How to build evaluation capacity

Guidance for organisations that are supporting young people into employment and training

Contents

Introduction

About this resource

The guidance is a **step-by-step guide** designed to support you to develop evaluation capacity within your organisation or team.

It takes you through the **key stages** involved in improving how you monitor and evaluate your work, from basic data collection to preparing for external evaluation.

It draws on Ipsos and NPC's **experience and expertise** delivering support to organisations that are supporting young people to access training and employment.

About the Building Evaluation Capacity project

This resource was funded by Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) as part of a project delivered in partnership by Ipsos and NPC. The project involved the provision of evaluation capacity building support to organisations that help young people to access training and employment. The resource is one of several learning outputs that aim to capture and share knowledge and insights from the initiative.

About Youth Futures Foundation

We are the National What Works centre for youth employment, with a focus on marginalised young people. We find and generate high-quality evidence and put it into practice with policymakers, employers and funders who have the means to make direct and impactful change.

Why is monitoring and evaluation important?

Monitoring and evaluation is essential for understanding how services are being delivered and the difference they are making. It is the basis for:

Learning

- Embedding evaluation in the organisational culture to "test and learn"
- Building skills and knowledge within teams

Assessing if a project is meeting its aims including:

- Impact
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Social value
- Financial value

Informing project development

- Providing evidence for internal learning
- Understanding contexts
- Informing decisions
- Improving delivery

Accountability

- To funders
- To young people
- To organisations
- To the public

Developing the building blocks of evaluation capacity

Definitions

Monitoring - Collecting and recording information in a routine and systematic way to check progress against plans and enable evaluation

Evaluation - Gathering, making sense of and using data and evidence about the effectiveness and / or impact of a policy or programme

Research - Research is directed toward increasing knowledge, the primary aim being more knowledge or understanding of a particular group, problem or issue

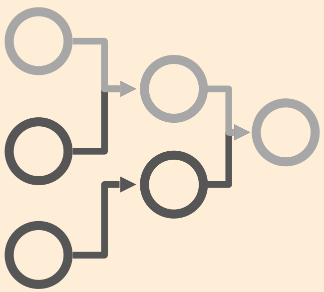
In this section we take you through the main building blocks of evaluation capacity, which includes:

- Setting out how you think your programme will lead to change through development of a **theory of change**
- Describing and exploring beneficiaries' experience of your service through a **participant journey**
- Setting out plans for **monitoring and evaluation** within a **framework**
- Selecting or designing **measures** and **managing, analysing and reporting data**

Source: Scott Chaplowe on Fun and Games in M&E Trainings (2011)

The process

Theory of change and participant journey



M&E framework (indicators & data collection plan)

Output/ Outcome/ Impact	Indicator	Data Source	Frequency	Target

Data collection tools, systems,and management

Enablers

Impact culture / commitment to evaluation

Staff capacity and resources

Developing a theory of change

What is theory of change?

A process for thinking about and describing programmes, projects or organisations that makes logical links between target groups, activities, outcomes and impact.

It's often associated with a visual map but can be represented in different ways.

Why is it useful?

- Helps you consider how change happens in the short, medium and long term to achieve the intended impact
- Allows you to articulate the change you want or expect to see through your programme
- Provides a basis for interrogating and testing your programme theory
- Facilitates team building for employees or volunteers through common goals and shared experiences
- Aligns stakeholder views on what success looks like and the best way to get there
- Acts as a foundation for strategy, evaluation and communication

Potential challenges and considerations

Youth Employment Services are not 'one size fits all' and are typically tailored to individuals' circumstances and needs.

There are numerous contextual or personal factors that impact a young person's outcomes, which are often beyond your control.

You can mitigate these issues by:

- Differentiating intended outcomes and 'change pathways' by individuals with different circumstances
- Identifying wider factors and assumptions in your theory of change.

