Monitoring and evaluation are essential elements of the problem-solving approach to crime reduction: they enable us to see which interventions work and which do not. They should therefore form an integral part of the strategy development process. This briefing provides guidance to crime and disorder reduction partnerships on when and how to monitor and evaluate.

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Introduction

Monitoring and evaluation have a vital role to play in the development and implementation of crime and disorder reduction strategies. They are essential elements of the problem-solving process: once an intervention has been developed and implemented it must be monitored and evaluated to ensure that:

- It has been successfully implemented.
- It is properly targeted on the problem.
- It is having the expected impact upon the problem.
- Any unforeseen impacts are not having a counterproductive effect on the problem.

However, monitoring and evaluation are more than just tools to show the success or failure of crime prevention. They enable us to investigate how particular changes are brought about. In other words, they enable us to look at what works, with whom and why.

Monitoring and evaluation: what's the difference?

Although monitoring and evaluation are closely related, they are two distinct activities:

- **Monitoring** is keeping track of and measuring inputs and outputs (part of routine project management).
- **Evaluation** is finding out whether a project has achieved its objectives by identifying if there is a link between a project’s impact and its outcomes.

Partnership members: what you need to know

It is particularly important that members of the partnership understand the strategic aspects of the monitoring and evaluation processes. These include:

- the differences between monitoring and evaluation
- the need for routine monitoring
- what to include in the initial framework
- when to evaluate
- the basics of evaluation, including which elements should be included in the initial framework and what results can be expected
- interpreting results

Practitioners: what you need to know

In addition to the above, practitioners will also need to know how to:

- Set up and run a monitoring framework.
- Analyse (at a basic level) the results of the monitoring process.
- Set up and manage an evaluation; or alternatively be able to specify what should be included in a detailed evaluation framework, so that if an external evaluator undertakes this work it can be tracked and remain open to scrutiny.

Definitions

**Inputs**

Any additional human, physical and financial resources that are used to undertake a project or initiative.

**Outcomes**

The consequences of an intervention. They can arise during and after an intervention.

**Outputs**

Narrowly defined as direct products of the process of implementation. They arise only during the implementation period.

**Performance indicators**

Systems to collect data that demonstrate how well a standard is achieved or whether a target is being met.

**Performance measures**

Statistics used to measure performance.
In the case of monitoring, this will require practitioners to work closely with the relevant finance department(s), local crime data analyst and officers working directly with the target population. All these staff will need to be briefed on their role before the beginning of the project.

**Building monitoring and evaluation into the project cycle**

Monitoring and evaluation cannot be tagged on as an afterthought once a project is completed. They are highly dependent on other stages in the strategy cycle, from auditing and consultation through to strategy development and implementation. The inputs, outputs and outcomes of all these stages need to be recorded in order to provide a solid basis for monitoring and evaluation.

Setting up a monitoring or evaluation framework during or after (rather than before) the life of a project will create difficulties: you will not be able to capture all the necessary data (some of which may be lost by this point). The results of such processes will be incomplete and at best partially invalid.

Initial frameworks for the collection of information and project management for the monitoring and any evaluation process should be produced at the strategic development stage, before implementation begins. In the case of monitoring and evaluation, the partnership will also need to make important decisions on what should be monitored and evaluated and then how these processes should be undertaken.

Decisions on evaluation need to be made before the monitoring framework is set up. The decision not to undertake a detailed evaluation will mean that only basic monitoring information on inputs and outputs needs to be collected. The decision to undertake a more complex and potentially costly evaluation will then mean that additional information has to be gathered, both at the start and during the life of the project.

**Monitoring**

Monitoring should focus on measuring inputs and outputs. It cannot assess the quality of a project or broader outcomes such as reductions in fear of crime. For this, evaluation will be required.

