

REF/CPA

undertaking an evaluation

Barbara Murray, Pauline Faughnan and David Redmond

1.1.2.

undertaking an evaluation

Combat Poverty Agency
Library 906

Reference Only
Please Do Not Remove
From Library

CO

2843

27 JAN 1995

8 CHARLEMONT ST., DUBLIN, 2

Barbara Murray, Pauline Faughnan and David Redmond

The Authors

The authors are members of the Sociological Association of Ireland.

Barbara Murray works in the Research section of NRB, 25 Clyde Road, Dublin 4.

Pauline Faughnan is based in the Social Science Research Centre, University College, Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4.

David Redmond is a member of NEXUS Research Cooperative, 9 North Frederick Street, Dublin 1.

© 1994 - Barbara Murray, Pauline Faughnan and David Redmond

Distributed by
Sociological Association of Ireland
Department of Sociology
St. Patrick's College
Maynooth

Tel: 01 628 5222
Fax 01 628 9373

ISBN 0 951341 2 X

The views expressed in this book
are not necessarily those of the Sociological Association of Ireland
or the Combat Poverty Agency.

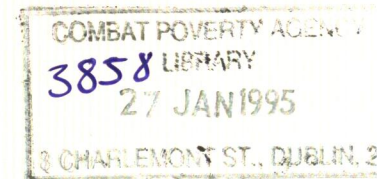
Design and Production
Language *visual communications*

Contents

Foreword

Introduction

1 Preliminary Stage	3
1.1 Who should be involved?	3
1.2 What is to be evaluated?	4
1.3 Why is an evaluation being carried out?	7
1.4 Who wants the evaluation?	9
1.5 Who is the audience?	10
1.5 What resources are required for the evaluation?	11
1.7 What liaison procedures are required?	14
1.8 Evaluation brief	15
2 Designing the Evaluation	17
2.1 How is the evaluation to be designed?	17
2.2 Stages of the evaluation	18
3 Action Phase - Carrying out the Evaluation	25
3.1 Role of the evaluator	25
3.2 Types of skill used by the evaluator	28
3.3 Issues arising during the action phase	30
4 Utilising Findings and Informing Policy	43
5 Concluding Comments	47
Glossary	49



Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the valuable feedback provided by SAI members on an early draft of the guidelines. The comments by practitioners from the Combat Poverty Agency, the Community Workers' Coop, Leargas, NRB and a local authority were very useful in shaping the final version. We are grateful to both of these groups for their contribution.

We would also like to thank the Department of Social Welfare, the Money-Lending Pilot Projects and NEXUS Research Co-operative for allowing us to use their project evaluation as an illustration.

Martyn Turner captured some aspects of the guidelines in a lighter vein, which may strike a cord with evaluators in the field!

The publication of these guidelines would not have been possible without the financial assistance of the Combat Poverty Agency and the Sociological Association of Ireland. We thank them for their support and encouragement.

The views expressed in the guidelines are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Combat Poverty Agency, the Sociological Association of Ireland or any of the other groups or individuals who contributed to their development.

Foreword

Over the past twenty years, evaluation has become part of accepted practice in publicly-funded activities. Funders have come to expect assessments of the effectiveness of activities which they support. Managers often require information to identify strengths and weaknesses of interventions and to plan future development. In the current climate of accountability and concern with value for money, in which the need for systematic and relevant information has become increasingly important, questions frequently arise about how best to approach the task of evaluation.

At a workshop on evaluation organised by the Sociological Association of Ireland in November 1992, participants identified a need for guidelines on how to undertake evaluations. They are written from the viewpoint of sociologists with considerable experience of evaluation research undertaken for a range of voluntary organisations, community groups and state bodies. The guidelines will be of interest to funders, managers, project leaders, staff and consumers in the voluntary, public and private sectors, as well as to those undertaking evaluations.

These guidelines are a response to this demand. The guidelines trace the evaluation process from the initial planning phase to its completion and the dissemination of findings. All sections will be of interest to evaluators and evaluation managers. Funders, programme administrators and project leaders, are likely to be particularly interested in the first section dealing with the Preliminary Stage and in the section on Utilising Findings and Informing Policy.

Introduction

Evaluations fall into three distinct phases - a preliminary planning stage, a design stage and an action stage. Choices have to be made at each stage - some by whoever commissions the evaluation (Funders), some by whoever manages the evaluation (Evaluation Manager), some by those involved in the activity (Managers, Staff, Volunteers), some by the person or persons who will carry out the evaluation (Evaluator) and some by all combined. The aim of these guidelines is to give an overview of the evaluation process, focusing on the steps which should be taken at each stage and the choices and issues which are likely to arise. An example of an evaluation commissioned by the Department of Social Welfare in 1993 - the Moneylending Pilot Schemes Evaluation - is used as an illustration throughout.

1. Preliminary Stage

Before an evaluation is commissioned, an evaluation brief should be drawn up. This can be a fairly time-consuming process, but is essential to the success of the evaluation. In the Moneylending Pilot Schemes, the development of the evaluation brief took approximately six months, from the time it was first discussed by the National Steering Committee to its final approval and the allocation of necessary funds.

The first step in the process is to decide who should be involved in the preliminary planning and in answering central questions about the evaluation. These questions are:

- What is to be evaluated?
- Why is the evaluation being carried out?
- Who wants the evaluation?
- Who is the audience?
- What resources are available for the evaluation?
- What liaison procedures are required?

1.1 Who should be involved?

Some individual generally has responsibility for initiating the evaluation. This person may be a representative of the Funders, or a manager within the activity to be evaluated. S/he may decide to draw up the evaluation brief alone and then circulate this document to others for comment; or to set up a planning group, which may act as a Steering Group once the evaluation has been commissioned. Whichever approach is taken, it is important to consider the viewpoints of key stakeholders in the activity - those who have an interest in it, whether or not they are involved in its management or operation - particularly if the evaluation is to be carried out as a partnership between the evaluator and the managers of the activity.

Ideally, the person initiating the evaluation process and others involved in the preliminary planning should have a good understanding of evaluation and its potential uses and benefits. If this is not the case, it may be decided to seek outside assistance in drawing up the evaluation brief. It is very important, though, that the person assigned to manage the evaluation later and to liaise with the evaluator, should have this knowledge, or spend time acquiring it.

1.2 What is to be evaluated?

Is the activity to be evaluated broadly categorised as a programme, project or service? While in practice, an activity may contain elements of each of these, or may evolve from one to the other over time, it is useful to describe them separately because of the different characteristics associated with each.

Programme

A programme is a planned and organised series of events which seeks to address a particular problem or to promote development, in line with formally stated goals and objectives. It may consist of a single activity or a series of related activities and operate at a number of levels - national, regional and local. It may also involve intermediate agencies, each of which has a different role and responsibility. Policies underlying a programme may, for example, be formulated at the level of national government or the European Union; operational and monitoring procedures may be drawn up by a semi-state body or local authority; and the programme may be implemented by voluntary organisations or area-based partnerships of voluntary and statutory agencies. An example relevant to Ireland is the Community Employment Programme (formerly the Social Employment Scheme). This was introduced by Government decision, is administered by FÁS and implemented by a range of agencies, many of which are voluntary organisations. The evaluations of programmes have tended, in practice, to focus more on the lower levels of the hierarchy than on the top levels, and on the implementation stage rather than on the policy process.

Project

A project is a scheme which seeks to address some identified need, deficit or development possibility within a specified time limit. Projects frequently explore innovative ways of meeting needs and pilot projects are likely to have implications for future programmes or services. It frequently happens that programmes are implemented through the medium of projects, so elements of both may well arise in the evaluation. In the Moneylending Pilot Schemes example which is used throughout this document, a number of pilot projects were funded by the Department of Social Welfare in order to learn lessons for future policy and to identify practical measures to help low-income families which were seriously indebted.

