Evaluation and assessment activities (not only) for Youth Work
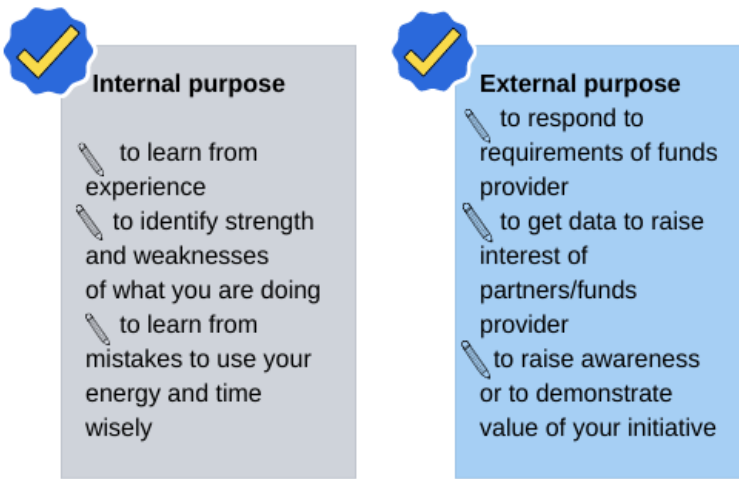
Evaluation in Brief

What is evaluation?

"Evaluation is about using information that you collect to make a judgment about how successful your project has been in making the difference you intended to the people that you set out to support."[1]

What is the purpose of evaluation?

There are essentially two types of purposes for evaluating you activity/project/intervention. Either an internal purpose or an external purpose[2]. In the case of an internal purpose, you are motivated to draw your own conclusions from the results of your initiatives/project implementation. When evaluating for external purposes, the evaluator must respond to external needs, such as requirements of those funding or providing financial support for a project/initiative. Furthermore, one can be motivated to obtain data in order to raise awareness or generate the interest of external parties, e.g. target group, general public, etc. Of course, an evaluation can be motivated by a combination of internal and external purposes.

Internal purpose
✎ to learn from experience
✎ to identify strength and weaknesses of what you are doing
✎ to learn from mistakes to use your energy and time wisely

External purpose
✎ to respond to requirements of funds provider
✎ to get data to raise interest of partners/funds provider
✎ to raise awareness or to demonstrate value of your initiative

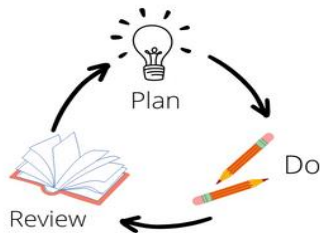*Source: YouthLink Scotland. Impact Evaluation for Youth Work.*

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[1] Youth Scotland CashBack Evaluation Toolkit: A Mini-Evaluation pack for Youth Groups and Organisations. URL: http://www.youthworkessentials.org/media/51060/ys_cashback_toolkit_webv.3_.pdf Last Accessed: 12.10.2022

[2] YouthLink Scotland. Impact Evaluation for Youth Work. URL: https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/4185/impact-evaluation-for-youth-work-youthlink-scotland-2019.pdf Last Accessed: 12.10.2022

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How to proceed with evaluation?

We recommend using the **PLAN - DO - REVIEW cycle**.

Based on this recommendation, evaluation should be an integral part of project/intervention planning. The data is to be collected during the project/intervention implementation, i.e. let us not forget to collect data while we are putting our project plan/intervention in practice. "Review" means to evaluate the effects of your activities/intervention based on the data you have collected. Your evaluation results can thus be used to change your plans for interventions in the future.

Source: Youth Scotland CashBack Evaluation Toolkit: A Mini-Evaluation pack for Youth Groups and Organisations.

Which methods can we use?

