MODULE 3

Monitoring and evaluating intergenerational programmes

Please note that the information in this section is intended to capture just the key messages on monitoring and evaluation from Module 3 which can be found in the International Diploma in Intergenerational Learning (IDIL) Course.

To access all the additional information please register to complete the course at [International Diploma in Intergenerational Learning (IDIL) (generationsworkingtogether.org)](generationsworkingtogether.org)

Should you decide to book on and complete the IDIL course, in Module 3 you will learn about the basic concepts we propose you use when evaluating an intergenerational programme, and we'll explain how the impact of these programmes can be used as an argument for achieving their sustainability.

Specifically, in this module we'll cover the following:

- You'll familiarise yourself with some of the principles and useful ideas for monitoring and evaluating an intergenerational programme.
- We'll make it clear why it's so important to evaluate.
- We'll show you some tools and methods used in the evaluation of an intergenerational programme.

If you complete the Module in full you will:

- Understand the importance of monitoring and evaluating intergenerational programmes.
- Be aware of the existence of different approaches to the monitoring and evaluation of intergenerational programmes.
- Have thought about some of the problems which can arise during the monitoring and evaluation of an intergenerational programme.
- Have an opportunity in the overall course assignment to map out an intergenerational project that you wish to develop and receive valuable feedback from your course tutor.

We hope after reading this short section on monitoring and evaluating intergenerational projects that you will join us and our international students and sign up to the course.

Key messages from Module 3

3.1 Basic Principles of evaluation. Why evaluate?

What do we mean by evaluation?

When we say "I'm going to evaluate an intergenerational project", this means different things to different people. For some it's a chore, best left to the end, perhaps a condition of funding, whilst for others they may believe it should be commissioned out externally.

So what do WE mean by evaluation? We think that:

- Evaluation is at the heart of planning intergenerational projects, It is utilized best when it is included in the objectives. Information obtained from evaluations allows us to incorporate changes and improvements as the project progresses.
- Evaluation helps us identify key aspects of a quality intergenerational programme and to shape meaningful practice, without which intergenerational work would not be possible.

Good project planning starts with a clear idea about what the proposed outcomes of the project are going to be, and it is these that will form the heart of the overall evaluation. The project plan sets out the journey to achieve those outcomes, while monitoring is the process to check that we aregoing the right way so we can make any necessary amendments in light of experience.

Don't Forget: Evaluation should be considered a strategic part of intergenerational work, aimed at measuring our impact on improving cohesion, development and planning in our communities.

Monitoring and evaluation

Evaluation is the process of making judgements about an intergenerational programme based on evidence. Evaluation is more than research: it does involve gathering information, but it is also about making judgements arising from that information. For intergenerational engagement is most effective when participant voice and experience is placed at the centre. Evaluation methods can allow us generate information that checks the activities we develop are not being done to people, but instead arise from their needs and desires. By building in a process that keeps track of what we aim to do together we can help build accountability and trust while embedding mutuality and reciprocity at the heart of what we do.

So, what's the difference between evaluation and monitoring?

Monitoring is about setting up procedures to gather and record information about the day-to-day functioning of an organisation or project. Therefore, while evaluation is about making judgements, monitoring is not. To monitor is to check on how project activities are progressing. It is systematic and purposeful observation while the project is being implemented. Monitoring enables you to make informed change throughout the project to reflect your learning and steer project to end destination. It is a key project management tool. Evaluation involves more than just describing what goes on - in other words more than monitoring. It's a way of analysing collected evidence in order to demonstrate to yourself and others whether or not your project achieved its objectives.

The best evaluations are those which are carried out honestly and openly. Showing that you're aware of what's gone wrong and have learned from your mistakes is a feature of a good quality evaluation.

The evidence gathered in the process of evaluation, therefore, is used to demonstrate the value and quality of your project or programme and with it you should be able to show the following:

- What has worked and why?
- What has not worked and why?
- What changes need to be implemented while the project is still running?
- What unexpected consequences or outcomes have occurred?
- What have participants done or achieved?
- What difference has the programme made to individuals, groups and the wider community?
- What have staff and volunteers learned?
- How has the funding been put to good use during the project?
- What would you do differently next time?
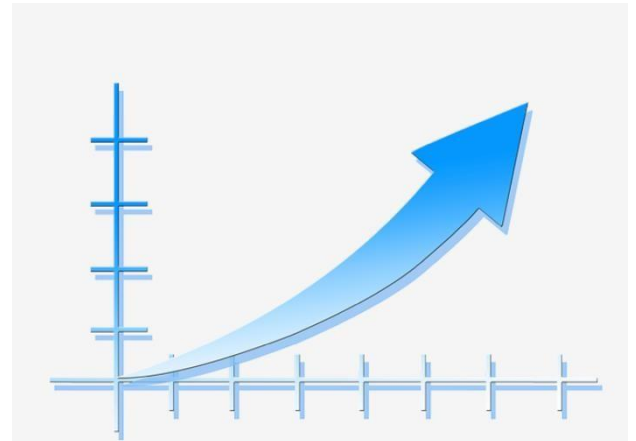
Why is evaluation important?

Common concerns when getting started on evaluating an intergenerational project include the following:

- Do I need special qualifications to carry out the evaluation?
- Will it be useful? Can we afford it? Have we got enough time?

