

rethinking
CRIME & PUNISHMENT

Right From the Start

An Evaluation Toolkit for Funded Projects

www.rethinking.org.uk

Introduction and Aim

Introducing Evaluation

Rethinking Crime and Punishment is committed to ensuring that all the projects we fund are appropriately evaluated in order to ensure the impact of the initiative and learn about what works.

The purpose of this toolkit is twofold:

1. To provide us with information about the reach, rationale, innovation and outcomes of your project.
2. To provide you and your project with detailed, practical information which will maximise the likelihood of the project reaching its objectives.

The general perception of evaluation is of a process which happens after the project has finished - however, the tools in this toolkit are to be used before, during and after the project.

If used properly they will help you to ask the right questions, to make sense of the answers and to take action which will affect the outcome of your project.

Some of the questions asked in this toolkit will have already been covered in your initial funding application, but it is helpful if you re-enter the information here. Where possible, please keep your information concise. We are not looking for essays, but for simple, concise information that will help us to find out what impact RCP is having.

Effective Evaluation

- is a circle of question, answer, conclusion, and action, all of which provides a continuous stream of rich, detailed, practical information.

- can help you in your planning and analysis before and during the event, as well as help you to assess the success or otherwise when the project is finished.

- will help you to make the best use of your resources.

- provides encouragement and motivation by showing verifiable levels of success

- provides accountability for all projects – particularly for innovative projects that have a short, exciting lifetime.

- identifies successful strategies for future projects

- contributes to general knowledge about criminal justice campaigns, activities and projects.

The Tools

This toolkit contains 5 'tools':

Project Overview

Evaluates what records are needed, evidence from previous activities, the overall aim of the project and the measurements needed at the start.

Stakeholders and Target Audience

Evaluates and identifies those groups involved in the project: the stakeholders and the target audience.

Setting Objectives

Identifies the targets against which your project will be evaluated.

Interim Evaluation

Evaluates how well your project is progressing, indicating where changes in strategy are necessary and give a renewed sense of direction.

Results Evaluation

Evaluates the success or failure of the project, identifying which parts worked well, and which parts didn't.

Using the Tools

Each tool will help you to ask - and answer - key questions about the aims, progress and final outcome of your project. When answering the questions it is important to be as objective and as specific as you can.

Objective

It is important that your evaluation is objective and dispassionate. This can sometimes be difficult when you are closely involved with the project itself. Naturally you may feel strongly about the cause you are pursuing. Nevertheless, it is important to make sure that you are not wearing rose-tinted glasses. The more objective the evaluation is, the more helpful it will be to your project. If necessary you might want to bring in someone from outside the project to help with the evaluation. For some major initiatives it might even be desirable to employ external evaluators. Where necessary we will be happy to talk to you about this and suggest appropriate evaluators.

Specific

Equally, it is vital that your evaluation contains measurable, specific and quantifiable information. What are the specific activities that you are going to do to reach your goals? How many people have you reached? Be as precise as you can - both in your aims beforehand and in your measurements of what has actually been achieved.

1. Project Overview

The Overall Idea

Many organisations fall into the trap of never defining in the first place, what their project is actually about. What is it going to do? What is the theme? Without oversimplifying, try to state this in as few words as possible – the aim should be for clarity and focus.

What is the overall idea and purpose of the project?

Data and Records

The records an organisation keeps are vital in its evaluation activities. Sources of data include activity levels, demand for resources, letters, requests, telephone calls, enquiries, website hits, survey results, production of leaflets, issue of press releases, etc. All these can provide highly valuable data for evaluations.

What data will help you when you come to evaluate?

Evidence from previous activities

Wherever possible, projects should be based on previous evidence. What models will you be basing your project on, if any? Is the work informed by research? How much change can be predicted on the basis of previous attempts? How does the activity use recent findings? What can you learn from previous projects? That is not to say you have to copy their approach - indeed, one of the main purposes of looking at previous projects is to establish how your work will differ, or what new research it will add to previous knowledge.

What evidence from previous projects will you use?

Starting Point

Measurements taken at the start - baseline data - are critical because without them you will never know if your project has improved the situation or not. The baseline data reflects the position at the beginning of your project and will be used to show what advances have been made by the end. You need to make sure, therefore, that this data can be collected throughout the project's duration. Sources of baseline data include survey results, government statistics, local crime statistics, opinion poll data, prison statistics, etc.

What is your baseline data?