There are various theoretical approaches that you can base your evaluation on, and methods to choose from. You should consider your background, the topic of the project/initiative, questions you are asking, and resources that are available (e.g. time available). When you are about to evaluate social or cultural phenomena, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is recommended.[3] Below we will address the main differences between qualitative and quantitative research.

Qualitative research

Evaluation based on qualitative research helps us to visualize "*complex interrelations and structures of social action patterns* "(Goethe Institute, 2016, str. 9). Our aim is to contribute to understanding phenomena, we are describing phenomena in context while using "*verbal descriptions of real-life situations*" (Silverman, 2014, str. 4).

Method	Features	Advantages
Focus groups	*type of group interview enabling interaction between participants *usually 6-8 (up to 10) participants	*enables mapping of collective experiences and group dynamics *useful for marginalized or less well-known topics[4]
Interviews	*different types of interviews (structured, semi-structured,	*method gives voice to someone's unique experience

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[3]Goethe-Institut e.V. 2016:https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf94/culture-works-brochure-september-2016.pdf.
[4]Hendl, J. (1999). Úvod do kvalitativního výzkumu. Praha: Karolinum.

	unstructured interview or biographical interviews) * open-ended questions are used to encourage open discussion (use questions starting with: "who", "what", "when", "where", "how", "why")	*supports understanding rather than explanation (esp. semi-structured and biographical interview)
Case Studies	*enables focus on one situation or phenomenon, and seeks understanding of a phenomenon in its broader context	*enables the evaluator/researcher to seek understanding *enables a view of a case in its complexity *useful for capturing the context of a phenomena
World Café	*work in small groups (4-5 people) with a facilitator *a topic/set of question is given for each discussion round *one discussion is usually between 20-45 minutes, 3-4 discussion rounds *important elements: introduction to the methods and closure (presentation) followed by written report	*enables the exchange of opinions between people who rarely have a chance to meet * helps shed new light on the topic (to see it from different perspectives

Quantitative research

In the case of our evaluation being based on quantitative research, we generate data that will enable us to conduct numerical analysis. In the case of a more complex data set, statistical calculations are to be done (with the help of statistical software). We aim to find "*explanations and correlations*" (Silverman, 2014, str. 5).

Method	Features	Advantages
Social survey	Random samples Measured variables	Representative Test hypotheses
Experiment	Experimental stimulus and control group not exposed to stimulus	Precise measurement
Official statistics	Analysis of previously collected data	Large data sets
"Structured" observation	Observations recorded on predetermined ´schedule´	Reliability of observations
Content analysis	Predetermined categories used to count content of mass media products	Reliability

Source: Silverman, David. 2014. Interpreting qualitative data. Fifth edition. Los Angeles: Sage, p. 11.

The above differences between quantitative and qualitative research were simplified for the purpose of this material.

Tip: In order to get a more complete understanding of the subject, please consult:
Silverman, David. 2014. Interpreting qualitative data. Fifth edition. Los Angeles: Sage.
Evaluation and Assessment Tools and Activities

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Evaluation and Assessment Tools and Activities

1) Planning stage

Theory of change (ToC)

This tool can be used for multiple purposes, e.g. to better understand what the effects of your initiative or project are, to map which sources you need to achieve the aim and how to make things happen in the most effective way.

The use of this tool also makes for suitable background information for the future impact evaluation of your project or initiative.

There are diverse forms to be used depending on the purpose and detail of your overview. For starters, the following form may be used:

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact

Input = necessary resources for your initiative/event/project. It can include financial resources, human resources or material resources.
Activities = this is what you plan to do, i.e. your project´s main products
Output = direct results of you project or initiative. It usually can be quantified (i.e. number of participants of your event)
Outcome = the subsequent effect on the target group, e.g. participants being more motivated to deal with disinformation and to use the tools you have presented at your event. The outcome usually describes qualitative results of your project/initiative
Impact = long-term effect of your activities, i.e. what do you want to change over time (e.g. youth being more resilient to fake news)[5]

Tip: For more information on how to use Theory of Change, not only for evaluation planning but also for monitoring and evaluation, see: www.betterevaluation.org

Tips for advanced students of evaluation:
Please, keep in mind that you should work both with intended and unintended effects on the impact level.

