

# DOES IT WORK?

A guide to evaluating  
community capacity initiatives

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# Foreword

Think Local Act Personal stresses the need to promote community support networks and community connections for older and disabled people. But how do you measure networks and connections? How do you know if the services you commission or provide are going to build and sustain people's social capital?

This useful evaluation guide, developed by Catherine Wilton and the Building Community Capacity learning community, complements *Are we there yet?* A planning tool and checklist for building community connections. It is aimed at local community groups and organisations, services and providers who want to evaluate the impact of their work on people's social networks. The guide helps you decide on the best way to approach an evaluation and suggests and describes some appropriate methods that you can use.

The guide touches on the thorny issue of evaluating for cost effectiveness and describes the development work that the Building Community Capacity project has done to date on linking outcomes to costs and financial payoffs.

It emphasises co-production, participation and the importance of involving local people in evaluation, demonstrating that the process of evaluating a service or project can develop social networks and connections in itself.

If we all start to express the outcomes that people want for themselves, their families and communities in terms of networks, links, groups and inclusion we can start to make a real difference to care and support by reshaping the services we provide and commission around people's wellbeing, happiness and quality of life.

Richard Jones



Miranda Wixon



Co-chairs – Think Local Act Personal Partnership Programme Board

# 1 Purpose of the guide

**This guide complements *Are we there yet? A planning tool and checklist for building community connections* developed for the *Think Local Act Personal Partnership*. It is designed to help you evaluate your community capacity-building project or the impact your organisation or service might be having on social capital.**

It guides you through the things you need to consider before you start, then suggests and describes some appropriate methods depending on why you want to do the evaluation and who it is for.

The guide is aimed at local people, community organisations, services and providers who want to evaluate the impact of their work on social capital and community capacity.

## 2 Background

**Think Local, Act Personal and the Government vision for adult social care Capable Communities and Active Citizens both highlight the importance of community capacity and people's personal support networks for the future of social care and underline the connection between preventative, community-based approaches and personalised care and support.**

The [Building Community Capacity project](#), now part of the Think Local, Act Personal partnership, has been exploring the role of social capital and the different approaches that councils and their partners can take to help disabled and older people build and sustain their social networks, links with community groups and contribute to community life.

Members of our learning community have returned many times to the question of measuring and evaluating the work that they are doing. They want to make sure that their projects are meeting their intended aims of enabling people to build and make use of their social capital. And people are being asked more and more to justify their investments in the current financial climate.

Clive Miller (OPM) has been working with the Building Community Capacity project to develop [Are we there yet?](#)

A [planning tool and checklist for building community connections](#) for councils and their partners wanting to assess their capacity building activities and develop a plan for building social capital in the future. It sets a 'gold standard' by asking the following questions:

What would it look like if people and local organisations in any one area were all operating in a way that developed and made the most effective use of local 'social capital', so that it benefited those older and disabled people who are often the most isolated and marginalised?

As a local organisation, leader or interested citizen, how would you know if you were doing a good job?

Professor Rob Paton of the Open University Business School has written an article on [approaches to evaluation](#) for the Building Community Capacity project and suggests four ways that you might generate useful information and insight:

- **Check out available management information** – some information from routine project reporting may be helpful
- **Consider harnessing the power of IT** – combine & analyse data you or others already have
- **Explore the survey option** – especially by adopting questions that others have used successfully before
- **Group discussion** – can be cost-effective and very appropriate for capacity-building work.

Professor Martin Knapp of London School of Economics has produced some [research for the Building Community Capacity project on the cost-effectiveness](#) of three initiatives that aim to build social capital in communities. The headline findings from his research can be seen below:

### **Estimated costs and consequences per participant and year:**

#### **Timebanking**

Cost per member per year  
*£450*

Savings per member per year  
*more than £1300*

#### **Befriending**

Cost per older person per year  
*£80*

Savings per person per year  
*£300*

#### **Community navigator scheme**

Costs  
*£480*

Savings  
*at least £900*

# 3 Scope of the guide

**This guide complements the work already done by Clive Miller and Professors Paton and Knapp. It is designed to concentrate on the last two methods identified by Professor Paton – what sort of surveys and group work you might do in different contexts to report the results of your activities.**

It is designed to be helpful and give a general overview rather than being a totally comprehensive guide. Our learning community has stressed that evaluation needs to be useful and do-able and something that adds value to the activity itself – not just a meaningless paper exercise.

It has been jointly produced with councils, community and voluntary organisations and others working directly with service users and carers. We welcome additions and amendments to the guide – the learning doesn't stop here. Please [contact us](#).