Service

A service is a system or arrangement that caters for public needs. Such systems may be designed to meet particular needs of a population, for example, in the fields of education, communications, health or training. Alternatively, they may seek to meet a range of needs of a particular population group (such as youth) or of people in a particular geographic area. Whatever the focus, client, customers or consumers are the key figures in a service. Services may be provided by the statutory, private or voluntary sectors, or by combinations of these sectors. Service evaluations often have the advantage not only of an existing organisational structure, but also of record-keeping systems which can provide a considerable amount of data. This is particularly so if the service has existed for some time.

The evaluation design, to be developed later, will differ depending on which of these types of activity or combination of types is to be examined. It will also be influenced by whether the activity is primarily social or commercial and whether it is intended to focus on the activity as a whole or on particular parts of it. A further consideration is the level of attachment felt by stakeholders to the activity. This is likely to influence the way in which the evaluation proceeds and should be taken into account in decisions about the approach to be taken. At this stage, consultation with key

Moneylending Pilot Schemes Evaluation

Questions to be addressed in the Preliminary Stage

What is to be evaluated?

- Pilot projects to combat money lending and indebtedness

Why is the evaluation being carried out?

- To learn lessons for future policy as well as to support practical measures to help families in debt.

Who wants the evaluation?

- The Department of Social Welfare, which funds the projects, and also the projects themselves, through the National Steering Committee.

Who is the audience?

- The Department of Social Welfare, other Government departments and the projects themselves.

What resources are available?

- The time allowed to complete the evaluation is nine months. The budget is approximately £17,000 - to cover labour cost, overheads, expenses and VAT. Information and key informants can be accessed through contacts with individual projects. Some material on the background to each project is also available centrally from the Department of Social Welfare, through project proposal documents and minutes of the National Steering Committee meetings.

What liaison procedures are required?

- The Department of Social Welfare to be kept informed of progress by means of an interim report and by telephone contact if necessary.

stakeholders should take place, if they are not involved in the development of the evaluation brief.

1.3 Why is an evaluation being carried out?

While all evaluations set out to provide answers to questions, the exact reason why an evaluation is carried out can vary greatly. In some cases, an evaluation must be commissioned by managers to meet funding requirements. In such cases, a definite aim for the evaluation may not be specified. If this is so, it is useful for the managers to reflect at this stage on the potential benefit of the evaluation to the activity ("What can we get out of it?"), rather than proceeding with the evaluation simply on the grounds that it is required.

Reasons for evaluation

The purposes of evaluation are frequently categorised as 'Summative' or 'Formative/Developmental'. Where the purpose of evaluation is summative, the focus is mainly on tangible outcomes and quantifiable costs and benefits. This approach is often attractive, because it facilitates comparison with other similar activities. It is likely to be used where the aim is to assess the effectiveness of an activity in terms of its outcomes or to measure its efficiency. Where the purpose of the evaluation is formative, the focus is mainly on describing and analysing the entire process involved, to examine and interpret the outcomes which occur and to contribute to on-going development. Nowadays, evaluations often have elements of both, with varying emphasis being placed on each aspect. It is useful to make the distinction, however, because each type of evaluation may give rise to different expectations.

Evaluations may be undertaken for one or for several of the following specific reasons, whether explicitly stated or not:

Assessing Effectiveness

An evaluation is basically concerned with the effectiveness of the activity, setting out to answer the question '*Is it working?*'.

Effectiveness can be assessed in terms of the impact of the activity or the process involved. Impact assessment involves establishing the outcomes of a programme, project or service. The impacts may relate to individuals, to a population group, to a local community or to an institution. They may be specifically planned or they may be unintended, happening as an unexpected outcome of the activity undertaken. Process assessment involves examining what the activity involves and the manner in which it is implemented, rather than the outcomes which result. Consequently, identifying, describing and analysing the process may be the core element in assessing effectiveness. Evaluations may focus specifically on one of these approaches - that is, on process evaluation or on impact or outcome evaluation - or more typically, involve a combination of both.

Developmental Tool

An evaluation may be undertaken in order to improve the effectiveness of an activity while it is being implemented. The process of evaluation in this case enables those involved in the activity to keep records on the operation of the programme, reflect on the information compiled and its implications and continually refine and improve its operation. Such self-evaluation or internal programme evaluation is an important element in good management. Managers, staff and, in some cases, volunteers are key figures in planning the evaluation in a way that suits their circumstances and needs.

Strategic Planning

The purpose of the evaluation may be to gather information or data on the operation of a programme or service which is needed to make planning or management decisions. In this case, the focus may be on particular aspects of the activity, rather than on the activity as a whole.

Assessing Efficiency

If the evaluation is undertaken to examine efficiency, the focus is on the extent to which the activity reflects an efficient use of funds and on the costs and the benefits of the intervention.

Accountability

The purpose of the evaluation may be to account for and to document the use of funds from public, commercial or private sources. Much of the recent demand for evaluations in Ireland has derived from the growing requirement for accountability in the use of funds allocated through European Union programmes or State agencies.

Because the reason for the evaluation may not be explicitly stated, the preliminary planning work should include clarification of its purpose with the parties involved and exploration of their expectations concerning the evaluation. All evaluations do not fulfil the same functions, so it is important to clarify the primary purpose and to ensure that the expectations of those involved are realistic.

Traditionally, evaluation has been viewed with apprehension and has involved an expert or experts handing down a judgement on the activity. A partnership approach to evaluation is now becoming more commonplace, involving active participation in the process by managers, staff and other participants. This type of approach is more likely to be empowering and to assist the development of the activity.

1.4 Who wants the evaluation?

The decision to evaluate may come from outside the activity from one of the following sources:

- *Funding agency* - European, Governmental or Non-Governmental Organisation. The funding agency may not necessarily be involved in the implementation of the activity.
- *External statutory agency* with an interest in or responsibility for the activity to be evaluated.
- *Senior management* of the organisation or agency, significantly removed from the operation of the activity to be evaluated. While the decision to evaluate an activity in this case may come from within the parent organisation, in practice it resembles an external

initiative as far as the people involved in the activity are concerned. This would be the case, for example, where an organisation has multiple centres, branches or departments each with their own management structure.

- *People affected by the activity* or whom it is intended to benefit, such as consumers or constituents.
- *Consortium or network of organisations or projects* with an interest in the activity.

Alternatively, it may come from *within* the activity, from the management, the staff, the voluntary helpers or the participants. There may be no specific external requirement to evaluate, but management or project teams may decide to evaluate their activities and begin to set in place a system of self-evaluation, either on a once-off, intermittent or on-going basis.

Even where the decision to evaluate comes from an external source, those directly involved in the activity can have a major influence on the shape and the nature of the evaluation. An example of this is where an evaluation is required by a funding organisation so that the use of the money allocated can be accounted for. Managers and staff may decide to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the evaluation to generate information about the activity and its effectiveness. Thus, the evaluation may lead to improved performance and be used as a tool to assist in the development of the activity or in strategic planning. A partnership approach to the evaluation would be most appropriate in this case, with the managers and staff participating actively in the evaluation process.

1.5 Who is the audience?

In considering the format of the reporting required, it is important to bear in mind from the outset that the evaluation findings will need to be communicated to an audience or to several different audiences. In many cases, different individuals and groups will have an understandable interest in the evaluation and its outcome. These

'stakeholders' frequently include funders, policy makers, decision takers, practitioners, agencies or organisations involved in the field, in addition to the consumers and constituents. A number of different messages may need to be conveyed to each of these different audiences. If this is the case, it should be mentioned in the evaluation brief.

The purposes of the evaluation will shape the manner in which the findings are fed back to the audience or audiences - whether in the form of a once-off report or in the form of regular feedback, both formal or informal, throughout the evaluation.

1.6 What resources are required for the evaluation?

Resources to carry out the evaluation should be allocated at the beginning of the process. These include

- Financial Resources - to pay for evaluation work, travel, office overheads
- Skills available for the evaluation, internally and externally
- Availability of information
- Access to information
- Access to key informants
- Time frame of the evaluation.