Theory of change components

Activities	Mechanisms	Outcomes	Impact
The actions, tasks and work a project or organisation carries out to create its outputs and outcomes, and achieve its aims.	The process through which your activities and outcomes will cause the outcomes and impact you want to see. Can also be thought of as how people will experience your work and how that experience will encourage or spark them to make changes.	The changes, benefits, learning or other effects that result from what the project or organisation makes, offers or provides.	Longer-term effects of a project or organisation's work that people achieve for themselves. This can include effects on people who are direct users of a project or organisation's work, effects on those who are not direct users, or effects on a wider field such as government policy.

Source of definitions: NPC [*Jargon Buster*]

Example: simplified theory of change for programmes that support young people into training and employment

Activities

- Engagement, recruitment and needs assessment
- Co-development and design (e.g. youth participation)
- Employability and skills training
- Personal development / wrap around support (e.g. mentoring)
- Work experience
- Follow-on activities / support

Mechanisms

Young people:

- Experience support that is tailored to their needs
- Are supported to take ownership of their own journey
- Experience safe and supportive environments
- Find the activities relevant to their needs
- Find the activities engaging
- Develop trusted relationships with staff
- Develop positive relationships with peers

Outcomes

Personal development

- Improved socio-emotional skills (e.g. confidence, self-belief, self-awareness)
- Increased sense of control over career choices

Employment related skills

- Improved workplace behaviours
- Improved employability skills

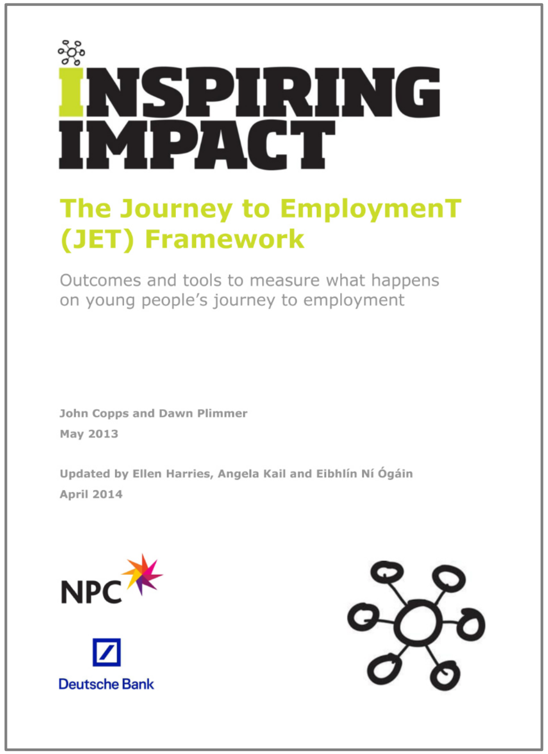
Career aspirations

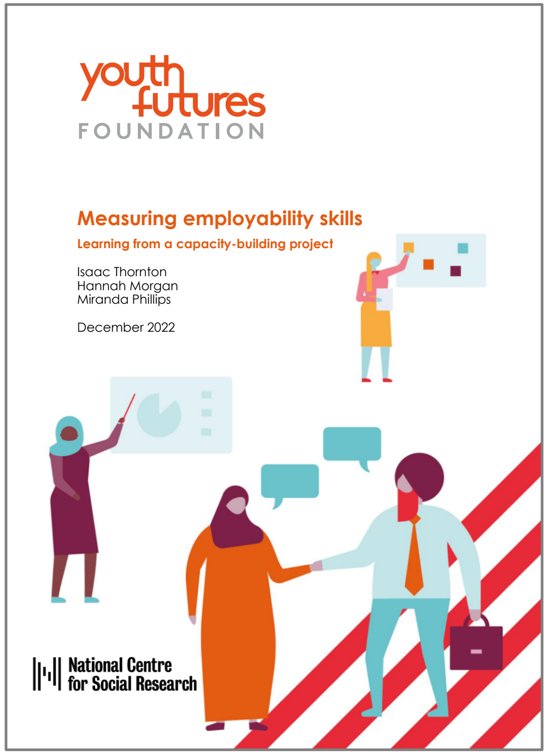
- Increased awareness of personal interests
- Clearer career aspirations
- Positive attitude towards future career

Impact

Young people are in sustained and meaningful employment in careers of their choosing

How to get started with a theory of change





NPC's guide to 'Theory of change in ten steps' takes you through the key stages in developing a theory of change.

