BUILDING CONNECTIONS FUND

Guidance on evaluation for grant-holders

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This document provides you with practical guidance for understanding evaluation and evaluating your activities. It builds on the What Works Centre for Wellbeing's Brief Guide to Measuring Loneliness, which explores the different measures you can use when working on loneliness. This Building Connections Fund guidance should be read in conjunction with the Brief Guide to Measuring Loneliness.

This document has been produced for **Building Connections Fund** grant-holders but can be applied to any activities aimed at reducing loneliness.

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NPC | what works wellbeing | The Centre for Youth Impact | Brunel University London | BPSR Bryson Purdon Social Research

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INTRODUCTION

The Building Connections Fund

Following the Prime Minister's endorsement of the Jo Cox Commission recommendations on Loneliness, the Building Connections Fund has been set up to support projects that are able to prevent or reduce loneliness. This is part of a significant programme of cross-government work on tackling loneliness, which includes the first Strategy for Tackling Loneliness[1] in England and recommendations on standard measures of loneliness.[2]

The Building Connections Fund is a cross-government[3] fund in partnership with The National Lottery Community Fund and The Co-op Foundation. The Fund provides grants to charities and community groups across England to fund projects aiming to prevent or reduce loneliness. These projects target people of all age groups and backgrounds.

What is this guidance for?

We need to understand more about loneliness: the factors associated with it, the effects it has on different people, and how we can prevent or alleviate it. Currently, the evidence base is very limited – we have some data on loneliness in older people, but less for other age groups (including children and young people).

A consortium of partners, led by NPC, has been appointed to support Building Connections Fund grant-holders—and the wider sector—with their evaluation practice, and to learn from the data collected, improve provision, and contribute to the evidence-base on what works in tackling loneliness. To find our more, visit our dedicated webpage in collaboration with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing.

This guidance is aimed at helping organisations working to tackle loneliness to evaluate their activities. You do not need to have any prior knowledge of impact measurement or evaluation.

How will this help you?

Evaluation is about asking and answering some of the most fundamental questions: *Are we making a difference? How can we improve? Are we reaching the right people? How does our programme lead to change?* It is about developing an approach to learning about what changes occur, how change happens, and what causes change.

The information that evaluation provides can be put to a range of different uses, including:

- **Designing activities**. Trialling and refining parts of an activity to develop a model that works.
- **Improving activities.** Adapting and changing (or in some cases stopping) activities to maximise impact.
- **Demonstrating the outcomes that your work achieves**: to funders, beneficiaries, the public, the media and other stakeholders.

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness
[2] See Section 1: National indicators of loneliness
[3] The cross-government interest spans across Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Department for Education, Department for Transport, Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health and Social Care and Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs.

- **Sharing ideas and building an evidence base**: about loneliness and methods of tackling it.
- **Maintaining accountability**: by evidencing to stakeholders how resources are supporting the aims of your organisation.

How to use this guidance

This guidance consists of three sections:

Section 1 outlines the national measures of loneliness. All organisations working on loneliness should consider if they can use these to evaluate their work.

Section 2 takes you through five steps for developing and implementing a measurement framework for evaluating your work.

Section 3 offers practical advice for using different approaches and methods for data collection and analysis. It also outlines key evaluation considerations relating to research ethics and data protection.

SECTION 1: NATIONAL INDICATORS OF LONELINESS

The Jo Cox Commission highlighted the need for a ‘national indicator of loneliness’ to enable better measurement of progress towards alleviating and preventing loneliness. Using consistent language and measures enables us to compare progress, clarify concepts, and identify gaps in provision. This can help us to improve understanding of loneliness across ages and groups, capture changes over time, and identify trends across geographical locations. It can help us to take action on the basis of findings, prioritise and target resources effectively, and measure and demonstrate the impact of different activities.

The What Works Centre for Wellbeing's Brief Guide to Measuring Loneliness outlines measures that you should ideally use in evaluating your activities. These are also outlined briefly below.

The national indicators of loneliness

The ONS has published recommendations on national indicators of loneliness alongside guidance for using these indicators.[4] They have been adapted for use with children and young people.

All initiatives should consider if they can use these indicators, to provide a minimum amount of standardised evidence across projects working to tackle loneliness.

Measures	Items	Response categories
The UCLA loneliness scale	**For adults:** How often do you feel that you lack companionship? **For children (ages 10-15):** How often do you feel that you have no one to talk to?	Hardly ever or never, Some of the time, Often
	For all: How often do you feel left out?	Hardly ever or never, Some of the time, Often
	For adults: How often do you feel isolated from others? **For children (ages 10-15):** How often do you feel alone?	Hardly ever or never, Some of the time, Often
Direct measure	How often do you feel lonely?	Often/always, Some of the time, Occasionally, Hardly ever, Never

The questions and response categories should stay in this order as responses are affected by the order of the questions and answers. Note that the direct measure response categories differ from the UCLA loneliness scale

*For other measures of loneliness, and measures of factors related to loneliness, please see **Appendix 2**.*

[4] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/compendium/nationalmeasurementofloneliness/2018
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/measuringlonelinessguidanceforuseofthenationalindicatorsonsurveys

SECTION 2: EVALUATING YOUR WORK

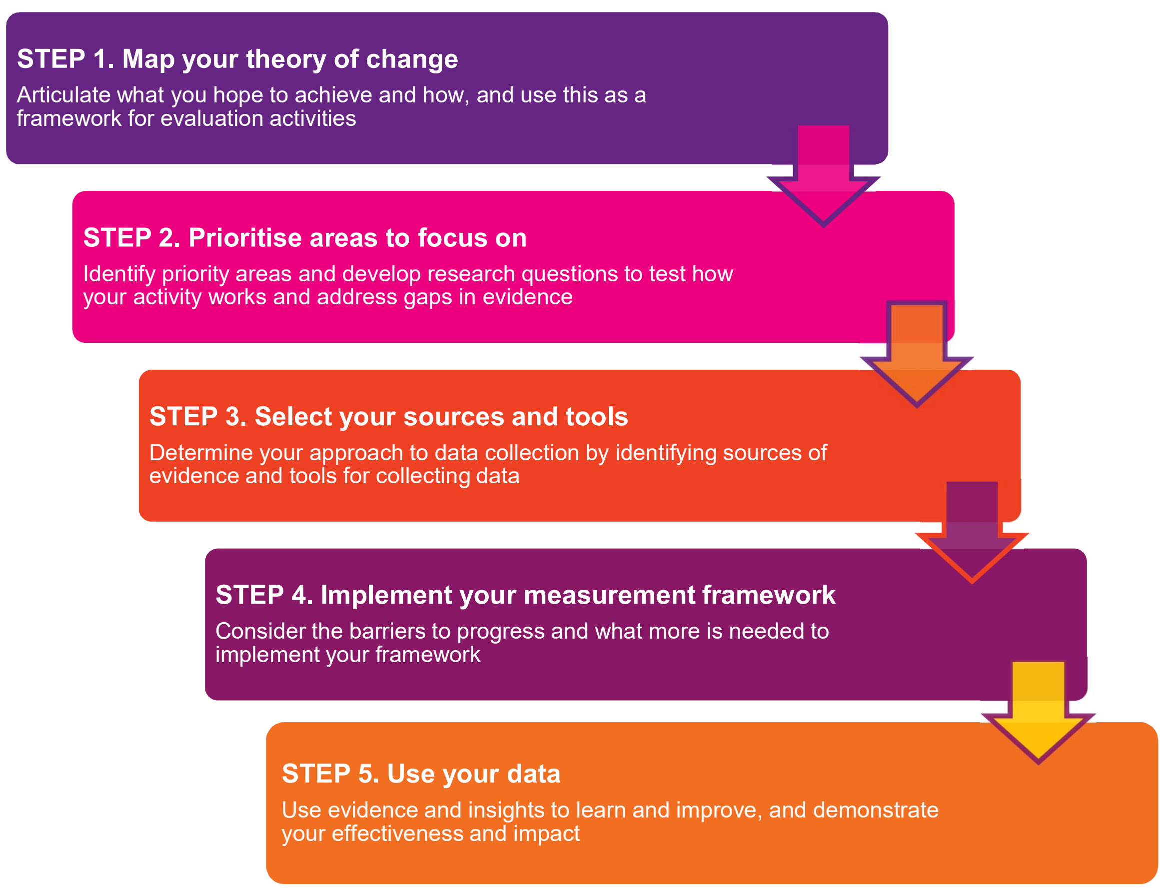
Evaluation involves asking yourself the following questions:

