the reading agency

Participate: evaluate, review, advocate, sustain

Evaluation is often seen as the final stage of project work. In fact evaluation is part of an ongoing process. Your evaluation strategy should be one of the first things you put in place when preparing your service for the active participation of young people. In order to be able to see how far you've come, you need to know where you started from and what you were aiming for.

Introduction

Evaluation may be the final stage of a focus project but it is also the beginning of a new journey towards the sustained involvement of young people in your service. Having evaluated your recent work, you will want to review your progress, making note of your successes and any areas that need development. Advocacy follows. It's time to celebrate your success and spread the word to new participants, staff members, partners and funders. All of this work will feed into future planning (with new evaluation targets); ultimately ensuring that work with young people is not about tokenistic one-off projects but about sustainable participation.

To help you remember this, we've suggested the ERAS acronym: Evaluate, Review, Advocate, and Sustain.

1 Evaluate

Use this chapter in conjunction with the *Participate Evaluation Handbook*, which is in the Evaluate and review section of Making Change Happen.

Why evaluate?

Evaluation is your opportunity to reflect on and celebrate your achievements and those of young people. It also provides key information about what works and what doesn't, so you can share your learning easily with others.

Evidence of positive outcomes, especially those that contribute to local and national policy areas, can help you to forge new partnerships and to unlock new sources of funding.

Being involved in evaluation also allows young people to reflect on their own achievements, contributing to their personal development and also to accreditation awards.

What to evaluate?

When developing your evaluation strategy, think about which outcomes you are hoping to achieve. In addition to considering external targets such as Public Service Agreement objectives (PSAs), National Indicators (NIs) and internal targets; it can be helpful to consider outcomes:

- for young people
- for the staff
- for the service as a whole
- for the community

It is also helpful to make sure that you are collecting both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Quantitative data (e.g. number of new library members) can be helpful for meeting external targets and creating statistics. Qualitative data (e.g. quotes from young people about their personal development) helps to demonstrate the distance travelled for individuals and can be powerful advocacy tools.

Evaluation tools

Effective evaluation is well-planned, engaging and consistent. When planning your evaluation methodology you could consider using a variety of appropriate tools. Using a written questionnaire such as the *Participate Staff Skills Questionnaire* will be ideal for auditing staff development, but questionnaires are far less likely to appeal to young people. Creative techniques using drama, art or focus groups will be more likely to engage the interest of young people, thus providing more effective feedback. See the *Evaluation Handbook* (in the Practical Planning section of Making Change Happen) for examples and templates of creative evaluation activities to use with young people.

Whilst collection methods will vary, you will need to use simple record sheets to ensure that evaluation is consistent throughout a project; and detailed interviews might be necessary at the end. To evaluate the overall success of a focus project, we recommend using the National Youth Agency's What's Changed tool as a simple and powerful demonstration of real progress.

Suggested evaluation techniques

Use the *Participate Improvement Framework* (in the Strategic Planning section of Making Change Happen) to see how you have progressed. Perhaps you have moved from Medium to Advanced in an area that you selected for improvement. You can

also use the Improvement Framework to see which NIs and PSAs you've met and to judge your progress towards achieving the full Library Offer to young people.

If you asked staff to complete a *Participate Staff Skills Questionnaire* at the start of the process, ask them to complete the same questionnaire again. The results will enable you to gauge the impact of your Participate programme activities on individuals and on the service as a whole as the basis for advocacy and future planning. Other evidence of impact could include:

- Sample interviews with young people, perhaps collected by other young people as podcast files (young people could undertake this consultation work as part of a volunteer role and be accredited for it)
- Sample interviews with frontline staff (again, young people could help gather this information)
- Feedback from young people about improvements to services and about their own contribution
- Details of new best practice developed as a result of your learning through the focus activity and partnership working
- Contribution to wider local authority targets, e.g. for positive activities or volunteering (National Indicators NI 6 and NI 110).

What do young people say?

The What's Changed tool is a template that can be used to map and demonstrate participation outcomes. Crucially it relies upon young people identifying what has changed for them in their own words. What's Changed participation is classified using the *Every Child Matters* outcomes.