# 4 How to start

Before you can work out what to do you need to ask yourself a few questions:

- **Why are you doing evaluation?**
- **Who is it for?**
- **How much time and resources have you got?**
- **How experienced are you?**



**Table 1** :: Questions to ask before you start

<b>Why are you doing it?</b>	<b>Consider</b>
<b>To find out if what you're doing is working</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work out what you're already counting or measuring across your organisation and what others are measuring</li> <li>• Have you got baseline measures? A 'before and after' picture is important</li> <li>• Consider using the same questions locally that are being asked nationally to get your area benchmarked</li> <li>• Can you piggy-back on other peoples' upcoming work?</li> </ul>
<b>To assess whether it is cost-effective in terms of time and resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You need to work out your input cost to start with (unit costs can be taken from the <a href="#">PSSRU Unit costs of health and social care 2010</a> and <a href="#">Beecham J (2000). Not exactly child's play – A guide to estimating unit costs for children's social care.</a>)</li> <li>• What services will either no longer be needed by people or at a reduced level because of the impact of social capital building?</li> <li>• Consider a <a href="#">Social Return on Investment</a> evaluation – do a forecast at the beginning so you know what data to collect</li> <li>• Look at what has already been published on cost-effectiveness to see if you can make use of the work to make some assumptions about outcomes and cost-savings (<a href="#">see BCC website</a>)</li> </ul>
<b>To review a service or change the way you do things</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a strong emphasis on co-production, with staff and local people – to what extent can you make the evaluation participative and/or developmental?</li> <li>• Are staff able/willing to collaborate with the evaluation – easier if there is a culture of open discussion</li> <li>• Are there people running a similar service or project elsewhere – learn form each other</li> </ul>

Who is it for?	Consider
<b>Commissioners and external decision-makers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define and agree outcomes with commissioners and link evaluation to those outcomes</li> <li>• Some <b>evidence of cost-effectiveness</b> or social return on the financial investment might be handy; how did they decide you were value for money when they awarded your contract/grant?</li> <li>• Show impact across a wide range of agendas e.g. social care, health, community safety, community cohesion, arts, culture and sport</li> <li>• Link to local priorities/initiatives and Government requirements</li> </ul>
<b>Managers/management boards/service reviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there scope for managers to make changes as a result of the evaluation – or is it predetermined?</li> <li>• Designing and doing the evaluation with staff and people who use services will be important. What are staff concerned with? How will you listen to their ideas?</li> <li>• Show impact on participants and the wider community</li> <li>• Look for ways to make the evaluation process a developmental activity in itself</li> </ul>
<b>Local people or participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree on the outcomes you are looking for together</li> <li>• What are their concerns about the service – their wishes for improvement – their ideas?</li> <li>• Look for ways to make the evaluation process a developmental activity in itself – what support will that require?</li> <li>• Make sure you are going to be able to hear everyone’s voices</li> <li>• Make sure you complete the feedback loop – show what you’re doing as a result and how you’ve taken views into account</li> <li>• Make sure you design a process that also recognises what is working not just the complaints</li> <li>• Include the evaluation of the resources/assets that local people are putting in to the outcomes and see how they could be better – whole system approach</li> </ul>

## How much time (and resources) have you got?

**This is a long-term issue – we've been doing this work for a while and have some resources set aside**

**I need to work out what I've achieved in this year as we need to look for further grant funding after that; we have some resources in terms of staff and volunteer time**

**I need a snapshot now as I've been asked to write a report; we have few resources to help us**

## Consider

- Work out what you're already measuring across your organisation and what others are measuring; see what baseline measures you've already got
- Agree on the outcomes you want to measure going forward, preferably at a strategic and multi-agency level so that everyone's evaluations are complementary – e.g. one for each aspect of social capital – ([more details here](#))
- Consider using the same questions locally that are being asked nationally to get your area benchmarked
- Get a picture of 'before and after'
- Build in some long-term community-led research e.g surveys, story telling, visual arts, meetings
- Build in evaluation at the beginning so you're not panicking at the year end
- Consider a [Social Return on Investment](#) evaluation – or other way of measuring cost effectiveness – you need to do a forecast SROI at the start of the project so you know what data to collect
- Make sure you report on the outcomes that your funders want
- Can you 'piggy back' onto other surveys going on?
- Try to get a snapshot of 'before and after' or narratives of how things have changed as a result of the intervention
- Involve participants in the evaluation and the reporting/recommendations
- Look at what you're already measuring
- Do a couple of [focus groups](#) /straw poll
- Tell [success or failure stories](#), or even better, get someone to tell their own story
- Involve participants and staff
- Think about what skills and time may be available in your organisation or the local community – resources does not just mean money

