Reporting Outcomes 4

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Evaluation
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This workbook was created by Evaluation Support Scotland to help organisations plan and evaluate their work and it has been adapted by Youth Scotland for use by youth groups and organisations. Some people find that they can use the workbook on its own without coming to workshops so it has been made available as a standalone resource. However, if you have any questions or would like help to make sense of things please contact either Youth Scotland or Evaluation Support Scotland.

Further copies of these workbooks and copies of blank templates and forms can be found at
www.youthworkessentials.org

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Reporting on Outcomes

A lot of people only start to think about evaluation when they are about to write a report, and most only start to write a report because someone has asked them to! However, it can pay to write reports whether someone else has asked you to or not! Writing your own report helps you learn and improve. It makes writing reports for other people much easier.

This workbook will help you to:

- Write better reports
- Promote your project or organisation to others

How to use this workbook

It's not easy to simulate writing a real report, but in this workbook we will help you to plan what to put in a report and how to set it out.

In our experience, the two most important things to learn are:

Analysis: Before you start to write or plan your report, analyse your data and work out what it tells you (see workbook 3 in this series).

Reporting: Think about who is going to read the report. What you say and how you say it will depend on this.

Give it a go!

Throughout the workbook you'll have the chance to work on examples from your own project or organisation. Look out for the **'give it a go'** sections. Feel free to write in the workbook, or to use a separate piece of paper if you prefer.

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Reporting... is like telling a story

When analysing your information, it's a bit like playing detective. You need to find evidence, piece it together and draw conclusions (see workbook 3 in this series).

Once a top TV detective has pieced together the evidence to solve the crime, they don't announce it just like that. Instead, they enjoy telling the story; explaining where they started, the questions they asked themselves and the answers they came up with.

Telling a story	Writing a report
In the beginning...	What need were you trying to address? (your original aim?)
Along the way...	What did you actually do? (outputs) What went wrong and why?*
In the end…	What difference did you make? What were the key headline achievements? (outcomes)
And the moral is...	What could be learned from your experience? Will you do anything differently next time?

*You might be surprised to see this! However you can learn a lot from looking at what didn't go so well. People, including funders, often want to know: if something didn't work, why not? How could it be better next time? If you show you're willing to learn, it will not be taken as a bad thing.

You might also want to add to the key information of your report by adding in extra information. This could be done by including case studies or appendices such as financial information about the project.

Warning!

It is a mistake to start to write any report until you have -

1. **Analysed your information**
2. **Decided what you want to say**

If you don't do this, your report is likely to be muddled, and the reader will not know what you're trying to tell them. A waste of time and effort.

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Reporting should not be something you do just because you have to, for example for a funder. There are many ways to use reporting to tell your story:

- Your own annual report
- Presentations
- Work report to managers, trustees or colleagues
- Newsletters
- Web pages
- Press releases
- Feedback to staff (e.g. appraisal)
- Report for funder

Of course, the most important person in this is the reader.

Different audiences will want to know different things about your project. If it helps, why not picture your potential reader in your mind as you write? It might also help to think through some of the questions below.

Key question	Common answers	Note
Who is it for? Who is the audience?	Service users. Potential service users. Supporters Funders.* Other staff or volunteers. Partners. Policy makers.	Your audience influences the way you write and the information you include. It always helps to use straightforward language and avoid jargon.
What is the purpose?	Awareness. Information. Decision. Action.	Your report may fulfil one or more of these purposes, but try to be clear on why you're writing it.
What is the message?	Showcase success. Explain challenges. Illustrate learning.	Different sections of the report will contain different messages telling the story, but each message should be clear.

*If your funder asks for a report, try to find out what they expect from you. Don't fall into the trap of thinking the report is unimportant, and rush to get it sent off.

Someone has to read it. They will use it to learn about your project and others like it. Use the opportunity well.

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Give it a go!

1. Who might be interested in your project's story?
2. How could you use the results of evaluation to tell it to them?

Who might be interested	How can you use evaluation results
e.g Local community	A report in the local paper

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Reporting... a suggested template

Report template

Writing a report can be daunting, especially if you've not done it before. However, it doesn't have to be. This template can help you plan what to include. You might not need every section for every report.

It can be useful to have a summary at the beginning of your report. This helps the reader see the key points quickly and also helps reinforce what you want to highlight.

This should include:

Project aim(s) and outcomes:
What goes here?
Your overall aim(s) and your outcomes

Where do I get this from?
Business plan, funding application, Weaver's Triangle* etc

*The Weaver's Triangle is a simple tool created by Charities Evaluation Service to help plan your outcomes. See workbooks 1 and 2 in this series, or download it from our website.

Our activities:
What goes here?
The main activities or services you provide to deliver your outcomes (an outline may do, rather than a full list.)

Headline achievements:
What goes here?
A few sentences that describe your top achievements.
Focus on the outcomes you have achieved.

The main content of your report should include:

Our outputs: main facts and figures about our activities:
What goes here?
The main facts and figures about your activities, for example the number of young people you worked with.

Our outcomes: what did we achieve?
What goes here?
The outcomes you have achieved. Try to be specific. For example: "Many local young people attend our services on a regular basis and have participated in issue based workshops to increase their knowledge. The greatest areas of improvement were in knowledge about healthy lifestyles and skills for employment."

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You might also want to tell the reader about:

What stopped the outcomes being achieved and why?
What goes here?
Any problems you encountered that stopped your outcomes happening. For example;
- staff vacancies
- activities that did not deliver the outcomes you hoped
- problems that were beyond your control

Case Study:
What goes here?
Case studies can bring your reports to life; they tell the human story. Tip: to help keep them brief, focus on the key message. What are you really trying to say?