Financial resources

Evaluations cost money and for this reason, it is important to explain the tasks involved to people who are experiencing evaluation research for the first time. Financial resources may have to cover not just a salary or fee for the evaluation but also overheads for an evaluator, such as the cost of an office, of producing reports, or travel. Provision for the evaluation should be built into the budget of the activity at an early stage and based on realistic costing. It may only be possible to estimate the costs at this stage but a firmer cost estimate should be sought from the evaluator after preliminary discussions have taken place. As part of this budgeting process, a balance should

be struck between the resources available for evaluation and the resources available to the activity itself, so as to avoid a situation in which the evaluation is perceived by managers, staff or volunteers to be eating up scarce resources at the expense of the activity itself.

Skills available

Evaluations require inputs from people. There is a need for skills on the part of the person or team undertaking the evaluation and inputs are also required from managers, staff and other participants in the activity. The actual task of evaluation may be undertaken by someone within the activity if the necessary skills are available. Alternatively, it may be undertaken by someone external to it. In each case, there will be a cost involved - either in terms of a fee or salary for the person or team, or in terms of opportunity cost, where internal personnel are utilised. Each situation offers advantages and limitations. While 'insiders' are likely to be quite familiar with the activity to be evaluated, they may be seen as representing particular interests within it. For this reason, if an 'insider' is given the task, it is important that some mechanism be put in place to ensure objectivity - for example an advisory group which involves outsiders to the activity. An 'outsider' may be seen as having the advantage of greater objectivity, but would require considerable time from staff or managers in getting a grasp of the situation. If an 'outsider' is appointed, provision would also have to be made to ensure this input. Also, depending on the reason for the evaluation, the 'outsider' may be viewed with apprehension and suspicion by some stakeholders. This would need to be managed, to enable the evaluation to proceed smoothly.

Even though the skills required for the evaluation may be available internally, it may be decided to engage an external person to undertake or facilitate the evaluation. This is usually the case where a summative approach is required. It may also be the case where a formative approach is seen as the most appropriate - such as where a team wishes to monitor and evaluate its own activities or services. In both cases, the evaluators' role involves the development of a sound basis for assessing effectiveness. Where a formative approach is used,

the evaluator will also be required to act as a facilitator in an education process whose success is judged by what others learn. Managers have considerable say in choosing the evaluator or in selecting the external agency which will have responsibility for the evaluation, even where the decision to evaluate is made externally. Previous work carried out by different evaluators should be reviewed to guide the selection.

The evaluation may involve additional work for staff and managers - such as taking part in discussions or keeping new records. For this reason, it is important that they clearly understand and agree with the purpose of the evaluation. They should also view the evaluation as an integral part of the activity, working to its ultimate benefit, rather than as something which is imposed on their everyday work and bearing little relation to it. It is thus important that the evaluation be designed in such a way as to minimise interference with day-to-day working of the activity.

Availability of information

In practice, it may only be possible to ascertain whether the necessary information is available once the evaluation has started rather than at the design stage. The information which is readily available will have a crucial bearing on the evaluation. In some instances the evaluator may have to put in place a framework for collecting or generating information before the evaluation can proceed.

Access to key informants

Key informants must allocate time to talk to the evaluator, who should have the authority to ask and get answers to questions which may touch on sensitive issues. It is important for the evaluator to develop a working relationship, based on trust, with those involved in the activity from the start of the evaluation and establish credibility so that a shared commitment to the evaluation will develop. This is particularly important where a partnership approach to the evaluation is adopted.

Time frame

A considered evaluation takes time - to interview people, to gather information, to reflect on and analyse the findings. Where there is

some flexibility about the time available to do the work, it is wise to build in a reserve of time from the start, to allow for unexpected delays which may arise. If a deadline for the evaluation report has been laid down by the funders of the activity, the evaluation should be initiated as early as possible so that a thorough job can be done.

Where the purpose is summative, the evaluation can only be carried out when the activity has been in operation for a period of time. A monitoring system may be set up at the start of an activity but final conclusions cannot be drawn until the activity is finished. Where the purpose is formative, the evaluation is best carried out in the course of the activity, with the evaluators ideally being involved from the very start. Problems may arise if the timing of the evaluation is wrong - for example if a formative evaluation is commissioned when the activity is nearing an end.

As in the case of costing, it may only be possible to estimate the amount of time involved when the evaluation brief is being drawn up. As a rule of thumb though, evaluations with summative purposes tend to be less time-consuming than where the purpose is formative. Once an evaluator has been commissioned to carry out the work, a more definite time frame should be worked out. An evaluator faced with a tight timetable may seek revision of the evaluation as outlined in the evaluation brief.

1.7 What liaison procedures are required?

The role played by the evaluator and the way in which s/he is perceived will influence the way in which the activity will benefit from the evaluation. It is thus important to the smooth progress of the evaluation that attention be given to liaison with the evaluator, particularly in the action phase. When the evaluation is being planned, decisions should be made on liaison procedures to be set up between the client and the evaluator. An evaluation manager with responsibility for liaising with the evaluator should be designated. In some cases, it may be decided that an advisory group will be set up

to oversee the evaluation. Agreement should be reached on the format of meetings. A timetable for the work and a schedule of meetings between the client and the evaluator should be drawn up, including agreement on the timing and frequency of reports and other forms of feedback. Expectations about the end-product of the evaluation should be discussed. The possible publication of research findings and the ownership of the data gathered in the course of the evaluation should also be discussed at this stage.

Where the purpose of an evaluation is formative, extensive contact and consultation should be set up with the agencies, staff and participants engaged in the activity to be evaluated. The liaison procedures will determine the evaluator's access to key information and informants, already identified as resources required for the evaluation.

It is possible that at some stage during the evaluation, tension may develop between the evaluator and people involved in the activity. Problems may stem, for example, from unrealistic expectations on the part of those involved or from issues which the evaluator has highlighted. To minimise possible disruption, it may be sufficient to acknowledge, at the start, that the evaluation might involve critical comment. It is also advisable, however, to agree an arbitration process to deal with cases of dispute.

1.8 Evaluation brief

At the end of the preliminary stage, there should be a clear idea of the general form of the evaluation design and of the role of the evaluator. An outline of what is required, the timeframe allowed and funding available should be produced in the form of a evaluation brief which will form the basic working document for the detailed evaluation design. Whoever draws it up should have a clear understanding of the evaluation process and what it is likely to entail for the activity. In some cases, the evaluation manager will have this knowledge and be familiar with evaluation terminology. In other cases, it may be necessary to seek external assistance in drawing up this document.

Moneylending Pilot Schemes

Evaluation Brief

The Department of Social Welfare is funding a number of pilot projects to combat money lending and over-indebtedness. As well as to learn lessons for future policy in the area, one of the objectives is to identify practical measures to help low income families with serious debt problems through the work of the pilot projects. Accordingly, an on-going evaluation is an integral part of the scheme.

The evaluator will be expected to keep in close contact with the projects during the evaluation period and to produce an interim draft report within six months of commencing the evaluation.

The evaluator is required to write a report:

1. describing the activities of the various projects, highlighting practices, approaches and experiences that have worked well,
2. evaluating the success or otherwise of the projects in meeting the objectives during the twelve month pilot period,
3. making recommendations in relation to the future of this initiative after the end of the pilot period and
4. making other recommendations that arise from the work of the projects, including recommendations for Government policy, debt and arrears management by public utilities etc as may be appropriate.

Proposals should set out the methodology proposed for the study and give details of similar projects previously undertaken by the evaluator. It is envisaged that the evaluation will be an in-depth one, involving interviews with project management, staff and clients. The evaluation will also look at the role of the National Steering Committee in supporting the pilot projects. Proposals should include the cost of the evaluation, which should be an inclusive figure to cover all travel, secretarial, equipment and other costs.

