PROJECT EVALUATION – A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Part Two: Collecting and analysing data

Types of data

There are two main types of research or evaluation data – quantitative and qualitative. Put simply, quantitative data is useful for representing things that can be counted, such as the amount of money spent or the number of people who have used a project. Qualitative data is useful for showing how a project is viewed or experienced by service users, staff or other stakeholders, or for exploring and gaining a better understanding of issues. The table below identifies the key characteristics of qualitative and quantitative data.

Qualitative and Quantitative data

	Qualitative	**Quantitative**
What questions does it help answer?	What? Why? How?	How many? What proportion?
What is it good for?	• In depth/detailed exploration e.g. understanding of individual circumstances • Understanding processes • Explaining why	• Breadth of understanding • Estimating e.g. demand • Measuring the extent of something • Measuring change/differences

	• Showing how • Generating ideas • Exploratory work – where issues are not clearly understood • Mapping the range of behaviour and experience	e.g. changes in attitude, improvements in wellbeing • To describe patterns and trends
What kinds of samples is it based on?	• Small samples • Purposively selected • Can be diverse or focus on specific groups • Sample enables comparisons and exploration of the issues in depth	• Larger sample sizes • May be randomly selected/probability samples • Numerically representative of 'the population' being studied e.g. All local 12-16 year olds
What kinds of questions is it based on?	Open-ended questions	Often closed questions – with pre-set answers which can be counted
What types of tools are used to collect it?	Interviews, focus groups, observation, case studies; pictures & videos; diaries; comment/feedback forms	Structured interviews, surveys and questionnaires, monitoring information (e.g. referral forms); standardised assessments
How is the data recorded and analysed?	More unstructured data so analysis tends to be time consuming. Attempts to preserve the concepts and words of the people involved.	More structured data – easier to handle in large amounts but analysis requires statistical competence. Usually reduces what people say to a number of standard categories.

Most projects will need to collect both quantitative and qualitative data as part of their evaluation. Your project is likely to need to account for what it is doing by reporting numbers e.g. how many people have accessed your services and from which target groups (e.g. numbers broken down by age, ethnicity etc). At the same time, proving you have reached x number of people tells you little about the kinds of issues they come with or what they think about their experience of your project. For that, you will need to collect some qualitative data. What you collect, how much and from whom will be informed by your project plan (especially the outcomes and milestones you've set for yourself), the priority questions you want to answer and the resources you have to carry out data collection. But however large or small your evaluation plans may be there are some key principles about collecting data which you might want to consider.

Some key principles about collecting data

- **Adapt existing systems where possible.** Don't give yourself extra work if you don't need to. But be prepared to alter or build on existing systems to obtain what you need. Don't duplicate information collection – if your project ends up using dozens of different forms you've gone wrong somewhere!
- **Collect only what you need.** It can be very tempting to add questions into a questionnaire or to collect a few more pieces of information about someone. However, it is better to collect only what you really need, otherwise you will end up with mountains of information that you can only use a tenth of.
- **Think about who will have to complete any forms you produce**. Will people understand them? Will they complete them in the same way? Will people have time to complete them?
- **Consider issues of confidentiality and ethics.** Can you justify the collection and use of this information? Can you keep it safely?
- **Plan who will analyse what you collect.** Do they have the skills? Do they have the time? Is it part of someone's job description?

Measuring outcomes

Usually projects will want to give priority to evaluating their outcomes but this can be a big task if you're trying to collect data about all your outcomes at once. It is likely to be a good idea to decide which are the most important outcomes or milestones to evaluate at any given time. It is also important to be aware of how hard it is to evidence outcomes for the following reasons:

- Some very important outcomes are hard to pin down or even to define. For example, an important outcome for many projects is people gaining greater confidence and self-esteem. Breaking these concepts down into components which can be measured is very challenging.
- Many outcomes are very long-term and may not become evident for a number of years.
- It may be difficult to differentiate who the outcomes are for. When working with families there are several people involved for whom different courses of action have different outcomes. It is important to be clear which outcomes you are most interested in measuring.
- It is not easy to be certain of a direct causal link between what a project does and a particular outcome for an individual. Thankfully, we have only a limited influence over people's lives and it may be that someone's life has been changed more by falling in love than by attending our group on a Tuesday afternoon!
- Some outcomes may be at a neighbourhood or community level and your project may be one initiative amongst many aimed at achieving similar changes. Identifying what can reasonably be attributed to a particular project, or has resulted from broader political, economic or generational change, can be challenging.