NPC's Journey to Employment(JET) Framework and NatCen's guide to Measuring Employability Skills provide additional examples of outcomes that may apply to your work.

Mapping your participant journey

What is a participant journey map?

A visual representation of the key touchpoints your beneficiaries have with your service or intervention, from their perspective.

Why is it useful?

Helps you to understand your beneficiaries' needs, motivations and any sticking points to identify areas where you can enhance their experience and improve impact.

Supplements your theory of change by providing more detail on:

- How target users are identified, engaged and recruited
- The different stages involved in delivery of your intervention or service
- The key stakeholders involved at each stage
- Experiences of different groups of beneficiaries

How to get started

Key steps:

- Map the different stages that participants go through when they engage with your service or intervention. Think about different stages such as 'awareness' through to 'engagement' and 'support'. Identify and capture the key touchpoints at each stage and the nature of the interaction.
- Ideally, you will engage with beneficiaries in this process, who can help you to identify high points (where they have outstanding experiences) and 'crunch' points (where progress through the journey is slowed or where people choose to leave).

Further support:

- Page 12 shows an example of touchpoints through a participant journey, which could be expanded on with help from participants, who can provide insights into how these touchpoints are experienced including the high points and crunch points.
- NPC's guide to user mapping techniques provides examples of ways to engage beneficiaries in this process.

Example participant journey touchpoints

1 Promotion and recruitment	**Referral:** Young person is referred by teacher	**Application:** Young person applies to be part of programme	**Selection:** Young Person is selected onto programme.	**Baseline survey:** Young person completes baseline knowledge, skills and attitudes survey
2 Programme Induction (month 1)	**Workshop 1:** Goal setting and introductions	**One-to-one coaching set-up:** Meeting the coach and 'contracting'	**Work experience matching:** Choosing a placement	**Work placement induction:** Meeting the employer and getting to know the placement role.
3 Programme participation (months 2-12)	**Workshop 2-5:** Employability skills development x 2 Socio-emotional skills development x 2		**One-to-one coaching:** 11 x monthly sessions	**Work placement:** 1 day per week for 11 months
4 End and Post-programme support (months 12+)	**Reflection and next steps:** Review goals and develop new goals and action plan.	**Post-programme survey:** Young person completes post-programme knowledge, skills and attitudes survey	**Celebration event:** Young people and friends/family attend event to mark successful completion of the programme	**Ongoing support:** Ad-hoc support for participants depending on need

Building and implementing your monitoring and evaluation (M&E) Framework

What is it?

A M&E Framework sets out what you intended to measure and how so you can understand how your project or service is performing..

Why is it useful?

- Helps us learn what is working, what isn't, and what's missing
- Tests whether the assumptions in your Theory of Change hold true
- Provides information that helps project teams improve their work
- Provides evidence that represents the views of all stakeholders

Monitoring - routinely collecting information while delivering your services, for example application forms, registers, client management systems.

Evaluation - using information to judge the performance of an organisation or project.

Source of definitions: NPC Jargon Buster

Example structure for M&E Framework

The table below can form the basis for your Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. You may also want to include individuals or teams who are responsible for data collection.

Focus	Indicator	Data Source	Frequency	Target
Feedback: Support is tailored to service users' needs	% of service users saying the support they received was tailored to their needs	Feedback survey of programme participants	Midway through programme delivery and post-programme	80%
Outcome: Improved workplace behaviours	% of young people who are rated as 'punctual' during work experience	Supervisor feedback	Quarterly as part of placement review	90%

How to get started with developing your M&E Framework

1. Prioritise what you want to measure from your theory of change, participant journey map and any other programme objectives.

2. Identify 'indicators' - these are 'well-defined information, which shows whether or not something is happening'.[2] Indicators will help you to measure how well you are doing against the areas you have prioritised for measurement.