How experienced are you?	Consider
<p><b>Very – I've been evaluating these kind of initiatives for ages</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be open to new ways of measuring social capital – make sure you're not relying on tried and trusted methods so much that you miss opportunities to innovate</li> <li>• Use as many participative methods as you can if you have the skills – if the method can be developmental in itself it adds value to the activity</li> <li>• Use the local community, user-led organisations, groups, volunteers and community activists and make sure you hear everyone's voices</li> <li>• Can you give support to others who are also looking to build social capital but aren't as used to participative methods as you?</li> </ul>
<p><b>I'm not completely confident but willing to give it a go</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in some evaluation/facilitation skills training for you/a group of you – it will be a valuable investment for the future</li> <li>• Get support from others who are more experienced in participative methods</li> <li>• Involve people who use services and staff – have a small steering group and learn together.</li> </ul>
<p><b>I don't know where to start</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep it simple – maybe agree on four or five things you are going to measure based on the 'gold standard' (<a href="#">more info here</a>)</li> <li>• Ask if you can borrow/adapt someone else's survey questions</li> <li>• Get support from others who are more experienced in participative methods and use methods that have worked for others before</li> <li>• Involve people who use services and staff – have a small steering group and learn together</li> <li>• Aim to get a few success/failure stories and share and celebrate them widely</li> <li>• Build on your evaluation as you go along – you might be starting small but if you continue in the same vein you'll build up a richer picture over time</li> </ul>

# 5 Look at the checklist for social capital

**For an idea of the kind of things you should be considering to measure social capital see [Are we there yet? A planning tool and checklist for building community connections](#) published by the Building Community Capacity project.**

Broadly if you are evaluating social capital you will be looking for outcomes that increase people's:

- **Social networks** – did an initiative help people to build or sustain networks of family, friends and neighbours, or connect people together?
- **Membership of groups and community associations** – did a project give people more information or help them to access or join a group? Was the group inclusive or did your activity support a group to be more inclusive?
- **Positive feelings about what it's like to live here** – did a project help people to get out and about and use universal services more, did it help people feel safer on the streets, did it improve access to employment, education or training?
- **Making a contribution** – did the initiative support people to make a contribution, help others, give their time and skills, be valued for their contribution?

# 6 Work out what happened as a result of the project

**To start with you need to think about what you have invested in the project or activity, what benefits it brings and how those benefits happen. This is sometimes called a 'logic model'.**

You ask yourself:

- **What do we invest?**
- **What do we actually do or what activities happen?**
- **And what happens as a result?**

Break down the individual parts and actions and think about the things that might happen in terms of social capital as a result.

This kind of activity can be done as a workshop so that everyone has a chance to think about the outcomes.

It could be a powerful exercise if you do this with a number of grant-funded community groups to build a picture of the contribution groups are making to building social capital in an area.

Table 2 shows a model for a council evaluating the impact of support given to a community carnival.

Table 3 is a blank template for you to use.

**Table 2** : Evaluating the community carnival

What is invested?	What activities happen?	What happens as a result that would not otherwise happen?
<p><b>What do we invest?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £3000 in grant funding</li> <li>• Staff support time e.g. legal, policing, insurance, communications, getting it through a council committee</li> <li>• Support on the day</li> </ul> <p><b>What do others invest?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Goodwill</li> <li>• Skills</li> <li>• Contacts</li> <li>• Lorries</li> <li>• Knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisers have a steering group which runs throughout the year</li> <li>• They get members of the community on board including local businesses</li> <li>• They recruit groups and organisations to contribute a float, procession, caterers or stalls</li> <li>• They plan the procession and the party in the park afterwards</li> <li>• They spread the word among their contacts</li> <li>• We help them engage the media; we organise press releases, use our contacts and feature it in our corporate magazine</li> <li>• The groups co-ordinate their own activity, get friends, family and neighbours on board, make costumes, get volunteer lorry drivers, get DJs</li> <li>• The procession happens; local people line the streets to watch; police provide a community safety presence; St John's Ambulance are there</li> <li>• Thousands of people come to the park for the party afterwards – to eat, drink, socialise and listen to local bands playing</li> <li>• They tidy up afterwards</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social networks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The steering group develops strong bonding and social capital between members</li> <li>• Networks of people and friendships develop around the designing and building of floats and costumes</li> <li>• People watching have a good time and talk to their neighbours while the floats go by.</li> </ul> <p><b>Membership of groups and community associations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People get the chance to join a group who are designing a float.</li> </ul> <p><b>What it's like to live here</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A wide cross section of the community is involved, particularly BME groups</li> <li>• Businesses and other stall-holders contribute and benefit from the event – financially on the day and through talking to potential customers/stakeholders</li> <li>• The media gets a good story and people buy the paper</li> <li>• People use it as an excuse to go to the park afterwards and enjoy the local facilities</li> </ul> <p><b>Making a contribution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People get a chance to showcase their art and costume-making skills; those watching enjoy the cultural experience –art, music and food</li> <li>• It's two-way – the people watching the carnival make a vital contribution to the event too.</li> </ul>

