good feel of the whole programme, project or service. Make sure you:

- choose carefully so that you cover the wide spread of the project, programme or services;
- organise how you will select what to read;
- decide who will read what;
- decide how you will feed this information back to one another;
- agree how much time you will allocate for this part of the evaluation.

It is helpful to have the most important papers sent to evaluators beforehand, to save time and to familiarise people with the project, service or programme. Before you read, decide amongst the evaluators who will search for which answers. Have questions and key points ready, so that you know what you're looking for.

We assume that the evaluators will meet together at the beginning of the evaluation process to finalise planning. This can be a useful time to get some background information from documents. Each person should take responsibility for certain documents. It is a good idea to meet regularly to report back on what you have read – perhaps at the end of each morning and each afternoon - as this will help recording. It can also stop someone wasting time looking for information a colleague has already found.

Reading documents will also help you phrase the questions you want to ask the people you meet during the evaluation, so write these down as they come to mind. You may find that other evaluators have similar queries, or that someone has found the answer in another document.

Use skimming and scanning techniques (scanning content lists, picking out headings and sub-headings, summaries, highlighted points, conclusions) rather than trying to read every word. Bear in mind, that, as you read, other questions will come to mind and these will lead you on to other documents. Restrict the number of papers you start with, or it will be impossible to get through them.

It is unlikely that you will have unlimited time for reading through documents when you are together as a team – two or three days is usual. So choose wisely, plan carefully and use your time well.

Inappropriate use of language in documentation
Some reports, especially about people who are disadvantaged or in a vulnerable situation, use language which is demeaning and insulting, e.g., ‘a cerebral palsy case’, ‘ignorant’, ‘uneducated’, ‘illiterate’, ‘uncooperative’. This is a situation that calls for tact and diplomacy. You can deal with it both by using it as an opportunity for awareness raising and further training and by referring to it (without naming the source, of course) in your report.

The limitations of documents
But remember: information from people is likely to be much more useful – and reliable - than information from documents! What is said to be happening is not always what is really happening on the ground.

You can always come back to documents later, but you might only have one chance to meet the participants!

You'll get your best information from participants – especially if you ask the right questions and listen carefully to the answers!

Self test for unit three

The self test on the next page will remind you of what you have covered in this unit and help you identify any topics you need to review.

SELF TEST FOR UNIT THREE

1. Explain the difference between service, project or programme objectives and evaluation objectives.
2. Give reasons why it is important to be as precise as possible in defining the evaluation objectives.
3. Explain what is meant by 'sampling'. What do you have to take into account when you select samples?
4. What is meant by the terms 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' information?
5. Which documents are likely to be most useful to you in collecting information?

UNIT FOUR: GATHERING AND MANAGING INFORMATION

Introduction

In this unit we focus on methods for gathering and managing information. We cover:

- Useful methods for gathering information;
- Getting information from documents;
- Recording information;
- Ongoing review of information;
- Analysing information.

Useful methods for gathering information

It would take a whole book to describe all the methods we might use for gathering information. We have selected those that are most likely to be of use to you.

Discussion groups

Discussion groups can take many forms:

- *Mixed groups,* e.g., adults and children; men, women, girls and boys; different levels in the organisation; service users and service managers; disabled people and non-disabled;
- *Single category* groups, e.g., girls only; care workers only; service users only;
- Large groups or small groups;
- A combination of large and small groups, e.g., starting in a large group, breaking into small groups for discussion, coming back together for feedback and then having general discussion to round off the session.

The discussions themselves can be:

- *Directed,* where the evaluator gives very precise guidelines about what is required, keeps to a tight timescale and keeps people on the point;
- *Open,* where only the topic or a very general question is given and discussion ranges freely around the topic, e.g., 'What are the biggest problems facing disabled people in this country today?' or 'You have twenty minutes to discuss the meaning of ' partnership';
- *A combination of directed and open,* where the evaluator gives a question and then guidance on the areas she would like the group to cover.

Brainstorming
You will be familiar with this activity. A topic or a question is given and participants asked to give their ideas immediately and spontaneously, without spending too much time thinking them through, e.g., ‘What would make it easier for disabled people to get employment?’

Let’s remind ourselves of the rules:
- All suggestions are accepted without question and recorded;
- No judgement is made of any idea;
- No suggestion is questioned or discussed at this stage, nor is more information or clarification requested – free-flow is important;
- Participants are encouraged to build on other people’s suggestions;
- The group keeps going either until ideas run out or until time is up, whichever has been specified at the outset.

After all suggestions have been recorded, participants take a critical look at them, select the ones they like best and discuss them. In the end they come up with a manageable list of things which can be acted upon.

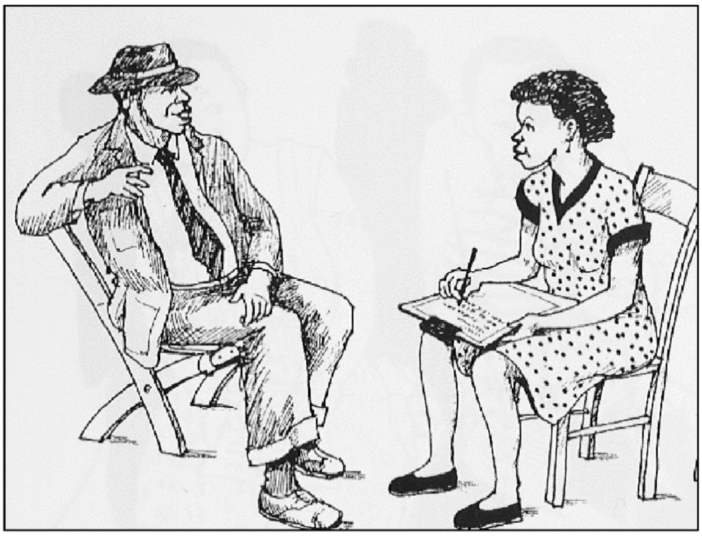
In an evaluation, you could use suggestions from a brainstorming session in a number of ways. For example: to review whether things are happening or not; to get an impression of how informed and realistic participants are about the issues under discussion. Suggestions can also be useful in the ‘conclusion’ and ‘recommendations’ section of the evaluation report.

Interviews
Both individual and group interviews are often used in evaluations. Here are some tips for preparing and conducting interviews:
- Be absolutely clear about what you want to find out;
- Prepare your questions well;
- Ask unambiguous questions;
- Keep questions short;

The types of questions you ask are important. You will probably use a combination of *open* and *closed* questions, depending on how structured the interview is and what you want to find out. Open questions which give the person answering the chance to offer their opinion are almost always better than closed questions, which give you the bare minimum of information, e.g., ‘What do you feel about the new health clinic?’ is an open question. ‘Do you like the new health clinic?’ is a closed question with only three possible answers ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or ‘I’m not sure’.

If someone else is conducting the interview on your behalf and the questions have to be translated into another language, take plenty of time to brief the person who will ask the questions. If possible, try to have immediate translation, so that you won't lose the answers. The best way of doing this is to have a second person translating for you so that the interviewer and interviewee do not lose the flow of the interview. However, this is not always possible.

In group interviews, larger groups can be divided, the questions given to a leader in each group and a second person appointed to record the answers. Answers can be recorded in different way, e.g., in note form, by using a chart prepared beforehand or by summarising answers on flipchart paper.



People answer much more readily when they feel at ease with the interviewer.

Group presentations

Another good way of obtaining information is to give each sub-group a task to work on and ask them to prepare a presentation for other groups. For example, if it were a group of mothers from an income generation cooperative, you could ask them for a presentation on, 'What changes have happened to you since the income generation project started?'

If people are not used to this kind of activity, you will have to give clear guidance and the necessary support. You might start by working with the whole group and saying, *'What was it like before the project? How are you going to present that? By telling us? By drawing something?'* You will gradually be able to withdraw your support and leave them to get on with the task, moving around groups to answer questions and deal with problems.

I never realised how popular I was until this income generating project started!'

Using drawings and other pictorial representations
Information is more interesting if it is presented in ways other than the written form – through pictures, for example. This is particularly useful for people who cannot read. For people who can read, pictorial presentations provide a new challenge and make them think carefully about what they are trying to express.

