Measuring the Impact of Volunteering – Information for organisations

What is impact?

Impact is the long term change or benefit that people experience as a result of taking part in activities. **Outcomes** are changes and benefits that occur during the life time of the project or volunteering activity.

We know that volunteering can bring about positive change for volunteers such as:

- More self-confidence.
- Better skills.
- Greater feelings of well-being.

But how do you know that volunteers experience these benefits? To measure impact, you must gather evidence on outcomes first. Impact is the cumulative effect of outcomes being achieved.

Outcomes for who?

When you think about assessing the outcomes of a project or service, you can measure many types of outcome. For instance, you could focus on the:

- Outcomes for the volunteer from their volunteering experience.
- Outcomes for the service user of a volunteer delivered service.
- Outcomes for the organisation or partnership of the volunteer programme.

You are not limited to what you measure and assess. The only thing that will affect what you focus on is likely to be capacity and time.

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Outcomes should be:

- Client centred and/or volunteer centred.
- Clear and use precise language.
- Observable or measurable.
- Realistic and achievable.
- Show progress.

Outcomes can be hard or soft. Hard outcomes are easy to assess and prove e.g. more volunteers attend the workshop. Soft outcomes are harder to assess but are often a sign of sustained change. Soft outcomes are about feelings.

Examples:

- Clients say they feel more confident.
- Volunteers report they are better able to support clients as a result of the training.

Programme Logic Model

The Model below shows us all aspects of a project or service area that can be evaluated. You will see that outcomes lead to impact.

INPUTS
The ingredients – staff, volunteers, resources, buildings, finances.
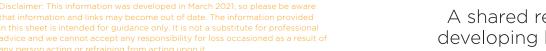
PROCESS
The way in which we deliver the project.

OUTPUTS
The activities we deliver – e.g. volunteering.

OUTCOMES
The differences or changes we are hoping to make in the lives of service users or volunteers.

IMPACT
The long term changes in service users, volunteers, communities, society.

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Why measure outcomes and impact?

Measuring outcomes and long-term impact allows you to show the differences you are making. You might want to:

• Encourage shared understanding of what can be achieved.

• Encourage volunteers to see their progress, further building their confidence.

• Gather evidence to influence policy and strategy.

• Show funders what their money is enabling us to achieve.

• Encourage new funders to invest in volunteering programmes.

• Highlight to potential volunteers what they could gain from joining your organisation.

• Evidence the importance of the volunteer function for the Board and senior managers.

• Demonstrate to partners what you offer and how you could work together.

• Enable us to identify what needs changing or improving – what's working and what's not working.

Volunteering can have positive impact on the volunteers themselves but also on clients, who engage with the volunteers. For example, volunteers with lived experience can easily relate to the experience, challenges and feelings of service users. For example, peer mentoring projects in mental health can benefit greatly from volunteers who have lived experience. By understanding why and how change happens, you can learn about what works and what doesn't. Measuring outcomes and impact allows you to continually develop and improve what you do.

How do you measure?

Key questions to answer are:

• What are you trying to evidence and who is the audience?

• What data will you gather?

• How will you report the data and how will you use it?

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What are you trying to evidence and who are the audience?

It is important to work out the outcomes you hope to achieve from your work. We always write outcomes using change words. Some examples are: better, greater, more, less, fewer, wider....

By using change words, you can evaluate how things were at the beginning of a programme of volunteering (the baseline e.g. how confident was the volunteer?) and then measure the difference in their level of confidence as a result of their volunteering.

KPIs and collecting data

First identify the signs you'll look for to show the change has happened – these signs are called Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Then decide if you're interested in KPIs about quantity or quality or both? Quantitative data includes:

• number of volunteers?

• number of volunteer hours?

• diversity data i.e. % of people from different ethnic groups, ages of volunteers.

Qualitative data is useful however, as it can provide story behind the statistics.

• What do volunteers think about...?

• How confident do volunteers feel...

Qualitative data is descriptive and about feelings, opinions, abilities, etc...

There are many ways of collecting data, but if you want to engage volunteers the best idea is to make the methods fun, creative and co-designed by the volunteers themselves. Here are some typical ways of collecting volunteering data:

• Record volunteer hours

• Record diversity stats

• Observation

• Learning logs

• Journals and diaries – written, audio or video

• Annual volunteer survey

• Ask for feedback from volunteers and service users

• Case-studies

• Testimonials

• Supervision and team meetings

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How will you report the data and how will you use it?

By regularly gathering data on outcomes, you can show the overall impact of your volunteering activities:

- Share the information in-house and with partners.

- Report to funders.

- Share your findings and show case achievements – at your AGM, partner events and online.

- Write and publish case-studies on volunteers and clients, from volunteer-led projects.

- Use the information to influence externally e.g. input to consultations on services and policies.

- Use the data in future funding applications and contracts for services.

Local contacts

Your local CVC will be able to support and advise you on measuring impact and outcomes.

Swansea Council for Voluntary Service (SCVS)

📞 **01792 544000**
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