3. Design data collection and capture approaches. This includes:
    a. Identifying measures and collecting data e.g. through surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations and using existing data sources such as attendance logs. You should also consider how data will be analysed and reported.
    b. Developing processes and systems for collecting and storing data
    c. Making sure your data collection is ethical and GDPR compliant

4. Analysing your data

5. Interpreting and communicating your findings

[2] NPC Jargon Buster

Step 1: Prioritising what data to collect

What questions do you have about your programme or service? Consider the following questions and record your answers.

Think about WHO you are working with: are you reaching the right people?

Think about HOW people are engaging with the project or programme: what do people think of it / how are they using it?

Think about WHAT difference it makes: what would you need to know to tell if your intervention is working? How often would you ideally review this?

A typology for identifying useful indicators: NPC's 5 types of data

Thinking about five key types of data may help further prioritise what you want to measure. Types 1-4 are likely to be included in your M&E plan. You may also wish to consider **output** data (how much have you produced or delivered) and quality data (what is your own assessment of how well you do things?)

1. User Data	2. Engagement Data	3. Feedback Data	4. Outcomes Data	5. Impact Data
• **Asks:** Is your project reaching the intended target group of young people? • **Establishes:** The characteristics of your project users. • **How often to collect it?** Routinely / at start up	• **Asks:** How effective is the project at continuing to engage young people? • **Establishes:** The extent to which young people engage in the project and how they engage. • **How often to collect it?** Ongoing basis	• **Asks:** What do young people think about the project? • **Establishes:** The extent to which the project is getting the reaction you want, or beginning to achieve its intended effect • **How often to collect it?** Ongoing basis	• **Asks:** How have young people been influenced or helped by the project in the short-term? • • **Establishes:** The immediate resources, benefits or assets that your users gain from the project. • • **How often to collect it?** occasionally (e.g. pre/post project)	• **Asks:** Have the outcomes helped young people to change improve their lives? • **Establishes:** The long-term impact for individuals, families, communities. • **How often to collect it?** At key strategic points / exceptionally

Step 2: Developing indicators

For each aspect of your work that you would like to measure (the outputs or outcomes) you need to identify indicators that will tell you whether or not it is being achieved.

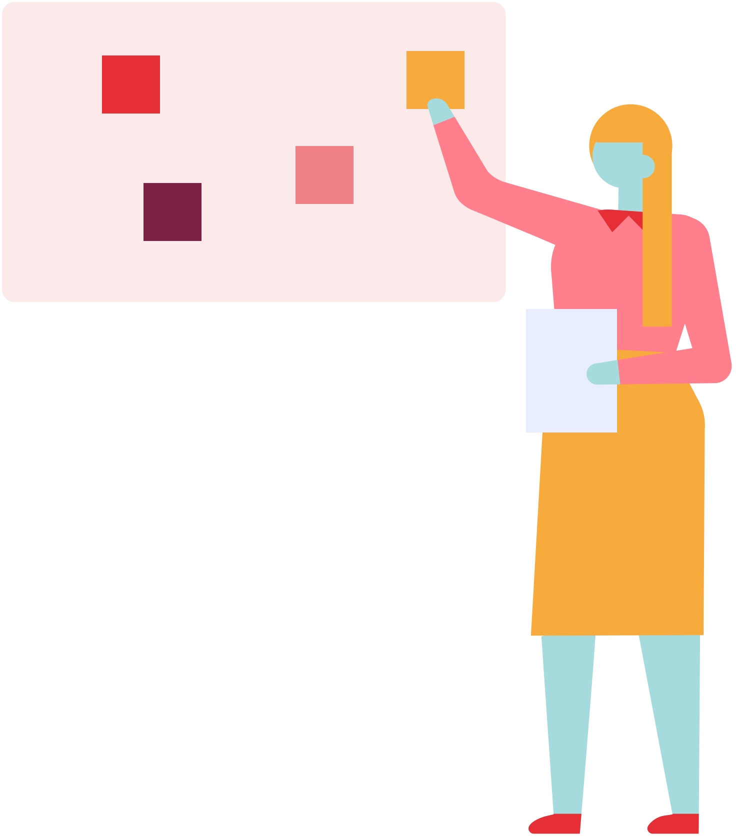
- Indicators should be expressed in **neutral language** (# of x, attitudes about y)
- Indicators should include a **mix of quantitative and qualitative** data, as well as both **objective** and **subjective** measures, to develop a full and accurate picture
- Indicators should be **context-specific**, based on signs of meaningful change
- Only select the minimum amount of indicators necessary - **Fewer, more focused indicators** can improve the quality of data and analysis
- Balance the **burden of data** collection against the **usefulness** of the indicator
- **Revisit and refine your outcome statements in the ToC if needed** - the clearer the outcomes are, the easier they will be to measure