To complete it the tool simply requires a description of:

- What young people said (evidence of listening)
- What actions were taken next to address these issues (evidence of action)
- What has changed (evidence of change)

This needs to be completed from the perspective of BOTH young people and the organisation. The tool also provides space for feedback and comment from the wider community and other young people. For the tool to be valid it is essential to have quotes from young people that describe what has changed.

You can use the What's Changed tool at the beginning of consultation with young people and at the end of any focused activity to see if your work has resulted in meaningful dialogue and actual changes to young people's experience of your service. You can download the What's Changed tool and supporting documents from the National Youth Agency website

2. Review

Having collected your evidence, you will want to review your evidence and reflect on your progress. Using tools such as those identified above, consider what has changed as a result of your activities with young people. What were the critical success factors? These are things that you will want to repeat in future participation work. Involve staff at all levels, young people and other partners to draw together the learning so far and to think about how you will turn your learning so far into sustainable whole-service change. Your Participate programme should be part of a process of continuous improvement, not a short-term project with a start, middle and end.

If there haven't been significant changes, think about why your activity has not been successful. What were the barriers to successful involvement of young people in your service? What do you need to do now to ensure that the next phase of activity is more successful? For example, you may need to think about conducting more staff training, or putting aside more time and resources. It is important to remember that getting your work with young people off the ground and sustaining it will be difficult at times.

3. Advocate and sustain

Having evaluated your work so far and reviewed the success factors and areas for improvement: spread the word about the work you've been doing with young people. Your message needs to be positive and will vary depending on who you are talking to and with what aim. It can be helpful to think about audience and purpose.

Who to tell (audience):

- Young people who took part
- Other young people
- library staff at all levels
- youth sector partners
- portfolio holders for children's services, libraries and culture

Why are you telling them (purpose):

- For young people who took part - to celebrate achievement, inform about changes, keep them involved
- For new young people - to inform them about new opportunities for involvement
- For library staff - to celebrate success and motivate new staff to get involved
- For youth sector partners - to broker partnerships and promote services
- For portfolio holders – to generate political awareness and support and raise your profile, to nurture local library champions amongst elected members

What should you tell them:

- Tell young people who took part how pleased you are with their involvement, what you'll be doing next as a result, and how they can get involved
- Tell other young people what's happened so far, what new services are available and how they can get involved. (Better still, get other young people to tell about it, using the power of peer-to-peer promotion).
- Tell library staff what a difference their work has made and how you'll be building on this work
- Tell youth sector partners what you can offer to them and to their young people
- Tell portfolio holders what has been achieved using quotes and case studies and show how the achievement addresses wider local authority targets and aims.

When to tell them:

- Tell everyone as soon as your initial work has finished. If your work has several phases, offer regular updates during the work to encourage others to get

onboard and to keep their interest. Let me them know what's happened so far along with your plans to continue and build on your learning.

How to tell them:

- Tell young people who tool part at celebration events and via groupthing.org
- Tell new young people at promotional events in the library and in schools or youth groups
- Tell staff through staff meetings, a personal letter from young people or the Head of Libraries (perhaps in staff payslips), at seminars and in newsletters
- Tell youth partners through youth newsletters and partnership meetings
- Tell portfolio holders through a visit to a library event or specially organised opportunity for them to talk to young people, and through the Head of Libraries portfolio holder's briefing.

Develop case studies using quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered through the project, to use with partners, funders and young people. Talk to young people about developing a media-based advocacy tool – e.g. using groupthing.org or making a film. Young people could apply for funding through the Youth Opportunities Fund for this work, or approach the local V.

The Reading Agency is keen to hear about your experience of working with young people and will be happy to collate and share information and learning for the benefit of all Participate authorities.

Remember that participation work with young people needs to be continuous. At the review and advocacy stages, you should already be well on the way with planning how you will scale-up your learning and involve more young people in more ways in service development, delivery and evaluation. Use the Participate practical modules Involving Young People, Creative Reading and HeadSpace to help you expand your services and your offer for young people.

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