2. Designing the Evaluation

The evaluation brief produced in the preliminary stage of the evaluation forms the starting point for the detailed evaluation design. This may be drawn up by an evaluator or team of evaluators whose first contact with the activity is reading the brief; by an evaluator who participated in the preliminary stage; by managers, staff or funders. It should clearly state what the evaluation sets out to achieve, what steps will be involved, what methods will be used, how much time it will take and how the results will be presented.

2.1 How is the evaluation to be designed?

The evaluation design should always follow a number of key steps, irrespective of the type of activity to be evaluated or the purpose of the evaluation. These key steps are:

- Documentation of the activity and its context
- Clarification of objectives
- Defining achievement
- Collection of information
- Analysing data
- Communication of findings

At the design stage of the evaluation, each of these steps needs to be considered in the light of the profile presented in the evaluation brief. It is important that the approach selected adequately reflects what is being evaluated as well as the purpose of the evaluation. Many of the problems associated with evaluation derive from the use of inappropriate approaches or from the use of some methods to the exclusion of others. It would be inappropriate, for example, to evaluate a community development project using quantitative methods only. It would be equally inappropriate to evaluate the performance of a commercial enterprise without a quantitative dimension.

The design will also vary depending on whether the evaluation is undertaken from the beginning of the activity or further on in its life cycle. Other factors influencing the design are the time available to carry it out, the type of data available and the resources available for data collection and analysis.

2.2 Stages of the evaluation

Documenting the activity and its context

The first step in the evaluation should entail a review of documentation and other relevant material (such as videos, tapes or photos) on the activity to be evaluated and discussion with the key stakeholders. The aim of this step is to obtain an overview of the activity, including its organisational structures, its links with other agencies, its time frame and statutory commitment to it.

Clarifying objectives

The clarification of the activity's objectives may be combined with the process of documenting the activity and its context. Emphasis should be placed on the way in which the key stakeholders perceive the objectives. Perceptions may vary considerably, with disparities appearing between the written version and stakeholders' understanding of this, as well as between stakeholders in terms of how they view the activity. The evaluator should therefore not rely solely on written documents as a source of information on objectives. The evaluation design should allow time to tease out any such disparities where they are found to exist.

Once the objectives have been clarified and agreed, the way in which they are implemented should be described.

Defining achievements

One of the important steps in the evaluation is to agree on ways in which significant achievements can be measured, whether they relate to the process involved in the activity or to its outcomes. The objectives of the activity have to be translated into terms which are

amenable to measurement; areas in which significant achievement is expected have to be identified; and ways of measuring these achievements have to be developed and agreed.



The ease with which performance indicators can be developed will depend on the type of activity to be evaluated and, in particular, whether it is primarily social or market-led in emphasis. The effectiveness of social programmes may not always be as amenable to measurement as market-led activities. In a manufacturing company, for example, measures such as its profit margin, turnover, market share and number of employees are relatively easy to quantify. In a social programme, the focus is more likely to be on changes which take place in individual participants, social relationships and institutions, requiring the use of qualitative indicators in addition to quantitative measures. In the Moneylending Pilot Schemes Evaluation, the development of ways to reflect the impact of the scheme required the use of qualitative indicators, including the level of stress resulting from over-indebtedness reported by debtors in open-ended interviews as well as the extent to which major creditors changed their policies as a result of project activities. Such qualitative measures, while more complex to develop, are invaluable ways of illustrating the impact of social activities, as well as the broader impact of market-led activities.

The process of developing performance indicators will also differ, depending on the type of evaluation which is considered most appropriate. If a summative approach to evaluation is adopted, the evaluator may be the only person involved in deciding how achievement is to be measured. If a formative approach is taken, the design needs to allow for the participation of key stakeholders in this process. In both cases, though, it is central to the credibility of the evaluation findings that there be agreement on the proposed performance indicators. It also needs to be agreed whether the evaluation will have a comparative dimension. This could, for example, involve comparing the activity with other similar activities or comparing the groups involved with other groups.

Collecting and analysing information

Arising from the fore-going phases of the evaluation design and in particular from the development of performance indicators, it will

Moneylending Pilot Schemes

Evaluation Proposal: Aims and Objectives

Aims

The evaluation will have the following broad aims:

1. To assess the impact of the schemes on their clients and on their creditors;
2. To recommend changes in project design (practices and objectives) and to present these for consideration by the National Steering Committee;
3. To make recommendations concerning broader social policy and legislation.

Objectives

More specifically, the evaluation will have the following objectives:

1. Investigate the differing origin/development path of the pilot projects;
2. Establish the development priorities, expectations and intents of all agencies and participants involved in the pilot projects;
3. Analyse, with the agencies and participants involved, the stated goals of the pilot projects and assess the relevance of the project measures to these goals;
4. In the light of the above, describe and analyse the actions of the pilot project as they promote or deter the project objectives and ascertain the extent to which co-ordination between all pilot projects exists;
5. Assess the adequacy of information on client and target populations and recommend, if necessary, new mechanisms by which shifts in all aspects of the situation can be measured and evaluated;
6. Recommend structures and processes that will ensure the active involvement of all participating agencies and groups in operating these mechanisms, and that will facilitate communication and feed-back between agencies and participants.

A more detailed set of evaluation objectives will be drawn up after the evaluators have familiarised themselves with the projects and have consulted with those involved. The research findings will be expressed as a set of workable policy measures and policy recommendations.

become clear what type of information will be required in order to measure achievement. It will not be possible until the action phase to specify exactly how much time will be required to collect this information. It will, however, be possible to allocate a notional amount of time for this phase, drawing on the profile contained in the evaluation brief. Depending on the research methodology adopted, the analysis of the data may be an ongoing part of the process of evaluation or may largely take place after the data is collected. In any case, adequate time must be allocated for interpreting and analysing the data collected.

Communicating findings

As in the case of the information collection, it will only be possible at the design stage to sketch out in broad terms what will be involved in the reporting stage. The key factor here is whether a formative or summative approach is envisaged. If a formative approach to evaluation has been selected, the design should allow for the communication of information to those involved in both formal and informal ways, on an on-going basis rather than once-off. The design should allow for the evaluator to contribute to the decision-making process at management level during the evaluation as well as through recommendations made in the final evaluation report. If a summative approach to the evaluation is considered appropriate, communication of the findings may be designed to take place in the form of a final report and possibly also of an interim report or other reports in the course of the evaluation.

The design may thus allow for regular feed-back, written reporting in the form of interim and final reports, seminars, a video, an exhibition or other forms of communication, depending, once again on the profile which has been obtained at the preliminary stage.

Attention should be paid at this stage to the evaluator's responsibility concerning the way in which the findings will be used. Issues relating to the presentation of findings, the wider dissemination of results and ownership of data all require clarification at this stage. At a practical level, these issues will have implications for the way in which the communication of findings is planned and structured.

Moneylending Pilot Schemes

Proposed Evaluation Methods

The evaluation will collect information:

1. From statutory agencies involved in the pilot projects;
2. From the voluntary community sector;
3. On the clients of the pilot projects;
4. On the target population of the pilot projects;
5. On the catchment areas in which the projects operate.

The main research tasks are as follows:

1. A review of relevant documentation;
2. Interview surveys of all pilot projects;
3. A workshop on interview survey results to develop common concepts and indicators of achievement
4. An assessment of project actions in meeting objectives;
5. Feedback from the National Steering Committee and from relevant government departments to draw out project-level issue implications for the broader legislative and social policy environment.

It will be crucially important to establish, at an early stage, the expectations of both funders and pilot project staff and volunteers regarding the effectiveness of the actions of the pilot projects.

3. Action Phase - Carrying out the Evaluation

In this section of the guidelines, issues which may arise in the action phase are outlined - particularly in terms of the skills required of the evaluator and the demands which are likely to emerge. The issues will vary according to the *type* of activity being evaluated (a project, a programme or a service), the *scale* of the activity and the *person* or *team* appointed to carry out the evaluation. The action phase of an evaluation will reflect the adequacy of the work undertaken at planning and design stages.