Intrac's guide to indicators provides further information about how to develop good quality indicators.

Setting targets for indicators

You may wish to set targets for your indicators. The following can be used to inform target setting:

- Do you have a baseline on which you can improve?
- Is comparison data available for similar projects with similar indicators?
- Can you estimate a target based on other activities?
- Can you estimate a target based on past performance?
- Can you or others apply your expert judgement to develop a target?
- Have funders or other stakeholders specified expectations?



Baseline – Information about the situation that a project or organisation is trying to change, showing what it is like before it intervenes.

Benchmark – A standard of achievement that an organisation or project (or others like it) has already achieved, which they can compare current achievement to or use to set a target

Source of definitions: NPC Jargon Buster

Step 3: Data collection and capture

In this step we look at how to collect meaningful and proportionate data against your M&E plan.

This includes:

- Identifying measures and collecting different types of data
- Developing processes and systems for collecting and storing data
- Making sure your data collection is ethical and GDPR compliant

Collecting USER data

Collect user data routinely from everyone you encounter as early as possible in your relationship with them. This is because:

- **You are trying to understand reach** – if some people drop out almost immediately, you will not get an accurate picture unless you do it quickly.
- **You have the opportunity to collect it** – because people are accustomed to being asked questions when they sign-up with a new organisation.

An easy way to collect this data is via a sign-up form. This might include relevant question such as, 'How old are you?', 'What is your ethnic group?', 'What qualifications do you have?'.

In some situations, it might be possible to also get user data from partners or referrers who are already working with people and have asked those questions before. This is always worth pursuing if it seems possible—whilst ensuring compliance with data protection legislation.

Ideally, all user data should be entered into a database or client management system against which all further data collected for that individual can be recorded.

Source: *Understanding Impact (NPC)*

Collecting ENGAGEMENT data

Collect engagement data routinely for everyone you work with as part of your basic monitoring processes. Ideally, record it in a case management system.

Objective engagement data, such as attendance, is relatively easy to collect. It gets more complicated when you want capture more detail. For example, how long they stay and what they do. You will need to decide how important this is to your theory of change.

For good data collection, we suggest you:

- Make data entry as easy as possible
- Ask staff or volunteers how they think data should be collected
- Encourage staff to enter data during or soon after interactions with service users rather than storing it and entering it in bulk later
- Ensure staff are consistent in the data they enter
- Try to move to an electronic rather than a paper approach to minimise data entry
- Have processes in place to check the quality and completeness of the data being recorded

Source: Understanding Impact (NPC)

Taking a joined-up approach

Your approach to both user data and engagement data should be closely linked.

Ideally it will be done in the **same system** to:

- increase efficiency
- help you to look at how reach and engagement are related, such as who is coming back

Looking at these insights will inform what strategies you can put in place to retain those who you think will benefit the most.