- What is the change I want to see? What activities deliver these outcomes?
- What do I want to find out with my evaluation activities? What questions do I need to answer?
- What are the different ways I can collect data? Where will this come from, and how?
- How will I use the information I collect?

This section outlines steps for developing and implementing a measurement framework for evaluating your work. By the end, your framework should include:

- A theory of change (Step 1)
- A list of priority areas to focus on which reflect your key evaluation questions (Step 2)
- Clear indicators which will help answer these questions, and the sources of data and appropriate tools you will use to collect data on these indicators (Step 3)
- Implementation plans on how you will collect the data (Step 4)
- Plans for how you will use the data to learn and improve as well as demonstrate impact (Step 5)

Diagram 1: Five steps for developing your measurement framework



Step 1: Map your theory of change

A **theory of change** shows what you want to achieve with your work, and how you plan to achieve it. It is a description of how your activities link to your final goals through a series of steps. This helps you determine what is most important to collect data on.

Your theory of change should be at the heart of your evaluation activities because it will help you determine what is most important to collect data on. To develop a theory of change, follow these steps:

- **Define the problem and the context**: What is the issue you are trying to address in order to reduce loneliness? Who is affected? What are the consequences? What are the causes? Who else is working to tackle the issue? What are the gaps in provision? What resources do we have to tackle the problem? Where might you make the most difference?
- **Describe your target group**: Who are you planning to work with to tackle this problem? Is it beneficiaries or the people around them, other organisations who you might work through to achieve change, or infrastructural or systems bodies—meaning you will be campaigning for change (eg, in the use of a community space) rather than delivering services? What are their particular characteristics—eg. age, gender, knowledge, attitudes—and needs?
- **Identify the intended impact for your work**: Ultimately, what is the sustained effect on individuals, families, communities and/or the environment that you hope to see? This is long-term and something that your service users will need to be able to achieve for themselves.
- **Work backwards from the goal to map intermediate outcomes**. What are the changes in your target audience that you want to see? Which changes in i) knowledge and/or skills, ii) attitudes, and/or iii) behaviours? Think of these as the assets you want your beneficiaries to have, or how you are aiming to equip your service users to change. Work backwards from the final goal asking 'What has to happen in order for this to be achieved?'
- **Establish the links between outcomes, and their order, by working out causes and effects**: Once you have a list of outcomes, go through the links in detail and identify sequences and causal links. These links need to be plausible and logical.
- **Outline the activities you deliver and identify important change mechanisms for your activities**: Change mechanisms are how your activities need to be experienced in order for them to be successful. What should delivery look or feel like? What should users be thinking, feeling, saying, doing while they use the service? Think about things like feeling safe, trusting staff, having fun, feeling listened to. It can be helpful to take each activity and ask why you deliver it in this way? What reaction do you want from users? Take each outcome and ask what aspects of your activities will trigger this outcome.
- **Look again at your activities and think about service quality**—how you need to deliver activities to trigger the mechanisms. What makes the activities 'work'? What makes them effective? What 'good practice' have you learned? What is unique, distinctive or special about your project or organisation?
- **Identify what else is needed for the intervention to work**. This is about identifying gaps / unanswered questions. What would derail the intervention and what would accelerate change? Do certain stakeholders need to be onboard? Might something be happening in the external environment that could help or hinder the theory of change? Think about which aspects of your delivery could be challenged—can you really reach the people you need to reach? Are staff/volunteers good enough?

Many organisations choose to represent their theory of change as a diagram. This is not essential but it can be helpful for two main reasons:

- The discipline of creating a diagram prompts further reflection. It can help you to be more succinct as well as see new connections and become clearer on the sequence of outcomes.
- Having a summary as a diagram can be a useful communications tool.

*See **Appendix 3 (page 34)** for an illustrative theory of change diagram for loneliness interventions and Example 1 below for ideas on what to include in your theory of change and how to present it*

Example 1: Theory of change diagram for [Devon Communities Together]

Step 2: Prioritise areas to focus on

Different types of data will help you answer your evaluation questions, and you can use different tools to collect this data. The five types of data framework will help you to map out your data collection in a systematic way.

You will not need to collect data on everything to understand the impact you are having. Being overambitious can result in an unwieldy system that produces large amounts of data of variable quality. You might require some trial and error to get there but taking good decisions on what is important to measure is critical.

The first task is to develop a list of priority areas and identify your evaluation questions. What do you need to know about your theory of change? What information would help you to understand and improve what you do? For example, if you identify a key outcome relating to the confidence of participants, your evaluation questions could include: To what extent does this activity result in an increase in confidence? For whom? Under what conditions?

Review your existing data

Organisations often struggle to make the most of the data they already have. Before thinking about what more you need to collect, think about the data you already hold and ask yourself the following questions:

- What data do I have and where is it held? Who is responsible for collecting and managing that data?
- How is the data currently being used?
- Is the data accurate and consistent? Is there anything missing?
- Do we really need to collect this data?

Step 3: Select your sources and tools

Using the five types of data framework below will help you map out your data collection in a systematic way and identify any gaps. Using your evaluation questions, go through each type of data and think about how you might be able to collect data to answer your questions.