So measuring outcomes is a tricky business and any approach you come up with will not be perfect proof of the impact of your project. You will need to balance what is important to try and measure with what is practical and affordable for you.

The women involved in the Obinrin project which we first met in part one of this Practical Guide got together to decide how they might collect data to evaluate the milestones and outcomes of their project. They came up with some possible approaches below:

Examples of possible approaches to evaluate milestones and outcomes of the Obinrin project

Milestone: Migrant women have improved access to relevant services (language classes, job skill training and financial advice)	
Evaluation Questions	Possible measures/methods
Do more women access services?	• Referral and take-up rates • Self-report through questionnaires • Survey of attendance levels
Are migrant women more aware of services?	• Questionnaire/survey of target group • Interviews with target group
Do migrant women feel more able to use services?	• Focus group on views of service users • Individual interviews with service users and non-service users • Questionnaires
Are professionals aware of and confident in the project?	• Referral rates • Telephone interviews with professionals • Questionnaire to professionals

Outcome: Women's language skills are improved	
Evaluation Questions	Possible measures/methods
Have women's language skills improved?	• Pre/post course language skill assessment
Do women feel more confident in their language skills?	• Interviews • Diaries • Focus group • Role-play/drama

Outcome: Employers have more positive attitudes to the employment of migrant women	
Evaluation questions	Possible measures/methods
Have employers attitudes changed?	• Pre/post survey of local employers attitudes
What has influenced employers' attitudes?	• Records of contact with project e.g. attendance at project employers lunches

	• Interviews with employers providing work placements • Interviews with women post-placements
Have migrant women been employed by employers as a result of contact with the project?	• Interviews with employers • Monitoring of employment of Obinrin project users • Facebook/text message follow-up of language class/job skill training graduates

Once you've decided what kinds of data will help you answer your evaluation questions, you will need to plan what tools to use in collecting it. You will need to take into account:

- **Usefulness**
  Is this tool the best way to collect the data you need? Will it give you enough data? For example, a questionnaire might not give you enough detail from the respondent about a complex situation or experience.
- **Practicality**
  Do you have the resources and capacity to collect data with your chosen tool? For example interviews can be expensive in terms of time, and focus groups require skilled facilitation.
- **Sensitivity**
  Are there any ethical issues to consider? Some approaches may be more intrusive than others and you should consider whether that intrusion can be justified.
- **Appropriateness**
  Who are your respondents and is the tool chosen suitable for your sample group? Is it age and gender appropriate? Does it allow for different language and literacy abilities?
- **Analysis**
  How will you analyse the information generated? E.g. focus groups can give you a huge amount of material which can take some time to analyse. Pictures or photographs will still require some sort of analysis which may be difficult to do, and your interpretation may be seen as quite subjective.

Commonly used tools for collecting data

Questionnaires

Written questionnaires can provide both quantitative and qualitative information and can range from formal tick boxes to feedback sheets on which people write their own comments and responses. Although questionnaires are perhaps the most commonly used evaluation tool, they are not always the most appropriate and are much harder to design than people sometimes assume. It's really important to pilot any questionnaire to identify whether questions are being understood as intended and that it works on a technical level.

Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Relatively cheap and easily administered e.g. by email	Often have a poor response rate
Can include both closed and open questions e.g. comments boxes	Lots of people don't answer open questions; cannot probe answers or ask people to expand
Can be sent to large numbers of respondents and collect views and data from many different people	Can result in biased sample as only those interested fill in the questionnaire
Can be structured to ensure that the views of minority groups are sought and represented	Needs careful design to be accessible and translation into different languages
Some people prefer expressing their opinions in writing	Reliant on literacy; some people don't like writing
Can be less intrusive and more private than an interview; People may feel more able to answer embarrassing questions or make critical comments	Does not allow people to 'tell their story in their own way'; doesn't allow for people's comments to be followed up
Can provide quantifiable results – and tools such as e-surveys can make analysis quite easy	

Questions basically fall into two categories – open and closed.

Closed questions give respondents alternative responses from which to choose e.g.
Q How many days a week do you attend the drop in?

- One day a week
- Two days a week
- Three days a week
- Four days a week
- Five days a week

Q What do you think about the activities at the drop in?

Please circle one response for each section:

• **Art activities**	Good	OK	Boring
• **Advice sessions**	Good	OK	Boring
• **Exercise classes**	Good	OK	Boring

Open questions ask respondents to supply their own answers:

Q How do you feel you have benefited from attending the drop in?

Q How do you think the project could be improved?

Q Why did you start attending the drop in?

Tips for designing questionnaires

- It's best to use more closed questions if you want to survey a lot of people or ask a lot of questions. Open questions are better for getting more detailed information but responses can be very variable and take a lot more time to analyse. If you want to ask a lot of open, in-depth questions you might want to consider interviews or focus groups instead.
- All questions should be phrased as clearly and simply as possible. Avoid long sentences and questions that ask two questions in one e.g.

Q *When you first came along to the well women clinic what did you think of it and was there anything you would have liked to have known in advance?*

This kinds of question needs to be broken down into two separate questions.

- Providing directions to navigate people through a questionnaire is important – it needs to be clear who should answer a question or you may not be able to make sense of the responses you receive. For example:

1. *Did you visit your child while they were in hospital?*
    - **a.** *Yes*
    - **b.** *No*
2. *How many times?*
    - **a.** *Everyday*
    - **b.** *5-6 times a week*
    - **c.** *3-4 times a week*
    - **d.** *Less than three times a week*
3. *Why was your child admitted to hospital?*

...

This might cause confusion on the part of respondents who did not visit their child in hospital who might then go on to tick the less than three times a week box. An improvement might be:

1. *Did you visit your child while they were in a hospital? (If YES go to Q2, if NO go to Q3)*
    - **a.** *Yes*
    - **b.** *No*
2. *How many times?*
    - **a.** *Everyday*
    - **b.** *5-6 times a week*
    - **c.** *3-4 times a week*
    - **d.** *Less than three times a week*
3. *Why was your child admitted to hospital?*

- If questions involve numbers, care should be taken not to overlap categories e.g. 12-16 year olds, 16-19 year olds – these should be 12-15 & 16-19.

- Think of the order the questions appear in: factual questions such as age, are easier to get people started, while more sensitive questions should appear later in a questionnaire.
- Care needs to be taken over the layout and format, so the final product does not look too daunting.
- Instructions need to be included on who should complete the questionnaire, when and to whom it should be returned and some space provided for additional comments.
- Think about the practicalities for people completing the questionnaire e.g. if you are sending out a postal questionnaire, you might provide a pre stamped, pre-addressed envelope so that people do not have to pay the cost of postage. Think about the timing of your questionnaire and how it likely to fit in with your respondents' other priorities.
- Plan when to send out a reminder. A follow up email just before or just after the closing date can be effective.
- Finally, do pilot your questionnaire. However experienced you are in designing them, you can be certain that the pilot will highlight some glitch or other you have overlooked.

Interviews

Interviews are usually conducted on a one to one basis, but can be with more than one person (e.g. a couple, a family or a group of co-workers). They are commonly either structured or semi-structured. They are often done face to face but can also be carried out by phone or on-line.