Use *drawings*, *symbols* and *pictures* cut from leaflets, old books or magazines.

Ask people to draw *maps* to show what the neighbourhood looks like, how people spend their time and who they spend time with, for example.

You'll notice how we use pictures in this manual to break up the information and make it easier to digest, to make you think and to get important points across. We all remember images much more easily than we remember words – especially if there's humour attached!

One 'symbolic drawing' that we have found particularly useful is the obstacle wall, used to symbolise the obstacles to achieving particular objectives. One problem is written on each brick and people then discuss the problem: what might have caused it, how big a problem it is and how it could be overcome. On the next page, we give an example from a workshop in India.

Example (extract from workshop report):

<u>Obstacles to Change</u>
The major obstacles to change were also identified and were illustrated in the form of a brick wall, symbolising the problems we have to overcome if we are to secure change and innovation.

The obstacle wall from this workshop looked like this:

physical access	Residents' participation	confidence

space	skilled personnel	Funding	volunteers

publicity	fixed mind set	Qualifications	transport	community awareness

Once a wall is completed, participants have great fun suggesting ways of knocking it down.

Workshops
Workshops can be extremely productive as part of the evaluation process. They give you the opportunity to follow through the information people give you and to pick up on ideas and problems you might not otherwise uncover. It is surprising what you can achieve, even in a one day workshop!

In planning the workshop, you must:
- Be clear about what you want to achieve;
- Prepare well;
- Allocate enough time;
- Decide which evaluator is responsible for which part of the workshop;
- Keep to time;
- Use a variety of methods and activities;
- Make sure you record what emerges.

Workshops have the added advantage of helping to make the evaluation more participatory as everyone can contribute and different people can take can take charge of specific activities.

Workshops give all participants the chance to contribute during an evaluation, to listen to one another's opinions and to come to a consensus. In reality, the participants are doing the evaluator's job for them – which is what should happen in participatory evaluation!

Questionnaires and checklists
What we mean here are questionnaires and checklists which are used as part of interviews or other activities, not the kind that are sent out to people to fill in and return. Postal questionnaires are very seldom successful in development work and are usually a waste of time, money and effort. On average, the return rate is very low and the information of limited value. It also takes a great deal of skill to compile a good questionnaire.

Questionnaires you might use in face-to-face contact:

- *Opinion questionnaires,* with open questions which allow people to give their own opinions on aspects of a programme, service or project, e.g., *How has this loan scheme helped you and your family? How could we make the loan scheme better for you?*

- Questionnaires with *answers along a scale or a continuum, e.g.,*
  Disabled children have the right to go to school like all other children
  Strongly agree -- Strongly disagree

- Questionnaires *with multiple choice* answers, e.g:
  I feel much more confident after the course ☐
  I feel a little bit more confident after the course ☐
  The course has not made any difference to my confidence ☐

- Yes-No questionnaires, e.g., after staff have been on a course, you might ask the service manager for her opinion on the difference it has made to their work:

S/he works harder now	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
S/he knows more about disability now	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐
S/he talks more to the service users now	*Yes* ☐	*No* ☐

All of these questionnaires – and others like them - should be used by the evaluator in face-to-face discussion with the person answering. It is good to give them to participants to use with one another. This also puts participants more in control of the evaluation!

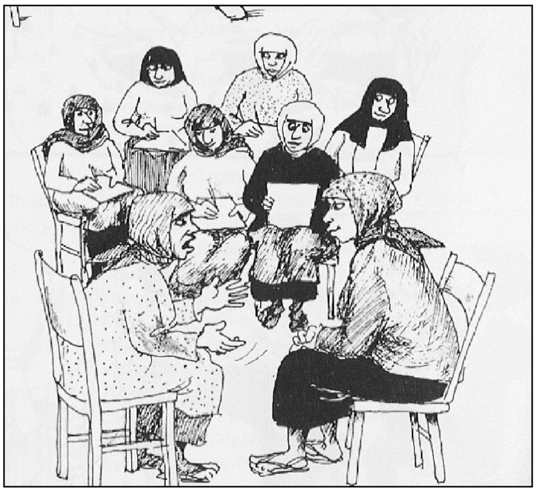
Observation
The final method we suggest is observation. It always sounds easy, but in reality requires great skill. We are talking about *structured observation* where you:
- Are clear about what you want to observe and plan well beforehand;
- Use key words and headings to guide your observations;
- Are aware of the skills needed to be a good observer, i.e., the ability to be: detached but friendly; impartial; alert to any tensions, nuances or hidden agendas.

Observation should always be done with the knowledge of the people participating in the activities and events you are you are observing, e.g., observing mothers working with their disabled children at a day centre.

Often the best way of using observation is to combine it with other types of information gathering. For example, you spend a short period observing a mother working with her child and then have an informal interview with her asking her about what she has been doing and why.

During evaluations, you can train other people as observers.

Observation can be a group or an individual activity.



Group observation of a role play.

Most evaluators become very skilled observers. The more skilled you become in evaluation, the more expert you will be as an observer. This is a very useful skill for an evaluator. Be conscious of the possibility of bias, however, and always check out your observations with the others in the team. And remember that observation can be intrusive and should not be used if people are uncomfortable with it.

Getting information from documents

In unit three we discussed which documents you might need to review as part of the evaluation. As information gathering proceeds, there may be other documents at different locations which are important for your purpose, so here are some additional points you might need to bear in mind:

Different languages

If the information you require is in a language you don't understand, rather than the time-consuming task of having documents translated, it is quicker and easier to sit with someone and ask specific questions which they then answer from the document.

Inaccurate information
Be alert to any discrepancies in documents, or anything which conflicts with something you have already been told or read. Check to see which source seems more accurate. If it is impossible to decide, record the conflicting information and take account of it, or discard it if it is not particularly relevant.

You should also be aware that information might be technically incorrect, because the people writing the document might be 'self-starters' and not have access to the information they require, e.g., the cause of, or beliefs about, a disability. In general, it is best just to take note of the inaccuracy and use it as the basis for one of your recommendation, e.g., 'more training required', rather than dealing with it there and then and risk embarrassing people. You might also get a natural opportunity to discuss it and find out more about where the information has come from.

Having information selected for you
In some situations, you might find your access to certain documents restricted. If the information is of a particularly sensitive or private nature, this might be appropriate. More problematic is when information is selected for you to provide a favourable impression, or to show only success. This is understandable – after all, no-one wants to shout about their weaknesses. Sensitivity, diplomacy and understanding are called for and fuller explanations of the purpose of the evaluation, and of confidentiality and anonymity. If there is still a problem, you may have to accept this and say in your report that your information is incomplete. This, once again, is an issue which indicates the need for further training, a change in systems and procedures or some other action.

Recording information

In this section of unit four, we make some suggestions about how you might improve your recording techniques. Some of these will be familiar, others will be new. First a general point:
- Make a habit of referring back to the objectives and purpose of the evaluation to keep you on track and remind you what you are looking for.

Recording qualitative information (from discussions, interviews, meetings):
- Don't try to record every word – you won't be able to; use key words and phrases;
- Underline or circle key points or issues so that they stand out;
- For key phrases, try to use people's own words – too much paraphrasing can lose the meaning; put your own words or comments in brackets if necessary;
- Note any particularly important comments or statements, especially if you plan to use them in your report;
- Use punctuation marks to highlight anything of importance or question, e.g., ?? or !!;

- Use symbols instead of words, either your own, or ones which are universally recognised. e.g., stick figures instead of the words, ‘men,’, ‘women’;
- Use flipcharts or large sheets of paper and list points as you go along, or get the participants to do this; make sure you collect all pieces of paper, including those from small group activities;
- If you are using activities which are particularly visual, and have access to a camera, use it;
- Use a tape recorder, if you have one and if you get permission from participants; or use a video camera if one is available; be especially sensitive in the use of this kind of equipment.

