

## Writing better evaluation reports

Impact measurement is rightly very topical at the moment; it is of course vital to consider how you assess the impact you make through your work. However, many organisations fall down on collecting the right monitoring information and the basic reporting of their findings.

Do you have a mass of data you don't know what to do with? Sally Cupitt, CES' Senior Evaluation Consultant, gives top tips for making the most of your findings. From getting the right information in the first place to communicating what you find out.

1. **Collect good data.** Many reports fail because their data is poor or there is too much of it. Collect data on what you do and your outcomes, including negative outcomes.
2. **Analyse well.** Spend time with the data, getting to know it, and making the most of it. Analyse the information for your readers and avoid presenting lots of raw data.
3. **Interpret.** Think about what the findings mean:
  - Try to explain how your project works, for whom and in what circumstances.
  - Link outcomes to what was delivered; try also to link outcomes to *how* it was delivered (process). Can you say what works for whom, and when?
  - Don't overclaim. Be careful about assuming that what you did made a change, or that no one else was involved in making that change.
4. **Make simple, meaningful recommendations:**
  - Be careful to make recommendations that flow directly from the data.
  - Make recommendations within the remit and power of the evaluation user (evaluation users are the people making decisions on the basis of your evaluation findings. This will usually be your management team and funders, but can include others too).
  - Develop recommendations collaboratively with evaluation users, where possible.
5. **Present findings logically.** A common outline would be:
  - about the project (headlines, inputs)

- about the evaluation (in brief)
- what was delivered (outputs)
- what people thought of it (user feedback)
- what happened as a result (outcomes)
- discussion (what it means)
- recommendations (what to do next).

#### **6. Write with your evaluation users in mind:**

- Answer their evaluation questions; this may mean finding these out in advance.
- Give them what they need to know to make good decisions.
- Don't give them what they don't need to know.
- Write in plain English, short and to the point.
- Report in a range of ways for a range of audiences.

#### **7. Be honest:**

- Make your findings clear, transparent and easily accessible.
- It's fine to say when things haven't worked – many funders appreciate this as it can be a great source of learning.

#### **8. Maximise use:**

- Help evaluation users feel a sense of ownership of the process and the report.
- Share findings along the way, if possible - don't just wait for the final report.
- Good timing of the final report really helps. Make sure it's ready in time for relevant decision making or fundraising.

Don't forget, CES can help you write better reports in a number of ways. We offer training courses on all aspects of self-evaluation, including presenting findings. We can mentor you through the process of collecting data and writing it up, and we can act as external readers of reports.

For more information on how we can help you through our consultancy or training, please visit [www.ces-vol.org.uk](http://www.ces-vol.org.uk) or call our friendly team on 020 7713 5722.