Source: Understanding Impact (NPC)

Collecting FEEDBACK data

Feedback data can be informal of formal:

	Informal feedback	Formal feedback
Description	Encouraging users to share their views over time and in different ways.	Using structured methods like questionnaires or interviews.
Why it's useful	You will get suggestions for improvement and an early indication of where things could be better. Users might feel listened to and more engaged.	You can direct people towards the specific questions you are interested in, encourage more people to take part and collect feedback from a more representative group. Formal feedback will also be more persuasive for stakeholders and funders.
Example method	• Pop-up surveys • 'Show of hands' • Satisfaction tokens • Suggestion boxes • Social media comments • Just asking people	• Surveys • The data that staff or volunteers collect about peoples' progress • Focus groups • In-depth interviews • Observation/ethnography • Interviews with other stakeholders
Suggested frequency	All the time. Users should feel that you are interested in their views and have a range of opportunities to share them.	Formal feedback can be more infrequent because no-one wants to answer surveys all the time. Different options for delivering a feedback questionnaire are discussed in the outcomes section on the next page. You will probably want to ask for feedback and outcomes data at the same time.

Source: *Understanding Impact (NPC)*

Collecting OUTCOMES data

Choose your tool:

- Review what tools are already available to see if any are suitable to adopt as you'll benefit from testing or validation
- Alternatively, you can also take questions from different tools and build your own (A 'pick and choose' approach will reduce the validity and credibility of your data. See page 30 for support resources)

Take a before-and-after approach:

- Ask the outcomes questions when collecting user data, before they use your service
- Repeat the same questions after they use your service, and again over time if appropriate, to measure change for individuals - you might be able to build outcomes measurement into your routines
- If you can't take this approach, you will have to rely on questions that ask people to say what they believe has changed as a result of your intervention.

Be pragmatic

- Deciding on the best way to administer questionnaires depends on the type of service you offer and the strength of relationship you have with your service users.

Source: Understanding Impact (NPC)

Consider additional or alternative sources:

- You may be able to collect observable indicators of change that can act as proxy information. For example, subjective assessments from staff or volunteers of service users' behaviour or mood
- Instead of a survey, conduct interviews or focus groups with samples of beneficiaries, ideally at a few different times to better understand how things change

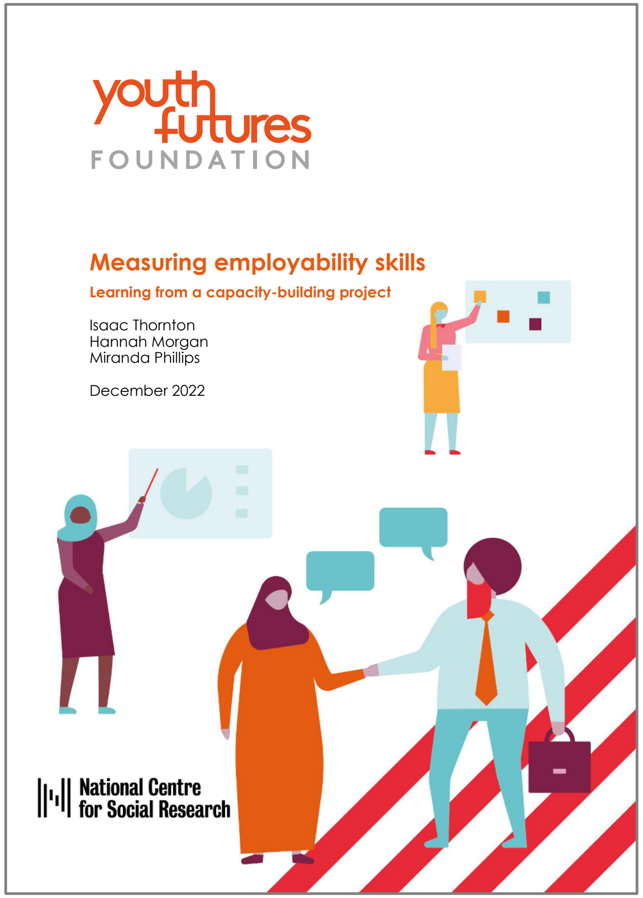
Be pragmatic

- Deciding on the best way to collect outcomes data depends on the type of service you offer and the strength of relationship you have with your service users
- It may not be possible to measure all service users' outcomes due to resourcing, so concentrate your efforts on collecting better-quality data from a sample of service users

Source: Understanding Impact (NPC)