Recording quantitative information

This kind of information is most easily recorded on charts. For example, let's suppose you want to find out how many people have benefited from courses in economic empowerment. You draw up a chart with the indicators down the left side. During the evaluation, as you meet the different groups who have attended the courses, you fill in the appropriate boxes, like this:

Indicators for economic empowerment

Course	A	B	C	D	E	**Total**
No. of participants	**15**	**13**	**11**	**18**	**9**	**66**
In outside training	4	3	2	7	3	**19**
Further training inside service	7	6	2	8	4	**27**
Employed in Cheshire service	2	2	0	2	1	**7**
Self employed	1	0	0	0	1	**2**
Open employment	1	0	0	1	0	**2**
Not yet in training or employment	0	2	7	0	0	**9**

You will see that, although the chart is quite simple, we can get a great deal of information from it, both by looking down the columns at the results from individual courses and by looking across the rows at the different indicators.

For example, we can see that course C is the least successful. Our next step would be to ask why? Is it the quality of the course or the tutor? Is it that the people attending this course are more severely disabled and therefore have more difficulty in getting onto courses or finding jobs? Only two people from this course are getting further training outside the service – why is this? Shortage of resources?

ACTIVITY 6

Look again at the chart and answer the following questions:

1. Which course has been most successful? Give a reason for your answer.
2. In which of their objectives (use indicators) have courses overall been least successful?
3. What questions would you want to ask next to find out the reasons why the programme is being unsuccessful in achieving this objective?

Comment

1. Course D has been most successful, because everybody has gone on to do something else (assuming that none of them had been doing anything beforehand.) Also, seven people are in training outside the service.
2. The courses have been least successful in (a) helping people become self employed and (b) helping people get jobs in the open market.
3. For example, you might want to ask questions about:

- the general unemployment situation in the area;
- whether enough work had been done with potential employers;
- if the courses are giving people the right type of training;
- if people are given support to find work or further training after they have finished the course.

Another way of recording quantitative information is to use is a *tally sheet.* Supposing you want to observe another aspect of empowerment, the extent to which a service user representative participates in management committee meetings. You attend meetings in different services as an observer and make a note of every time each representative contributes to the meeting. On completion, your record sheet on which looks like this:

Representative	A	B	C	D
Offers an opinion	/////		/////	///
Joins in discussion	///		////////	/
Asks a question	/		////	
Answers a question	///	//	//// /	//
Agrees with comment	////	///	///	/
Disagrees with comment			///	
Totals	16	5	28	7

You can then count up the times you observed the representative participating in the meeting. You can also see just what kind of participation occurred and how other people interacted with him.

From the chart above, we can see patterns emerging. Representatives A and C seem to be holding their own pretty well and seem fully involved in the meeting. There are 16 interactions in total recorded for A (the figure on the bottom row in the column under A) and 28 for C (also from the bottom row). C is strong enough to disagree several times. B, on the other hand, not only doesn't join in, but is largely ignored by everyone else. D doesn't do much better. Only 5 interactions for B and 7 for D, as you can see from the totals in their columns.

You can also see where this record could lead you, what further questions you would want to ask and which other aspects of empowerment you would want to investigate.

There are many other types of chart, some of which you will already be familiar with. Their great advantage is that they allow you to record useful information in a short space of time and in an organised way, so make as much use as you can of them.

You will have prepared most of your charts at the planning stage of the evaluation and they should be ready for use. However, as the evaluation progresses, you may find that you need to develop different kinds of charts, or to adapt some of the existing formats.

Managing the information as you collect it

It is important for you and other evaluators to have ongoing reviews of the information you gather as the evaluation progresses. This is because:

- It makes information more manageable;
- It cuts down the amount of work you will have to do later;
- You begin to see patterns emerging;
- It helps keep you from getting side-tracked;
- It shows you where there are gaps in your information;
- It alerts you to additional information you need;
- It enables you to share information with other evaluators, to compare notes and to consider different interpretations;
- It helps you see what the main issues are, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the project, programme or service;
- It prepares you mentally for reporting back;
- It helps you review which methods and activities are working well and which ones are causing problems; you can then rethink your plans;
- It helps you ascertain whether all evaluators are coping with their responsibilities, whether they need additional support and whether the individual strengths of the team are being used to best effect.

When you were preparing the evaluation plan, you should have built in time for ongoing review and discussion with other evaluators. You should try to get together at the end of each day to feed back to one another. Try to have a more comprehensive review at regular periods throughout the evaluation, but not too often. If it is necessary to transcribe any information, try to do this as you go along, rather than leaving it all until the end. Remember though, that you also need time to relax and avoid exhaustion – get the balance right!

Don't try to go through everything in detail as you review. Identify and share major issues, any problems, any outstanding questions and any changes of direction required. Often the best thing to do with a tricky issue or problem is to leave it aside, have a break and come back to it more refreshed and with a clear head.

Analysing the information you have collected

Analysis is a cumulative activity. This means that you are organising, summarising and analysing information as you collect it, both on your own and in the review meetings with the other evaluators.

By the time the information gathering process is complete, you will have a good idea of the strengths and weakness of the programme, service or project and of the answers to the questions you posed at the beginning of the evaluation. Your review of information at the end of the collection process will then enable you to see the full picture.

Analysis should be done so that it enables you to:

- assess which of the programme, project or service objectives have and have not been achieved, and the reasons for this;
- see the relationships between different aspects of the programme, project or service;
- find out whether resources have been used well and efficiently;
- identify major issues, problems or patterns;
- assess whether the programme, project or service gives value for the time, money and effort invested in it;
- organise the information in a way that makes sense and is helpful to the development of the service, project or service.

In a fully participatory evaluation, there may be a considerable number of people involved in the analysis of information. In this situation, analysis can be done by representatives of the different stakeholder groups, in the form of meetings or workshops, or in small groups, with everyone working towards a consensus.

Once your analysis is complete, it is time for the next part of the process: reporting back. We deal with this in the next two units. Unit five covers written reports. Unit six covers other forms of reporting back and, perhaps most crucially of all, action planning.

Self-test for unit four

For now, it’s time for you to reflect on this unit by undertaking the self-test, which is on the next page.

SELF TEST FOR UNIT FOUR

1. List the three methods you would most enjoy using to gather information from participants during an evaluation. Describe the advantages of each method.
2. Describe two methods of recording a) quantitative information and b) qualitative information in an evaluation.
3. Why is the ongoing review of information important during an evaluation?
4. Why is the ongoing analysis of information important during an evaluation?

UNIT FIVE: THE WRITTEN REPORT

Introduction

The information has been gathered, organised and analysed. You have now reached the next stage, reporting back. In this unit, we discuss the written report.

- We consider who should write the report;
- We give some general guidelines about making the report meaningful;
- We discuss structure;
- We highlight the importance of participation in report writing.

Who writes the report?

If we take participation to an illogical conclusion, we could picture several hundred people jostling for a place round the table and trying to grasp the pen being used to write the report. Participation is as important at this stage as it is throughout the entire evaluation, but there are more manageable ways of doing it!

Someone has to take overall responsibility for overseeing the writing of the report. Different people might write different parts of the report, but not too many, or it becomes fragmented and different styles become a problem. The structure should have been agreed at the planning stage of the evaluation, but will have to be adjusted in the light of the information collected.

The report will need a number of re-writes, in order to take account of the comments of the different partners. In the end, however, one person has to draw the whole thing together, usually the team leader or coordinator. Let's think about what report writing involves.

Making the report meaningful

The report has to be meaningful to all those involved in the evaluation if it is to be of use in the ongoing development of the programme, service or project. Remember that it's quality and not quantity that counts, so be selective as you write your report; don't feel you have to include everything. Here are some general tips:

- Plan well before you put pen to paper;
- Use headings and sub-headings to help you organise information;
- Emphasise headings, sub-headings and major points, by underlining, or using capitals, italics or different size fonts;
- Use a numbering system, as it looks better and is easier for people to refer to and find the exact place;

- Make sure pages are numbered;
- Use short, concise sentences;
- Use short paragraphs;
- Use a new paragraph for each new point; if you need to develop a point, use a new paragraph rather than letting the first one run on for too long.
- Don't expect to get it right first time; expect to write several drafts.

