Module 5: Evaluation Tools and Techniques

Gathering Qualitative Information

There are many methods for collecting feedback and information from people who have used a service or a project. Some are quite formal methods (such as questionnaires or interviews with set questions) while others are less formal. This is referred to as qualitative information.

> Qualitative information is about researching and gathering the observations of people involved in your project rather than raw numbers.

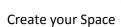The table below provides some examples of methods to help you do this. Remember, it may be that a combination of these methods will work best for your particular project and you should make sure the methods you chose are appropriate to the indicators you have chosen.

Method	Description
Observation	Observation (i.e. watching and listening without taking part) is a good way of gathering qualitative information. It's useful to assess how people respond to a project. Seeing and listening are key to observation and it is particularly useful to capture information without being dependent upon peoples' willingness and ability to respond to questions. You need to obtain permission from those involved to watch the activity. You also need to establish whether you will take part in the discussion or activity or whether you will simply watch and listen in a non-participatory way. In undertaking observation it is worth recording some basic information about the environment, the purpose of the session, the location, date and time, and some information about attendance.
Interviews	Interviewing people involved with or being supported by your project (sometimes referred to as beneficiaries) is a tried and tested method for collecting information about soft outcomes. Some key pointers for undertaking one to one interviews include: • Develop a brief interview guide to ensure that key points are covered and that the conversation does not digress too much. • Avoid using the guide as a questionnaire. Use it more as a checklist and try to have a natural conversation with the person or people you are interviewing. • Start with open and easy questions and keep any challenging or sensitive questions towards the end. • Avoid using closed, confusing or leading questions. It is often useful to take notes during the interview and to record quotations as these can be powerful evidence to use in any evaluation

	reports or case studies. If appropriate the interview could be recorded but this will require the interviewee's permission before hand and may inhibit the discussion.
Focus Groups	Focus groups provide a setting to collect information in a social context allowing specific topics to be explored in depth with a group of selected people.
	Focus groups can be a useful way of gathering feedback but it is important to plan ahead. Make sure for example that you arrange the event at a convenient time and venue that suits people. Allow time for comfort breaks and if you can, offer some light refreshments.
	Some key things to bear in mind when arranging focus groups are: • Focus groups require resources to plan and arrange properly so that the right beneficiaries, partners or people are recruited. • Focus groups work best with between six and 12 people and it can sometimes be worth offering an incentive to attend. • Try to keep your focus group to a maximum of one hour. • Use a limited number of open questions to direct the conversation and which allow people to tell the story in their own words. Examples might be "What did you think?" and "What difference has XXX made to you?" • It is useful to use probing techniques such as repeating questions, asking for more detail, asking when, what, where, which and how questions; and adding neutral comments such as "Why do you feel like this?" • Ideally, focus groups need to be run by an experienced facilitator who remains neutral, can listen and encourage everyone to participate.
Joining in	Going for a walk, or helping out on the ground can provide opportunities for observing a project in action. Chatting in informal settings can be more productive than holding formal interviews Allowing participants to direct the conversation can open up opportunities to discover things you might not have been aware of. As with interviews it's helpful to take notes from this kind of activity.
Diaries or Journals	A diary or journal can be useful for capturing a beneficiary's record of observations, events and behaviour. Asking people to write a few lines can be less intimidating than asking them to "write a report" or "answer questions in an interview".
	Making regular notes of things that happen, observations and reflections can be a simple, easy way for people to record information. The data collected can also have the advantage of showing whether/how things change over time and any links between events.

	If you decide to use this method, select a small number of people involved with your project/beneficiaries to complete a diary or journal covering issues such as: • Activities and interactions • Emotions, feelings and health • Thoughts on changes over time This method is potentially quite resource intensive for those you want to involve, so you may need to factor in that some could lose interest over time. It is also worth considering that any time delay between the observations and completion of the diary may mean that beneficiaries won't be able to remember much about the experience or their reaction to it.
Digital Storytelling	Digital Storytelling is a media form that uses still images and a person's voice to create a short film that can be published on the internet, on DVD or embedded into a presentation. Recording a person speaking into a small, portable voice recorder, and then editing some still images to accompany the voice creates a Digital Story. The editing and production process is completed on a computer and can be achieved using easily available software. A Digital Story can be a simple slideshow of images with a voice track, or it can be more sophisticated using music and special effects. There is no use of a video camera, so people do not need to worry about speaking "on camera" and all the associated trepidation that comes with this. The images that are used in a Digital Story can be family snaps from a photo album, pictures from an organisation's photo archive or new photographs taken with a digital stills camera. The use of archive photographs encourages a sense of reflection or "looking back" that can be particularly useful in the context of self-evaluation.
The Outcomes Star	The Outcomes Star is a set of tools for supporting and measuring change when working with vulnerable people. There are over twenty versions of the Outcomes Star – some of which have been adapted for use with specific audiences e.g. the 'Older Person's Star', 'My Star' for work with children and young people, 'Wellbeing Star' for adults managing long-term health conditions and 'Community Star' for community involvement projects. Developed by Triangle Consulting, these stars each have six to ten key outcome areas for measuring change against. Further information about the Outcomes Star can be found at http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/. Training on the use of the Outcomes Star can be accessed from Triangle Consulting http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/outcomes-star-training Please note that this is a commercial product that has to be purchased.

