

The Power of Evaluation and how it can improve your programme performance



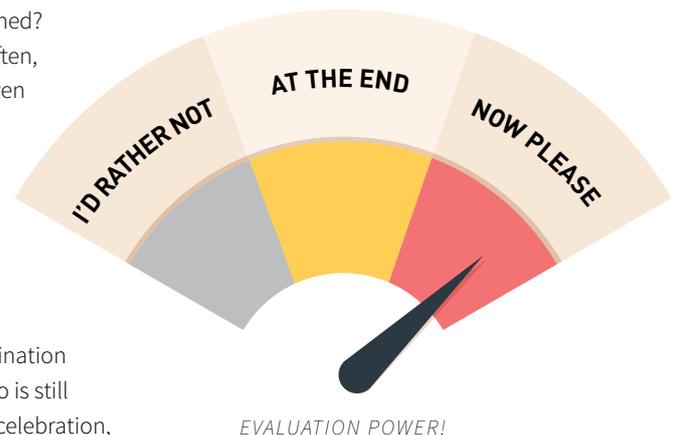
Michelle Hollier (nee McGuire), [Winning Moves Ltd](#) | T: +44(0)121 285 3800 | E: michellem@winningmoves.com

What's the point of evaluation? Why can it make us shudder? Is it just a compliance requirement? Through challenging some commonly held assumptions about evaluation and providing compelling and real life ways that evaluation can add value to your programme delivery and performance, we look at... *The Power of Evaluation*.

Many of us are unsure what 'evaluation' actually is. For others, it brings uncertainty – what does evaluation mean? How should it be approached? Who should do it? For those who are more familiar with evaluation, often, the mere mention of the word brings a shudder to the shoulders of even the most hardened project, programme or policy managers. It can also bring with it a range of negative connotations – especially the perception of it as a burdensome compliance obligation as an end of project evaluation, necessary to fulfil funding requirements, adding in an extra commissioning phase and stretching that already stretched budget even further.

Haven't you just safely captained your ship from home shores to destination Project Completion? None of your crew jumped overboard, your cargo is still intact, so the journey appears to be a success. It should be time for a celebration, or at least to begin starting your next exciting journey, not to set about starting a post-hoc evaluation.

Let's debunk some commonly held myths about evaluation...





DEBUNKING THE MYTHS

There's a range of myths shrouding evaluation. **Let's bust them.**

Myth #1

Evaluation is only done once, and at the end, to determine the success or failure of an activity.

Myth Buster... Success is contingent on continuous feedback. Rather than just providing evidence that a programme was good or bad at the end, conducting evaluation mid-journey can verify that the activity is running on track, identify strengths and weaknesses, and where and when changes may be necessary.

Myth #2

An evaluation won't tell us anything we don't already know.

Myth Buster... Sometimes evaluations do not provide a different viewpoint or new data, however, there can be value in a separate assessment of this, or capturing that value for future activities. And often, evaluations do provide new information, or help to frame information in a different way. An evaluation plan helps to refine your data collection and assessment practices and can help to ensure the focus is on data that is meaningful and fed back in an engaging and actionable way.

Myth #3

Evaluations are time consuming and expensive needing the appointment of an external consultancy.

Myth Buster... There are a wide range of different evaluation tools and approaches ranging from short and straightforward to longer and more complex. Evaluation, could include making sense of monitoring data, critically assessing programme data, collating anecdotal information or carrying out interim or post project reviews. And all of these elements can be carried out by an internal team. An external evaluation consultancy can add more value if an independent evaluation is appropriate, internally you lack the skills and / or resources, or the scale of requirement necessitates it. An evaluation should be proportionate to the activity being undertaken.

Now the common myths have been busted, it's important to highlight how evaluation can help to make us better at what we do. Following on are ten ways in which evaluation can add value to your activities.

Evaluation has the power to help us learn...

Help understand: is it working? Evaluation helps to understand impact – is it making the difference we want it to in the way that we thought it would?

Help understand: how is it working? A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Which part is working the best? What needs changing or improving?

Help understand: why it is working. Evaluation contributes to our understanding of programme effectiveness so that activities can be tested, developed and improved.