3.1 Role of the evaluator

It has already been mentioned that the role played by the evaluator and the way in which s/he is perceived by managers and staff are central to the success of the evaluation. Attention needs to be paid to *these* aspects of the evaluation process, particularly during the action phase. Perceptions of the evaluator and the actual role played will vary depending on the reason for undertaking the evaluation, the methods selected and also on whether the evaluator is an insider or an outsider to the activity.

3.1.1 Common perceptions of evaluators

Evaluators may be regarded in different ways by different stakeholders. Some common perceptions are:

Evaluator as expert

Frequently associated with this perception of the evaluator are the notion of objectivity and the concepts of the natural sciences. The evaluator may be an expert in evaluation techniques but will need to rely on the expert knowledge of stakeholders in relation to what is being evaluated.

Evaluator as official scrutineer

If the evaluation is commissioned by the funders of the activity, its form is largely shaped by the concerns and objectives of the policy makers who make such projects possible through legislative decisions, funding, or other initiatives. The evaluator in this guise is often perceived as the policy makers' "official scrutineer".

Evaluator as facilitator

The evaluator may be expected to facilitate the process of reflection and discussion which is inherent to some evaluations. This will only be possible, however, once a relationship of trust has been built up between the evaluator and the stakeholders,

Evaluator as problem solver

An evaluation may be commissioned if management is unable to resolve disagreements internally or with external funders. The evaluator may be expected to specifically address these disagreements and suggest solutions. It is not the role of the evaluator to be a 'trouble shooter' or to solve problems within an organisation or activity. The evaluator can, however, identify and analyse the source of problems and thus inform the decision-making process which remains very definitely the responsibility of the key stakeholders.

Evaluator as part of a delaying tactic

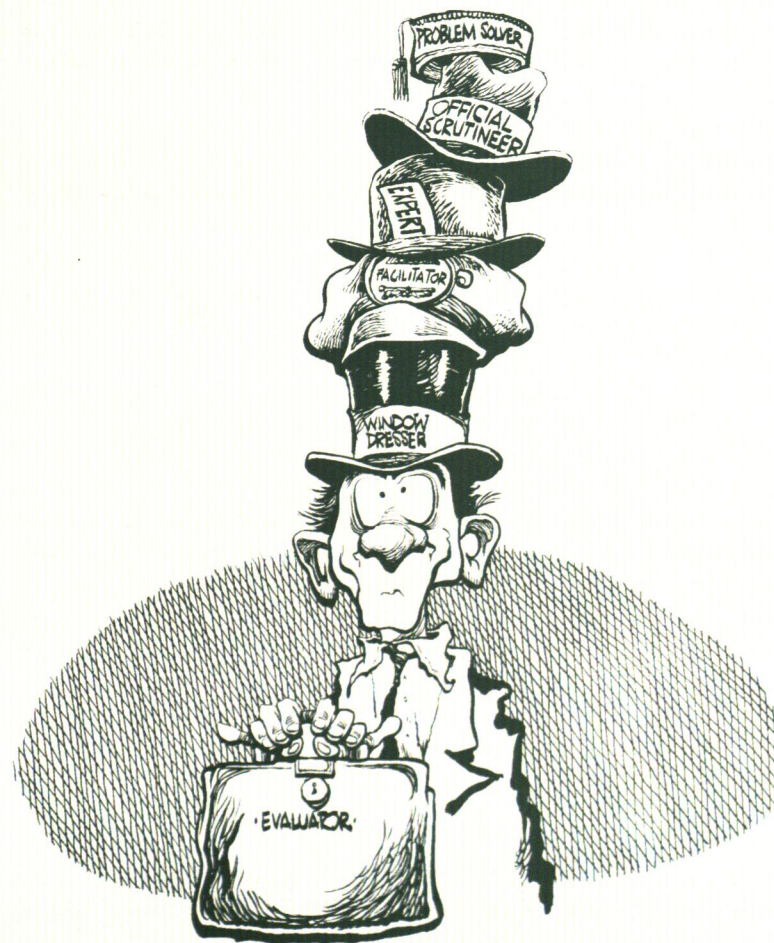
This perception of the evaluator and the associated view of the evaluation process is likely to arise when the continuation of an activity is in doubt. Such evaluations are likely to be emotionally charged and thus difficult contexts within which to work. If the evaluation is being carried out for this purpose, this needs to be acknowledged from the start, so that the conditions of the evaluator's task are clearly recognised.

Evaluator as window dresser

If the evaluation is commissioned primarily to satisfy the requirements of an external funder; in the hope of ensuring continued funding; or promoting a particular approach; the evaluator may be expected to paint a rosy picture and to highlight the positive aspects of the activity, playing down its weaknesses. There may be collusion in this

perception by a number, but not necessarily all, of the stakeholders. The subsequent findings will often be accorded the status of a rigorous scientific undertaking.

The way in which the evaluator is perceived may change as the evaluation proceeds through its various stages. If this happens, issues may arise which should be dealt with by the evaluation manager and the evaluator, so that the evaluation can proceed smoothly.



3.1.2 Actual role of the evaluator

Where the purpose of the evaluation is formative, the most appropriate role for the evaluator is likely be that of facilitator assisting stakeholders to reflect on the activity being evaluated; provider of on-going information to the stakeholders about the operation and impact of the activity; and perhaps also advisor to decision-makers. The focus of the evaluator's work will be on understanding what is going on, raising questions about the process, as well as on examining the impact of the activity.

Where the purpose of the evaluation is summative, the role of the evaluator is likely to be closer to the traditional image of an inspector investigating the effectiveness and efficiency of what is being evaluated. The evaluation design in this case may be built around a quantitative, quasi-experimental or cost-benefit design, using standardised criteria which have been developed outside the activity and which may not take account of its specific characteristics or context. It may also attempt to articulate the concerns of stakeholders using a qualitative approach but consultation with stakeholders about the conclusions being drawn, where it occurs, is unlikely to be as extensive as in the case of formative evaluation. It is also likely to take place at an advanced stage in the evaluation process.

Whatever the purpose of the evaluation, evaluators should have expertise in evaluation theory and practice, but will rely heavily on the knowledge and experience of all the stakeholders in order to gain a full understanding of the activity being evaluated.

3.2 Types of skill used by the evaluator

Research skills

Evaluation is an applied area of research which requires research skills, no matter what type of evaluation is being undertaken. People carrying out the evaluation need to have skills in or access to expertise in carrying out surveys, developing case studies and analysing documentary sources. They frequently need experience in

participant observation; should have the capacity to understand action; and could usefully have some experience in practical action projects. Very importantly, they must have analytical skills which will enable them to interpret the data collected, synthesise it and identify the core issues. Many of these skills are developed through experience.

Approaches used by evaluators may be drawn from traditional social research methodology, including participant observation and survey techniques and from systems consultation, including group facilitation and group therapy. While the type of work involved in evaluation, social research and group work may differ, some of the methodological aspects of the work are similar, in particular the need to maintain objectivity while participating in the activity. Evaluators may need to guard against methodological weaknesses, such as bias, which may creep into this type of evaluation, arising from close identification with what is going on.

Interpersonal skills

In addition to the research skills needed, evaluators should be skilled in communication, facilitation and negotiation. Communication skills are likely to include the ability to address different audiences which have varying expectations about the evaluation - and also the capacity to reflect the activity in all of its dimensions. Sensitivity to the needs and levels of the different audiences is therefore a requirement. Negotiation skills are particularly important where the evaluation is intended as a developmental tool and may possibly involve tensions between the evaluator and staff members or volunteers. A key task of the evaluator in such circumstances is to negotiate and elicit trust to carry out the evaluation, including permission to disagree and be critical.