Unintended effects = effects that are essentially beyond your control, but you can influence indirectly by your initiative. The unintended effects can be either positive or negative. The goal is to induce positive effects, but we recommend reflecting on potentially negative outcomes at the beginning, during, and at the end of your intervention.

A mitigation plan for unintended effects is to be drafted, i.e. you are showing that you are aware of them and plan to do something about them.

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[5] Goethe-Institut e.V. 2016:https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf94/culture-works-brochure-september-2016.pdf.

2) Evaluation phase

Beyond the above mentioned methods, the following tools may prove helpful while working with specific target groups including youth. The advantages of the tools are as follows:
- the tools help involve participants in a more engaging way
- the tools are useful in guiding the users through the evaluation process
- the tools are easy to combine and to customize based on your needs, the target group, or the evaluation purpose
- they are fun to use :)

H-Form

An H-Form is one of the tools used within the Participatory Appraisal Approach[6].

This tool helps us map the positives and negatives of a particular issue, while also providing a space for feedback. The feedback may be used to mitigate potential negative aspects.

The tool is suitable for evaluating everything from a single event to a more complex local initiative. The advantage of this tool is that the answers you collect are based on participants' experiences and reflect their needs (what is important for them and what is not as important). It also gives voice to everyone, thus it can be seen as an empowering tool as well.[7]

2. Negative reasons for score	1. How good was the event …? 0 — 5 — 10 Identify 3-5 ways that… could be better:	1. Positive reasons for score

Source: Youth Scotland CashBack Evaluation Toolkit: A Mini-Evaluation pack for Youth Groups and Organisations. URL:
http://www.youthworkessentials.org/media/51060/ys_cashback_toolkit__webv.3_.pdf

Instructions:
1. You can make an H-Form from a large piece of paper or on a whiteboard/blackboard. Post-it notes may be placed on the respective parts of the diagram. Alternatively, you can print one big A3 scheme as a base for discussion (Or you can use an electronic version for on-line gatherings).
2. Ask a simple question: e.g.: How good was the…?

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[6]North East Social Enterprise Partnership (2014). Introduction to the Principles of Participatory Appraisal. URL:https://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk/files/NESEP_Participatory_Appraisal_Handbook_2014.pdf
[7]Youth Scotland CashBack Evaluation Toolkit: A Mini-Evaluation pack for Youth Groups and Organisations. URL: http://www.youthworkessentials.org/media/51060/ys_cashback_toolkit__webv.3_.pdf

3. Give the participants the floor to express their opinions, and collect constructive advice on how to make things better.
4. Make sure you have proper documentation. e.g. take a photo (or screen shot) of the diagram and make it available for diverse purposes later on (to be sent to the participants of the meeting or funders, when applicable).

Quizzes

Another tool you can use for evaluating your event/training session is Quiz designing and distribution. This method is suitable for evaluating activities, especially when you want to engage the participants in discussion or evaluation.

While it may be difficult to make the public answer your open questions (people may be reluctant to share their answers and unique experiences), quizzes with closed questions or multiple options present a timesaving and efficient way to collect data from larger groups of participants all at once.

Using a quiz as an evaluation tool might be beneficial to both the quiz designers and the participants taking your quiz. While creating a quiz you can:
- apply your knowledge in different settings and forms (simplification, etc.)
- learn how to prioritize the information included in the quiz based on topics and/or its relevance
- test your ability to interpret the results

Instructions:

While making a quiz:
- make the questions easy to follow, i.e. avoid framing questions in a complicated way.
- try using different question types to make the quiz as engaging as possible, e.g. open question, multiple choice, scales (when applicable)