The structure of the report

Get the structure right and you will find it much easier to organise the information. Neglect structure and you will end up in confusion, lose the main messages and spend much time tearing your hair out!

Guidelines for report writing

The length of your report, the structure and the amount of information you include will depend on the type of evaluation you are doing. The more extensive and longer in duration the evaluation is, the more information you need to provide. For most evaluations, the shorter the report the better. Here are some guidelines:

Small-scale evaluations

If it is a small scale evaluation of a service or a small project, you shouldn't need a highly formalised or lengthy report. You will, however, need to include:

- An *introduction* in which you give background information about the project or service, and explain why the evaluation is happening and who is doing it;
- A section describing *how information was collected* for the evaluation, why you decided to do it this way and who did what;
- An explanation of *how you analysed and organised the information* you collected;
- Details of *what you found out*;
- A *conclusion* based on your findings;
- *Recommendations* about how the service or project could make use of the findings;
- An *action plan* to help people make use of the evaluation findings.

Larger-scale evaluations

In a large scale evaluation, whether it be for external funders or to decide the future direction of a programme, you will have to provide much more detail. We give you guidelines below. Adapt these to meet your own needs – be selective. Be aware, however, that some funders and organisations have their own format, or certain expectations, so check on this before you start the evaluation.

Structure and contents of the report

Sections will include:

1. A <u>title page</u> which gives the name of the evaluation, the dates on which it was carried out and the locations. You might also want to have the names of the evaluators on this page, or you might want to put this information on the second page. If it is a self evaluation, you should give the name of the group

which undertook it, e.g., *Conducted by the participants of the Wiseways Community Project.*

2. *Acknowledgements.* If there are too many people to thank, make a general statement, such as, 'With thanks to all those who gave generously of their time and effort during this evaluation' or 'The evaluation team wish to acknowledge the support of all participants in making this evaluation possible.'

3. *Contents page*. Remember to re-check page numbers as a final step before reports are printed or copied. If it is wrong, your contents page is more or less useless and can be more frustrating than not having one at all.

4. A *summary.* Write this last, after you have completed all other parts of the report. You cannot summarise something until after you have written it, so don't try. The summary has a twofold purpose. It acts as an *advance organiser* for readers, giving them a framework and introducing them to the key points of the report. It is also useful for people who don't want, or haven't time, to read the whole report. Some people put the summary before the contents page, but we prefer it after.

   The summary should include:
   - An introductory sentence stating what the document is about;
   - A very brief description of the project, programme or service being evaluated, to include its general aim;
   - The purpose of the evaluation;
   - Brief details of who carried out the evaluation;
   - The places visited and people seen, with dates;
   - A summary of the methods used;
   - A summary of the major findings;
   - A summary of conclusions;
   - A summary of the recommendations;
   - Any additional *essential* information.

   Ideally, the summary should not be more than three pages long. Anyone should be able to read through it and get an overall picture of the whole evaluation.

5. The *introduction.* This sets the evaluation in context and should include:
   - Background information about the programme, service or project being evaluated;
   - The aims and objectives of the service, programme or project;
   - The target group or participants;
   - The coverage and scope of the project, programme or service;

- The main reason why the evaluation is taking place;
- Any other relevant information which is required as background.

6. *Aims and objectives* of the evaluation and the *methods* used to gather information. This section should include:
   - The general purpose or aim of the evaluation;
   - The specific objectives of the evaluation;
   - Details of the evaluation team or group and how they worked, e.g., in our Southern Africa evaluation, we would explain here about the team dividing up to cover different countries; in a fully participatory evaluation, you would describe the different responsibilities;
   - The methods and activities which were used in the evaluation (if some of the methods are unusual or may be unfamiliar to people, describe them briefly and include an example in an appendix; cross reference to any examples you put in the appendices);
   - The reasons why these methods were chosen;
   - The limits and scope of the evaluation, i.e., what it was and was not designed to do.

7. A section on the *analysis of information,* to include:
   - The methods used for analysing the information;
   - The reasons why these methods were chosen;
   - Any limitations in these methods;
   - Who was responsible for which aspects of the analysis.

8. *Findings.* A section presenting your analysis of the information you collected. This is a *factual* section which should include:
   - A summary of the information you collected, organised under headings and sub-headings;
   - Charts or diagrams summarising the findings;
   - Any photographs which might illustrate main points;
   - Any quotes from participants which illustrate main points.

NB Some people put the last two sections – analysis and findings – together.

9. *Conclusions.* This is a *discussion* section. In it you give your opinions about what the findings tell you (but make sure they are based on the factual evidence presented in the findings section, not your own ideas or beliefs). For example:
   - How well is the programme, project or service working overall?
   - Which parts are working well, which are not?
   - From the information you have obtained, what are the reasons for the strengths, weaknesses or gaps?

- Are there any major problems?
- To what extent is the project, programme or service meeting the needs of the people for whom it was designed?
- How do people feel about the programme?
- What impact has the programme, project or service had on the lives of the people involved?
- Is it dealing with the diversity of need of the target group or participants?
- Is it focused enough or is it spreading itself too thinly?
- Are the priorities right?
- Is it value for money, time and effort?
- How well are the systems, processes and procedures working?
- Is it adequately resourced?
- Do the people involved have the necessary capacity?
- Are resources being used effectively and efficiently?

10. *Recommendations.* This section suggests the action which should be taken to strengthen and improve the service, project or programme. In this section you will want to make recommendations about some or all of the following:
    - What should be continued and built upon because it is relevant, a strong element of the programme, project or service, and meeting needs appropriately?
    - What needs to be resolved or strengthened?
    - What should the priorities be for the next development period?
    - What changes need to take place in systems, processes, procedures, activities or methods?
    - Should any re-assessment of needs take place?
    - Are there any major problems which are undermining or hampering progress?
    - What actions should be taken in relation to all the points above, who should take action and what sort of timescale would be useful?

11. *Bibliography* or *List of References.* If you have used any books or papers as reference material, you should list them after the recommendations and before the appendices, using the standard format.

12. *Appendices.* You may or may not decide to have an appendix, or several appendices. These can contain anything which gives additional information people might want to know, but which is not essential to the meaning of the report. For example:
    - A extract from an interview transcript;
    - An interview schedule or questionnaire;
    - A fuller description of a method you have described in brief in the report;
    - An example of a completed form or chart;

- An example of a categorisation system or an observation schedule you have used.
- A leaflet or flyer about a service or an activity, which can serve as an example;
- Anything else you have referred to in the report and have cross referenced.

Don't be tempted to have too many appendices – between two and five is usual. Any more and people get tired of them and lose the thread, which can detract from the report. Include only information which is relevant and make sure you refer to every appendix in the appropriate place in the body of the report. Make sure that everything included in an appendix is easily understood. If anything isn't clear, provide an explanation.

Presentation of the report

The presentation of a written report is very important, as it will influence people's impression of it. Reports should look professional right from the front cover and arouse the reader's interest.

Here are some guidelines:

- Get the report typed;
- Make sure there are no typing or spelling errors;
- Double check to make sure all corrections are done before the final copy is typed;
- Make sure that the print is of a reasonable size so that people of all ages will have no trouble reading it; it may be necessary to produce it in large print for older people or people with visual impairment;
- Use thekind of languagewhich is appropriate for the readers, e.g., if it is in English and English is not their first language, avoid any words or phrases likely to cause confusion; if it is translated, get someone to double check the translation;
- Make sure the report is written in a style that takes account of significant issues, e.g., culture, gender, age;
- Make sure charts and tables are clear, well presented and accurate.

The importance of participation

Report writing should be a joint effort, so make sure you allocate enough time for discussion and checking back with others involved. A report written by one or two people is likely to give the opinions of the evaluators, rather than those of the stakeholders. The more removed the writers are from the people concerned, the less likely the report is to reflect the situation on the ground.

User-friendly ways of reporting back

Report writing is important, but it is only one way of giving feedback, not necessarily the most *user friendly*. We discuss other, more *interactive* ways in the next unit. Because they are interactive, they are particularly suited to participatory evaluation. They provide opportunities for stakeholders to be active partners at the feedback stage and not just the recipients of information and opinions.