Table 1: The five types of data framework

	Type of data	Guidance
	User data Information on the characteristics of the people you are reaching	**Why?** To check whether your activity is reaching the intended target group, and tell you about the population you are currently serving. For example, your work may specifically target care leavers, people aged 16-24, or people from a specific socio-economic background. **How often?** Routinely. User data is best collected from all your users during the sign-up stage or shortly afterwards. **How could I collect this?** You can get this information by asking your users when they join your activity, or by getting it from your referral partners. Depending on your area of work, asking users can be sensitive. It is okay to try to get this information

		from people once you have got to know them—although it means you lose data from people who don't come back.
	Engagement data Information on how users are using your activity, and to what extent.	**Why?** To understand whether or not you effectively deliver the activity to your intended users. For example, if you deliver a befriending service, you may need to know how often people meet, for how long, and over what period of time. **How often?** Routinely. Like user data, you should be trying to collect this data on an ongoing basis—as and when people use the activity. **How could I collect this?** The main method will be to rely on staff or volunteers to collect the data. To help them you will need to make data entry as easy as possible, encourage them to enter it routinely and ensure they are consistent in how they enter it.
	Feedback data Information on what people think about the activity.	**Why?** To establish whether your activity gets the reaction you want and whether it is beginning to work in the way intended. Specific questions might include: Do people enjoy your activity? Do they find it useful? If you offer advice or signposting to resources, are there particular areas where your services are stronger? Are there gaps? Which aspects do users rate the best or least? **How often?** Routinely. Users should always feel encouraged to share their views and have ways to do so. **How could I collect this?** Feedback can be approached informally whenever people use the project - this could involve suggestion boxes, online feedback, social media channels, and simply talking to people. You can also approach feedback formally by using surveys / questionnaires or qualitative research. You can take a more occasional approach to formal feedback.
	Outcomes data Information on the short term changes, benefits or assets people have got from the activity.	**Why?** To understand how people have been influenced or helped by your work in the short-term. Key questions include: What is different now? Are there any changes in the knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours of your users? For example, are users building more positive relationships? Has there been any changes in their confidence and self-esteem? How do they think your activity has helped? Which aspects have helped which types of users in which circumstances? And which have not? **How often?** Occasionally. Outcome data is best collected by staff or volunteers because they develop the strongest relationships with people. But they should not spend all their time collecting this data, and you may not need to collect it from everyone—you could just collect it from a sample of your users. **How could I collect this?** Surveys, interviews, focus groups and observation are all potential methods. For more general advice on choosing between quantitative and qualitative methods, see Section 3.
	Impact data Information on the long-term	**Why?** To understand the long-term difference, you make for the people you work with; is loneliness being reduced and prevented?

	difference that has resulted from the activity.	**How often?** Exceptional circumstances. This is the hardest data to collect—many activities do not need to collect this data and should focus instead on the other types of data outlined. **How could I collect this?** Using high-quality evaluation methods when enough time has passed and ideally using a comparison group.

For more information on data collection tools and methods, see Section 3.

Consider the following as you go through the framework:

What information do you need internally to help improve your activities?

Consider how you would use the data you collect, from informing small changes in delivery to much wider strategy decisions.

What information do you need to share externally?

Identify your key stakeholders and understand their priorities, and work towards streamlining data collection so that it meets your internal needs as well as those of your external stakeholders. Explain what your data collection decisions are based on, to help negotiations on what to report on (ie, share your theory of change, evidence gaps, and evaluation questions to help improve your provision).

What is your organisation's capacity and capability?

How much time and what resources will you be able to devote to collecting and analysing this data? Is this enough? Do staff have the skills and knowledge to be able to collect this data and make sense of it? Will they need additional training or support?

Can you draw on existing evidence?

If there is existing evidence that supports some of the causal links in your theory of change, there is no need to collect new data, but the evidence on what works best to reduce loneliness is limited. When using external data, look widely and present a balanced picture of what you find. Bear in mind the context—knowing that a model has delivered successful results in other settings cannot guarantee that it will do the same in yours.

Who do you need to collect data from?

Your activity may interact with a range of beneficiaries, staff, practitioners, and policymakers. It may be appropriate to consider groups with whom you have indirect contact, or people who choose not to use your services, to understand why they do not.

When will you collect data?

Will you collect data on all activities at all times or carry out smaller evaluations at regular intervals? A common pattern is to collect data before and after an intervention. Think about how long after the initial data collection you can expect to see a change in outcomes, particularly if some of your outcomes are longer-term.

Is it possible to create a counterfactual?

This involves comparing the outcomes of people who participate in an activity with similar people who do not. This can sometimes be possible through comparing to a ‘natural’ control group such as people on a waiting list, or people in another area not accessing the same services. If you cannot create a control group or run a trial, you can collect qualitative data to support quantitative measures of change[5]; and use more than one source of data to support each causal link in your theory of change.

Step 4: Implement your measurement framework

Evaluation isn’t just about developing the tools and frameworks to collect data. **It is important to adapt your culture to bring a greater focus on learning and improvement**, to support the changes you are implementing.

Data collection and evaluation takes time and it can be challenging for those involved if they don’t see the benefits in the short-term. This section outlines some steps you could take to adapt your organisational culture, to bring a greater focus on learning and improvement.

Have a clear plan for evaluation

This will underpin your activities and help you involve staff, volunteers and users. This could outline:

- The priorities and evaluation questions identified in Step 2
- The sources and tools identified in Step 3
- Who is responsible and accountable for collecting, analysing and learning from data
- Timings and milestones for data collection, analysis and reporting

Communicate with people in your organisation

Everyone within your organisation should understand: what evaluation is, why it will help the organisation, what your specific priorities are and why. It might be helpful to:

- Write a simplified version of your plan and use this as a foundation for your discussions. Try to make this as jargon free and accessible as possible.
- Explore with staff the different ways in which evaluation might help people to do their job. Find out which arguments are most engaging for people and what barriers they think they might face. As time progresses, reflect on how different parts of the organisation are doing, and why.

Create buy-in by involving people

A great way to build commitment is to involve staff, volunteers and users at all stages of your evaluation processes. It may be beneficial to hold workshops on your plan, or ask a sample of staff to comment on drafts of data collection tools.

For more information on involving users in evaluation, see Section 3.

[5] See Section 3

Demonstrate the value of learning from evaluation

Demonstrate how evaluation is being used to improve your work. For example:

- Making evaluation results the focus of internal communications. You could introduce evaluation as a standing agenda item in team and board meetings, and share findings via internal newsletters.
- Sharing the results of data analysis with those that have been involved in collecting it and others. It can be useful to give people access to explore the data for themselves, or set up a dashboard to show the key information relevant to them.
- Encouraging others to share learnings from data; for example through internal blogs or forums for discussion.

Define clear roles and responsibilities

Everyone involved should be aware of their role and responsibilities in evaluation. For example:

- Senior staff and trustees need to set the tone and promote evaluation as an essential part of your work. They will set up systems, allocate resources and communicate what the organisation learns from data and how they are acting on it.
- Managers can promote good practice, connect people who could learn from one another, take time to understand the results, and think about what can be done to improve.
- Frontline staff and volunteers are often responsible for service delivery and data collection, meaning they can offer useful feedback about what is happening on the ground.
- Beneficiaries should have opportunities to share their views and contribute to the development of the activity.

Offer appropriate support and training

Staff and volunteers will need the right skills and support. There will need to be someone with data analysis responsibilities who understands how to check and organise data, and extract insights through analysis. Defining clear roles from the start can be helpful—so you can identify who will lead on a project, who will coordinate data collection, who will be responsible for data analysis etc. You can then use this to think about the skills you need and if there are any gaps.

Offer incentives

Think about how else you can promote evaluation in the organisation. Opportunities may include:

- Embedding evaluation into performance and pay, recruitment, strategy development, project management, and volunteer management.
- Getting people to act as ‘champions’. Champions can promote evaluation generally or take on specific roles like answering particular questions about impact measurement. Think about which staff will be most enthusiastic and who has skills and experience that they can share with others.
- Using team meetings to highlight examples of people making a contribution to evaluation.