### Table 3 : Template

<b>What is invested?</b>	What activities happen?	What happens as a result that would not otherwise happen?
What do we invest?		Social networks
What do others invest?		Membership of groups and community associations  What it's like to live here  Making a contribution



# 7 Further guide to evaluation in different contexts

**This section describes a variety of situations and gives you some pointers about evaluating social capital in each of these scenarios.**

## **Running a small local project?**

Jim runs a community bus service with one other part-time staff member and a fluctuating cohort of volunteers. Funders are now asking about the lasting impact of the work, and the chair of the management committee says he needs to provide evidence that the service prevents social care needs from arising...

*If this is a bit like your situation, then check out these approaches:*

- **Storytelling**; use follow-ups with your clients to gather outcomes stories and case studies showing the impact on participants and the wider community
- Use '**Outcomes Stars**' for service-user feedback/ use the copyrighted stars or develop own steps to improvement
- Use a **peer review**
- Use a **discussion/focus group** to find out how it benefits people who use it
- Use NEFs '**Prove It**'
- Get data on what people use the buses for e.g. shops, GPs, work, school
- Try a **social network analysis**
- Get some data on increased volunteering, increased participation in small groups, increased number of community activities.

### Commissioning services?

Michelle commissions services for elderly people for the City. Councillors are sold on the idea of doing this in ways that work with and strengthen the local community so now she needs to include some requirements for this in service specifications and needs to write in the ways in which this element will be measured by the clients and users. She is concerned to do this in ways that she can oversee, so she is not just rewarding people for warm words...

*If this is a bit like your situation, then check out these approaches:*

- Make the most of **management information** that you are requiring them to collect already
- Use **key informants** in the community to tell you how it's going
- Run a **focus group** or workshop
- Consider starting a **community navigator/researcher** scheme
- Try a **participatory appraisal**
- See the work that NEF is doing on **outcomes-based commissioning**
- Try the **appreciative** approach
- Hear from a wide range of people through a **World Café** approach

## Running a third sector organisation?

Mohindra runs a well established local community centre that is home to a wide range of activities, including a youth club, parent and toddler group, dance classes, after school club and lunch club for older people. The centre receives core funding from the council but run by a management committee of local people. The council is reviewing the funding it gives to centres in the light of its new health and wellbeing strategy...

*If this is a bit like your situation, then check out these approaches:*

- Use discussions/**focus groups** with groups using the centre to find out what they think
- Try a **peer review** approach
- **Survey** residents to ask what has changed round here?
- **360 degree tests.**
- Try an **action learning** approach involving a wide range of people, including commissioners
- Try **Open Space technology**, bringing people together by setting a scenario like, 'To make sure we get funding in the future we need to prove that we're having a positive impact on health and wellbeing – how can we work together to ensure that we share all the great things that we are doing?'

### Project funder?

As part of a joint NHS/council initiative, Calum manages a small budget to fund local initiatives that will reduce health inequalities and target marginalised groups. He has been told that he needs more evidence that the projects he is funding are having a lasting impact on the local community...

*If this is a bit like your situation, then check out these approaches:*

- Run a workshop to help the organisations develop a **logic model**
- See the work that NEF is doing on **outcomes-based commissioning**
- Ask grant recipients to provide **stories** as a way of evidencing the impact they've had.
- Consider use of system to store, organise and **analyse stories** e.g. 'Views'.
- Try a **participatory appraisal**.

# 8 Evaluating for potential cost savings

**This guide would not be complete without mentioning money. In tough financial times capacity-building initiatives have to prove their worth in terms of outcomes for people but also for budget holders.**