Structured interviews are essentially a verbally completed questionnaire. They can be quick to carry out and more straightforward in terms of analysis, yielding some quantitative data, but they limit the responses of interviewees and thus can lack depth and variety. These are useful if you want survey type data from people who are reluctant or unable to complete a written questionnaire.

Semi-structured interviews include some pre-set questions but also allow the interviewer to encourage the respondent to expand, elaborate or provide examples. Having some structure means that common themes or issues can be more easily compared across interviews.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Enable in-depth and detailed data to be gathered	Can be costly and time consuming
Usually have a reasonable response rate – once people have agreed	Analysis can be complicated
More appropriate than questionnaires in some circumstances, for example if talking about sensitive issues, or you want to collected data from those with limited written skills	Trained interviewers may be required
People often enjoy them and appreciate being listened to and involved.	Some people may find a one to one situation intimidating

Tips for designing and carrying out interviews

For all types of interview you will need to prepare an interview schedule, containing the topics or questions to be covered. Gaps can be left between questions to enable the interviewer to write down the interviewee's response, if the interview is not being recorded. Make sure the interviewer is familiar with the interview schedule, as this makes it easier to adapt if the respondent jumps around topics.

When designing your interview schedule, many of the same guidelines apply as to questionnaire design, such as keeping your questions clear and unambiguous and starting with questions which are generally easier to answer/less sensitive. Open questions can be followed up with prompts to assist interviewees in answering questions.

For example:

Q. *Which welfare professionals do you have contact with?*

(prompt: social workers, health visitors, psychologists, probation, education...)

Starting the Interview

- Getting off to a good start is important – you need to make the person feel relaxed and comfortable.

- Try to find somewhere to conduct the interview that is comfortable and private. It may not be possible to avoid all interruptions but try to keep them to a minimum.
- Explain what the interview is about, why they have been chosen to take part and how the information will be used. Take plenty of time to explain and answer any questions the respondent may have.
- Explain how long you expect the interview to last.
- Reassure people about confidentiality. Assure them that they do not have to answer any questions they do not want to, that their responses will not be used for any other purpose than the evaluation and the interview material will be written up in a way that will not identify anyone individually.
- If you are using a voice recorder explain this to the respondent and ask their permission to use it. Explain what you will do with the recording and who will hear it. If you are taking notes make sure you are ready to start writing down people's responses as soon as the interview starts. Explain why you are doing this. It can feel as if you are being rude – writing down while people are talking – but the information is no good unless it is recorded.
- Check they are happy to go ahead after you have explained the above. Get their consent (usually a signed form) before starting the interview.

During the Interview

- Give the respondent time to answer and to think about their replies – don't be afraid of a silence.
- Try to stick to the wording on your interview schedule to be sure everyone is being asked the same things. Do explain any questions that people don't understand.
- Encourage people to expand on their views by using prompt questions such as 'in what way?' or 'can you give me an example?'
- Use 'playback' questions to clarify what people are saying e.g. 'Can I check with you that I understand what you are saying there?' Don't be afraid to ask people to slow down a bit so you can get their views down on paper.

- Don’t make comments about the respondent’s answers – especially if you disagree! Encouraging noises are ok though.
- Do use encouraging body language and non-verbal signals to show that you are interested in what people are saying and are listening – encouraging nods, smiles and eye contact.
- Make sure you record each answer very carefully. Check out with people that what you are writing down reflects what they are saying. Remember that if the information is not properly recorded, the interview has been a waste of time.

Ending the Interview

- Try to make the encounter end in a positive way – try not to leave people feeling depressed!
- Remember to thank the respondent for their help and remind them how the information will be used.
- Ask people if they would like further information about the evaluation and/or the project.
- If your interview has been on a sensitive topic or asked people to talk about difficult experiences, make sure they have access to support – this needs to be planned for in advance.