Monitoring should be written into all the work of the partnership: it can be a useful tool for ensuring the project management framework is sufficiently detailed and straightforward (because a proper monitoring framework demands that spending is allocated to specific tasks and expectations are set out in concrete terms). Although this often requires extra effort at the start, because all those involved in a project need to meet and make decisions on the immediate way forward, it can ultimately kick-start a project and may even result in wider participation, interest and resourcing.

**General tracking of crime and disorder issues**

Tracking developments in local crime and disorder is important. It should be a routine activity for the police and crime and disorder partnerships, in order to target police operations and review local crime and disorder issues. It can also be used to assess where a partnership is achieving wider targets, by measuring new developments against baseline data and targets contained within the crime and disorder audit and strategy. Such general tracking can include:

- regular collection and analysis of crime and other core statistics, including identifying trends in crime and mapping crime hotspots
- the collection of intelligence through the community and continuous consultation with the public through local bodies, such as town centre partnerships, Neighbourhood Watch and specialist panels

However this approach has limitations, the main one being that it does not attempt to match inputs with outputs and therefore only gives limited information on the effectiveness of local interventions.
Tracking specific projects

Monitoring can be used to track the progress of specific projects or developments in multi-agency working. This kind of monitoring should normally be carried out by the project manager, with the assistance of the appropriate finance departments and officers implementing the project on the ground. In order to monitor individual projects, specific monitoring frameworks will need to be created.

It should be possible to monitor developments in multi-agency working which have resulted in specific outputs. This might be undertaken as a routine task by a community safety officer with the assistance of the appropriate finance departments and officers directly carrying out the work.

The monitoring process

The monitoring process must start with the designing of a monitoring framework and project management plan. This includes:

- setting inputs
- setting outputs and performance indicators
- the timetable for the implementation of the project, including a start and end date and milestones for regular review of inputs and outputs
- a protocol on keeping a centralised record of spending. (For this, you will need to identify all possible forms of spending before the project begins, and brief staff to record and code this accordingly)
- specifying one lead person (eg the project manager) responsible for data collection
- making other project staff aware that they will need to provide necessary information in a user-friendly form and within the specified timetable
- any staff training necessary to support this process (eg computer skills)

In the case of projects where delivery is multi-agency or output data is complex and intensive, sophisticated recording systems will be needed and decisions will need to be taken about which software should be used (eg compatible databases and spreadsheets).

Summing up your results

You should undertake routine summing up of the results of your monitoring, perhaps as part of the annual review process. Summing up can address issues such as:

- Was the project carried out according to plan so that the target outputs were reached?
- Were inputs within the expected range?
- Did recipients receive the service?

Evaluation

Getting the timing right

Monitoring can only show that a project is being implemented and managed appropriately. Evaluation focuses on outcomes and allows you to go a step further and assess the impact of the project. Routine monitoring of crime and disorder may show that outcomes match the targets that were set. This does not automatically mean, however, that changes in local patterns of crime and disorder were due to partnership work: this can only be proved by comprehensive evaluation.

The evaluation process

Effective evaluation can only take place if the rest of the problem-solving process (including monitoring) has been carefully followed. However, in contrast to monitoring, evaluation should be seen as a highly complex process, which should not be undertaken lightly. It requires:
a highly detailed monitoring framework to be set up before the implementation of a project

information additional to that gathered for monitoring purposes to be collected, possibly beyond the lifetime of the project

careful and expert analysis

This is an expensive and time-consuming process, which will not necessarily reveal the results that the partnership was hoping for. The evaluation process is highly dependent on the quality of monitoring data and analysis, and the co-operation of both agencies and individuals.

It is therefore very important that the decision to evaluate should not be taken lightly. Once the decision to evaluate has been taken, every effort should be made to set up and maintain the highest standards of data collection and analysis.