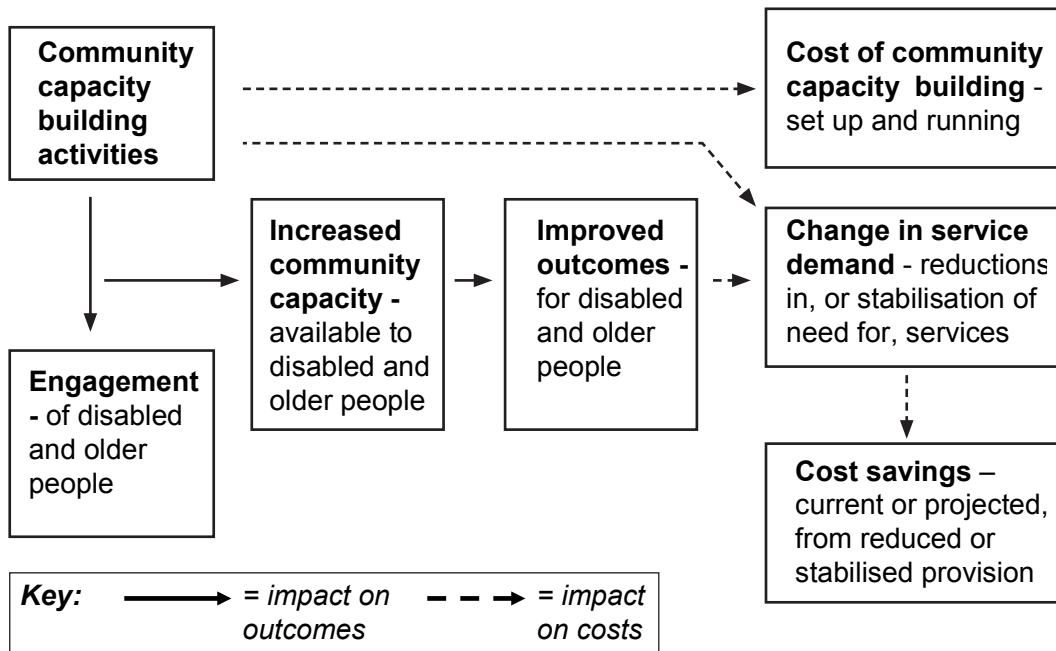
Ideally you would build some form of cost-benefit analysis into your evaluations but it is not always easy to do. A cost-benefit analysis is an economic evaluation method that aims to transform the consequences of an intervention into monetary benefits and is able to show the savings that can be made to different public sector budgets. Its focus so far has been on measuring outcomes known to influence individuals' and communities' wellbeing such as employment, crime, housing and debt.

The [Social Return on Investment](#) model is very helpful in giving you some idea of the added value of your work, though it can be time-consuming to undertake. The following is a really helpful paper on methods of economic evaluation: Sefton, T (2000); Getting

Less for More: Economic Evaluation in the [Social Welfare Field](#); Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusions, London School of Economics

The Building Community project has also been working with Clive Miller to develop a shortcut approach to enable the costs and benefits of social capital-building projects to be easily evaluated. He uses the following model to identify how such projects produce outcomes and the resulting financial costs and benefits (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: How building community capacity links to improved outcomes, costs and savings**



## Figure 1 : Key

**Community capacity building activities** that benefit disabled and older people can be achieved through either targeted activities such as befriending schemes or wider community-oriented activities, such as timebanking, that benefit everyone.

**Engagement** – disabled and older people can be engaged as both participants in activities, for example, making use of a community café and/or helping manage or run an activity.

**Increased community capacity** – community capacity-building activities aim to increase one or more of the following four aspects

of social capital available to disabled and older people:

- *Social networks* – of friends, neighbours, workmates and others
- *Membership of groups* – that are run by and for local people
- *What it's like to live here* – the interactions that people have with others when they are out and about in the local area
- *Making a contribution* – disabled and older people being able to make a contribution, help others, give their time and skills, be valued for their contribution.

**Improved outcomes** – may include:

- *Improved mental and physical health* – through greater social contact and engaging in enjoyable activities, for example, through a befriending scheme
- *Maintaining independence* – receiving practical support, for examples, purchasing meals at a community café
- *Employability* – developing or regaining work skills through participation in community capacity building activities, for example, through skills exchange via a timebank.

**Change in service demand** – some of the improvements in outcomes may lead to people substituting existing community capacity-building activities for some of their current supports, for example participating in an allotment club instead of attending a daycare centre. In other cases people may experience improvements that mean that they no longer need some of their current supports.

**Cost savings** – these are narrowly construed to cover the savings in expenditure on health and social care services. Where these occur, some of the savings may accrue to disabled or older people who are engaged in the community capacity-building activities and others to the budgets of health and social care commissioners.

Savings may accrue both from the positive impact of the activity on community capacity feeding through into improved outcomes and, where they are part of the activity, practical benefits, for example, gardening support from the timebank, or a lunch purchased at the community cafe.

**Costs of community capacity-building** – including establishing the activity, for example a timebank, in the first place and its continued running costs. Excluded from the calculations are the opportunity costs of the time that unpaid people expend through their involvement in the community capacity-building activities.

This work is still in its development stages but further information will be shared via the Building Community Capacity website as it becomes available.