Improve efficiency. Evaluation can help identify the most valuable and efficient use of resources. So we do more of the things that work and less of the things that don't.

Highlight unintended outcomes. Is there more happening than you thought? Unintended outcomes are hard to capture without an evaluation plan.

...and benefit from that learning

Inform decision making. Evaluation can be critical for building a strong evidence base for continuing a programme, changing it, ramping it up or scaling it down.

Demonstrate effectiveness. Robust evaluation helps to better communicate the value of your work – take-up, effectiveness, demand and value for money.

Improve adaptability. Evaluation supports a dynamic way of working, enabling project delivery to be adjusted based on new and improved understanding and knowledge.

Support continuous learning. Evaluation reveals mistakes and successes, and new understanding offers paths for learning and continuous improvement.

Contribute to wider learning. Evaluation can strengthen your capacity to contribute evidence based knowledge to other settings.

Considering all of this, let's go back to the ship analogy... If, as the Captain, you had implemented an evaluation, instead of simply arriving at your destination and assuming it was a success, you might have been able to:

- Review and improve processes on board, introducing efficiencies and improving effectiveness
- Test the route (is it still the most appropriate course, vehicle, time plan etc) and even is the destination still right?
- Explore what impact certain variables (e.g. the weather, route and storage plan) might be having on the cargo and what adaptations could be made to mitigate damage and optimise its safe passage
- Understand whether your customers are happy – do they consider the journey to have been a success? Were there any unintended outcomes? Could anything be changed to ensure more success is derived in the future?
- The Admiral of the Royal Navy could objectively and measurably see how successful you had been, and ring fence a budget for your next voyage (which would be improved due to continuous learning).

We understand, first hand, the **power of evaluation.**

Winning Moves together with our sister company Databuild, have been designing and delivering evaluation for a predominantly public sector client base for over twenty years. We support local and national government to make evidence based decisions concerning policy, programme or service intervention, routed in robust research. Clients have used our evaluations to understand what works, why and how much, and in doing so, enhanced the outcome to the end user.

We can help you with your evaluation needs. Whether it is an informal chat to provide a few pointers, to request more case studies like the one below, or to better understand how evaluation could be used to improve your programme delivery and performance, please do get in touch.

CASE STUDY: Broadlands District Council (BDC)

The evaluation: A three-part (baseline, interim and final) evaluation of their Growing Greener Homes project (with ERDF funding) which involved intensively retrofitting eight social housing properties with the aim of achieving 90% energy and carbon emissions reductions per property and establishing the most cost effective approach. The project also engaged businesses in the retrofit supply chain, providing them with 12 hours of support, to help develop the market for sustainable retrofit in the area.

The outcome: By using evaluation smartly, BDC were able to make instrumental changes to their Growing Greener Homes programme which contributed directly to the effectiveness of the project and ultimately its success. The project has been awarded a Green Apple Award for environmental best practice.

BDC used the baseline and interim evaluation results to develop and refine the support they were offering to businesses through the programme both to make sure they were meeting the needs of local businesses and to ensure they met their ERDF targets.

For example, the evaluation helped BDC to understand that some businesses were struggling to take action after just attending one seminar – which in turn meant that BDC would struggle to meet their targets- so they introduced 121 support which was tailored to each business and enabled the advisor to write an action plan to encourage participants to take action. This dynamic way of working facilitated programme improvements as the project was being delivered.

The final phase evaluation enabled BDC to demonstrate their effectiveness by providing an assessment of the success of the project in terms of attributable impacts, including the impact on the businesses supported in terms of sales, profit and job creation, and carbon impacts delivered through the retrofit work.

BDC used lessons from the evaluation to contribute to their wider learning, as well as to support continuous learning. BDC continue to use new knowledge from the evaluation to effectively target and engage businesses in other funded support programmes that they deliver, as well as to develop the sector and to support policy.

GET IN TOUCH

Ground Floor, Baskerville House, Centenary Square,
Broad Street Birmingham B1 2ND

T +44 (0)121 285 3800
E info@winningmoves.com

winningmoves.com