Reporting back should be a participatory activity

Self test for unit five

But now, time for the self test! There's a lot of factual information in this unit, so you may need to keep referring back to different sections to check it out.

SELF TEST FOR UNIT FIVE

1. Who should contribute to the written report and why?
2. How can a written report be made as meaningful as possible?
3. List the headings you would expect to find in most written reports.
4. How can you make the report more readable and professional looking?
5. Why is participation important at the report writing stage?

UNIT SIX: MOVING FORWARD

Introduction

In the previous unit we focused on the more traditional way of giving feedback, through a written report. In this unit, we suggest other ways of reporting the findings of an evaluation, ways which are more interactive and 'user friendly'. We then move on to the next stage in the process, action planning. The unit covers the following topics:

- Reporting back to different audiences;
- Interactive methods of reporting back;
- Reporting back at a distance;
- Interesting ways of presenting information;
- Action planning;
- Learning from experience.

Reporting back to different audiences

Written reports, especially those which are lengthy and formal, have their limitations. To illustrate this, we take you back to Venturaland - remember them from unit 1?

Example

The government of Venturaland are concerned about the state of health care in their country, so decide to have an evaluation in six of the eighteen provinces. They send two researchers to each province to train village health workers to carry out the evaluation. Once the information is collected and analysed, the researchers go back to each province to report back to the health workers who were involved and to representatives from different community groups.

The researchers bring with them the lengthy report which has been written for the government, and lots of transparencies (slides) with statistics and their conclusions. They borrow an overhead projector and read the figures from the transparencies, explaining what they mean as they go along. They then give their conclusions and recommendations and ask for questions. The meeting is held in a large room in the provincial hospital and takes several hours.

'We're very grateful to our two eminent researchers for spending the last five hours explaining their report to us. And now we'll take your questions.'

What's your immediate reaction to this story? Think about it by doing the next activity.

ACTIVITY 7

Answer the following questions as fully as you can:
Why was this not the most effective way of giving feedback?
Do you think the people asked many questions? If not, why not?
How could the researchers have done it more effectively?
What do you think the community members were most interested in finding out from the evaluation?

Comment

It's such a pity the Venturaland government spoiled their own attempts at participation, isn't it? This way of giving information is seldom effective, even if the audience is a group of statisticians! But it was totally inappropriate here.

You probably identified the following problems:

- Far too much information;
- Not in a form that can be understood;
- Meeting far too formal and too long;

- Held in an inappropriate place – many people would feel intimidated;
- No time or opportunity for interaction;
- Not the information the people want;
- One solution for different audiences (stakeholder groups);
- The community members would be more interested in when and how things were going to improve – were they going to get more doctors and clinics, for example.

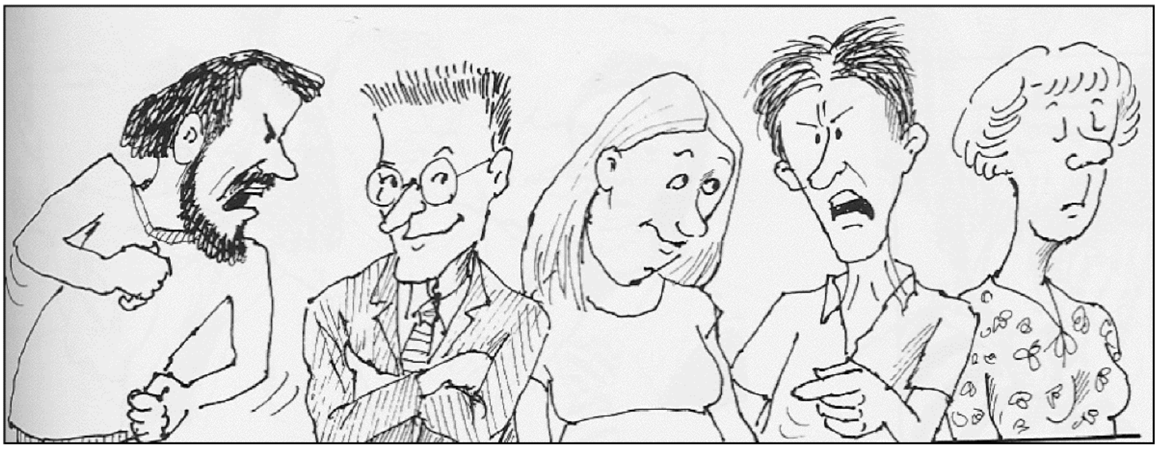
Using lengthy and formal written reports – written without the involvement of stakeholders - as a means of giving feedback to people who have been active partners in the evaluation process is a contradiction, and can undermine much of what has been achieved through participation.

Feedback can be given more appropriately and effectively, and made much more interesting. The first thing to be considered is who the feedback is *for* – the different audiences you are reporting back to. In your evaluation, who are your audiences?
- Service users, or project or programme participants?
- The families of service users or participants?
- Front-line staff, whether paid or voluntary?
- Mid level managers and senior staff members?
- Community leaders and professionals, such as nurses and teachers?
- Other community members?
- Community workers and health workers?
- Senior managers and volunteers who act as members of committees or boards?
- Local government representatives?

It's almost certainly going to be a mixture of these different groups. Which means that, in your feedback, you are going to have to take account of their different needs and interests. The information must be presented in ways which are meaningful to them and which can help them move forward. And remember:
- The method of conveying information has a profound effect on how well it is understood;
- We can only absorb so much verbal information at a time;
- Visual aids help us absorb and understand better;
- The feedback process should be followed immediately with decisions about action.

For these reasons, *interactive* methods of reporting back are particularly effective.

Interactive methods of reporting back



The advantages of interactive methods of reporting back are that they:

- Continue the process of partnership and participation;
- Enable people to hear the information for themselves and not get it second hand;
- Give evaluators the opportunity to check out your findings and conclusions;
- Enable your partners to contribute to the next stage of the evaluation;
- Help people take ownership of the evaluation;
- Give you and others a further opportunity to listen to the range of opinions;
- Bring collective experience to the decision making and action stages of the evaluation process;
- Ensure that all opinions and aspirations are taken into consideration;
- Give the evaluation more validity.

Here are some examples of interactive feedback. The methods may not be new to you, but have you used them in evaluation?

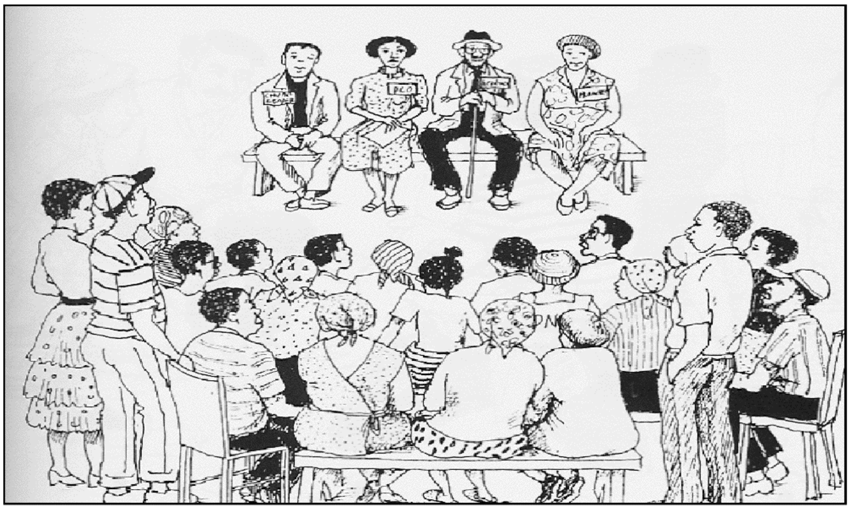
Open meetings

If the group is not too large, and if time and location permit, a series of open meetings can be extremely worthwhile. Make sure you avoid the mistakes of the Venturaland researchers – too much information, too long a meeting, information not tailored to the audience. Organise the meeting as you would a workshop, with visual aids of different kinds (more about this later); a minimum of ‘information giving’ to the large group; small group discussions and activities; and feedback from participants at regular points in the meeting. Plan it well, be clear about your objectives and make sure all information emerging from the meetings is recorded so that it contributes to decisions on conclusions, recommendations and action plans.