# 8 Methods of evaluation

**In this final section we detail some recognised and helpful methods of evaluation, many of which we've suggested you take a look at earlier in the guide. For each method we describe what it is, its advantages and disadvantages and, where possible, have provided a link for finding further information.**

**Good luck with your evaluation and please let us know how you get on!**



## Social Return on Investment

Social return on investment was developed by the new economics foundation (NEF) as a tool for measuring the value of a project in terms of its social and environmental benefits. NEF says, 'SROI is able to assign a monetary figure to social and environmental value... For example, NEF research on the value created by a training programme for ex-offenders revealed that for every £1 invested, £10.50 of social value was created.'

**Advantages:** Great to have evidence of cost-effectiveness

**Disadvantages:** You probably need some training to be able to do it properly or buy in someone to do it; it is time consuming

More information: <http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/social-return-investment>

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## Storytelling

Storytelling is a way of collecting information about people's experiences and feelings about successful projects or activities. Jane Foot writes in A Glass Half Full, 'Sharing and valuing different stories of past achievements is engaging and energising. People gain confidence: what we did once we can do again. They learn what they already know and see how they could apply it to their current situation.'

**Advantages:** Easy and quick to do, people like telling stories; they are great for persuading hearts and minds

**Disadvantages:** Sometimes it's difficult to pin down the 'essence' of what worked or how it worked; you'll need to spend some time writing them up; some people dismiss 'anecdotal' information.

**More information:**

[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/resources/resourcedatabase/id473\\_valuation\\_through\\_storytelling.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/resources/resourcedatabase/id473_valuation_through_storytelling.pdf)

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## Using follow-ups to gather outcomes stories

One way of gathering stories easily is by using routine follow-ups with people who have participated or used services. These mini-stories can be categorised in terms of the number of outcome areas involved and how they have come about.

**Advantages:** Easy to do if you are undertaking follow-ups anyway.

**Disadvantages:** More difficult than a face-to-face approach  
– participants could be wary of the phonecall

## Outcomes Star™

The Outcomes Star is a tool for measuring change and getting service-user feedback. Each point of the star represents a domain of personal experience e.g. social networks, self-esteem, independence. Each point has a graduated scale from 1-10 for people to plot their score in that particular area. There are different versions of the star for different sectors and a new, shorter star has recently been produced which is even easier to use than before. Copyright does not allow you to develop your own stars but there are other ways of doing a similar thing e.g. spider diagrams.

**Advantages:** Proven, simple, great to use with individuals though can be used with groups too; you can track progress over time.

**Disadvantages:** Good to combine it with stories to get a fuller picture not just snapshot of experience

More information: <http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk>

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## Peer reviews

Peer-to-peer approaches work well in evaluation as they involve 'equal' partners in evaluation. Local people asking their neighbours about their experiences or a service user asking another service user may get more realistic and honest responses than if an authority figure is doing the research. It is not just applicable to individuals – services or voluntary organisation who do peer reviews can find there are mutual benefits and shared learning from the activity.

**Advantages:** The personal touch; it's developmental – the person/group doing the evaluation benefits as well as the resposdee; the person doing the evaluation understands the issues so is not coming to it 'cold'; can be cost-effective for groups to help each other

**Disadvantages:** Possibility of 'bias'; you need to train the peers so it's not necessarily a quick or cheap option (though it doesn't need to be expensive)

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## Focus group

A focus group is when a group of people are put together and asked about their opinions or experiences of a produce, service or project. A facilitator poses questions or guides the conversation.

**Advantages:** You can get feedback pretty immediately, it is fairly developmental in that the participants feel they are actively involved in shaping something.

**Disadvantages:** It takes a degree of skill to conduct a focus group successfully - you may need some training or support; if you're not careful discussions can be dominated by a strong individual and people's opinions skewed; they don't necessarily give you a representative picture.

**More information:** West Berkshire Council has developed a useful guide to focus groups: [http://www.westberks.gov.uk/media/pdf/2/h/How\\_to\\_Run\\_a\\_Focus\\_Group.pdf](http://www.westberks.gov.uk/media/pdf/2/h/How_to_Run_a_Focus_Group.pdf)

### **'Prove It' by NEF**

Prove it is a toolkit which can help you identify the impact of your project on individuals the local community and build on what you learn from people's experiences. The toolkit includes a storyboard exercise for understanding how a project's intended activities will lead to change, an example Survey Questionnaire (you will need to adapt the questions to social capital), and a Poster Evaluation exercise to reflect on lessons learnt. The method involves volunteers and beneficiaries in telling their project's story.