Pre/post measures

You can only provide evidence that things have changed for people using your project if you have recorded how things were when they first came along. This is known as baseline data. The same data is then collected again after a period of time during which they have received support/done a course etc. This kind of pre and post assessment can be collected either through a self-completion questionnaire or via an interview.

Many projects use standardised pre and post measures to collect this kind of data. It can usefully form part of the assessment and review activities of a project – it’s a way of finding out how people are doing.

Bespoke pre-post tools can be designed specifically around the outcomes that a project is trying to measure but designing good tools requires considerable expertise and extensive piloting. It is usually better to start by trying to identify tools that have already been designed and shown to work in similar situations.

There are numerous such tools available to measure changes in attitudes, well-being, health and behaviour at the individual level e.g. Edinburgh-Warwick Well-Being Scale; Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale or Teenage Attitudes to Sex and Relationships (TASAR). Some of these tools are very reliable because they have been developed with and are known to measure change amongst different age or ethnic groups.

Many of the best validated tools have been developed in 'clinical' contexts and the concepts and language used may not fit your project's philosophy or style of work. Some of the wording can be off putting both for staff and the people who use projects. However, there is a growing number of less established tools that are nonetheless well-designed and have been extensively piloted that may be a better fit and meet your needs e.g. the Outcome Measure developed for women survivors of violence and abuse '*How are you doing?/How are we doing?*.

Focus Groups

A focus group is a qualitative approach that may be useful for gathering information from a group of people on a pre-determined list of topics/questions. Focus groups may also allow for observation of group dynamics and the way participants respond to particular issues and debates. A focus group tends to be relatively small in size, about 6-8 individuals. These may be representatives of your local community or a specific group of people e.g. survivors of domestic violence.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Allow a variety of views to be expressed, discussed and explored	Can be time consuming to set up
Can be a good way of getting a multi-faceted perspective on a topic	Requires skilled facilitators

Usually less time consuming than individual interviews, although there may be more irrelevant material produced	Can be a difficult format for some people who are not used to sitting and talking in a group.
Encourages interaction between respondents to generate more ideas than might have surfaced via individual interviews	Those with minority views within the group might not feel able to express them
Good for getting suggestions on future improvements to the service	Data can be difficult to record and as a large amount of material is likely to be gathered, analysis can be complicated
Can enable those less confident and less articulate to express their views	Confidentiality can be an issue
Can be enjoyable / fun for participants	Not appropriate if you need data on individuals

Tips for conducting focus groups

- There may be advantages in using established groups where people already know each other and feel comfortable talking together.
- In arranging a focus group you should consider the location, travel and childcare arrangements, time and expenses.
- For group discussion, topic areas rather than very specific questions are required. Ask clear but open ended questions to get the discussion going.
- Focus groups need to be led or facilitated (usually by two facilitators) to ensure that the main issues are discussed in a constructive way.
- Focus groups are usually digitally recorded (with the group's consent) so the dialogue can be analysed in detail. It can be difficult to note take in a fast moving discussion.
- Refreshments can help to break the ice and make people feel welcome, but remember, if you are recording the group don't provide bags of crisps as the rustling is all you will hear on the recording!

Many of the pointers on interviews apply to focus groups but there are also additional tips to consider when facilitating a focus group:

- Ask the group to come up with some ground rules for the discussion
- Agree on the confidentiality of the group
- Try to keep everyone involved
- Be prepared to handle conflicts, interrupters and dominant voices
- Try not to give your opinions in the discussion
- Take note of visual cues as well as what people say, for example whether people reacted positively to a comment made by a member of the group
- Give people the opportunity at the end to give you any feedback or views in private, for example suggest that they can email you any additional thoughts if they wish to. This allows people to give opinions they might not have felt able to give in the group.

Creative, Visual and Non-Verbal Tools

Visual data can include drawings, paintings, videos or photographs. For example, children's drawings of their area could be used before and after a community development intervention and their perceptions of the area in which they live could then be compared to assess change over time. Role plays can be used to act out situations to which a focus group are asked to respond. The use of drama or puppetry with children can be a particularly useful way of communicating about sensitive topics or to explore alternative scenarios. Other possibilities include video diaries, photography, collage, stories, cartoons and discussion games.