Flexibility

Evaluators may not only need a range of skills, but also the ability to be flexible in their use. In multi-faceted evaluations, the evaluator may be required to switch between a predominantly formative role at times to a predominantly summative role at others. For example, the evaluator may be involved in supporting the development of

initiatives under a national or European programme, while at some stage also being required to provide a summative overview of their achievements.

Creativity

Creative ways can be used to document an activity. In the evaluation of social activities, in particular, it may be helpful to use photography, video or multimedia, as well as written reports to mirror the activity and its achievements. An ability to envisage how these media could be used to best effect in the process of documenting the activity would therefore be of advantage. It is important that the use of these media should be planned at the design stage of the evaluation.

3.3 Issues arising during the action phase

In carrying out the tasks associated with the action phase of the evaluation, issues may arise in relation to clarifying objectives, identifying performance indicators or collecting the information. In addition, unexpected factors may crop up in relation to any of these tasks, either due to changes in the external environment or to internal changes in the activity or its organisational structure. These may necessitate a review of the evaluation design.

3.3.1 Documenting the activity

The process of documenting the activity should involve a review of documentation, where it exists. It should take account of the views of the 'stakeholders' - people with an interest in the activity, either because they manage it, implement it, fund it or are its clients and customers. If the activity involves many people, it may be decided to contact representatives of each stakeholder group. It may also be decided *not* to include particular stakeholders - such as was the case in the Moneylending Pilot Schemes evaluation, where the illegal moneylenders were not included.

Moneylending Pilot Schemes Evaluation

Research Tasks in the Action Stage

1. Familiarisation. Read documentation from the Department of Social Welfare on each of the projects: 2 person days.
2. First round of visits to each of the five projects: Interviews arranged with members of the Management Committee; project workers and other key stakeholders such as important creditors (Main means of identifying important issues for projects): 10 person days.
3. In parallel with the first round of interviews, data was extracted from the records of the projects: 5 person days.
4. Second round of visits to each of the five projects to interview project clients and to contact some stakeholders unavailable at the time of the first round of visits: 5 person days.
5. Write up notes from interviews with project management and staff. These were used to form the basis of the 'profile' for each project:
 - describing the background to each project from proposal stage to their situation at the time of the evaluation;
 - describing their management structure and organisational history;
 - detailing the projects' staff and other resources;
 - giving an account of the work undertaken to date;
 - assessing the impact of the projects, through an analysis of project records and from interviews with clients.
6. Circulate draft project profiles to projects for feedback.
7. Write up draft final report to be circulated to projects and to the Department of Social Welfare, National Steering Committee and other agencies for feedback, especially concerning recommendations: 8 person days.

3.3.2 Clarifying objectives

The evaluator needs to focus on how different stakeholders perceive the mission and the objectives of the activity, particularly if it has been in existence for a long period, since, over time, it may have diverged from its intended course. Different stakeholders may vary in their views of the purposes of the activity and what it is supposed to achieve. Any differences in perception or opinion need to be clarified before the evaluation proceeds.

If an innovatory or new project is being evaluated, the evaluator may become involved along with the stakeholders in the process of articulating the goals and translating these into operational objectives. Techniques used to assist this process may include group discussions, structured interviews, semi-structured interviews or self-administered questionnaires.

The exact issues which arise in the course of documenting the activity and clarifying objectives will vary depending on the scale of the project, the length of time it has been in existence and the number and type of stakeholders. These in turn will be closely related to the evaluation methodology chosen. Issues may thus arise concerning the adequacy of available resources to complete the job; the availability of records and information; access to existing information and to the means of generating new information.

Once a clear picture has been obtained of the activity to be evaluated, it may be necessary to review decisions made at the design stage about the information to be gathered. Before final decisions are taken about the research methodologies to be used, the following questions need to be answered:

- Where is the information required?
- What is the quality of the available information?
- Who has the information?
- Who controls access to it?
- How does the evaluator get information which is already collected?
- How does the evaluator get the new information which is required?

If extensive information is available, decisions will have to be made about the basis for selecting data. There may be good information on consumers, for example, but insufficient information on the wider target population. If the available information is not adequate either in terms of quantity or quality, methods will have to be agreed for collecting necessary data or for updating information, and the question of whether there are sufficient resources for this will arise.

The accuracy and comprehensiveness of the profile obtained at this stage should be checked with the stakeholders before proceeding to the next phase of the evaluation.

3.3.3 Defining achievement

For the evaluation to proceed, the activity's goals need to be translated into objectives which are amenable to measurement or assessment in either qualitative or quantitative terms. The identification of performance indicators which will reflect the extent to which the objectives have been met is a crucial step in the evaluation process.

Where the goals and objectives are intangible or broad, as is often the case in social programmes or community development projects, the outcomes may not be easily quantifiable or amenable to measurement. In addition, it may be difficult to attribute causal relationships between the activity and its apparent outcomes. Indicators may include qualitative and quantitative measures of both the process and the outcomes. These should be based on the objectives as clarified earlier in the action phase and be accepted as adequately reflecting these. The involvement of the stakeholders in the selection of indicators may well be central to their credibility later, when the evaluation findings are being discussed.

For this reason, all stakeholders should be involved in the process of defining indicators. It may be necessary to negotiate agreement that all may participate in this process. It may also be necessary to encourage stakeholders to participate actively and fully in this task, as they may be reluctant or feel that they lack the necessary ability. It is

Moneylending Pilot Schemes

Performance Indicators (Qualitative and Quantitative)

Issue

Nature and extent of contact and consultation between the different pilot projects themselves.

Performance indicators

- No. and frequency of meetings
- Documented jointly devised policies
- Existence of commonly devised services

Issue

Nature and extent of contact between voluntary sector and statutory authorities (Health Boards, Dept. of Social Welfare and National Steering Committee).

Performance Indicators

- No. and frequency of meetings between voluntary sector and statutory bodies
- Changes in the nature of consultation between voluntary and statutory sectors (i.e. who initiates consultation, is it formalised etc)
- Changes in support from statutory to voluntary sector in terms of personnel, finance etc.
- Changes in policy

Issue

What is the impact of the pilot projects services on their client groups?

Performance indicators

- Local Authority Rent Arrears
- No. of loans to moneylenders
- Incidence of multiple debts
- Average number of debts
- Average size of individual debt
- Average size of total debt
- Changes in household borrowing patterns over a period - from moneylenders to Credit Unions
- Levels of information/awareness among low income families about credit availability and cost
- Levels of stress experienced by debtors

Issue

What is the impact of the pilot project services on availability of alternative credit, practices concerning billing and indebtedness in local authorities and public utilities?

Performance Indicators

- Whether codes of practice exist for dealing with arrears
- Public service statistics on arrears, disconnections/evictions and court orders
- Availability/openness of banks/credit unions/criteria applied to personal loan applicants
- Changes in practices on moneylenders
- Changes in credit union membership
- What alternative payment options are open?
- Changes in practices by public utilities regarding disconnections/billing procedures.

very important to clarify, check and recheck with stakeholders at this stage, as well as at others stages, to ensure that the subsequent findings are comprehensive, meaningful and relevant.

Quantitative indicators are frequently well-established and facilitate comparisons between activities and programmes. Qualitative indicators often need to be devised specifically to reflect the progress of a particular activity or a particular context and do not, therefore, facilitate comparisons. The desirability of comparative data should be borne in mind, though, in the process of developing such indicators. Examples of qualitative indicators from the Moneylending Pilot Schemes evaluation are the level of stress resulting from over-indebtedness, reported by people in open-ended interviews and the extent to which major creditors changed their policies as a result of project activities.

A distinction was made earlier between the evaluation of primarily social activities, those which are market-led and activities which involve elements of both. Evaluation of social programmes may require the use of qualitative indicators to a greater extent than that of market-led activities. Where the activity is primarily market-led, quantitative indicators may appear to adequately reflect its effectiveness, but if its broader impact is to be examined, qualitative indicators may need to be developed.