Make data collection and data use as easy as possible

To secure support from the front line, you will need to design systems that make data collection and the use of data integral to the day-to-day work. This means ensuring processes that are as light-touch as possible—preferably part of the work itself, and provide immediate information which staff can use themselves in their work.

- Spend time shadowing and talking staff to understand the complexities and processes involved in collecting, reviewing and sharing data. Consider how frontline staff could be supported in doing this.
- Think about how frontline staff could have more meaningful conversations with users to collect information, in addition or instead of the current form filling exercises.
- Survey staff or set up a feedback meeting to get views on the value and time required to collect requested data and what can be done to improve this.

Set up systems and processes for learning

You need to find ways to encourage and make it easy for people to share their thoughts. You could cover learning in team meetings or conferences. It may be possible to introduce more structure to this, for example always having learning meetings at the start and end of projects, or at regular intervals. It can be useful to set up mechanisms for staff and teams to share insights with each other. You can set up intranets and forums, or use tools like Slack and Medium for sharing information between teams.

Pilot and test

Piloting and testing tools before rolling them out can help make sure they give you what you need. This also enables you to check for mistakes or glitches, and test the time it takes to carry out the measurement. You should pilot your tools with a sample of people who represent the population you want to get information from. Once your tools are live, keep testing with staff, volunteers, members, partner NGOs and members of the public.

Be open to mistakes and failure

It's important to promote a mindset that focuses on improvement. Any disappointing results should be examined, and staff should feel encouraged to do this. It can be useful to reflect on how you currently share findings within your organisation and beyond. How do people respond to disappointing results? How do you explore what could have been done differently?

Example 2: Action East Devon reports on learning and changes as a result in its 2014/15 annual review

WHAT WE'VE CHANGED

- We have increased the number of young people registered at any one time for each group from 15 to 20. We have found that all the young people registered will rarely, if ever, attend every session. This can be due to a number of reasons – outside commitments, including family/social events; deterioration or improvement in symptoms; transport issues; pressures of school work, exams and/or revision for exams
- Promotion of The Project in schools has increased awareness about the support we can offer, and this has resulted in more referrals through schools, as well as self-referrals
- We began looking at ways in which feedback could be obtained from professionals making referrals to The Project. We have created a Referrers Feedback Form, which will be implemented in the coming year

Step 5: Use your data

Analysing your data allows you to test whether your theory of change works in practice—whether you are approaching your work in the best way, or could do better. Used well, your measurement framework enables you to demonstrate to staff, funders, and beneficiaries that 'by doing X, we achieve Y'.

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data you have collected. It involves examining the data you have collected to find patterns and themes, and drawing conclusions about what it is telling you, so you can learn and improve. Through your data analysis, you should aim to answer three questions.

Does your data support your theory of change?

Are there any links that do not work as you expect them to? Does your activity work the same way in different places or with different people? What factors facilitate your theory of change and what factors impede it? Does the data point to any untested assumptions?

Answering these types of questions will help you identify how you might be able to increase your impact. You may want to change some activities, stop some, or engage in new ones. You may want to change your target audience and focus on those who need the most help, or who show the greatest improvement from your activities.

How do your results compare with similar activities or organisations?

Comparing your results with others can help you understand how you are doing in relation to your peers. This can offer insights into the level of success you can expect from your work, and suggest ways you might improve. Bear in mind that you need to be sure you are comparing apples to apples: are your results measuring the same thing, in the same way, in the same context?

Are your results improving over time?

This is the most important question to answer. It is useful to be able to show funders and other stakeholders that you can learn and improve. The challenge is taking account of factors that influence your impact but are outside your control.

How to analyse your data

Data analysis should start with what you need to know. Going back to your priority areas and evaluation questions, and work your way through the five types of data framework.

Remember the difference between **attribution and contribution**. Your work exists within a wider system and other factors are likely to contribute to any changes you see. Ask yourself: who and what else is involved in supporting this person or community?; and how can we understand their contribution? Challenge yourself—can you really attribute these changes to your work, or if there are other plausible explanations of the impact you think you're having?

For guidance on analysing qualitative and quantitative data, see Section 3.

SECTION 3: PRACTICAL ADVICE ON APPROACHES, METHODS AND CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

- **Approaches**: User involvement, quantitative data analysis, qualitative data analysis
- **Methods**: Routine data, surveys, focus groups, case studies
- **Cross-cutting themes:** Research ethics, data protection

Approaches

1. User involvement

User involvement is all about designing and delivering activities 'with' people rather than 'to' people. This way, power is shared and better answers are found.

There are a number of reasons for involving users in evaluation. It can give a moral legitimacy to your organisation, which is important when you are representing your users. It can give you a better understanding of the needs of your users and enable you to harness their knowledge and skills. It can help build trust and engagement with your activities among users and strengthen staff-user relationships. Additionally, users can benefit directly from feeling heard and involved as this can give them a sense of agency and confidence.

You can involve people at different stages of evaluation, and at different levels. At its most basic, this might mean sharing information about what you are doing. At its most involved, people might participate throughout the process. For example, you might have users on your trustee board or you may work with users to co-design tools.

Table 2: User involvement at different stages of evaluation

	Consultation	Conversation	Participation
Deciding what data to collect	Ask users what they think of your evaluation priorities.	Discuss your priorities.	Involve users in deciding your priorities.
Collecting data	Ask users what they think of how you collect data.	Discuss how you will collect data.	Involve users in collecting the data.
Analysing data	Ask users what they think of your analysis - do they challenge or agree with your interpretation?	Discuss and refine your findings together.	Involve users in analysing and making sense of the findings.
Presenting and using data	Ask users what they think of how you plan to respond.	Discuss recommendations and actions.	Involve users in taking action with you.

To determine how you might involve users, consider the following questions:

- What level of involvement makes sense for your organisation and your user group?
- What fits with your mission, vision and values as an organisation?
- Can user input in evaluation further what you are trying to achieve as an organisation?

For more information on user involvement, see: Make it count: Why impact matters in user involvement.

2. Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data is numerical, eg. responses to multiple choice questions in a questionnaire.

Analysing quantitative data will help you generate findings on *how much* change has occurred as a result of your work and who has experienced change. Quantitative data is also useful for presenting evidence on your impact visually in charts and tables. It is normally useful to combine quantitative data with qualitative data, as qualitative data can tell you about the nature of the change, and why it has occurred.

Prepare your data

If you use paper forms or surveys, you will need to enter these into a spreadsheet or database. If you use an online survey tool, such as SmartSurvey, you will likely be able to export your data into Excel or CSV format.

Once your data is in the correct format, you will need to 'clean' your data:

- Identify and correct (or remove) inaccurate data such as blank responses, duplicates, and obvious errors.
- Standardise the data so that, for example, all numbers are in number format rather than a mix of words and numbers.

Decide which statistics to use

Different statistics can be used to shed light on your findings. It is often helpful to use a combination of different measures, as well as combining quantitative with qualitative findings.

Percentages: It is often helpful to present numbers as percentages of a total, as this gives readers a sense of scale and proportion. Be wary of using percentages when presenting data from small samples. Avoid percentages for samples of fewer than 50, and avoid drawing firm conclusions from small differences in percentages for samples of 50-100. Make sure you refer to the correct number of respondents, eg. if analysing data from a survey, use the number of people who have responded to a specific question rather than the number of people responding to the survey.