Existing approaches to measuring outcomes of employment programmes for young people

These resources provide guidance on adapting existing outcomes measures and designing your own:



[Measuring employability skills (NatCen)]

[The Journey to Employment Framework (NPC)]

Identifying and implementing an online system

While there are different ways of collecting and storing data, from paper forms to spreadsheets, we advise using an online database because it:

- Provides a **single source of truth** – everyone always updates and uses data from one place
- Is **easy** to cross reference and report on data
- Is **secure** and backed up
- Is **accessible** from different locations and devices
- Can have **automations**, making it less repetitive manual data entry
- Documents who's done what and when – giving a trail to **audit**
- Allows different **access permissions** - people only see what they need to see

You can find out more about how to select and implement an online database in our resource: Data collection systems for monitoring and reporting

Research ethics and data protection

In conducting monitoring and evaluation, you will need to understand and follow ethical research principles. If you hold any information about staff, volunteers, donors or service users, you will also need to store and protect this data appropriately. Below are key research principles that should attend to in your M&E activity:

1. **Voluntary participation** - Do users taking part in your data collection understand they do not have to participate and can leave at any time?
2. **Informed consent** - Do users taking part in the data collection understand what they are getting involved with?
3. **Do no harm** - Do you approach sensitive topics appropriately?
4. **Protected identity** - Are you protecting participants' data?
5. **Neutrality** - Have you taken reasonable steps to ensure the researcher remains objective?
6. **Minimalism** - Are you only collecting what you need to know?

Read more about research ethics and data protection, including GDPR at NPC's cycle for good impact practice.

Step 4: Analysing your data

Data analysis should start with what you need to know. By working through the questions in Step 1 of the M&E Framework approach (page 20), you will have identified your monitoring and evaluation questions. These should form the basis of your analysis.

The way you go about analysing your data will depend on the type of data you have collected:

- **Quantitative data** – Quantitative data is numerical – for example, responses to multiple choice or rating scale questions in a survey. Learn more about analysing quantitative data.
- **Qualitative data** – Qualitative data is not numerical. It may include open-ended responses to questionnaires, data from interviews or focus groups, or creative responses such as photographs, pictures or videos. Learn more about analysing qualitative data.

Source: *Adapted from NPC's cycle of good impact practice: Analyse your data*

Step 5: Interpreting and communicating your findings

You can use findings from your M&E activity to build a clear and cohesive story about your impact and inform future decisions about your programme or service.

Explore the following resources for further information on reviewing, improving and sharing learning:

Working with your findings to improve impact

- Interpret your findings – How can you identify conclusions and lessons from your data?
- Improve your work – How can you use your findings to improve your work?

Communicating your findings

- Share your findings – What's the best way to share your findings and learning with stakeholders?
- Produce an impact report – how can you communicate your value through an impact report?
- Visualise your data – How can you visualise your data to tell a clearer story?