2. Stakeholders and Target Audience

Stakeholders

The stakeholders are all the groups and individuals who have an interest in the project; who have a 'stake' in it. They might include service users, community groups, staff, funders or decision-makers. Many projects fail because they don't address the needs or represent the views of the stakeholders. For this reason, ideally, they should be involved in your evaluation. Stakeholder involvement will help your organisation do what is right, rather than what it 'thinks' is right.

Broadly speaking, stakeholders include three groups: **sponsors, channels and beneficiaries.**

Sponsors

The sponsors are those people or groups behind the project. This might be your organisation, or another group or organisation on whose behalf you are working.

Who is sponsoring the project? How are they perceived by the target audience?

Describe your sponsors:

Channels

The channels are the agencies or individuals that actually deliver the message. This might mean individuals, such as a well-known spokesman or a celebrity. Or it might simply mean the staff of your organisation. You need to be sure that these are the right channels to help the project achieve its objectives.

*What channels are you aiming to use? Would individuals or spokespeople aid the project?
What kinds of media channels are you going to target?*

Describe the channels you will be using:

Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries are those individuals or groups who stand to gain from your project. You will need to take into account how the beneficiaries are perceived by your target audience and, if there is a negative perception, how this can be challenged. You will also need to consider how to consult with beneficiaries about the project – and if you aren't going to consult with beneficiaries, is this for a reason you're confident to justify?

Who are the potential beneficiaries of the project? How are they perceived? How are you going to consult with beneficiaries about the project?

Describe the beneficiaries of your project:

Target Audience

Understanding your target audience will help you to define what you say to them and how you say it.

There may be subgroups within the target audience, which need to be targeted as priorities, such as practitioners on specific training courses or victims of crime among the general public. These subsidiary audiences may need a different style of approach in order to persuade them to influence your major target audience.

Reference Groups

Most target groups will not simply take your message at face value. They will take into account the opinions of their reference groups. A reference group is a groups that people think about when they assess a message. It might be their peers, their friends, their workmates, the members of their political party.

Opinion Formers

The target group also has opinion formers – people who influence behaviour and set an example, who innovate and who form opinion.

Who is your target audience? What are their beliefs and attitudes? How much knowledge do they have about the project topic? What benefits could it derive from new beliefs? Are there key subgroups which should be targeted as priorities? Who are the reference groups and opinion formers?

Describe your target audience, its reference groups and influencers:

3. Setting Objectives

One of the most frequent difficulties with evaluating the success or failure of a project is the lack of clear objectives.

Your goals and objectives will give you the targets against which your project will be evaluated.

Specific

Be as specific as you can. What audiences are you going to reach and how are you going to reach them? What do you want them to do as a result of your project? When is all this going to happen? Spell it out as clearly as you can – that way you are much more likely to have everyone on your team pulling in the same direction.

Achievable

What you want to achieve through your project will need to take into account the resources and the capacity of the organisation. The smaller your organisation and its resources, the smaller your objectives will probably be.

Measurable

Where possible and applicable, objectives should be measurable. How many people do you want to reach with your message? What kinds of changes do you want to see in their attitudes or behaviour?

Your goals should concentrate on three key areas:

Outcomes – What Are You Aiming To Achieve?

Out-takes – Getting the Message Across

Outputs – What Are You Going To Do?

You will also need to set targets in terms of **timings and costs**.

Outcomes

Outcomes are the ultimate objectives of projects - they are changes in attitude, beliefs and behaviour, or actions in response to the message. This might mean a reduction in fear of crime, increased confidence in the criminal justice system, practical support for new initiatives, a reduction in the prison population or a change of policy by the government of the day.

What actions do you want people to take as a result of your project? What changes do you want to see – and in what areas? What measurements can be applied to these outcomes?

List your desired outcomes:

Out-takes

Out-takes are measurements of whether your message has actually been heard. You might want people to have an increased recognition of your organisation's name and purpose, you might want them to understand the arguments, or remember the key facts. These out-takes do not necessarily mean that your project has worked, because there is a vast difference between hearing the message and changing your behaviour.

What message do you want people to take from your project? What key facts do you want them to understand? Are there key arguments you want to get across?

List your desired out-takes:

Outputs

Outputs are the activities you are going to engage in, in order to achieve your desired outcome. They are almost the 'physical' side of your project - the column inches in the newspaper, the amount of leaflets you are going to give out, the number of visits to your website. By themselves they tell you nothing about whether your project has worked - many projects send out thousands of leaflets without ever changing the opinion of those who read them. However, they are important in helping you to plan production and activity effectively.

What are you going to do to get your message out there? What quantities of output are you going to need? What types of media are you going to use (e.g. leaflets, adverts, promotional items, exhibitions, press releases, websites, mailshots, etc.)