Small group meetings
Alternatively, you might have a series of small group meetings. Make sure each group is representative of all stakeholders. If the evaluation is small scale, you should be able to include everyone in the meeting.

Sometimes it is appropriate to have ‘single category’ groups – of service users, women or front line staff, for example. This means that the same information may have to be given in different ways, or perhaps that different amounts of information or different aspects have to be presented to the different groups. Again, organise well, use interactive methods, and record the outcomes.

A forum



You might decide to organise a forum, with a team presenting the information on behalf of all the evaluators. Presenters should be drawn from the main stakeholder groups. They should be well prepared and should be good communicators. They may require support from the more experienced evaluators, especially if they are new to this experience. During the forum there should be opportunities for everyone to contribute, either in the large group or once people have gone into smaller groups. The forum has similarities to the open meeting, but participants are selected. Both they and the presenters are drawn from the different stakeholder groups.

Using an interim report as the basis for discussion and further action
It is often useful to provide people with an interim report as a stimulus to discussion and further action. This is a report which summarises the information collected during the evaluation and highlights the main findings. It does not, however, draw any conclusions nor make any recommendations. It is a *report in process*. The interim report is circulated beforehand and people then come together to discuss it and give their opinions on what it says.

An interim report is useful for:

- Allowing the evaluators to check the accuracy of their information;
- Adding any essential information which may have been missed previously;
- Giving participants the opportunity to hear the full range of opinions;
- Preparing people for the final report.

An interim report also continues the process of participation, providing opportunities for participants to help draw conclusions, decide on recommendations and contribute to the action planning which is an integral part of the evaluation.

Reporting back to the steering group
If it is impossible to bring people together from different locations, the steering group, which should be representative of the different stakeholders, can be the ones to receive and consider the feedback.

Other interactive methods
Many of the methods we suggested in unit four are just as suitable for reporting back as they are for gathering information. Look back at unit four now and identify those which you could use for reporting back the findings of an evaluation.

Interaction at a distance
If distances are great, time limited and the budget restricted, it is not always possible to report back face-to-face. Interaction at a distance may sound like a contradiction, but there are ways of doing it. Here are some of them.

Newsletter
One way of dealing with 'interaction at a distance' is by producing a newsletter which is sent to all stakeholders. They are then encouraged to respond, by giving their comments, both on the content of the newsletter and on the evaluation process.

The Southern Africa evaluation involved nine countries, six of which were visited by evaluators. It was impossible to bring people together at the feedback stage, so the team had to find some way of disseminating the information and getting feedback. They decided to use the quarterly newsletter and devote it entirely to the evaluation.

The newsletter was deliberately kept short and succinct. It outlined the main processes of the evaluation, the major findings and the recommendations. It also reproduced a cross-section of comments from participants. A short extract from the newsletter is given here.

Extract from the newsletter reporting back on the Southern Africa evaluation (June 2000)

We collected information through:

- Meeting with members of the regional team, committee members, service users, national board members and staff;
- Sending out questionnaires;
- Reading a selection of documents and reports in the regional office in Harare;
- Observing services in operation.

What people in the region said…….

In a newsletter of this size, it would be impossible to report everything which people said, but here are some examples:

- *'We would like more visits from the regional team';*
- *'I don't really know what the team does';*
- *'We've really benefited from the staff training';*
- *'It's always management and senior staff who attend workshops; what about the rest of us?';*
- *'I've really got to know people from other services in the region through attending workshops';*
- *'Can you do something about our salaries?' (We had to explain that this is not our job, and that they should speak to their managers);*
- *'The visits to other services have really been useful';*
- *'They haven't helped us much with fund raising which is what we need most of all';*
- *'I've really learned to speak up for myself and I'm more confident';*
- *'What's the good of speaking up for yourself when nobody will listen?';*
- *'The international self reliance programme has really helped me';*
- *'The international self reliance programme has really let us down; how do people in London know what it's like here?'*
- *'Bringing together staff, service users and committee members has given a new status to service users';*
- *'The team cannot be expected to meet all needs; we have good people in the region who can help';*
- *'Committee members should be more involved in the training';*
- *'We have understood more about moving from a 'charity' approach to understanding the rights of disabled people';*

Participants were asked to discuss the newsletter within their own service and to provide feedback on both the information and the evaluation process. A forum was then arranged for a later date, to be held in one of the countries, and attended by representatives of the different stakeholder groups. This would give the opportunity for further interaction, decision making and action planning. This illustrates again that the evaluation is not a 'one-point-in-time' event, but an ongoing process over a longer period.

Discussion or focus groups

Discussion groups (sometimes called *focus groups* because they focus on particular issues or questions) are useful for reporting back at a distance. Groups are set up at the different venues involved in the evaluation and a facilitator selected for each group. A list of key points from the evaluation findings, or a short report, is sent to the different groups, with a reminder of the task and the facilitator's role. Telephone support can be given to the facilitator, if systems and resources permit. Feedback can then be sent by post to the evaluators, or given by telephone.

Interesting ways of presenting information

Remember the Venturaland government? Their visual aid (the OHP) didn't work very well, did it? They had the additional problem that they had not selected the main points from their lengthy report. We know you won't make this mistake!

Information is so much more interesting if it is presented in an unusual or novel way. It is also much easier to absorb and remember – and much more fun to deliver! You'll know this from your own experience. So let's explore some ways that information giving can be made more exciting!

Drama and role play

Example

Aaron is meeting with a group of disabled and non-disabled people to report back to them on the recent evaluation of a revolving loan scheme which was started three years ago and has a problem. The problem is that the non-disabled people are all getting loans, while the disabled people are being ignored.

He decides that the best way of getting his information across is through a role play involving a disabled woman applying for a loan, a non-disabled staff member from the organisation running the loan scheme and a non-disabled loan applicant. The people in the role play have been briefed beforehand and given the key points they should get across. The role play shows, very powerfully, the misperceptions which non-disabled people hold about disabled people and the discrimination which exists within the scheme. These were uncovered during the evaluation and the information recorded. The role play stimulates discussion and moves the group towards a decision of the actions that should be taken to change the situation.

***ACTIVITY* 8**

Answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think Aaron decided to put the information across in this way rather than just reporting it verbally?
2. What makes drama a powerful medium for conveying information?
3. Could you use drama for any of the information you have to convey in your evaluation?

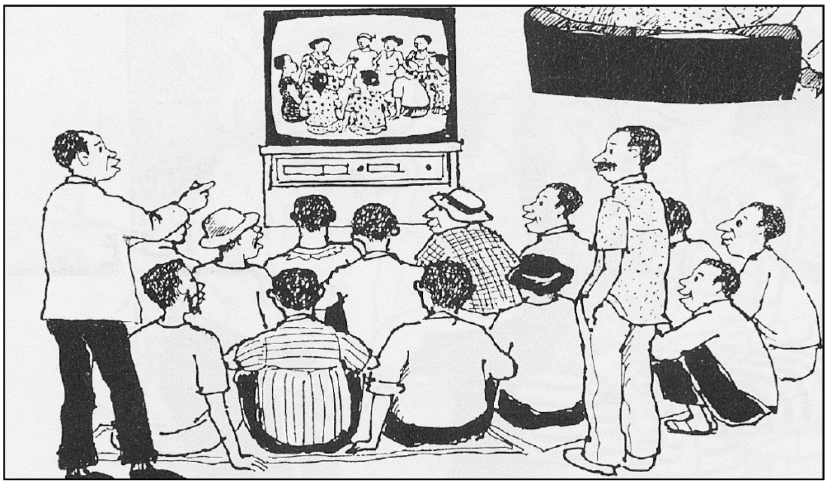
Comment

Were your answers similar to these?

1. Because he knew he could get his message across much more effectively through role play.
2. Drama coveys information through our senses and uses emotion to express things, so it is much more powerful than just delivering a message verbally.
3. You almost certainly could! Think about how you might use it.