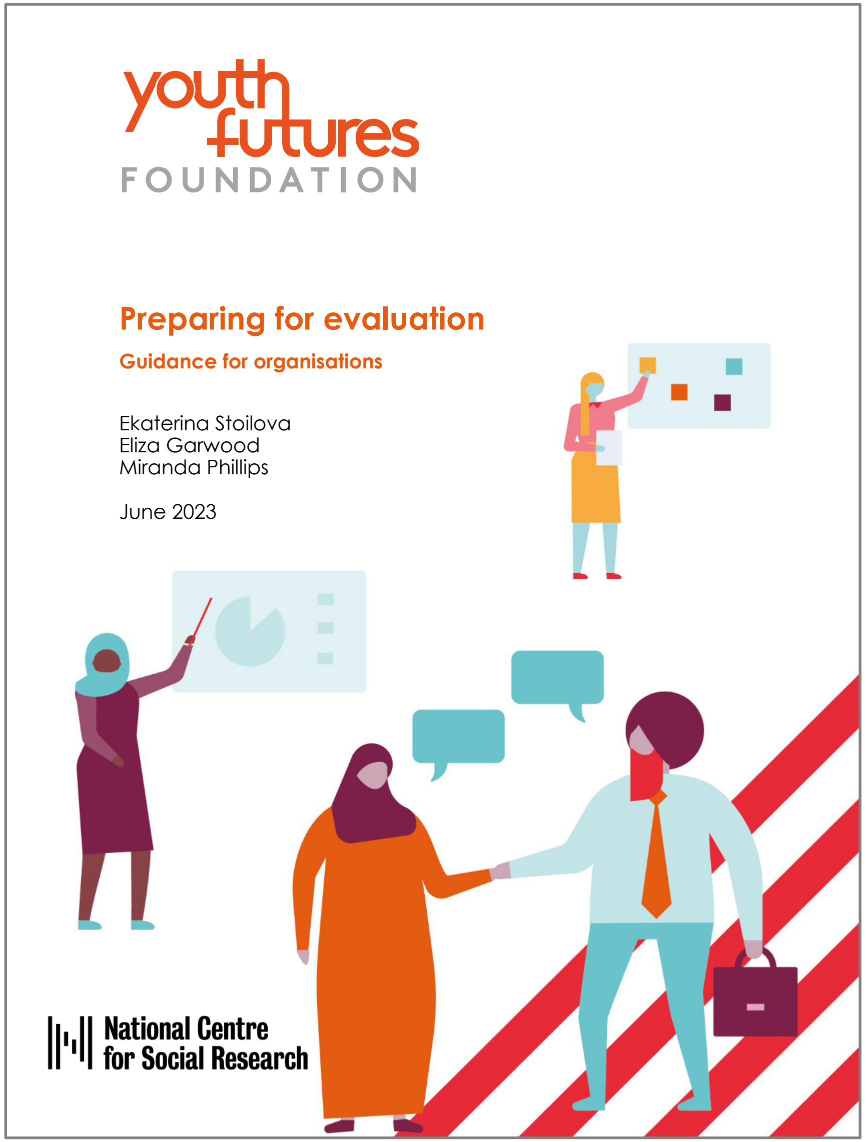
Preparing for external evaluation

As your project or service develops, you may engage with external evaluators, who will draw on the data you are collecting internally to conduct more rigorous, in-depth evaluations of your work.

As part of the Youth Futures' capacity building programme, NatCen produced guidance to support organisations to:

- begin to think about evaluation, build a culture of evaluation within your organisation, and prepare for external evaluation of your work/programmes;
- effectively participate in and support the process of an external evaluation; and
- make the most of the learning an external evaluation can provide

Read more about how to prepare for evaluation.


youth futures FOUNDATION

Preparing for evaluation

Guidance for organisations

Ekaterina Stoilova
Eliza Garwood
Miranda Phillips

June 2023

National Centre for Social Research

Developing a learning culture

About this resource

Using data and evidence is as important as the process of data collection itself. We call this 'having a learning culture'.

Giving time to reviewing data and reflecting on your work can provide helpful insights into what data is missing and what is working so that best practice can be adopted.

It also helps identify what is working less well so you can adapt and improve activities and how they are delivered.

Read more about NPC's approach to developing a learning culture.

Learning culture framework

The best way to think about what a learning culture looks like is to use the **knowledge, attitudes and behaviour framework**.

Knowledge and skills

- Understand your mission and your plan to achieve it
- Understand how measurement contributes to your objectives
- Understand your learning priorities
- Understand your role in measurement and evaluation
- Identify the appropriate analysis and interpretation skills for your role

Attitudes and beliefs

- Believe in the potential to improve services through learning
- Be open to change and innovation
- Be curious about current impact and the opportunity for improvements
- Be generous in sharing learnings
- Accept failure without blame

Behaviours

- Take a learning approach
- Collect and record good-quality, impartial data
- Regularly discuss results and learnings with others
- Try to see things from perspective of service users
- Change actions as a result of learning

Source: adapted from Developing a learning culture (NPC) youth futures FOUNDATION

Get in touch:

www.youthfuturesfoundation.org

@YF_Foundation

company/youthfuturesfoundation