3.3.4 Collecting Information related to the performance indicators

Some evaluations may draw exclusively on existing information sources, while others may have to devote considerable time to collecting data. In a pilot project there is not likely to be a store of accumulated information on which the evaluator can draw. One of the dilemmas facing the evaluator in designing the evaluation of an innovatory project is that it may not be clear which information will provide important insights into the project's operation. For this reason, it may be initially necessary to gather extensive information, in order to document the project's operation and its impact. Much of this will be qualitative, particularly if the project has a social orientation. Descriptive data may be the key to understanding the project's

success or failure and may also prove invaluable if it is decided to develop further initiatives based on the experience of the innovative project. The design should also allow for the collection of quantitative information, particularly in relation to costs, since the question of 'Value for Money' is never absent in an innovatory project.

In finalising plans for collecting information, it should be recognised that there may be tensions between this task and engaging in other activities, particularly if the activity is an action-research project. There may well be a demand to meet other project needs as well as those relating to the collection of information. A balance will also need to be maintained between collecting data, devoting time to processing it (including transcription, writing up of field notes and reports of meetings), and to preliminary analysis. Where a formative approach is adopted, in particular, the researcher must move between participation in the project or organisation and the more withdrawn reflective role of the analyst.

In the evaluation of a programme or service, the information collection tasks may be relatively simple if a variety of information is already available and particularly if the record-keeping system has been computerised. This does not mean, however, that less time should be allocated to the process of collecting information, since considerable time may be required to sift through the records in order to extract relevant information. In addition, particular types of information which are seen as central to an evaluation may not be available in existing record systems. The exact amount of time allocated to each task will, of course, depend on the time-frame of the evaluation.

Questions which are likely to arise at this stage are:

- Is the available information comprehensive?
- Is the available information sufficient for the purposes of the evaluation?
- Is the information which is available or gathered during the evaluation structured in a way as to facilitate comparisons?
- Will written information (including statistics) fully convey the process and impact of the activities or should other types of information also be gathered?

3.3.5 Analysis of the findings

The choice of a framework for analysing the evaluation data will be influenced by what is being evaluated, the purpose of the evaluation and the resources available. For example, if the activity involves community development, it may be very difficult to say that a specific outcome is the result of a particular project intervention. The analysis will thus be less clear-cut than, for example, in the case of a training project which has the clear goal of increasing the number of people with specific certified skills. It will be very much shaped by the quality of data collected, which only becomes clear during the action stage. The analytical framework cannot, therefore be finalised before the action stage is well underway.



WITHDRAWING TO REFLECT ON AN EVALUATION (TOTAL FANTASY).....

It is central to the evaluation that sufficient time be allocated for the analysis of the information collected. This is particularly important in qualitative research where the on-going analysis feeds into the evaluation process. The actual process of analysing data in evaluation research is the same as for other forms of social research. Research skills are required by the evaluator whether quantitative or qualitative data is being analysed and it may be necessary to withdraw to a certain extent from the activity, to carry out this analysis. When the preliminary analysis has been completed, the evaluator should provide feedback to the stakeholders and consult with them on the themes, patterns and issues which are emerging. In the case of internal or self-evaluation, the full project team may also need to withdraw for a period from their day-to-day work in order to reflect on and analyse the findings of their evaluation activities and to examine their implications for future development.

3.3.6 Communicating the Findings

The choice of ways to communicate evaluation findings will influence the extent to which they are used by decision-makers. Traditionally, a written report has been the main method chosen and while the length of the report has often been taken as an indication of its value among evaluators themselves and in the academic community of social scientists, the content and quality of the analysis and the conclusions drawn are most important. Management practice indicates, however, that a written report on its own, may not be the most effective way of getting the findings across.

Interim findings may be presented to stakeholders in different ways throughout the evaluation. This can be a useful way of cross-checking and validating information, expectations and assumptions. It may be done in the form of verbal feedback or interim written reports.

The structure of the evaluation report or reports needs to be discussed with the commissioners at an early stage in the evaluation. It is also important to clarify whether the evaluation report or part of it is to be

widely available or treated as confidential. If there are different audiences with different information requirements, it may be necessary to plan for several reports.

Where written reports are presented at the end of the evaluation process, a clearly written summary, running to a small number of pages, has come to be expected. If the evaluator does not provide this, then someone else is likely to be asked to do so. This summary is important because it may be the most that many people will read. The presentation should be attractive and reflect the type of activity which has been evaluated.

The selection of communication methods needs to be carefully considered by evaluators and managers. In addition to the written reports, the potential of video, photography or multi-media to illustrate social and community-based activities requires wider exploration. The question of different audiences also raises the possibility of using different techniques of communication including audio-visual forms. Media coverage and political lobbying are methods which some commissioners of evaluations have chosen to publicise their findings. While these approaches may sometimes be seen as departing from accepted research procedures, evaluators are faced with the choice of engaging in these forms of communication themselves or having others do so, using the evaluation findings with varying degrees of accuracy.

Where the purpose of an evaluation is formative, the means of communicating the evaluation findings to those involved in the project is likely to be both formal and informal, on-going rather than once-off. The evaluator is as likely to contribute to the decision-making process at management level during the course of the evaluation as through the analysis and recommendations made in interim or final reports.

Where the purpose of an evaluation is summative, the report(s) presented is likely to be the stakeholders' main source of information about the evaluation findings. In addition to an interim report, a draft

final report may be presented in order to receive some feedback from stakeholders or to encourage them to contribute to recommendations on future direction and policy. This process of reviewing the draft report and consulting about revisions is an important element of the evaluation process, particularly where it is based on a partnership approach, as there is often scope to make changes in the report. Once again, it is important that the evaluation manager and the evaluator allow sufficient time for this.



4. Utilising Findings and Informing Policy

When an evaluation report is presented, either as an interim or final report, the funders and managers involved will have to consider the findings and their implications. Issues emerging at this stage may include:

- Whether the stakeholders are happy with the work carried out by the evaluator
- What changes or actions are needed, arising from the evaluation
- Whether the lessons learnt are applicable elsewhere.

Discussion with other stakeholders in the evaluation may take place around these questions. A policy or action statement should be drawn up on the basis of the evaluation findings. The *use* of the results to inform policy and actions and the *dissemination* of the results are separate issues which may require separate strategies, depending on the purpose of the evaluation.

How the findings are used will depend a lot upon the groundwork done in the preliminary stage of the evaluation, when liaison and reporting structures were set up and expectations about the report formed and clarified. The dissemination of the results will also have been considered, in a fairly general way, at this time.

Depending on the nature of the evaluation, findings and data generated by the research may be fed back to the commissioners throughout the evaluation process and, in this way, may have already shaped policy and actions. The evaluator may have an active role in this process, especially where a formative approach to evaluation is adopted. With a summative approach, on the other hand, the Funders may not request or want any information until a final report is available.

Whatever the approach adopted, the final report will most certainly need to be tailored to a wider audience than those who have been

engaged directly or indirectly in the evaluation process. It is often useful to prepare a shorter summary report for wider circulation to those who may not have the opportunity or be prepared to read the complete report. It is important that this summary be succinct and well presented.

In addition to a written report, the evaluation findings may be presented through

- seminars and workshops targeted at policy-makers
- meetings with targeted audiences, based on issues emerging from the evaluation
- conference papers and articles for publication
- photo exhibition
- video.

The choice of approach will depend partly on the effect which it is hoped to achieve and partly on the type of audience involved. If some of these approaches are to be used - in particular, if a video is to be produced or a photograph exhibition mounted - discussion and planning will have taken place at an early stage in the evaluation, so as to allow time for preparation.

Resources need to be allocated for the dissemination and use of results. In this respect, the impact of the evaluation continues after the research phase has been completed and, frequently, after the evaluator has completed the work.