Using pictures, slides, photographs and video in evaluation.

Have you heard the phrase, ‘A picture’s worth a thousand words,’? It’s generally true. Pictorial information is much easier and quicker for us to absorb than a line of text. So pictures, slides, photographs and video images can get a message across much more effectively than a speech. Video has the added advantage of having commentary as well – so we receive the message both visually and aurally (through our ears).



‘I wasn’t actually thinking about the their unusual accents but that’s an interesting observation.’

Pictorial images are particularly useful for people who are not accustomed to the written word, or who have not learned to read. We often use images in training, but how often do we think of using them during the final stages of evaluation? Yet they can provide us with an extremely productive means of feeding back information, getting additional opinions or suggestions, and stimulating discussion.

ACTIVITY 9

Employability is a service whose main objective is to help people with intellectual disability to get paid employment. They have had little success and want to find out why, so they decide to have an evaluation.

Imagine you are one of the evaluators. How could you use pictorial images (photographs, drawings, videos etc) to do the following:

- Interview service users to get their views on the obstacles to employment?
- Find out what kinds of jobs they would prefer?
- Check back to see whether the information you have gathered is accurate and reflects people's views?
- Report back on findings to all participants?
- Get suggestions from participants on how the obstacles might be overcome?

Bear in mind that the majority of service users have not learned to read or write.

Comment

Did you suggest any of the following:

Interviewing service users:
- Use photographs of people doing different jobs;
- Use photographs depicting different obstacles to employment, e.g., employers, inaccessible buildings;
- Ask people to get into groups, discuss the problems and draw pictures to symbolise the obstacles;
- Video discussions (with the permission of the participants, of course).

Checking back to see if information is accurate and reflects the views of those interviewed:
- Use chart with pictures and/or symbols, rather than numbers or writing;
- Use slides of people in jobs, or of obstacles to work;
- Use extracts from the interviews you recorded on video during the evaluation.

Getting ideas and feedback from participants:

- Put people into mixed groups, or single category groups (e.g., service users in one group, staff inanother), and ask them to draw pictures, charts or posters to represent their ideas and to use these while giving feedback;
- Give each group pictures representing the obstacles and get them to select the three which they think are the biggest.

Summing up suggestions:

- Use picture charts or symbols;
- Produce an obstacle wall (remember this from unit four?).

You probably had several other ideas. All it needs is imagination! Experiment with visual aids at different stages of the evaluation process, but test them out beforehand to make sure they work. But take care that the *method* doesn't become more important than the *message.*

Action planning

Do you remember in the introduction to this book we emphasised the fact that evaluation is part of the development process in a service, project or programme? And that evaluation is only useful if it leads to change? We can summarise it like this:

Evaluation

↗ ↘

Change and development ***Feedback***

↖ ↙

Action

In this, the last part of unit six, we come to the final stage in the evaluation process: action planning. However, it is only final as far as this book is concerned. In evaluation terms it's another beginning, which will lead to ongoing development and improvement.

The process is:

Deciding what kind of action is required
➜
Drawing up an action plan
➜
Putting the plan into action
➜
Monitoring the outcomes

Let's think about this in more detail.

Deciding what kind of action is required

You have now completed your reporting back to all stakeholders. They have joined in discussions and contributed to conclusions and recommendations. It is now time to act on the recommendations. But how? Together, you need to decide on a series of actions which will help move the project, programme or service forward into the next phase of development. The stakeholders make a number of suggestions of how this should be done. But which of the many options should be selected and developed into an action plan? Decisions have to be made!

There is a SMART way of doing this. SMART means:

Specific
Manageable
Achievable
Relevant and realistic
Time-limited

SMART is a formula often used to check out objectives, but it applies equally well to actions.

Let's try SMART out on the example in activity 9, of people with intellectual disability trying to get jobs. Imagine that the options suggested for achieving the goal of getting people into paid employment are:

- Build better relationships with employers so that they understand the potential of service users as employees;
- Consider alternatives to jobs on the open market;
- Do more research into the reasons why people are not getting jobs;
- Explore possibilities of families being more fully involved;
- Find out what other services in the locality have done to help people get work.

To apply SMART to this list of options, we need to ask these questions about each one:

- Is this option stated clearly enough for people to understand and take action? (S)
- Is it manageable in terms of resources and staff capacity? (M)
- Can it be achieved within the time and with the resources available? (A)
- Is it relevant to the goal? Is it realistic in terms of the opportunities available locally, the context of the service and the capacity of staff and service users? (R)
- Can we set a time limit on it? (T)

These questions, or ones that are similar, will help to decide which of the actions are the most relevant and appropriate. They will also raise other questions, e.g.,

- Will a new member of staff have to be appointed to take charge of this aspect of the service?
- Will an existing staff member have to receive further training?
- How will service users and families be involved?
- Are there other sources of support, e.g., volunteers?

Can you see how SMART might be useful in your evaluation?

Developing the action plan

Once you have identified the most appropriate actions, your decisions have to be recorded as an ***action plan*** which should specify in *do-able* terms:

- Each action which is to be taken;
- Who is to do what in connection with each of the actions identified;
- How the action is to be carried out;
- When it is to be done and completed by (some actions are ongoing, so you might have to have interim time limits for certain aspects);
- What resources are needed;
- Anything else which is relevant to the situation.

Putting the plan into action and monitoring developments

Action plans should be:

- clearly written and easily understood by all involved; this means that you might have to produce different versions, e.g., in different languages or using pictures;
- circulated to all participants, so that they can then be discussed and revised as part of the ongoing process;
- acted on as soon as possible;
- monitored regularly to make sure everything is on track and to deal with any problems;
- regularly reviewed and revised in the light of experience and development.

Problems in action planning

In theory, things will change as a result of evaluation. Action plans will be acted on immediately and will work! However, we live in the real world and life isn't like that! So we have to be prepared for the things that can go wrong and have some ways of dealing with them. People sometimes don't want to change, because they are comfortable as they are, or are afraid of change, for instance.

'They must be joking –
that'll never work!'

In most cases, the reactions are defensive. People need support to work through them. Be aware of the following possibilities:

- They might feel that change is being forced upon them;
- The change may threaten or disturb their way of working;
- It may alter the power relationship and make them feel less important;
- They might be afraid of failing and afraid they will be blamed if things go wrong;
- They might not understand what is being suggested and be afraid to say so for fear of looking stupid.

Evaluators, in their role as *facilitators,* have a key part to play in helping deal with these barriers to change. There are no set answers, but some guidelines:

- Work out why there is resistance;
- Make sure people are fully informed and involved in the decisions;
- Lead from the back! This means, start with *their* ideas and work forward from there, giving people a little push now and again;
- Make it clear that the process of change is a partnership;
- Enlist the help of those who *do* want to make changes;
- Take your time; don't try to rush things;
- Seize on any change that does happen, no matter how small, praise people and reinforce their achievements.

Being a realist
So, we have come full circle. This evaluation cycle is finished and we hope that it will lead to the change and improvement which is needed. This will require the commitment, enthusiasm and energy of all those involved.

But, evaluations don't always change things in the way we want. Fortunately, few of them are disastrous. Most have some impact, but possibly not as swiftly or as extensively as we might like. Some of the changes which occur because of an evaluation are obvious, others less so. This is fine. Evaluations are not meant to be instant cures. Rather they are ***systemic,*** meant to have a gradual effect on the whole system, so that everything becomes stronger and better.

So don't be disheartened, or turn into the person who says, '*We tried it before. It doesn't work*!' Your next experience will probably be entirely different. Remember too, that change takes time. There might be all sorts of little changes going on beneath the surface that you're unaware of.

And what is your role in this ongoing change and development process? Well, this depends on your particular situation and your work responsibilities. You will almost certainly continue to have a *support* role and you may also be involved in *monitoring* progress and development. There may be *actions* you are required to do. You may also be involved in the ongoing *collection of information* and in *reporting back* on progress. Perhaps the stakeholders need help in using the information from the evaluation as the *basis of a project proposal.*

Learning from experience

Whatever part you continue to play afterwards, you'll have learned a great deal from the evaluation process, no matter how experienced you are. And your experience is unique to *you,* so it's important to reflect on it and identify the lessons learned. Reflection is most effective if it is done both individually and in a group. We look at both in this final section of unit six.