Most Significant Change	Most Significant Change involves gathering stories from your community, beneficiaries or partners involved in delivering your project. You can either get them to write their story, ideally about their experience with your project and the difference it has made. Or, with their permission, you can interview some of your beneficiaries and write up the story yourself. Once you've gathered several stories, the most significant change concept involves getting people to sit down together, reading the stories and discussing the value of the reported changes. If you do this regularly enough, it can begin to help you focus your attention on the results and outcomes your project is having. You can find out more about most significant change at: http://www.kstoolkit.org/Most+Significant+Change

Gathering Quantitative Data and Information

Questionnaires and surveys are good ways of gathering information from a large number of respondents or beneficiaries. Researchers sometimes refer to this as 'quantitative' research.

There are three common ways of doing a survey and there are pros and cons to each of these approaches.

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Paper surveys	• Relatively inexpensive (other than printing and distribution costs) • Un-intrusive for respondent and can be completed in own time • Respondents can secure support from carer/family to complete survey	• Usually fairly low response rate unless survey is administered to a 'captive' audience e.g. at an event • Little control over sample e.g. difficulties associated in achieving quotas say for male/female responses • Respondent has to work through questionnaire 'routing' themselves – in other words, work out which questions are not relevant to their circumstances
Face to Face or Telephone surveys	• Usually good response rate • Greater control over sample size and desired quotas • Can be administered over tight timescales	• Relatively expensive – requires researchers' time • Training usually required for researchers • Danger that researcher bias is introduced to responses

Web surveys	• If project has software and skills in place it is a relatively cheap method • Automatic routing of questioning dependent upon prior answers • Ability to issue automatic reminders to non-completers so as to boost response rate	• Only appropriate for respondents with access to internet and confident in using ICT • Varied response rate, depending on purpose of survey and nature of target group

Survey Resources

The amount of resource you need to allocate to a survey depends a lot on what kind of method you use and how much data you want to collect. At a basic level, you can prepare a research questionnaire with a word processor and make copies to distribute on paper or for use by telephone researchers. You also need to think about how you will input, collate and analyse the data you get back from your survey, perhaps using a spread sheet.

This is fine for a small scale survey and relatively straightforward questionnaires. For larger, more complex surveys, it's probably worth considering survey software such as:

- Survey Monkey: A basic, free survey tool for on-line questionnaire design, data collection and analysis. Users are able to design surveys with up to 10 questions per survey and up to 100 responses per survey free of charge. Additional features can be purchased. Details can be found on http://www.surveymonkey.com/

- Snap Surveys: A survey tool for questionnaire design, publishing and analysis of online, paper, and telephone surveys. There is a charge for the software and details can be found on http://www.snapsurveys.com/

If you intend to work with an external evaluation partner, and they plan to do a survey of their own, it's worth making sure that beneficiaries and your project partners are not over-burdened with evaluation interviews: try to plan ahead and co-ordinate survey activity relating to your project.

Additional considerations for Create your Space projects

In addition to surveys to collect information and evidence from participants, Create your Space projects might wish to consider how they can gather bio-physical or geographic information to measure physical changes to specific sites over time. This could be done via the use of ecological surveys, photography/aerial photography or mapping software such as GIS.

The Create your Space programme also actively encourages projects to try out new and innovative approaches. In terms of evaluation, think about how you could do things a little differently. For example:

- Using art and visual aids, photography or video to highlight visual changes that have taken place in the environment or to capture activities that have taken place within a community

- Utilising automatic counters to measure footfall at specific sites, particularly if there is a tourism/visitor attraction element to the project

- Making full use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube for simple evaluation data gathering or to distribute surveys to specific audiences

- Presenting evaluation information in fresh, new ways such as infographics, word clouds, sketch mapping and interactive maps

Remember, your OB3 evaluation adviser is on hand to help provide advice and guidance on the various tools and techniques available and how they can best be utilised to gather evidence against your chosen indicators.