While interpreting quiz results:
- make sure you are able to contextualize, rather than generalize, the results, i.e. keep in mind that it is not a tool to measure participant's level of knowledge without context. The results of a quiz focused on participant knowledge, following a training session, also speak to your lecturing skills, and ability to present information in a comprehensible way
- make an effort to make the quiz as anonymous as possible
- do not interpret the results in a way that could shame anyone (i.e. your target group or its part)

Tips for on-line tools to be used for quizzes and polls and included in your activities:
- https://www.slido.com
- https://ahaslides.com/
- https://www.tyform.com
- https://survio.com

Appreciation Line

Appreciation Line is another tool you could use for your evaluation. It should be included in your evaluation activity or satisfaction questionnaire. The participants are given a voice via this tool to express their satisfaction with their participation in an event, or their opinion on certain issues of importance for your evaluation purpose.

Instructions:

Make sure you assign attributes to your numerical scale to reach a general understanding of what the values of the scale mean for the participants, e.g. 0 = poor, 10 = excellent

Pay attention to the order of the questions asked, and especially to the values and their assigned attributes, e.g. it can be confusing and time-consuming for a participant to jump from a question using ascending order to a question based on values in descending order and vice versa.

Make sure your line is visual enough to make it easier for participants, e.g. via simple graphics:

1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐

Tip:
You can give participants space for comments on their reasons for choosing a value, e.g. using the "**washing line**" below. In this way, you will be able to combine this quantitative tool, generating numbers, with qualitative data in the form of comments and explanations. Thus, you can also make sure the participant understood the question.

Washing Line.
Source: North East Social Enterprise Partnership (2014). Introduction to the Principles of Participatory Appraisal, p. 13
URL:https://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk/files/NESEP_Participatory_Appraisal_Handbook_2014.pdf

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The Blob Tree

The Blob Tree is an easy-to-follow qualitative evaluation method. It is handy for evaluating group dynamics, individual engagement, team roles, etc. But it can be easily modified!

The Blob Tree was initially developed by behavioral psychologist Pip Wilson while working with young people. It can be used to help people articulate their feeling and emotions.

The method consists of pictures of various blob-persons on or around a tree. The tree represents a setting, such as a school or a volunteer group, and every blob represents a feeling or position in the group. It can be used both for self-reflection and work with any given group of young people or adults.

Given the characteristics of this method, it will not present you with any quantitative information, but it may help you interpret the data. This method is a fun way to learn about group dynamics or explore how people feel in any given setting.

Instructions:

This method is suitable for individual work, but you can modify it to work in a group too. For our purposes, we will explain the way you can use The Blob Tree when doing interviews with one person at a time.

Instruct the person to look at the picture of the tree and decide which blob they can relate to. It will give you some clues about how they feel in a given program, whether they are climbing the tree or just hanging out on top of its branches. Ask them to elaborate more on their choice and provide some examples.

Unfortunately, this method is pretty specific and contextual; we cannot give you a set of questions to ask. You have to take part in a conversation with the given person. But make sure you are not taking the blobs too seriously - everyone can interpret them differently; sitting on the highest branch might mean for one person that they are running the project and they feel like a boss, for another it may mean that they can calmly chill while others are doing the work and they are just observing. That are precious data!
Just make sure you are not rigidly connecting the blobs and roles without any space for further interpretation.

Tip 1
You can let them color their blob and talk about the colors; this works excellently with younger people and kids! Or, choose a blob for each person in the team, how they see it, and why. There are lots of opportunities if you do not stick to the most straightforward explanation!

Tip 2
You can use The Blob Tree for different activities than evaluation! For example, it is a great starting point when you want to check everyone's mood in the group. Just spread them in pairs, hand them the picture and let participants choose one blob that represents their current mood and why. They can share in pairs or the whole group, depending on its size.

