collecting
evidence

evaluation
pathway

Designing evidence collection methods

Once you have set your outcomes and indicators [see *Setting outcomes* and *Working out what to measure* support guides], it's time to think about how to **collect evidence**.

First things first

It is very important to set your outcomes and indicators **before** you think about which methods to use. It is tempting to jump straight to designing a questionnaire when you start thinking about evaluation, but if you don't know what you need to measure you won't ask the right questions, and a questionnaire might not be the most appropriate method in any case. You may be able to use a tool which someone else has designed, but you may find you can get more useful evidence by designing your own.

> *Example:* If you take children with low literacy levels white water rafting in the Highlands on a rainy day, you are unlikely to get useful evidence from any questionnaires you hand out at the end!

Have a list of your **key indicators** in front of you when you start designing methods. You need methods which will **routinely** give you evidence about **each** of them. You may find you need to use more than one method, but wherever possible, try to make it part of your everyday work. For example:

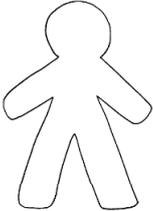| **Outcome:** Care home residents are more physically active	
Key indicators:	**Methods:**
number of steps taken daily	pedometers
number of activities involved in	attendance records
means of getting around care home	observation / ask people
length of time can stand on one leg holding onto a chair	timed attempt
feelings of fitness	ask people to move to the picture which best reflects how fit they feel

Things to think about when designing methods

You want to collect the most **useful** evidence you can. Remember that you want to collect evidence about your **outcomes** (not just about the quality of your service, though this is important too). At the same time you want to make evidence collection as **easy** as possible. Here are some things to consider when choosing methods:

Bear in mind...	Examples:	Possible implications:
...the **characteristics** and **abilities** of the people you work with e.g. age, literacy, culture, disability	*literacy / language*	People who find reading and writing (English) difficult may be put off by questionnaires. Choose methods which use few or no words, avoid jargon, use simple language and/or try to illustrate concepts with images.
...the **circumstances** of people you want to gather evidence from and what you can reasonably expect from them e.g. availability, internet access, amount of free time	*availability*	You won't get useful evidence from people who need to rush away after a session. Build in enough time to collect evidence and try to make it part of your activities. People who find it difficult to travel or have caring responsibilities may find it hard to join a focus group. However, others may welcome the opportunity to give more detailed feedback and meet up with peers. Professional referrers may have very limited time to give you feedback. Ask one or two key questions and make it easy to respond.
	internet access	Some groups (e.g. older people) may be less likely to be confident online or even to have internet access. Avoid internet-based surveys or e-mail requests for feedback.
...the **nature** of your work and the **environment** you work in e.g. sensitive or not, one-to-one or group-based, seated or physically active, indoors or outdoors	*sensitive work*	If you run individual counselling sessions for people who have been victims of abuse, it would be inappropriate to ask people to give feedback in front of others and you should allow them to choose to do it anonymously.
	suitability	It often makes sense to choose methods which reflect the type of work you do (e.g. evaluate creative interventions creatively). You are more likely to engage service users and evaluation can become part of your work.
	outdoors	Paper-based methods are less likely to work, but being outside can give you opportunities to build evaluation into your activities.

Bear in mind...	Examples:	Possible implications:
…**when** and **where** evidence might be seen and **who** could witness it e.g. school / home, during activities	*other people*	If other people (e.g. referrers or family members) are more likely to see evidence of the difference you are making to your service users than you are, try to give them the opportunity to tell you what they notice.
…how and when you **already** collect information e.g. registration forms, assessments, attendance records, case notes	*attendance records*	Records of who comes to which activities can be useful, especially if you track individuals. Consider adding space to your existing form with reminders of (all) your indicators as a prompt for people to note down any outcome evidence they observe during a session.
…the need to **check you understand** evidence from more creative methods e.g. pictures, body maps, relationship maps	*body maps*	Creative methods can provide richer evidence, but check you understand what people are telling you. If someone draws a black body map don't just assume they are feeling negative, they might feel good wearing black. Think about how you are going to record this.

Where does your evidence come from?

Evidence can come from a range of sources, including:

- Things you observe (e.g. notes of what you see happening, photos, videos)
- Things you are told by service users (e.g. casual feedback, questionnaires, interviews, video diaries, focus groups, visual tools, social media)
- Things you are told by people in service users' lives (e.g. referrer feedback or case reviews, feedback from relatives or friends)
- Records you keep (e.g. attendance, list of activities, use of services, assessments, number of downloads from your website)
- External statistics which you can compare with those for your service users (e.g. debt or truancy)
- Awards and standards achieved by your organisation and/or your service users (e.g. care inspectorate reports, adherence to codes of practice, Duke of Edinburgh or Saltire awards).

Gathering evidence from a mix of different sources can strengthen your case.

For some inspiration to help you design and/or choose evidence collection tools, there is a range of **methods sheets** on the ESS website which you can download.

When do you need to collect evidence?

You need to collect evidence **more than once** in order to measure change over time. Exactly when will depend on your service. You will probably at least want to collect **baseline** evidence (i.e. at the start) and repeat the process at the **end**. You may also want to gather **long-term** feedback. Think about the typical service user's **journey** to help you identify when best to collect evidence.

example journey for someone receiving a one-to-one service
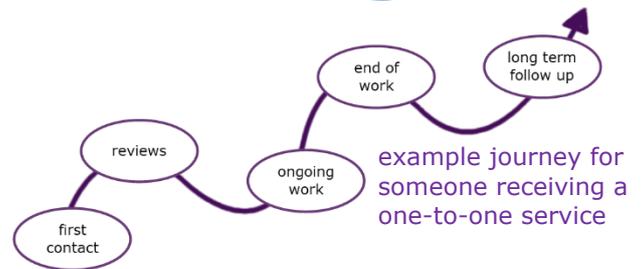
If your service is a one-off short-term intervention, you might not need baseline data. It may be enough to ask people to describe the difference your service has made and perhaps also request longer-term feedback after some time has passed.

Our advice

Evaluation Plan				
Outcomes	Indicators	Methods	Who collects the evidence	When and where it's collected

- Draw up an **evaluation plan**
- Build evidence gathering into your **activities**
- Consider using a **range** of different methods and don't be afraid to create your own
- **Test** your methods and get feedback from those collecting evidence as well as those they are collecting it from
- Remember you don't have to collect information on **all** your outcomes all the time
- Gather evidence of any **unexpected** outcomes or **other indicators** as this can strengthen your case, help improve your service or identify new sources of funding
- Record when things **don't work** too – this can provide the most useful learning.

More help

Our training workshop *Make to Measure* will help you at this stage. To book a place visit the workshops page of our website. If you want to look at some pre-existing methods, there is information together with real examples of them in use in the resources section of our website.

collecting evidence

What next?

Now you need to work out the best way to store your evidence to make it as easy as possible to use. See our *Storing evidence* support guide.