Your reflections will have been ongoing throughout the evaluation both when you thought about things on your own and when you discussed them with others. This ongoing reflection is vital as it enables you all to adapt and be responsive as you go along.

Individual reflections
The suggestions below should help to stimulate your thinking. Adapt them to suit yourself.

- Look back over the notes you made during the evaluation, especially at comments and points you highlighted; there's no need to read everything – be selective, skim and scan;

- Listen to tape recordings, look at photographs and watch any videos made; these will help transport you back to the situation in which they were made;
- Ask yourself questions, like:
  - What surprised me during this evaluation?
  - What was new?
  - What was difficult?
  - Who and what stick in my mind and why?
  - What worked well and what was problematic?
- Make notes as you think; get into the habit of 'thinking on paper';
- Write down any questions still in your mind so that you can think about them and possibly share them with others;
- Spend time on your reflection; don't feel it's time wasted – it's not; it's real work;
- Try to get an opportunity to discuss your reactions with a colleague or mentor.

Reflecting with others

- Spend time reflecting with other evaluators. Share your reflections, opinions, impressions and experiences.
- Structure your reflections and discussions by using questions. For example:
  - What worked particularly well in this evaluation? Why?
  - What didn't work well? Why?
  - What should we have spent more time on? Less time?
  - Where were the gaps in our information? Why?
  - What were our strengths as a team? As Individuals? Our weaknesses?
  - What would we do differently next time?
- Go through the different stages of the evaluation, if you haven't already covered them, and discuss strengths and weaknesses. Share any questions still unanswered. Discuss any conflicts.
- As well as the structured part, give some 'free rein' time, when people can just say what they think – like thinking out loud. You might want to use brainstorming here.

- Make a record of the lessons learned and decide how you will use them in the future, both individually and in any future collaboration.
- Bring the reflection time to an end at a pre-arranged time. Don't let it go on until no one has anything left to say or gets bored.
- You might want to involve the steering group in this reflection, or you might want to do it just with the other members of the evaluation team or other coordinators.

Warning: this step of reflection is often overlooked as the team is often so rushed producing the report that everyone tends to be too exhausted to do it! But it is crucial for personal and professional development

Getting feedback from stakeholder groups

In the Southern Africa evaluation, the evaluators asked what the participants thought of the evaluation process by sending feedback forms with the newsletter. The form was designed to be short and straightforward. Participants were invited to return their completed form and to add any additional comments on separate sheets.

The form is shown on the following page in a reduced format.

Southern Africa Evaluation: Feedback Sheet

Part 1: the evaluation process.
Please answer this part only if you took part in the evaluation.

Please circle one answer

1. Did you find the evaluation: useful not useful not sure

2. Did you have a good enough chance to give your opinion?
   Yes no not sure

3. How could the evaluation have been done better?

Part 2:this newsletter

4. Has this newsletter told you enough about the evaluation?
   Yes no not sure

5. If you said 'no' what else would you like to know?
   Yes no not sure

6. In general, do you agree with the things people said?
   Yes no not sure

7. If you said 'no', what would you like to add?

8. In general, do you agree with the recommendations
   Yes no not sure

9. If you said 'no', what would you like to add?

10. Please use the box below to comment on any aspect of this newsletter or the evaluation. Write on a separate sheet if you wish. Please be assured that your comments will be kept confidential and that we will take full account of them in our future work. Thank you for your help.

Because of confidentiality, we cannot quote directly from participants' responses, but we provide a summary of comments in the box below.

- *Without exception, comments are positive; participants appreciate the fact that they have been kept informed;*
- *Agreement with many of the recommendations, especially the one about more specific needs analysis;*
- *More service users should be given an opportunity to air their views. Service users need more opportunity to get together with disabled people from other countries to share ideas. We also need magazines to show us what is happening elsewhere.*
- *Training should be for service users, not staff. There are not enough resources to go round, so money should be spent on service users.*
- *Training and development programmes should be developed with the country, not imposed from outside;*
- *Staff and service users have valued the opportunity to take part in training workshops;*
- *It is always very educative to know other people's opinions on a given subject, even if you do not agree with all of them;*
- *It would be helpful if there was a manual with problems met by other services and how these have been solved elsewhere; every situation is unique, but many factors are common and sharing experience, ideas and solutions is less difficult than sharing funds;*
- *Attendance at workshops in urban areas is too far removed from rural areas, not only in distance but also in experience and relevance; working in rural areas brings its own problems, especially with regard to follow up of service users;*
- *The project document and full evaluation report should be circulated;*
- *It will be difficult to implement the recommendations in all places, because of the vast area to be covered;*
- *Some objectives do not relate to our services; rural needs are very different from urban needs; children's needs are different from adults' needs.*

The evaluators used this method because the stakeholders came from nine countries and about forty services, and the evaluation team members from different countries, so there was no possibility of everyone getting together for reflection.

You can see from the selection of comments given above, that the regional project team have a number of starting points from which to move forward with services in the different countries. These points give them the basis of their action plans for each country.

If it is possible, try to meet face-to-face with participants after the evaluation and 'take soundings' to find out their impressions and opinions of the evaluation experience. You can do this at the end of the report back meeting, or at a separate time.

It's not only at the end of the evaluation that this can be done, of course. You can also gather this feedback at the end of consultation sessions as you go through the evaluation. This will help you to adapt the way you organise other consultations during the evaluation.

Share this feedback with others, as well as your own reflections and those of the team, by writing a short report, producing a newsletter or news-sheet, preferably with illustrations, e.g., 'W*hat You Said About the Evaluation Experience'.*

Is it *Getting Better All the Time?*

We finish where we started – with the title of the manual. Your evaluation experience should have been an enjoyable – if exhausting – one. You should have developed your own skills, especially through your role in leading others through the process. When you teach other people, you learn more yourself!

So it *should* be getting better all the time:

- Your own abilities as an evaluator;
- Your skills in training others;
- Participation between the different people involved;
- And – most importantly of all – the service, project or programme which was the focus of the evaluation and for whose sake it was done.

The lessons you have learned can be taken forward into the other parts of your work. Into the organisation of training courses, for example, for managers, staff and service users or participants who are going to be the future evaluators.

You also need to think about disseminating your evaluations more widely. An easy way of doing this is to share the evaluation reports with others. Or, if there are confidential issues discussed in the report, write a shorter version that can be disseminated. Another good practice is to write a report that includes a mixture of the findings and recommendations of the evaluation *and* the lessons learned from doing the evaluation.

In this way, you are helping to ensure that the whole process **is** *getting better all the time!*

Further Reading

One way of improving your skills and understanding, both as an evaluator and as the trainer of other evaluators, is to read about other people's experiences. Exchanging evaluation reports with one another is a useful way of doing this. It is always interesting to see how other people work – and you pick up many tips! All of the writing done on evaluation, and every other subject, borrows from other people's work, so don't try to go it alone. Build up a stock of useful reports, papers and books as you go along.

Three books that you will find particularly useful are:

Feuerstein, M.T. (1988) *Partners in Evaluation.* London: Macmillan Publishers

Gosling, L. and Edwards, M. (1998) *Toolkits: a practical guide to assessment, monitoring, review and evaluation.* London: Save the Children

McConkey, R. (ed) (1996) *Innovations in Evaluating Services for People with Intellectual Disabilities.* Chorley*:* Lisieux Hall Publications

Self test for unit six

And now for the final self test, which will help you to reflect on unit six. As usual, it's on the next page.

SELF TEST FOR UNIT SIX

1. Who are the different audiences you might have to take account of when planning feedback?

2. Describe briefly three interactive methods of reporting back the findings of an evaluation to participants.

3. Describe how feedback can be made more interesting.

4. Describe two ways of dealing interactively with feedback at a distance.

5. What does SMART mean and how does it apply to action planning?

6. Why is reflection an important part of the evaluation experience?