List your desired outputs:

Timing and Cost

The timing and cost of the project needs to be clearly established. Identify any key stages of the project, and, as far as possible, indicate significant areas of expenditure.

How long will the project need to be to achieve these targets? What is the budget? What is the cost per person reached?

List the significant timings and costs:

4. Interim Evaluation

An interim evaluation aims to measure how well you are hitting your output targets, how well your message is getting across and, if possible, how far along the road you are to hitting your desired outcomes.

It can provide you with crucial information. It will help you to clarify the project's prospects: it identifies challenges and resource shortfalls, presents indicators of progress and gives the team a renewed sense of direction.

You can perform a number of interim evaluations, depending on the duration of your project. For a short project you might do an interim evaluation when the project has reached the halfway point; for longer projects you might find it helpful to perform two or three interim evaluations to check progress.

Outcomes

How well are you meeting your objectives? Should they objectives be changed? Should there be a concentration on the most achievable objectives or on key priorities? Do you need to change your strategy or approach? How even is the spread of progress towards the objectives? What are the general trends external to the project and what are the implications for the project?

For each of your desired outcomes list what progress is being made, the source of your data about that progress and any action needed:

Out-takes

How successfully have the outputs been in reaching the target groups? Which groups are not aware of the message? What are the reactions of consumers? What methods of communication are proving useful and which need revision?

For each of your desired out-takes list what progress is being made, the source of your data about that progress and any action needed:

Outputs

Which outputs, out-takes and outcomes are actually being measured? How reliable and valid is this information? Are there any problems with the production or delivery of outputs

For each of your desired outcomes list what progress is being made, the source of your data about that progress and any action needed:

Timing and Cost

Is your project on track in terms of budget and timing? Are there external events which have influenced the progress of the project? Are you within budget? Are some areas more expensive – or cheaper – than you imagined? Are you on schedule? How likely are you to achieve your objectives within the final time limits ?

For each of your key timings and costs, list what progress is being made, the source of your data about that progress and any action needed:

5. Results Evaluation

A results evaluation will give a final account of the success or failure of the project.

It aims to identify which parts worked well, and which parts didn't; to present an objective picture of the project as a whole. It will identify how far your objectives have been achieved, how successful your strategy was, and how far the situation has changed from your baseline measurements.

Outcomes

Has their situation of the beneficiaries changed in ways that the project wished? What effect has the project had, measured against baseline data? How successful has the strategy been?

What were the outcomes of your project:

Out-takes

Were there any problems in reaching the target audiences? How successfully did the project reach its targets? What methods of communication turned out to be effective?

What were the out-takes of your project:

Outputs

How much was actually achieved in terms of output? What kinds of output proved to be the most useful? Were there any problems with delivery, production or timing?

What were the outputs of your project:

Timing and Costs

Did the project work within the envisaged time-frame? Did it run over or under budget? Were there activities which cost a lot more - or a lot less - than you expected? Did you get value for money?

What were the significant timings and costs of your project:

Conclusion

Evaluation is not an optional extra. It is not 'a nice thing to do if you have the time'. It is crucial to the effectiveness of your project. If done thoroughly, efficiently and objectively it will maximise the likelihood of your project reaching its desired objectives, as well as providing RCP with crucial information about the impact of our initiative. Effective evaluation will help you get it right from the start.

Most importantly, effective evaluation cannot be left to the end. It is important that you monitor and evaluate before, during and after the project. The checklist of questions below will help you to plan the progress of your evaluation across the duration of your project.

At the beginning of the project...

Project Overview

1. What is the overall idea and purpose of the project?
2. What data will help you when you come to evaluate?
3. What evidence from previous projects will you use?
4. What is your baseline data?

Stakeholders and Target Audience

5. Describe your sponsors:
6. Describe the channels you will be using :
7. Describe the beneficiaries of your project:
8. Describe your target audience, its reference groups and influencers:

Setting Objectives

9. List your desired outcomes:
10. List your desired out-takes:
11. List your desired outputs:
12. List the significant timings and costs:

During the project...

Interim Evaluation

13. For each of your desired outcomes list what progress is being made, the source of your data about that progress and any action needed:
14. For each of your desired out-takes list what progress is being made, the source of your data about that progress and any action needed:
15. For each of your desired outcomes list what progress is being made, the source of your data about that progress and any action needed:
16. For each of your key timings and costs, list what progress is being made, the source of your data about that progress and any action needed:

At the end of the project

Results Evaluation

17. What were the outcomes of your project?
18. What were the out-takes of your project?
19. What were the outputs of your project?
20. What were the significant timings and costs of your project?