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Measuring the impact of volunteers

Being able to showcase achievements helps to get the best results for volunteers and proves the real difference a project can make to people's lives. Here, we'll set out some tips from our GOGA delivery plan that should help with evaluating a volunteer programme.



Planning

Planning is by far the most important consideration when thinking about measuring the impact of volunteering. Agreeing the difference a project wants to make and how to measure it from the start is vital as this will underpin each stage of the evaluation cycle. Remember to remain flexible to account for any changes and lessons that might be learnt during the volunteer programme.

Keep it simple

Try not to overcomplicate what you're asking of volunteers as this may risk putting them off. Only ask for information that will definitely be used. Be mindful that volunteers are giving up their time and volunteering should be enjoyable.

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7. Measuring the impact of volunteers

Be clear on what to measure and why

Make sure to share this with all the relevant people. For example, if you're intending to measure impact that will encourage further investment in the programme, take an approach to measurement that is likely to appeal to commissioners (e.g. use validated industry standardised scales which are proven to measure things like wellbeing).

Select the right tools

There are a variety of evaluation tools that can be used. Some are designed to help with planning, while others measure 'distance travelled' and include baseline and follow up data capture. It is important to carefully consider in advance the evaluation question and what you are trying to find out and why as this will influence which tools to use. When selecting a tool, consider the type of intervention, the timing of the evaluation, the skills of the assessor(s), the resources available and the audience of the evaluation.



Be creative!

When it comes to collecting data, it doesn't have to be formal. Consider asking for feedback over a cup of tea/coffee, through WhatsApp group messages and via informal chats during activities.

Involve volunteers

Research has shown that involving volunteers in impact measurement yields better results. Volunteers are often seen as being outside of evaluation rather than playing a key role in it. Volunteer involvement could take the shape of framing evaluation questions, data collection and reviewing the findings as this will make them feel involved and valued.

Broad feedback

Inviting feedback from as many stakeholders and perspectives as possible will help to give a rich, detailed and well-rounded picture of the impact volunteering is having on your organisation or programme.

Be objective

Always be open, honest and clear. Reflect on what went well and what didn't go well and consider how your organisation could improve.

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Use evaluation findings to review and improve what you do

Make the volunteers aware that this is one of the ways in which this information will be used as it might encourage them to get more involved with it.

Speak to experts and peers

Evaluation can be complex but it doesn't have to be. Talk to academics and evaluate someone you know who would be happy to advise and review as a critical friend. It may also be beneficial to speak to similar organisations about how they evaluate their progress.

Professional judgement and common sense is key

Data collection should never override this. After all, you are the experts and know your volunteers better than anyone else so keep this central to the process.



Top tip!

Keep it simple!

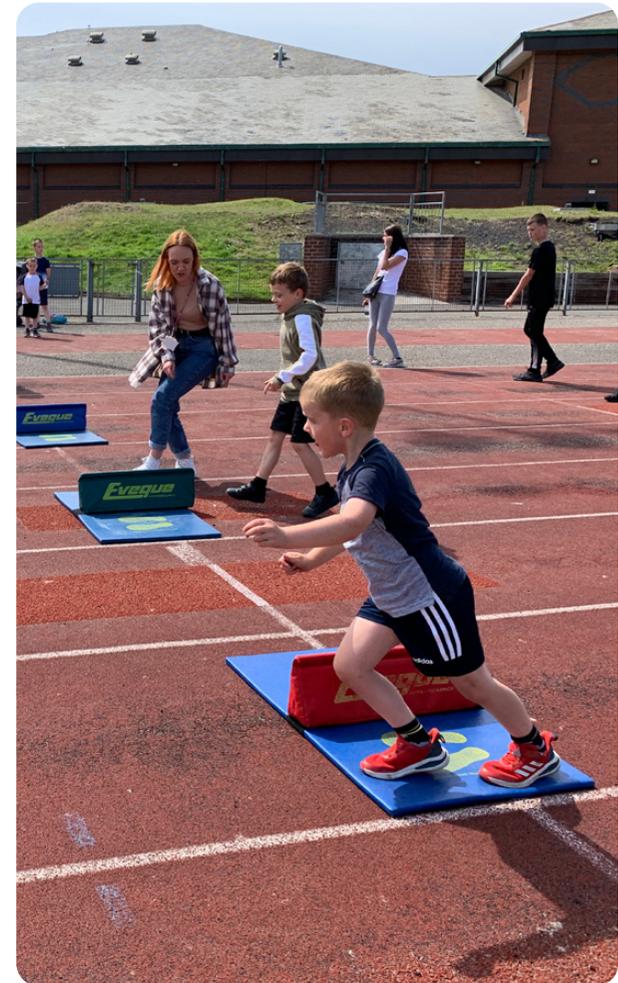
Only ask for what is going to be used.

Resources

[NVCO impact](#) ▶

[NVCO impact and evaluation resources](#) ▶

[Sport England evaluation tool](#) ▶



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Photo credits: Active Lincolnshire (2), GOGA Blackpool (4), GOGA Bradford (1), Live Active NI & DSNI (3).