Moneylending Pilot Schemes

Issues Arising from the Evaluation

Issues for Projects

- Need to develop record keeping system to allow comparison between projects
- Need to establish standard list/classification of sources of referral
- Need to have dedicated resources for administration
- Need to set time aside for strategic planning
- Need for common approach on treatment of Child Benefit in calculation of household income
- Issues for Local Authorities and Health Boards
- Inflexibility in dealing with rent arrears and rent collection
- Need for Community Welfare Offices to have time for specialist training and delivery of money advice

Issues for Major Creditors

- Need for clarification around policy on Budget Meters by ESB
- Need for 'holiday' periods from repayments for clients
- Need for a code of practice for door to door sellers

Issues for National Steering Committee (NSC)

- Need for representation by Credit Unions
- Need for national co-ordinator
- Need to formulate standard operating procedures and
- Guidelines for new projects
- Need for formal representation of project workers on NSC.

Issues for Department of Social Welfare

- Need to reintroduce full double week Social Welfare payments at Christmas
- Need for quarterly payments from SWA to coincide with periods of additional expenditure for households, such as return of children to school in autumn
- Consideration to be given to extend provision of free TV licence and free electricity allowances to households on long-term Social Welfare.

5. Concluding Comments

These guidelines have traced the different stages of an evaluation process - the preliminary stage at which the purpose of the evaluation is clarified and an evaluation brief is drawn up; the design stage at which a detailed plan for the evaluation is worked out and agreed; the action stage at which the evaluation is carried out; and the final stage at which the findings are presented and discussed and their implications for policy and action are considered.

At each of these stages, different points need to be borne in mind and different issues are likely to arise. While the importance of these should not be overlooked, the overall success of the evaluation will depend very much on the preliminary stage and particularly on the clarity of the evaluation brief in providing answers to the questions of what is to be evaluated; why the evaluation is being carried out; who wants the evaluation; who the audience is; what resources are available; and what liaison procedures are to be put in place. This point applies, regardless of whether the evaluation is being carried out by an external evaluator, by an evaluator working closely with the activity or as a form of self-evaluation. The preparation of the evaluation brief is likely to be a time-consuming process, but investment of time at this stage will save time and avoid complications later.

Evaluations may give rise to feelings of apprehension among those who see their activities and performance being assessed. An understanding of the evaluation process and, in particular, of the benefits which may be obtained from it, should help to overcome misgivings and empower those involved to take advantage of the opportunity it represents.

Glossary

Evaluation

Evaluation is a structured and systematic exercise to explore and report on the effectiveness of an activity. It examines performance, outcomes or impact against what the activity set out to achieve - its goals and objectives. Evaluation involves the collection of quantitative and qualitative information about the activity. It can answer questions such as how well the activity is doing, whether it represents value for money, or how it needs to be changed to improve performance. It can also help to understand why things have worked out in the way they have and to learn from achievements and disappointments.

Evaluation Brief

An evaluation brief specifies the scope, type and nature of the evaluation required. It is drawn up by, or on behalf of, the person or agency commissioning the evaluation.

Evaluation Proposal

An evaluation proposal is a document normally drawn up by prospective evaluators for presentation to the commissioners of the evaluation. The proposal typically indicates the person or persons who will undertake the evaluation (detailing previous experience in the area), describes how it will be done (methodology), and how much it will cost, giving a breakdown between the different tasks involved.

Formative Purposes

An evaluation carried out for formative purposes describes and analyses how the activity is carried out (the process involved) and examines and interprets the outcomes. Such an approach is valuable in helping those directly involved in the activity to understand its strengths and weaknesses and to identify the changes required to improve its effectiveness. It can also provide a useful guide to people who wish to start a similar activity elsewhere.

Goal

A goal is the overall purpose which guides the design and the implementation of a programme or an activity. Goals are often, but not always, formally stated.

Key Informants

Key informants are individuals who have information about the activity or who control access to information or to other informants.

Objectives

An objective is a specific, operational statement about what the activity intends to accomplish in order to reach its goal. A number of objectives may be specified, with different levels of priority being attached to each. Objectives are frequently tied to specific time frames.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a method of investigation and of collecting information in which the researcher(s) participates, to varying degrees, in the organisation or activity that is being studied. The level of participation can range from detached observation to active and, at times, total participation. The data collected in this way is primarily qualitative.

Performance Indicators

A performance indicator is a measure which is adopted to record progress towards an objective or to indicate success in achieving it.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data seek to describe the experience of people in their own words, in an open-ended way, without attempting to fit what they say into predetermined, standardised categories. Qualitative data may consist of detailed descriptions of an activity; direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs and thoughts; excerpts from documents, correspondence, records and case histories. Such data are generally collected through direct observation and relatively unstructured interviewing.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data consist of facts or information which can be measured and expressed in numerical form. They may, for example, comprise numbers, weight, size or amounts. Quantitative data are gathered using a standardised framework and frequently one which limits information collected to certain predetermined categories.

Self Evaluation

Self evaluation is evaluation of an activity which is undertaken by those directly involved in implementing that activity. It may be undertaken solely by those involved or facilitated by an 'external' person. Regardless of which strategy is adopted, self evaluation involves participants in reflecting on the aims, objectives and performance of the activity with a view to promoting its development.

Stakeholders


Stakeholders are the people who have an interest in the evaluation of the activity and in its outcomes. They may not be formally represented on its management or in its day to day operation. They could include policy makers, funders, decision takers (whether within the activity or in its wider organisational environment), practitioners, clients or customers, as well as agencies and organisations involved in similar or related activities.

Summative Purpose

Evaluation carried out for summative purposes is designed to judge the effectiveness of an activity, usually in terms of its outcomes and impact. The focus is mainly on measuring outcomes and quantifying costs and benefits. Comparison with other similar activities is facilitated by this approach. Such an evaluation may also indicate the conditions under which the activity is likely to be effective in other situations or places.

Timeframe

Timeframe refers to the period of time within which the evaluation work is to be completed. It may differ from the number of 'person days' taken to complete the work, if, for example, thirty 'person days' work is spread across different tasks over a three month period.



Why is the evaluation needed?

What resources are available?

How is the evaluation conducted?

How to measure achievement?

What is the role of the evaluator?

How will the findings be used?

Evaluation Guidelines - Key Points

1. Preliminary Stage

Who should be involved in the decision to commission an evaluation?	3
What is to be evaluated? Programme, project, service or combination ?	4
Why is the evaluation being carried out?	7
Who wants the evaluation?	9
Who is the audience?	10
What resources are required for the evaluation?	11
• Financial resources	11
• Skills	12
• Information	13
• Access to key informants	13
• Time	13
What liaison procedures should be set up?	14

The Evaluation Brief

outline of what is required, in what time frame, at what cost	15
---	----

2. Designing the Evaluation

Steps to be covered:	18
• Documenting the activity and its context	18
• Clarifying the objectives of the activity	18
• Defining achievements	18
• Collecting and analysing information	20
• Communicating the findings	22

3. Action Phase - Carrying out the Evaluation

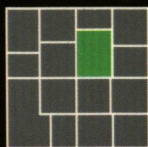
How will the evaluator be perceived?	25
What role does the evaluator actually play?	25
What skills does the evaluator require?	28
What issues might arise during the evaluation?	30

4. Utilising Findings and Informing Policy

43/44

Is the evaluation work satisfactory?	
What changes are needed in the activity?	
Can the lessons learnt be applied elsewhere?	
How can the evaluation findings be disseminated?	





Sociological
Association
of Ireland



COMBAT
POVERTY
AGENCY

The guidelines trace the process of evaluation through from the initial planning phase to the completion and the dissemination of findings.

They are written from the viewpoint of sociologists with considerable experience of evaluation research undertaken for a range of voluntary organisations, community groups and state bodies.

They will be of interest to funders, managers, project leaders, staff and consumers in the voluntary, public and private sectors, as well as to those undertaking evaluations.

Distributed by
Sociological Association of Ireland
Department of Sociology
St. Patrick's College
Maynooth

Tel: 01 628 5222
Fax 01 628 9373

Price £5.00