Advantages	**Disadvantages**
They can be fun	Analysing the material can be a challenge – it's hard to put a video or drama into report form!
Involve all abilities	Relies on the researchers' interpretation of the visual representations.
They don't depend on words – and may capture things differently	Will not give easily quantifiable information
Provide attractive material for reports and presentations	

Observation

Observation involves the evaluator being present, watching events and actions and writing down, filming or recording what happens. It is an important method in the professional evaluator's toolkit and can 'anchor' other kinds of data in an accurate understanding of the realities of project delivery. However, it is a difficult method for self-evaluation. External evaluators bring a different perspective and may well be able to see and describe what insiders take for granted.

An observation checklist is a good way of ensuring that different people look for the same things and enables comparison across a number of sessions/events.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Observation can be a useful way to build hypotheses which can then be tested using other types of information	Observer may affect what happens
Can see what people do rather than what they say they do	In some contexts it can be hard to observe and take accurate notes at the same time
Can give an authenticity and accuracy to evaluator descriptions.	What the observer records may be biased by their own views of what is important.
Evaluators can gain greater understanding of the challenges of project delivery.	May not be suitable for some projects / activities

Extract from an observation checklist for observing the Obinrin project job skill training sessions
1. Is arrival and welcome a pleasant experience? Do the women seem comfortable/anxious? 2. Are introductions well conducted? 3. Are the training objectives made clear?

4. Is the content relevant to the needs of participants?
5. Is the language and content accessible?
6. How does the trainer handle questions?
7. Is the course respectful of the views and experiences of migrant women?
8. Does everyone participate (who does/does not?)
9. Describe the group atmosphere at end of morning? (Engaged? Passive? Bored?)

Analysing Data

Analysing quantitative evidence

Quantitative monitoring data can be summarised to provide a 'picture in numbers' of service use:

- How many families use the project each day / week.
- How many children attended the summer playscheme.
- The average number of people using a drop in each week.

These numbers might be broken down in different ways including by gender, age group, postcode or presenting issue according to what is meaningful for the project and the outcomes it is trying to achieve.

Referral, initial assessment or new user data can be used to provide a numerical profile of people accessing the project as a whole or using specific services. It can provide clear evidence that the project is reaching its intended beneficiaries – including specific groups. It is likely to provide information about where referrals are coming from and about levels and types of need, risk or vulnerability.

Monitoring data can also help tell the story of a project's development – e.g. by showing the monthly increases in referrals received across the year. Some of this data may be reported most effectively by displaying it in bar charts or graphs.

It is likely that monitoring and referral data will have been collected on project forms designed for this purpose and will then be entered into a database. Most analysis of this kind of data can be done in excel (and generally is) and it is worth ensuring that at least one member of project staff is a competent excel user and that you run and use reports based on monitoring data at least quarterly.

Some pre and post measures such as Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation (CORE) or Outcomes Stars are available with bespoke desktop or on-line analysis and reporting software for an annual licence fee. Other pre and post measures will need to be analysed using SPSS or similar and most projects will need to engage professional help with such analysis. (The most important aspect of collecting pre-post data is that each follow-up is paired with its baseline questionnaire. If this isn't the case the data will be useless.)

Structured questionnaires can be both entered and analysed using an on-line package such as surveymonkey. These make simple analysis and presentation of statistical data very easy, though you may want to bring in some additional expertise if you want to do anything more sophisticated. On line packages are quite low cost with the starter level often free – though you will have to start paying once you go above a certain number of responses and/or questions.