In order to identify whether evaluation is necessary and realistic, you need to decide:

- **The purpose of the evaluation.** What will the partnership do with the results of the evaluation?
- **Elements of innovation.** Very few initiatives will be truly innovative and most projects implemented at local level are drawn from knowledge of what has worked in other areas. If a certain type of project is already known to work, there is little point in evaluating it. Consequently, evaluation is more appropriate for projects that have an element of innovation or specific local conditions that have not been evaluated before.
- **Level of investment in the project and resources available.** Evaluation should be cost-effective – a low cost project is unlikely to warrant detailed evaluation. The cost of evaluation is likely to be a substantial percentage of the project costs.
- **Length of the project.** A longer-term project is more likely to be costly and complex, and therefore more likely to require detailed evaluation. However, short-term projects can have longer-term effects which require evaluation.
- **Type of project.** Social measures aimed at offenders, victims or the wider public are often longer-term, more complex and costly, and therefore suitable for detailed evaluation.
- **Size of the project.** If the project works with only a small number of people or covers only a small area, it will be very difficult to evaluate. If the size of the target area is small, patterns and trends of crime will be much more open to the influence of small fluctuations.
- **Quality of local data.** The partnership will need to check whether the core data required for an impact evaluation is available and in a form (digital, high quality, clean and compatible) that will allow for meaningful analysis.

**Types of evaluation**

Once you have decided to evaluate your work, you should decide whether you will carry out a full or intermediate evaluation, and whether you will evaluate the process or the impact. These different types of evaluation are covered below.

**Intermediate evaluations**

It has been suggested\(^1\) that projects costing between £20,000 and £100,000 may warrant this type of evaluation. Intermediate evaluations include:

- some documentation of the implementation process
- an examination of output measures
- a limited assessment of outcomes
- no attempt to measure displacement
- limited cost-effectiveness analysis

**Full evaluations**

These should be reserved for larger projects and initiatives, or ones that are particularly innovative. Full evaluations include:

- full documentation of the implementation process
- thorough examination of both intermediate and final outputs
● an audit scheme to see if the project or initiative was implemented as proposed
● a search for evidence that mechanisms for reducing crime had operated as expected
● comparison of crime trends in the target area with control areas, displacement area and benchmark areas
● as full as possible cost-benefit analysis

**Process evaluations**

These examine the process involved in setting up and running the project. A process evaluation includes:

● an assessment of the way the project was carried out
● an identification of the key elements of best practice (eg involvement of the right partners, good project management and effective communications)
● the difficulties a project encountered during implementation
● the extent to which the project was carried out as intended

**Impact evaluations**

These examine the extent to which the project impacted on the problem. They can:

● Potentially identify direct links between the results of the project (the outputs) and the wider outcomes (eg a direct impact on local crime rates).
● Identify what happened to the problem in the target area. Using a control area or comparison group lets you estimate the actual impact of your intervention.
● Identify additional consequences of the project, such as displacement, diffusion of benefits, changes in unrecorded crime or wider outcomes (such as increased demand for housing in the area or greater economic activity).

**Getting the information you need**

Some of the information required for evaluation is provided by earlier stages in the strategy cycle. For example:

● The results of the audit and consultation identify the problem and its context. They will include detailed information on the local area, your target group, and wider local problems and issues (eg other activities and provision that might also impact on the problem).
● The strategic aims and objectives provide a summary of the terms of references for the project or initiative being evaluated.
● Records of the development of the strategy and action/implementation plans will include records of the process of identification of particular projects and activities.
● Action plans, project plans and implementation plans, together with records of the rationale for any changes in the project (collected during the monitoring process), will contribute to any process evaluation that was undertaken.

If a detailed evaluation is to be undertaken, the following information will need to be collected during the life of the project:

● **Information on the intensity of the intervention.** This is calculated by seeing what numbers (of offenders, victims, households, etc) have actually been covered by the project as a percentage of the maximum number that could be covered by the project (based on local assessment).