Please mind that the original The Blob Tree sheet is protected by Copyright. If you wish to use the original template, you can purchase it here https://www.blobtree.com/

The Boat

A simple drawing of a boat can help you explore various structures and patterns in your group dynamics while enabling you to keep them in mind for the next session. You can may start the session with it, but it is also a handy evaluation tool. It will not give you quantitative feedback, but rather, an idea of how the group is doing.

The method consists of a flipchart drawing of a boat on the sea, where the sun is shining from above, and some fish are swimming in the water (they are sharks, possibly). Then, the group should discuss a few elements (you can modify them for your needs).

- **Sun** (the positive element) - What do we like, we want this to happen, this was nice…
- **Water** (the unknown element) - What do we fear is going to happen, what we do not want to happen, this was an unpleasant experience, I do not want this to happen again
- **Fish** (the specific element) - Specific concerns or worries, experiences or ideas that should not occur in the group (e.g. misgendering, hate speech); you can specify the kind of fish (shark vs. goldfish) or its size, color, etc.
- **Boat** (the responsibility element) - What can we do about it, how did we face it, what have we done about it, strategies, how can we prevent X from happening

Instructions

- Explain the aforementioned elements (sun, water, fish, and the boat) and their meanings to your participants. Feel free to alternate the specific formulation for your needs.
- Give them appropriate time for group work, which depends on the group size. At least 10 minutes for a small group, definitely not less.
- Let them discuss and ensure the possibility of equal participation. All of the associations should be filled into the mentioned spaces on the picture.
- Get back together with the whole group and let them introduce their posters. Discuss any differences in their boats, and if relevant, include statements for the next session (e.g. I see you all felt boredom from the frontal learning and would like to avoid it next time. I may try my best to revoke our plans in a way that would suit your preference and let you know in advance how it went.)
- Keep the pictures; they can help you evaluate your project. Mark them with the date and group name for better orientation.

This is just a basic instruction; you can adapt the activity for you needs. Use it while doing in depth interview with participants, or at the end of a session.

If you wish to explore more about similar activities, inspire yourself in our e-handbook, **With You*th.**

Tip: You can also use The Boat when working with a new group of participants to set some ground rules and explore their expectations and wishes.

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Temperature check

If you have limited time and do not need anything sophisticated, do a temperature check with your group. It will give you some insight into how the group feels about something specific. Please do not use it for an extended time or complex ideas; keep it as simple as possible.

Instructions

Ask a question, and the group will use their hands as an indicator on a thermometer. The lower the temperature, the more "no, against, negative, never" it means. And, to the contrary, the higher the temperature, the more "yes, in favor, great, agree" it means. The ground is the lowest possible point, and the highest temperature is where the arm is totally lifted. When you say "check," the group raises their arms and indicates the temperature.

Some ideas for questions:

- Did you like this activity?
- How tired are you?
- Can you indicate how energetic you are feeling right now?
- How would you rate the lecture?
- Do you need a break right now?

Remember that you can only ask a question that may be answered by showing the temperature.

Tip 1
Do the temperature check a few times during your workshop. It will help you consider at what times or after which activity the results were the best.

Tip 2
If your group cannot decide something, use a temperature check as a voting mechanism. It gives space to those who are not against it but are also not in complete agreement. You will see if responses lean towards yes or no, and can adjust the mechanism.

Leafy tree

A quick and easy activity for the end of longer sessions and workshops. It is pretty decorative too, and will give you some insight into the opinions of your participants.

Instructions:

To start, sketch a tree on a flipchart or any big piece of paper. Do not draw the leaves, just the trunk, and branches. The leaves will be created by participants from post-it notes or any other sticky paper with their input.

At the end of a session, present your participants with the flipchart with the sketch of a tree. Hand them post-it notes and some pencils or pens. Let them write a comment on a given sticky note and instruct them to post the note as a leaf on the tree branches. After everyone is finished, you will have a complete leafy tree with plenty of comments and input. You may decide to ask them for specific feedback on an activity, workshop, atmosphere, or the content of the lecture; it is up to you.

Sources:

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