You should conclude your report with:

Learning for the future:
What goes here?
Key issues that you want to highlight for your board, your colleagues or funders and anything you will do differently in the future.

Summary of how evidence was collected:
What goes here?
A brief summary of how you collected the information for your evaluation.
What methods did you use? Who did you involve?

Name of report author and date it was written:

If it helps you can download a blank report template for your use from:
www.youthworkessentials.org

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Layout and Design

Once you know what to include in your report, it pays to think about
DIFFERENT WAYS OF PRESENTING IT
Some, like the font above, might get in the way of understanding.

Give it a go!

Have a look at the three pieces of information on this page. Which do you find easier to understand?
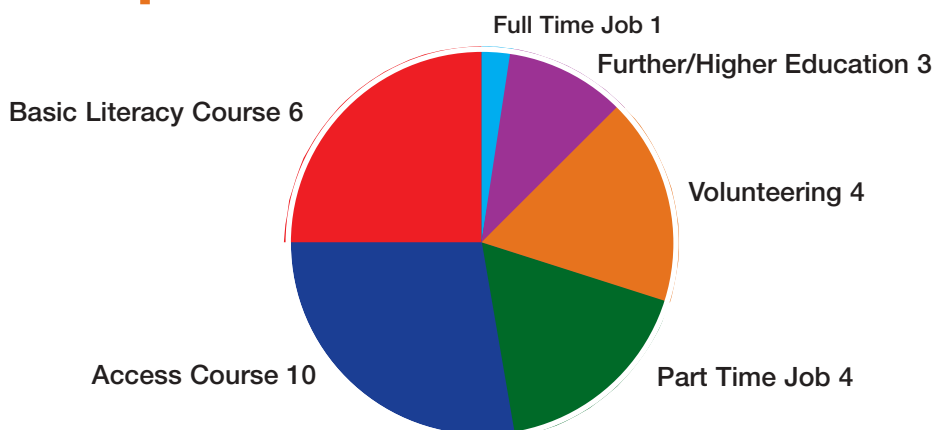
Example 1:

An important impact of our 'Careers Cafe' service for young people was the fact that they achieved positive destinations and engaged with work or learning. Some of the young people went into employment (one got a full time job, four got part-time jobs), three others went onto courses in further or higher education, 10 young people managed to get onto Access courses and six onto basic literacy courses at the community learning centre – where four also volunteered.

Example 2:

Outcomes for young people attending 'Careers Café'

Access Course	10	Part Time Job	4
Basic Literacy Course	6	Full Time Job	1
Volunteering	4	Further/Higher Education	3

Example 3:

Full Time Job 1
Further/Higher Education 3
Basic Literacy Course 6
Volunteering 4
Access Course 10
Part Time Job 4

The information in each example is the same. There's not a right or wrong way to present information, but some might be easier to understand. In this example, most people find the table (number 2) easiest to read, though some prefer the pie-chart (number 3) and some the text (number 1).

It is worth thinking about the visual appeal of your reports, to encourage interest and understanding.

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Don't just take our word for it!

The Scotland Funders' Forum have looked into how reporting can be more useful for funded groups – and funders. While reporting isn't all about funders, they are **important**. The tips they came up with can help you get more out of reporting. For more information look online for the Scotland Funders' Forum.

Good practice for funded organisations

What makes a good report

A good report:

1. **Tells a story** – of what you did and what difference you made.

2. **Is well structured**, concise and easy to read. No fancy phrases or specialist language. Longer doesn't always mean better – brevity can be good.

3. **Makes a clear link to what you planned to do** (or said you'd do when you got the funding). That might include explaining that things have not quite happened as you expected – and why.

4. **Uses numbers clearly.** Funders want to know how many people you worked with and what you did. Don't bewilder them or try to pretend that two sets of numbers relate to different people when they don't.

5. **Provides qualitative information** – not just numbers. Qualitative information provides depth and detail about attitudes, feelings and behaviour and gives a better sense of 'why' and 'how'.

6. **Is clear about what you know** and do not know from the evidence you have collected.

7. **Gives a flavour of individuals' experiences** of your organisation or project (case studies or quotes). Do this once you've told the general story of the organisation or project. A quote or short case study should be used to illustrate your numbers and qualitative information. Make clear whether this is a typical or exceptional experience. Be aware that some funders won't want too much.

8. **Is honest.** Funders know things sometimes go wrong. If you say it was all perfect they might be suspicious and ask questions.

9. **Sets out what you have learned,** what you might do differently in future.

10. **Is submitted by the agreed deadline in the agreed format.**

Some funders like [but check first before you provide this]

- Information about the broader context of the work or partnerships – such as who else you work with, the policy context.
- Supporting evidence such as newspaper clippings. A few but not many funders like DVDs.
- Visuals such as photos or pie charts and diagrams for numbers.

And finally ...

Follow the principle of **no surprises**. If things are going wrong, don't wait until the report is due to tell the funder about the problem. The funder is more likely to be supportive if you give them notice of variations, challenges or changes.

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And finally!

The most important person in all this is the **reader**. What you put in your report and how you lay it out will depend greatly on who is likely to read it.

And someone will read it! It can sometimes feel like people ask you for reports just to create work for you! Try to see it as an opportunity to put your organisation or project across well.

You might be surprised how much you learn from preparing your report too.

Remember…

No-one gets it 100% right first time. Reporting on outcomes can be time consuming and sometimes confusing. Set aside some time to do it properly and try to involve someone else if you can, even just to check that it reads well. You'll then find that you're able to make sense of your information to present a coherent story.

The next step!

Once you've analysed and reported, it's time to put what you've learned into practice and plan the next project. Now you've taken this evaluation journey, it will be much easier next time!

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