Similarly, when people hear the word 'evaluation' there is often an association with something threatening and complicated, rather than feelings, meanings and experiences. But this is not the case. Indeed, those who have undertaken the process often say things like:

- "It hasn't been as complicated as I had thought."
- "Having done it now several times I feel much more confident around evaluation."
- "Evaluating my project has enabled me to appreciate it much more."

Whatever type of project you run, evaluating it IS really important!!!

Evaluation is important for a number of reasons. We've already said that it's important because it helps us to make a judgement about what we've achieved and how things are going / have gone and to learn from that. As well as that, evaluation is important because it allows us to:

- Learn from the process in ways that can improve, develop and sustain the work you are doing. This doesn't mean that evaluation necessarily leads to change: sometimes it confirms that what you're doing is working as well as it can and so should continue just as it is.

- Use the resources you have available in the most effective way.
- Convince your managers, community, or trustees to sustain the work or support you to try a different approach.

Do you want to see some more reasons why evaluation is important for intergenerational organisations and staff? See below a list of ten answers to the question "Why evaluate an intergenerational project?"

Ten reasons why evaluation of intergenerational projects matters:

1. It is essential that we gather objective evidence of the impact of our work **to enable us to demonstrate that it makes a difference.**

2. **Participants, volunteers and staff are motivated** to contribute to make a positive difference for other people – evaluation demonstrates the success they achieve.

3. This is a developing area of work and we need **to take an evidence based approach to understanding what works and what we will need to do differently** in the future and be able to demonstrate this to other practitioners in our field, policy makers and funders.

4. We need to understand **what is different about taking an intergenerational approach**, particularly in respect of its intentional methodology to building relationships between the generations and the impact that a relational focus can achieve.

5. We need to demonstrate that our approach is based on an evidence base and **meets the quality standards for intergenerational practice** endorsed by this course.

6. **To prove to our funders that we have achieved the aims of the project they funded** and to demonstrate that **intergenerational approaches are a cost-effective means** to building positive relationships and support between the generations that achieve demonstrable benefits for all who participate and their wider communities.

7. **To ensure that the learning from our project is captured and disseminated**, thus contributing to the growing understanding and theoretical basis for intergenerational practice.

8. **To help secure future funding** by having the evidence to substantiate the outcomes and impact that intergenerational work can achieve and the effectiveness of achieving this through a generational approach across the generations.

9. From an appreciative inquiry point of view —a good fit in the case of relational endeavours like intergenerational projects, we must evaluate **to search for and highlight the good that there is in any project, its positive core.** From this perspective to eVALUate means to VALUE to the project.

10. As intergenerational project developers we need to be aware of the moral side of evaluations. We must assume our responsibility around inclusion, appreciation of differences and creation of ongoing dialogue. Hence, the need to undertake responsive evaluations **to foster mutual understanding through connecting all people and generations who have a stake in the evaluation.**

3.2 Basic principles of evaluation, when to evaluate and who to involve

When should we evaluate and who should be involved in the process?

The evaluation process can begin as soon as an initial idea for a project becomes a practical possibility. Monitoring and evaluation should be part of the planning process. From the beginning you need to ask the question what difference the project will make and how you will know. You will need to decide whether the evaluation takes place before, during and / or after the project.

We recommend that information you collect should take place before, halfway and at the conclusion of any project. It is also helpful, if possible, to collect information from your participants months after a project concludes in order to see what happens next. Do the intergenerational connections you initiate evolve into new directions of community engagement? Are relationships sustained, or do they fade? Does this learning change how you approach what you do next?

As an integral part of our project plan we have to agree at the beginning what difference we intend to achieve, that is to say what impact or outcomes we intend to achieve. The evaluation plan then identifies and determines what evidence we need to gather throughout the project to substantiate our progress in achieving these outcomes and also to understand what has and hasn't worked as expected.

Alongside the evaluation plan we have the project plan which shows the actions we need to go through to achieve these end outcomes and also the changes (outputs) that will be achieved at each stage as a result of these actions. Monitoring enables us to follow the progress of the project against this plan, understanding the progress we are making and enabling changes to be made if things go differently to our original predictions. Delivering a project is a process of continual learning as we monitor the project to be as successful as possible and are able to demonstrate the outcomes and success of the project through the evaluation evidence we have gathered throughout the project.

Participants need to be placed at the centre of any evaluation process, and everyone who contributes to, takes part, or benefits from a project should play some part in the evaluation.

We have prepared a simple tool for you to practice the identification of your project's stakeholders: a stakeholder map.

It's important to ask ourselves from the outset whether the particular evaluation we want to carry out is best done by someone within the organisation, an individual or agency outside the organisation - or a combination of both.

Both internal and external evaluations have advantages and disadvantages. For example, an insider may know the issues and the organisation well and be a familiar figure to participants, staff and volunteers. An outsider, on the other hand, may find it easier to offer a more objective view on what is happening.

Should you decide to complete the IDIL Course the last two sections of module 3 cover the following themes:

3.3 Basic principles of evaluation: what can we evaluate?

Exploring the specificities in the evaluation of intergenerational projects ie
- Relational evaluation for relational intergenerational projects.

- Project and life experience, a key component in evaluation.

- Age and generational diversity, an invitation to be creative.

3.4 The stages of evaluation and the steps we should follow:
- Planning.
- Gathering evidence and the different techniques you could use.
- Reporting the outcomes/key findings according to your audience.