Measuring change: If you have asked the same questions before and after your intervention, you can subtract the 'before' score from the 'after' score to find out how much change has been experienced. You can work out the average change for your whole group or for sub-groups, or what percentage of respondents experienced positive or negative change

Cross-tabulation: This is a way of comparing results for different types of respondents. Eg, if you want to know if your intervention is more effective for people who are unemployed or in employment, you could use cross-tabulation to compare their experiences.

3. Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data is descriptive data that is not numerical, eg. feedback collected through open-ended responses to surveys, interviews or focus groups. It can encompass creative responses such as pictures and videos.

While quantitative data can tell you how much something has changed, and for whom, qualitative data will help you generate findings on the nature of that change and why it has occurred. It can offer insights into what aspects of your activities work well and why, as well as those that don't. It may help you to understand the contribution you make towards achieving change, compared with other factors.

Choose your approach

There are two main approaches to analysing qualitative data.

Code and count involves coding your data into categories and counting the number of responses. This is helpful for understanding how many people gave a particular response, particularly when you have a larger sample and data that can be separated into distinct categories. However, this does not enable you to capture the strength of feeling associated with responses, and if your sample size is small, you may not be able to generalise from the data.

Theme and explore involves identifying themes from your data and exploring how different people have responded to these. This is good for smaller sample sizes and more complex subjects. It is particularly helpful when your respondents have different understandings of the same issue and you want to compare them. It can also help develop findings around how your work has contributed to changes compared with other factors.

Themes are usually decided on after having read most or all responses. For example, if you had interviewed people about their attitudes to loneliness and read through your data, you might find the following themes emerging: social isolation, physical health, socio-emotional wellbeing.

Categorise your data

You can categorise data in various ways.

By hand: With a small amount of paper-based data and a small number of codes or themes, you can categorise by hand. Make a note of the codes or themes in the margin. You can then cut up the transcripts and paste them onto larger sheets of paper, one for each code or theme.

Using MS Word or Google Docs: You can use a similar approach to paper-based data. Use the comments feature to make notes in the margin, or copy and paste sections of your transcripts into a new document under each code or theme.

Using a spreadsheet: If you are using code and count, create a column for each code and put a '1' in the column if that code is mentioned in the survey response. You can then use the 'sum' formula to count how many times the code is mentioned, and the 'filter' function to view all the responses for a particular code.

Using data analysis software: Packages such as Quirkos, Atlas.ti, MAXQDA and NVivo allow you to code data more quickly, search for codes or groups of codes, and visualise your data in graphs or charts. If you analyse qualitative data regularly then you may wish to invest in them.

Tips for categorising data:

- Data can be categorised into more than one code or theme, but try not to do this too often.
- If using code and count you will need to make notes of how often each code appears. You may want to create a table or tally chart to do this.

- You will need a category for ‘don’t know,’ ‘no answer’ or ‘other’ responses. If ‘other’ responses make up more than 5% of your total, look at the data again to identify additional codes or themes.
- It can be helpful to write notes to yourself as you go through your data, and highlight interesting quotes.

Think critically about your data

Questions you might want to ask of your data include:

- Are there any links between codes? Are some things mentioned together frequently? Are there other patterns, trends or themes? Are there any deviations between these patterns?
- Are outcomes different for different groups of people? Why were some outcomes achieved, and others not achieved?
- How do people understand their own journey or story? What do they think has caused or affected the outcomes that they have experienced?
- What has surprised you about the data? What has challenged your assumptions?
- Are there any gaps? What do you need to find out more about?

Make sure your analysis can be verified and you can justify the claims that you make. Ways you could do this include:

- Keeping a paper trail, including copies of your notes and your coded data.
- Checking your analysis with others. It can be helpful to have two people code some of the data and check whether their coding matches. You may also wish to check your analysis with your evaluation respondents to check that you are representing them accurately.
- Wherever possible, checking data from different sources to see if the results are the same or different.
- Checking your own biases. Write down your initial views on the data and deliberately look for evidence to dis-confirm your views.
- Coding your data can result in looking at statements out of context. Check back against the rest of the data provided by a respondent to make sure you haven’t misinterpreted data.

Methods

You can use a broad range of tools for collecting both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (non-numerical) data.

Common quantitative methods and tools	Common qualitative methods and tools
• Routine monitoring data • Surveys • Psychometric scales • Case work tools/records	• Interviews • Focus groups • Case studies • Observation/ethnography • Anecdotes and feedback

1. Routine monitoring data

Routine monitoring data is information you collect from your users on an ongoing basis. You’ll often ask for this when an individual applies to take part in your activity, eg. to assess suitability, you might ask someone their age. Routine monitoring data is crucial for understanding your impact because it tells you about who is using your activities, how they are engaging, and what their experiences are.

Using the five types of data framework, data you should collect routinely are user, engagement and feedback data.

The first step is to review the routine data you already collect and identify any gaps. You can then use monitoring forms and surveys to fill gaps in your evidence. There are two key opportunities to collect this data:

- **When someone signs up to or joins your activity**. This could be via a sign-up or registration form.
- **As or immediately after a user engages with your activity**. If you run a website, you may be able to capture analytics. If you host a telephone helpline, routine data could include the number and duration of calls. You may have an instant feedback mechanism for a particular activity, where people rate their interaction immediately afterwards.

2. Surveys

A survey is a process of systematically gathering information for analysis. They often focus on quantitative data such as ‘how many?’ and ‘how often?’, which gives you answers that you can easily analyse.

Benefits	Limitations
• You can reach a large number of people • They can provide data that is easily analysed • They can allow people to respond anonymously • They can enable you to compare before and after (‘pre and post’)	• Persuading people to respond can be difficult • There is a risk of questionnaire and form-filling overload • It can be difficult for people with literacy and numeracy issues, learning difficulties, or those for whom English is a second language

Develop your questionnaire

Your survey can draw on existing tools and measures and you can also develop your own questions.

Using existing measures

Using measures that have been designed by researchers and statistically tested can help ensure the quality of the data being collected, and may allow you to compare your results with others. Your questionnaire should include the national indicators of loneliness, outlined in Section 1. These should not be amended as changes would mean your data is no longer comparable with data collected by others using the same tool.[6] Other measures are outlined in Appendix 2. These have not been designed with your activity in mind and you may need to adapt them. Again, this will mean your data will not be comparable but these tools may still provide a useful starting point for a well-structured question.

Developing your own measures

When writing your own questions, it is often helpful to use a combination of both closed and open questions. **Closed questions** collect quantitative data. They are quicker for users to answer and the results are easier to analyse. Types of closed questions include: Choosing from a list of options, ranking options in order of importance, and scales—often number or agreement scales.

[6] With the exception of making language adjustments for specific audiences. ONS and the Campaign to End Loneliness have made recommendations for adapting questions for children and young people. It is also worth thinking about those with limited English and those with disabilities, for example, and how you may need to adapt your measures to their needs. For more information, see the What Works Centre for Wellbeing's Brief Guide to Measuring Loneliness and the ONS Measuring loneliness: guidance for use of the national indicators on surveys.

