Quality and evaluation in voluntary and community organisations

Guidance paper 1

How to cost an evaluation

charities evaluation services

Many voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) want to evaluate their work, so as to learn more about their effectiveness and to satisfy the requirement of funders. Often self-evaluation is appropriate, but sometimes an external evaluation – undertaken by an external and independent evaluator – is more appropriate.

Many VCOs that consider employing an external evaluator are concerned or unsure about the costs involved. This guidance paper has been written to help voluntary organisations and funders estimate the costs of carrying out an evaluation.

It is difficult to give a precise answer to: 'What will an evaluation cost us?' This will vary widely, according to the scope and nature of the evaluation. If you want to be able to publish your findings widely, or use the results of the evaluation to make a good case for refunding, this may influence who you employ to do the work, and how much you need to budget for.

Any costing for an external evaluation should consider the following possible components:

1. External consultant fees.
2. Consultant travel costs, overnight stays, subsistence (food, etc)
3. Administration, printing, postal and telephone costs. This may include costs for telephone interviews or for postal surveys.
4. User feedback, including room hire, refreshments, incentive payments to participants.
5. Steering group costs, including reimbursement for travel costs and room hire.
6. Time costs for internal support to evaluation.
7. Printing and binding costs for the report, plus dissemination costs.

The rest of this guidance paper outlines the possible costs for each of these seven components.

1. External consultant fees

You are likely to find fees quoted between £300 and £700 per day, and you may (but not always) find that the difference in fees charged relates to levels of experience. It would be appropriate to allow at least £500 per day for an evaluator, who will have skills in designing the evaluation, work with your internal team or the steering group, do all the necessary research, and write a report with recommendations.

You may be able to commission some specific elements of research, such as telephone survey work for a rate of £200-£300 per day. Data inputting may cost between £100 to £200 per day, depending on complexity.

2. External consultant expenses
Think carefully about the likely research to be carried out before budgeting for travel and subsistence costs and for overnight stays.

- Are you likely to find a consultant from your local area? If not, what will be the overnight and travel cost implications?
- Will the work involve face to face work in different locations? What will be the travel and accommodation implications?

3. Administration, printing, postage and telephone costs
You will need to consider the likely design of the evaluation in order to estimate these costs. Will the research involve a large survey, or lengthy telephone interviews?

Note that you will not normally be expected to include consultants' costs for stationery, printer cartridges, and other 'tools of the trade.' However, if the consultants incur costs specific to the evaluation, for example, postage and telephone costs, this should be regarded as a reasonable expense.

4. User feedback
Bringing a group together for feedback may entail costs, such as travel expenses, refreshments and small token payments for participants, room hire and related costs.

For a formal focus group conducted by external consultants, which requires reasonable time to be allowed for researching or bringing the group together, and for analysis of the data, you may need to allow £800 - £1,000 per focus group.

5. Steering group costs
If you are bringing together a steering group to help manage the evaluation, you will need to budget for any travel expenses, room hire and related expenses.

6. Time costs for internal support
It is important to estimate the cost of support time that will be required from within your organisation. This may be for :

- administrative support
- liaison with the evaluator
- liaison with the steering group.

You will also need to factor in time to obtain data for the evaluator, for being interviewed by them, and for reading the report. All these are an important part of the evaluation, although a funder may not agree to fund these costs.

7. Printing and binding costs for the report
An evaluator will normally supply you with a limited number of bound copies of the report. If you wish to have more for distribution, this should also be costed. You may also wish to have the report printed. A realistic estimate of these costs should be provided, including any costs of layout and design.

Example costing for a small evaluation

The following is an example of the quote that might be provided by an external evaluator. Remember that this will not include all your internal costs, and will not necessarily include all the expenses shown above. You will need to be clear with the evaluator in advance what those expenses are likely to be, and make that part of the contract.

An advice service has five members of staff and 200 users. The evaluation will assess:

- whether/how the project aims and objectives had been met
- what users thought of the service
- what the outcomes of the service are for service users.

The evaluator will draw on existing project data, as well as collecting additional data through interviews and a postal questionnaire.

The costs for the consultant fees are based on estimated days multiplied by the day rate, as shown in this example table:

Task	Days
Meetings with client	1
Desk research (including project's existing monitoring data)	3
Drafting interview schedules (including consulting with client)	1
Drawing up questionnaire (including consulting with client) and mailing out questionnaire	2
Five qualitative interviews with service users, including set-up time (allowing for drop-out rate)	2
Two interviews with project staff	1
Data analysis	4
Writing report	5
Total days	**19**

19 days @ £500 per day = £9,500
Plus VAT @17.5% = £1,662.50
Total cost: £11,162.50

In addition, the evaluator should estimate and add the costs of the expenses they incur directly, which will include travel and overnight stays. Be clear who is paying for items such as room hire.

What services does CES offer?

In-house training
CES offers training in monitoring, evaluation and quality systems. Training courses can be run in-house and tailored specifically to the needs of your organisation.

Open training
We also run a programme of training courses covering monitoring and evaluation and quality systems from our accessible central London venue.

Contact us by email: training@ces-vol.org.uk or call for our training guide.

Consultancy
Our consultancy service is flexible and provides support for organisations that want to understand and implement monitoring, evaluation and quality systems.

External evaluations
CES has carried out evaluations of a large number of organisations since 1990 as well as working with funders to evaluate their programmes and funding strategies.

Contact us on enquiries@ces-vol.org.uk or call for more details.

Publications
CES produces a range of publications on quality and evaluation. Please look at our website www.ces-vol.org.uk for further details.

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