The most important thing to remember when analysing and presenting numerical data is to be clear and transparent about what the data represents. For example, it is common for people to report numerical data as percentages. However, this may not be appropriate when numbers are small. If you are told that 90% of cats prefer whisky you are likely to think the 90% represents most cats, or at least a lot of cats. If in fact the data was drawn from a focus group held in Edinburgh involving only 10 cats – 9 of whom expressed a liking for a good malt – you will realise that the findings may be context specific rather than generalizable to the overall cat population. If you do use percentages, you should always include the actual numbers alongside e.g. 68% of service users (13 out of 19 respondents) had been referred to the project by their GP.

Analysing qualitative evidence

Qualitative data is even less straightforward to analyse. Even with a relatively modest number of interviews, a couple of focus groups and a pile of feedback forms, you are going to have a lot of information to sift through. You are likely to have collected a wide range of opinions, about what the experience of your project has been like for them and the extent to which it has made a difference to peoples' lives. It's easy to get bogged down.

It's generally helpful to structure your analysis under headings based on the key questions you are trying to answer. If your interview topic guide worked well this can be a good place to start. Then you need to sort and label people's responses into some basic categories such as positive/negative, advantages/disadvantages. This is called 'coding' in the research trade. Responses that do not fall into these categories will need to be sifted separately – why don't they fit, are they similar or very different?

You are likely to then take a second look at the basic categories you have identified and begin to explore themes and patterns within them.

You may also want to sort and label your data by some key characteristics of your respondents: gender, age group and ethnicity may all be relevant, and look for differences between and within these groups. For example, both men and women accessing a project for survivors of child abuse might report that the project has made them feel less isolated but there may be gendered patterns in the services they have engaged with: on-line community, telephone helpline or weekly self-help group, and in their explanations for how services have most helped them.

Most researchers use simple techniques to code or mark up interview or focus group notes or transcripts. They use coloured pens and post-it notes, or sort data by 'copying and pasting' into different files. Some develop thematic grids or charts, others draw or map emerging issues in order to track the links and relationships they identify. There are also specific qualitative analysis packages such as NVivo to facilitate and store analysis (though this is not a short cut because you have to learn how to use them).

All these approaches include procedures for saving quotations from the data, which can be cross referenced to the thematic displays or the maps. Quotes are used for a number of purposes: as evidence; as explanation; as illustration; to deepen understanding; to give participants a voice, and to enhance readability. Care needs to be taken in using them because they tend to stand out on the page – so try to be clear about the 'status' of any particular quote you use and indicate whether it sums up a widely held view or presents a very specific perspective. Where the latter is the case you may want to balance the quote with others from alternative viewpoints. Individuals should never be identified, or identifiable, when quoted but it is useful to indicate the category of person who gave the response – for example, service user, volunteer or worker and, where relevant, to indicate their gender or ethnicity.

Analysis of qualitative data – checklist

- Sort the material into some basic categories
- Analyse each category separately
- Look for recurring themes and note in whose interviews they appear, and with what qualifications and differences.
- Identify the themes/issues which seem to be of particular importance, bearing in mind the context.
- Revisit the project's original objectives and the outcomes it intended to achieve and assess what the qualitative data has to tell you about whether they have been achieved and what has helped and hindered their achievement.
- Pay attention to 'outliers' (both positive and critical) to ensure your analysis reflects the full range and variation of views and experiences.
- Check that your judgements are based on evidence from different categories of people involved (e.g. participants, carers)

Further information

This part of the Practical Guide provides only a very brief overview of what is involved in data collection and analysis. It is not a complete DIY guide and if you haven't done any evaluation before you may want to consult other resources which provide more comprehensive coverage of the methods and tools outlined here.

In writing this Practical Guide we wanted to de-mystify the processes involved in evaluation and encourage projects to collect data for themselves. However, it is also fair to point out that carrying out the methods and tools described here does require time, effort and not a little skill. Before embarking on them it's important to be sure you have these capabilities within your project. Professional evaluators have a number of years of training (and experience) to draw on and it can be worth consulting or commissioning an individual or team to advise, support or assist with your evaluation.