Open questions collect descriptive information. For example, what aspects of your relationships with friends or family are working well for you? Are there any changes you would like to make?. These enable users to answer more freely and in more detail, and to provide insights you hadn't anticipated.

Closed questions	Open questions
• Simple and quick to answer • Tend to get a higher response rate as they require less effort to answer • Can help users to recall relevant information • Can convey specific areas of interest • Easier to analyse responses	• Allow users to answer freely and in more detail • Less likely to lead users to a suggested response • Require users to think about their answers • Can provide insight into users' true feelings and views, including those you didn't anticipate

When designing your questions, bear in mind the following points:

- **Keep your questions simple, focused and easy to understand**. Remove unnecessary words, avoid technical language, and try to keep sentences short. Be specific and avoid words that are open to interpretation, for example use 'daily' rather than 'often'.
- **Keep your survey short.** We recommend a maximum of 15 questions (or around 5 minutes for online surveys, 10 minutes for paper/phone, 15 minutes for face-to-face).
- **Avoid leading questions**, which imply respondents should respond in a particular way. Use questions which allow for both positive and negative views, such as 'How satisfied are you with this activity?'
- **Avoid asking more than one thing at a time**. Eg, 'Did you find the session helpful and interesting?'—this should be divided into two separate questions.
- **Try to use scales consistently** both within a survey and across different tools.
- **Focus on the objectives of your survey**. It can be tempting to try to collect information not relevant to your immediate objective but this can make your survey longer and less appealing to participants.
- **Think about how you will analyse the data**. For example, if you have limited capacity, it may be helpful to use more closed questions, as you are unlikely to be able to analyse large amounts of free text responses.

Choose how to deliver your survey

How you deliver your survey will affect how people answer. For example, there can be differences depending on whether respondents completed it themselves or had assistance. Think about how your users might be influenced by different factors, and make sure you use the same method of asking your questions at each subsequent application of the tool.

Online	Paper	In person or over the phone (structured interview)
• No printing or postage costs • Takes less time to issue, administer and analyse • More flexibility in terms of layout and design • Useful for discussing sensitive topics as users can complete in private and in their own time.	• Available to users who may have difficulties completing an online survey • Useful for discussing sensitive topics as users can complete in private and in their own time • Reduces risk of interviewer bias	• Available to users who may have difficulties completing an online survey • Interviewer can offer support if the user is struggling • Speaking to a person may generate more thoughtful responses

• May be easier to fulfil accessibility requirements—eg large font, translating into other languages • Reduces risk of interviewer bias	• Speaking over the phone may offer a greater sense of anonymity compared with in-person

Design your survey

The following points can help to make sure respondents give you the information you need:

- Provide background information and clear instructions. Your introduction could include why you are conducting the survey, how the information will be used, and instructions for navigating and completing the survey.
- Ensure your survey is accessible and easy to read. Think about formatting, font colour and size, and spacing. Avoid including too much information in one section. You could group similar questions together. Consider if any respondents are likely to have accessibility requirements.
- Test your survey with a group of people. This will give you insights into how easy it is for participants to respond, and how useful the information generated will be.
- Think carefully about who your survey should go to, and whether the questions will make sense depending on which services they use. Aim to give everyone an equal opportunity to take part, so your respondents are as representative as possible.
- Reflect on language. The ONS recommends introducing the topic as relationships with others rather than loneliness. Think about how you use positive and negative language. Positive language can reduce the likelihood of distress but it can also lead respondents to under-report their loneliness. Consider whether you need to adapt your language, for example for young people or those with limited English.[7]
- Be mindful of the impact on respondents. Answering your questions may be upsetting or may feel to stigmatise loneliness. Where possible, conduct your research in an environment where people feel safe and comfortable.

3. Interviews

An interview is 'a conversation with a purpose' that allows you to gather detailed information on attitudes, motivations, beliefs and experiences. They should not be used to generalise about the experience of others, but they can work well to explore the findings from surveys.

Benefits	Limitations
• You can map out a range of experiences by talking to different people • You can obtain broad geographic coverage • You can get an in-depth understanding of individual perspectives • Enables you to explore more sensitive topics	• Can be time consuming • Can be intimidating for people who feel put on the spot • Doesn't capture the full range of experiences

[7] For more information, see the What Works Centre for Wellbeing's Brief Guide to Measuring Loneliness and the ONS Measuring loneliness: guidance for use of the national indicators on surveys.

Identify who you want to interview and why

If you are trying to get a broad sense of the issues encountered when using an activity, it may be appropriate to interview a representative sample of users. If you are trying to understand the barriers to using an activity, you may wish to increase representation of individuals with particular needs.

Choose your interview structure

There are different types of interviews you could use, and you may want to combine them. For example, you may have a set of specific questions to ask everyone and a number of topic areas which can be explored more flexibly.

Structured interviews (surveys)	Semi-structured interviews	Unstructured (or depth) interviews
• Questions are asked in a set order and with exact wording. Interviewers are given detailed instructions on how to ask the questions. Most questions are closed, with respondents choosing answers from fixed responses.	• Less rigid format with open-ended questions designed to draw out more qualitative information. • Questions do not have to follow a pre-determined sequence. The interviewer can explore the answers in greater depth to probe and follow up answers • Can last between one and two hours	• Flexible—can be tailored to the individual and lead to greater understanding of the respondent. You may want to cover different areas of information are in different interviews • Can last between one and two hours

Set up your interviews

Interviewers would ideally be skilled in interviewing as well as knowledgeable about the field and people they will be interviewing. They need to be active listeners and good note takers. They need to understand how to minimise bias by ensuring clarity, consistency and neutrality in their words spoken, tone of voice and body language. It is important to ask all questions in an open way and to acknowledge responses without empathising or encouraging, as this can lead the user to alter their future responses to gain a certain reaction.

Prepare a topic guide. This should outline the questions interviewers should ask and provide instructions, for example, on how to capture feedback and on prompts they can offer to participants. Remember to:

- Keep your questions simple, focused and easy to understand. Remove unnecessary words, avoid technical language, and try to keep sentences short.
- For closed questions, avoid leading questions, which encourage or imply respondents should respond in a particular way.
- For open questions, try to keep these as open-ended as possible. If the participant's answer is short, the interviewer can reply with 'can you tell me more about that?' or leave silence for them to elaborate.
- Ask one thing at a time.

Think about how you will capture information. The interviewer could take notes or record the conversation. Remember that you will need permission to do both of these things before conducting the interview, and there will be data protection implications for the information you collect. Consider if you can preserve anonymity.

Prepare participants in advance. Confirm the time and medium or location and share a brief overview of the topics to be discussed. Explain the purpose of the interview and what will be done with the information.

When conducting the interview, remember to:

- Thank the interviewee for their time and remind them about the purpose and length of the interview. If relevant, ask for permission to record or to take notes during the interview.
- Try to remain neutral but show empathy and respect. Make eye contact and be aware of your body language. Try to build a rapport and break down barriers between you and the interviewee.
- Make notes as you go, capture non-verbal information, and seek clarification or probe further if needed.
- Signal when the interview is drawing to a close. This helps both you and the interviewee to wind down and allows the interviewee an opportunity to add anything that may have been missed. Clarify key points to check you have correctly interpreted and accurately recorded what they said. Let the interviewee know how and when you propose to share the findings of the interview.