● **Identification of ‘buffer’ or ‘control zones’.**
  ● Are any local boundaries likely to change during the life of the project and evaluation?
  ● Is the control area of a similar population size to your target area and if possible adjacent to the target area boundary?
  ● Is your buffer an area into which crime is most likely to be displaced?
  ● Are any major operations or projects taking place in the control zone that are also likely to have an impact on the crime type being targeted?
**Multiple interventions.** Areas where there is a concentration of social problems are usually the focus of a number of interventions. Many of these interventions may be targeted at the same population groups and so it may be very difficult to evaluate the effect of any particular one of these interventions. There is no easy answer for this in terms of local evaluation. The best course of action is to ensure that the outputs and outcomes for your project are tightly defined, with the results put in the context of the other work taking place locally.

**Information on displacement.** Identifying displacement may be thought of as indicative of project failure. However, this is not always the case. In some circumstances displacement can be used as a powerful policy tool, directing victimisation away from the most victimised areas. Displacement is identified by creating a control zone for the project area or population. Comparison of data for both the project area and the control zone should then show if crime has been displaced into another crime type, victim type, area or time.

**Who should carry out the evaluation?**

You could carry out the evaluation ‘in-house’ or bring in an external evaluator. In order to decide between these two options, partnerships need to consider:

- How complex is the project? Do you have the skills needed to undertake the evaluation in-house? The skills required can vary from survey design to an in-depth understanding of psychotherapy.
- If the evaluation requires assessment of people’s behaviour, this is a complex process requiring particular professional expertise. Who has this expertise?
- Do partnership staff have the time and resources (including expensive software) to carry out evaluations? How do these costs compare with the costs of external evaluators?
- Will partnership staff be able to retain a high level of independence and resist ‘political pressures’? These issues are often considered less problematic when external evaluators are carrying out the evaluation.

Once it has been decided who is to do the evaluation, the partnership will need the following:

- realistic costings (eg 15 per cent of the costs of the whole initiative) and timetable
- joint objectives and targets for the evaluation (which should also be prioritised if necessary, so the evaluator is not then confused by multiple requirements)
- assurances to appropriate staff that their cooperation is vital and necessary

If the evaluation is to work, boundaries have to be set and all partners must be seen to be giving their full backing to the evaluation.

**The tools you need**

Although computer software can assist in the analysis of both qualitative (eg surveys) or quantitative data (eg police statistics on crime), first you need an in-depth understanding of the process of evaluation and how results can be interpreted – you will not be able to set up or undertake computer analysis without this understanding. Consequently, the skills of the evaluator should include:

- knowledge of criminological theory and concepts (eg repeat victimisation, displacement, routine activity theory, social control theory and individual risk factors)
- knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research methods
- computer skills, including using software and understanding what results it can produce
- communications skills (eg interview techniques)
- organisational skills (eg project management)
Using your results

The partnership will want to see positive results because positive results:

- Can be important for obtaining continuation/additional funding.
- Will boost community interest in the work of the partnership.
- Will boost the morale of staff working on the project or intervention.
- Will raise the profile of the partnership and demonstrate that it is effective.
- Will allow the partnership to contribute to the national debate on what works.

However, the partnership should also give consideration to how it would handle less positive results. Poor results are as important as positive results because:

- The partnership can take the findings forward into future practice.
- The partnership can contribute to the national debate on what works and provide best practice advice to other practitioners.

The partnership should develop a media strategy for all its contact with the public, including the dissemination of evaluation results. The partnership should make a joint decision on how to present and summarise the results for the press and public. Although outright mistakes should be avoidable through using problem-solving approach and good project management, the partnership should not be afraid to admit that something unexpected has occurred, particularly if the public also see the partnership taking action to deal with this.

Resources

Other Nacro guides

This guide is one of a series of four that have been written to help crime and disorder reduction partnerships with the strategy cycle. The others are:

- The Nacro guide to crime audits
- The Nacro guide to developing and implementing crime reduction strategies
- The Nacro guide to partnership working

Bibliography and further reading

Creswell, J (1994) Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, Sage

Footnotes

1 Hough (1998)