**Advantages:** Comprehensive, thorough, developed over 10 years, inclusive and participative

**Disadvantages:** Not a simple solution – you might need some training; suited more to larger services or organisations

**More information:** <http://www.proveit.org.uk/downloads.html>

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### **Making the most of management information systems**

'Routine management information can sometimes help in capturing 'softer' outcomes,' writes Professor Rob Paton of the Open University Management School. Move towards a situation in which you collect indicators of quality and outcomes as well as activities, levels of spend, numbers and timescales. Modern IT systems also offer the prospect of combining information from different sources allow a broader and deeper understanding of the workings and outcomes of social interventions. You can ask questions about the areas where things are good and working: how can that be replicated?

**Advantages:** You're collecting it anyway so you are just making the most of what you've got

**Disadvantages:** You may lack the expertise to analyse the data to best effect; consider getting assistance through collaboration with a University to help you with this. Knowledge Transfer Partnerships provide one mechanism for engaging such support – see <http://www.ktponline.org.uk/business/business.aspx> . Collaborative studentships are another vehicle for partnership – an academic, or university department, with the interests and expertise you seek will give more information: [http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/2344/CASE\\_studentships\\_.aspx](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/2344/CASE_studentships_.aspx)

**More information:** [http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/\\_library/Resources/BCC/Evidence/Rob\\_Paton\\_-\\_Reporting\\_the\\_Results\\_June\\_2011.pdf](http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/_library/Resources/BCC/Evidence/Rob_Paton_-_Reporting_the_Results_June_2011.pdf)

## Key informant assessments

The key informant technique is a method involving a series of semi-structured interviews with residents, service users or members of the community who are in a position to know how things work as a whole.

**Advantages:** Efficient and quick – focuses on those who are well placed to reflect and review

**Disadvantages:** You need to be careful in selection of key informants as some people might be offended if you don't ask them; possibility of bias

**More information:** [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNABS541.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNABS541.pdf)

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## Community navigator/researcher method

This method was developed by Turning Point and piloted in various areas of the country. It involves local people who are recruited to be community researchers, working with the public to find out what they want from their health, housing and social care services.

**Advantages:** Proven to be successful; it develops communities and is a valuable activity in itself; can help deliver improvements to services/commissioning

**Disadvantages:** Not quick or cheap to set up properly – schemes have generally had start-up funding

**More information:**

<http://www.turning-point.co.uk/commissionerszone/centreofexcellence/Pages/ConnectedCare.aspx>

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## Participatory appraisal

Participatory appraisal is when local people are trained to collect information about the needs and priorities in their community by talking to local people passing by, attending groups/meetings and arranging events. The aim is to get a diversity of views and describe the situation and how it came to be that way. A steering group of local people set the framework for the research and a range of visual, creative and participative methods.

**Advantages:** Builds capacity through the process as well as providing an evaluation; it's inclusive; gets buy-in from all sectors of the community

**Disadvantages:** Not the quickest method, though it is worth it.

**More information:** No more sticky dots: making progress with Participatory Appraisal in Salford: <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/ukpoverty/downloads/nomorestickydots.pdf>

## Outcomes-based commissioning

In Lancashire they have developed 16 strategic commissioning intentions with people who use services, providers and professionals within the local authority. The commissioning intentions strongly incorporate community capacity building. To develop they invested time in people talking, planning and learning together locally and trusted people, 'as experts in their own experience.'

**Advantages:** If you've decided on capacity-building outcomes at the beginning, all your monitoring will help evaluate the impact

### More information:

[http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/\\_library/Resources/BCC/CaseStudies/Lancashire\\_Commissioning\\_Case\\_Study.doc](http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/_library/Resources/BCC/CaseStudies/Lancashire_Commissioning_Case_Study.doc)

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## Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry is a way of drawing out the strengths and successes in the history of a group, a community or an organisation. You start by asking what went well rather than what went wrong or what the problems are. In due course you can ask, 'What stops things like that happening more often?' and 'What do you want to do more of?'

**Advantages:** Positive, participative and confidence-building; you build solutions together

**Disadvantages:** Needs planning and skilled hosting

**More information:** <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/default.cfm>

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## World Café

World Café is a method of involving a large number of people in a 'conversation' about a hot topic or issue. Tables are set up to enable groups of about 5 or 6 people to discuss the issue with one person acting as the 'host'. After about 20 minutes, the participants move on and the host tells the next group of people about the previous discussion. At the end the emerging themes and ideas are brought together by the whole group.

**Advantages:** Particularly useful for communities, councillors and service providers to talk to each other productively, share their knowledge and collaborate on ideas for change

**Disadvantages:** It takes some preparation and you need to be a confident facilitator; make sure you keep people in the loop and discuss next steps so that people feel their participation counted

**More information:** Wiltshire Council organised World Café events to discuss the question, 'What is good about community life here and how do these good things work for older and disabled people?' Read more at [http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/\\_library/Resources/BCC/Sustainable\\_\\_Inclusive\\_Community\\_v\\_2.pdf](http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/_library/Resources/BCC/Sustainable__Inclusive_Community_v_2.pdf) and <http://www.theworldcafe.com>

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## Surveys

Surveys are probably familiar to you. You ask a set of questions to a give number of people e.g. a representative sample, or a random snapshot of people using a service on a given day. If you are thinking about doing a survey, try first to put some questions into someone else's survey as it avoids duplication of effort.