For more practical tips and example topic guides, see Annex 2 of the ONS National Measurement of Loneliness: 2018.

4. Focus groups

A focus group is a facilitated discussion with a small group of people. They can be a way to explore views in more depth, enabling participants to interact with each other and discuss a broader range of issues.

Benefits	Limitations
• Understand points of debate, similarities and contrasts in people's experience • Generate ideas for changes or improvements • Generate a lively and interesting discussion • Can help people to feel more engaged with your organisation	• Results cannot be analysed at the individual level • Discussions move fast so difficult to get into detail • May not be appropriate for sensitive topics • Can be dominated by the most vocal participants

How to use focus groups

Prepare for the focus group

Participants: Focus groups should have between six and ten participants. Consider how you can make it easy for participants to take part. This could affect your choice of venue—both in terms of convenience and comfort. You may wish to offer incentives such as travel expenses or refreshments.

Facilitators: It is best to run a group with two facilitators—one to run the session, and one to make notes. Facilitators need to have skills in managing group dynamics. They also need background knowledge on the topics being discussed, and an awareness of the profile of the participants.

Topic guide: Prepare a structure for the discussion with a list of questions or topics. Think about ways in which you might rephrase questions in the event they do not evoke responses or are not understood. Decide what to do if participants ask for advice or information. Generally, it’s best to acknowledge what participants have asked for and ask to speak to them about it after the group has ended.

Logistics: If conducting the focus group in-person, ensure you have a comfortable and convenient venue that takes into account the accessibility requirements of the participants. You may choose to use an online platform. This can make focus groups more convenient and people may share more honest opinions due to the anonymity of the discussion. However, online focus groups tend to have a higher drop-out rate and the technological requirements may bias your results. Focus groups are tiring and should not last longer than two hours. Allow time either side for facilitators to agree on the process and debrief afterwards.

Communicate with participants in advance: Tell them about the broad topic area beforehand, but not the specific questions and give clear details about the date, time, venue and any incentives offered.

Running the focus group

When running the focus group, remember to:

- Explain the purpose of the focus group and how participants can help. Tell them how you plan to communicate the results of your work. Check they are happy for you to take notes or record the session.
- Let participants respond on their own terms, and define the issues that are important to them, but keep the group focused on the key topics. Respect their right not to discuss sensitive topics but support them if they wish to do so.
- Give everyone the opportunity to comment, particularly those who may find it difficult to contribute. Politely manage participants who try to take over the discussion or provoke others.
- Ask for feedback periodically to summarise and clarify key points.
- If taking notes, refer to the whole discussion and not only the points that are agreed by the whole group. Try to write down interesting comments word for word so you can quote them. Record non-verbal behaviour.
- Let participants know as you come nearer to the end of the discussion.
- Remember, focus groups can be hard work for everyone involved. Thank participants for their contributions.

After the focus group, the facilitator and note-taker should spend some time reviewing and agreeing how to analyse and report on the information gathered. Remember to give feedback on the outcomes to the participants, especially if you are planning to bring them back again for further focus groups.

5. Case studies

Case studies involve looking in-depth at particular individual cases. They often draw on a range of data sources such as interviews, feedback and secondary data, and can be useful for understanding how different factors, activities and outcomes fit together.

Benefits	Limitations
• Gives a detailed understanding of a particular setting or process • Allows for comparisons, eg. between individual experiences, delivery settings, or geographical areas	• Examples need to be selected and handled carefully as they will not be representative • Can be time consuming

Conduct your research

Select your case studies. Case studies for understanding impact require a different approach to marketing or fundraising case studies. Rather than looking for stories about people who most dramatically illustrate the needs and benefits of your activity, you should find stories that give a more balanced view. You want to explore both the typical and the range of experiences of people who use your activity, to gain a better understanding of the difference your programme is making and how people experience it.

Conduct your interviews: When conducting interviews for case studies, bear in mind the following points:

- Your focus should be on the difference that has been achieved. Evidence is important for justifying your claims about impact, as is an understanding of context.
- Participants need to understand the role they will play and the ways in which their story may be used, before giving written approval via a consent form. Reassure them that their contact details will not be shared without

their consent. Check if they are happy to use their real name or whether they would prefer to use a pseudonym. Ask about which types of media they would be happy to be featured in. Get their written approval on the notes you prepare and a consent form, to confirm what's been agreed.

- For more information, see the section on 'Research ethics' below.
- Get a copy of any photos the case study is willing to share with you. If they don't have any, check whether they'd be happy to be photographed for the media.

Write up your case study

Once you have your aim and evidence, you need to weave your story together.

- **Think about your audience**: What information would they like to know and how would they like that to be presented to them? What style and tone will they find engaging?
- **Reflect on the positive and negative learnings**: It is as useful to learn from your story as it is to convey the good things. This also helps to make your case study feel more genuine and honest.
- **Structure and format**: Make sure your case study is comprehensive by covering the background, the issues and problems faced, the actions taken, the outcomes and the lessons learned. Keep it short but detailed–a few paragraphs will usually suffice. Include quotes throughout to add authenticity.
- **Review your case study**: Think about what your work has achieved that hasn't been evidenced sufficiently. Ask a colleague to read through your case study to help identify any gaps.

Cross-cutting themes

1. Research ethics

It is important to think about whether your research plans are appropriate and acceptable. The table below outlines key principles you should consider—you should be able to answer 'yes' to each principle.

Principle	Key questions
Voluntary participation	*Do people taking part in your data collection understand they do not have to participate, and they can leave at any time?* It is important they understand that whether or not they take part will have no bearing on how they are treated or their access to activities.
Informed consent	*Do people taking part in the data collection understand what they are getting involved in?* It is important that the people you work with fully understand: • What the evaluation is aiming to do • How you will be using, storing and publishing any information about them • How you will make sure their information remains confidential • How to opt-out, at any point, during the process, should they no longer want to take part • It can be useful to provide this information both in writing and verbally.
Do no harm	*Do you approach sensitive topics appropriately?* Going over difficult or emotional experiences can trigger reliving of traumatic episodes. Only well trained researchers should be used when the subject matter is sensitive. If sensitive issues are to be discussed, prepare by taking information about sources of support and advice.
Protected identity	*Are you protecting participants' data?*

	Nobody except the evaluation team should have access to the data, and nobody except the evaluation team should be able to find out participants' identities. Ensuring that responses are kept confidential—for example, by changing names to identification numbers is essential. Think about where the research will take place—will other people be within earshot? How many people are there in this population group—could their story could be identifiable to others because there are few people in this situation?
Neutrality	*Have you taken reasonable steps to ensure the researcher remains objective?* This means staying objective and not getting involved, even if the topic is sensitive. It also means avoiding bias—see our guidance on conducting interviews above.
Minimalism	*Are you only collecting what you need to know?* Don't collect any more information than you need to answer the main research question. It isn't fair on participants to collect more of their personal data than you need, as it takes their time and effort, and puts their data in the hands of other people.

For more information, see the Impact Management Programme and the Social Research Association's Ethical Guidelines.