**Advantages:** You get answers to the questions you want; give you data that decision-makers like

**Disadvantages:** Time consuming; people get fed up of filling them in; your results might not be representative; it's not participative unless you get community members to undertake the surveys

**More information:** Turn the statements into *Are we there yet? A planning tool and checklist for building community connections* into questions: [www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/BCC/EvidenceAndEvaluation/AreWeThereYet](http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/BCC/EvidenceAndEvaluation/AreWeThereYet)

See also In Control's personal budget survey: [www.in-control.org.uk/what-we-do/research-and-evaluation/national-personal-budget-survey-\(poet\).aspx](http://www.in-control.org.uk/what-we-do/research-and-evaluation/national-personal-budget-survey-(poet).aspx)

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## Use a system to store, organise and analyse stories e.g. 'Views'

Views is, 'a flexible online platform that helps public and community and voluntary sector organisations to demonstrate the value and outcomes of their work.' Providers, grant funded organisations and services enter data into Views which can analyse outcomes and run reports for you to use.

**Advantages:** A single place to store all your data across an area and really work out the outcomes you are getting for your investment

**Disadvantages:** you have to pay for it, though individual licenses are reasonably priced

**More information:** [www.views.coop](http://www.views.coop)

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## 360 degree appraisal

360 degree appraisal is a way of collecting views from a cross-section of stakeholders about something (HR departments often use them as part of staff

appraisals). You devise a set of questions or things you want feedback on, then do a stakeholder analysis to decide who to ask. You would seek a few responses from each group e.g. members of the wider community, people who use your service, staff, managers, commissioners, peers from other local groups.

**Advantages:** It's a quick, easy and cheap way to get a cross-section of views.

**Disadvantages:** It's a top-down method so won't build capacity through the process or involve participants in the solution.

**More information:** There are tools to help online but most are commercial. HR departments should be able to advise you on how to design the process as some councils will be using the method for appraising employees.

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## Action Learning

Action Learning is when a group of people or 'set' meet to reflect on and learn from their experiences. Sets tend to meet regularly and work best if they are facilitated, at least until the group is established. At the meeting, each group member is assigned a period of time to present an idea or issue. The other members ask questions designed to draw out important issues and help the presenter see things from different perspectives.

**Advantages:** Works really well for organisations; good way of developing people and enabling problem solving.

**Disadvantages:** Quite formal; needs you to dedicate time and space for it; it's more about human solutions – it won't provide you with data

**More information:** [www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/factsheets/action-learning.aspx](http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/factsheets/action-learning.aspx)

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## Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology is a method of enabling a group of people to 'self-organise' discussions about issues and topics they believe to be important. It can be used for a large and diverse group of people (minimum about 20 people but can be used for a 1000+ people). Once you've got people in the room you set the agenda together by asking people what they want to talk about and getting volunteers to host those discussions. You write this up on a large sheet of paper so people can choose where they want to go. You close the event by asking people what was significant and what they're going to do as a result. People feed back if they want to rather than in a formal way, though conversations can be written up and made available to all participants – best done within a few days of the event.

**Advantages:** You can get a large number of people talking about an issue; good way of identifying the energy and leadership for change and getting people to 'buy-in' to an issue and the solutions

**Disadvantages:** Not to be used if you don't want to give up 'control' of the meeting or if you need a specific and prescriptive outcome of what to do next

**More information:** <http://www.openspaceworld.org/cgi/wiki.cgi?>

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## Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis can be used as a way of measuring the connections between people and local resources. It enables community organisations to create visual representations of these connections. This can be done using free software such as NodeXL or by hand using string and pins, or pen and paper. Visualisations can visually demonstrate the impact of a project if, for example, it increased the connections between people; or linked isolated individuals to other people and local resources; or to show how a local project empowered local people by joining them up with people and places. The RSA has done this by asking questions such as: Who do you enjoy spending time with? Who would you go to for emotional support or practical help? Who do you know who is good at getting people together or organising things locally? What groups do you take part in or community facilities do you visit?

**Advantages:** Mapping out problems and solutions seems to work very well for people; it helps people see that they can be in charge of their own networks; visual information is often very compelling.

**Disadvantages:** This requires some technical expertise

**More information:** <http://nodexl.codeplex.com>  
<http://www.thersa.org/projects/>





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