2. Data protection

Expanding on the 'Protect identity' category in the table above, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) governs data protection. Key actions required are set out below:

- As a minimum, organisations need to understand what personal data is being processed where, by whom and for what purpose.
- Note that under GDPR, if the legal basis for processing data is consent, collecting consent on an opt-out basis is no longer valid.
- Document the legal basis on which you process data from the six possible options. For charities, this is likely to be because you have asked people if you can, because it is part of your contract to deliver an activity, or because you have a 'legitimate interest'.
- Look at what information you give people about how you process their data. What you do with data should be set out in a privacy policy or a fair processing notice.
- The most common data breaches are caused by human error; develop or review your data protection policy, and train staff in how to keep data safe. Document how you will report any data breaches.
- People can request the data you hold about them, and you will have a month to comply with their request. Develop procedures for enabling people to access the data you hold about them, and test your systems on how to retrieve data.
- Document your processes. The Information Commissioner's Office understands that data breaches such as cyber hacking can happen as part of the digital age, we now live in. It can happen to big and small organisations. So, it is your processes for safeguarding the personal data you hold that will be of importance.

***For more information, see the Information Commissioner's Office**: Guide to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).*

APPENDIX 1: FAQS

I have started delivering services without collecting any evaluation data. Does this matter?

You don't have to collect data on everyone all the time to get a sense of what could be improved, or what impact you are having. Start as soon as you can, and make sure you have enough resources to analyse the data you are collecting.

How can I use the ONS national indicators of loneliness if I don't work directly with users?

The national indicators of loneliness have been developed for organisations working directly with users to reduce loneliness. It may be less appropriate for organisations that support other organisations, or aim to influence the system, policies or infrastructure around loneliness. In these instances, you will need to adapt the guidance for your purposes—many of the principles will still apply.

How can I evaluate my work if it is preventative, rather than aimed at reducing loneliness?

For organisations working to prevent loneliness, it is likely to be more relevant to measure changes in intermediate outcomes—such as improvements in confidence or self-esteem—which are expected to reduce the risk of loneliness. It may be possible to collect data from teachers/healthcare providers/others who can provide an assessment in the longer term change in an individual.

How do I approach the subject of loneliness with users? It feels too sensitive or personal.

It is important to make sure you have the right support in place for research participants both during and after you ask them about loneliness. Be prepared to provide additional information and signpost to support after you have conducted your research. Interviewers or focus group moderators should be briefed about the reasons for asking questions and equipped to signpost to advice and resources. It may be appropriate to ask your questions via online surveys rather than face-to-face interviews, to allow participants to respond in their own time and in private. Preserving confidentiality and anonymity can also help. The validated measures proposed in this document have been tested and potential sensitivities considered in their development.

I work with different audiences with different needs and responses to our work. How do we capture this?

Collecting demographic data can help you understand and analyse the differences in your target audiences, both in terms of the services they engage in, and the impact this has on them. *For more information on demographic data, see* ***Appendix 2.***

How do I adapt the measures for different audiences?

As far as possible, the national indicators should not be amended. However, it may be necessary to adapt the language for specific target audiences, eg. people with disabilities. The ONS conducted cognitive testing to explore differences in interpretation for different groups. For more information, see the ONS website.

We already have an evaluation framework in place. How can we align this?

Try to balance the recommendations in this guidance with other needs, which may not be compatible (eg requirements from other funders and commissioners). We recognise this may be difficult and recommend prioritising proportionality—ensuring data collection efforts are proportionate to the resources used to deliver your services.

We have limited resources/capacity. What should we prioritise?

For organisations working directly with users to reduce loneliness, we recommend prioritising the national indicators, as their usage will give you reliable data that is comparable with other projects. Beyond this, Step 1 (map your theory of change) and Step 2 (priorities areas to focus on) will help you to focus your activities on what you really need to know.

How can we improve the quality of the data we already collect?

Data collection and evaluation can take time to get right. Review your data as you gather it and think about what it's telling you. If there are recurring errors or issues, consider if processes need to change. It may be helpful to deliver training for staff and volunteers, or consider ways to incentivise data collection. *For more information about developing a culture of learning at your organisation, see Step 4 (implement your measurement framework) and the* Impact Management Programme website.

Is any more support available as part of the Building Connections Fund?

All grant-holders will have the opportunity to access an in-person workshop focused on evaluating your work, and a webinar. There is also an opportunity for some grant-holders to receive additional support from the Building Connections Fund evaluation team, as we will be looking for volunteer organisations to have their data synthesised. More information will be provided about this shortly.

APPENDIX 2: OTHER MEASURES

Other measures of loneliness

Grant-holders may wish to use other existing measures of loneliness, such as the Campaign to End Loneliness tool or the De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale. For more information about the benefits of the different measures, and how you might use them, see the Campaign to End Loneliness guidance for measuring impact on loneliness later in life.

Measures	Items	Response categories
The Campaign to End Loneliness Measurement Tool	I am content with my friendships and relationships	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree, Don't Know
	I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time	
	My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be	
De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale	I experience a general sense of emptiness	Yes, More or less, No
	I miss having people around me	
	I often feel rejected	
	There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems	
	There are many people I can trust completely	
	There are enough people I feel close to	
Single-Item direct measures (examples)	How often do you feel lonely?	Often, Some of the time, Hardly ever or never (Community Life Survey/ELSA) Very often, quite often, occasionally, hardly ever (British Household Panel Survey)
	Are you: (Joseph Sheldon)	Very lonely, lonely at times, never lonely
	During the past week, have you felt lonely? (Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale)	Rarely or none of the time (eg less than 1 day), Some or a little of the time (eg 1-2 days), Occasionally or moderate amount of time (eg 3-4 days), All of the time (5-7 days)
	Thinking about the last week, have you felt lonely? (Health behaviours in school aged children—England)	Never, rarely, quite often, very often, always
	In the past two weeks, I felt lonely (Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in Great Britain)	Mostly true, sometimes true, not true

What else to measure?

In addition to tackling loneliness, your project is probably trying to improve other aspects of people's lives. Asking about these related factors could really help to build the evidence on the topic.

The What Works Centre for Wellbeing's Brief Guide to Measuring Loneliness recommends using additional questions relating to overall wellbeing, experience of social relationships and support, and feelings about the areas people live in.

Measures	Items	Response categories
ONS four personal well-being questions	Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	0 'not at all satisfied' -10 'completely satisfied'
	Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile	0 'not at all worthwhile' -10 'completely worthwhile'
	Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?	0 – not at all happy, 10 completely happy
	Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday	0 – not at all anxious, 10 completely anxious
Community Life Survey: Social relationships and support	If I needed help, there are people who would be there for me	Definitely agree, Tend to agree, Tend to disagree, Definitely disagree
	If I wanted company or to socialise, there are people I can call on	Definitely agree, Tend to agree, Tend to disagree, Definitely disagree
	How often do you chat to your neighbours, more than to just say hello?	On most days, once or twice a week, once or twice a month, less than once a month, never, don't have any neighbours
Community Life Survey: Trust, belonging, feelings about the area	How strongly do you feel you belong to your immediate neighbourhood?	Very strongly, Fairly strongly, Not very strongly, Not at all strongly
	Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?	Most people can be trusted, Can't be too careful in dealing with people, It depends
	Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?	Very satisfied, Fairly satisfied, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, Fairly dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied
Demographics	Age; gender; number of people living in the household; marital status/living as a couple; rented or owned accommodation, poor health, disability or limiting conditions.	

Additional measures which may be relevant to your work include:

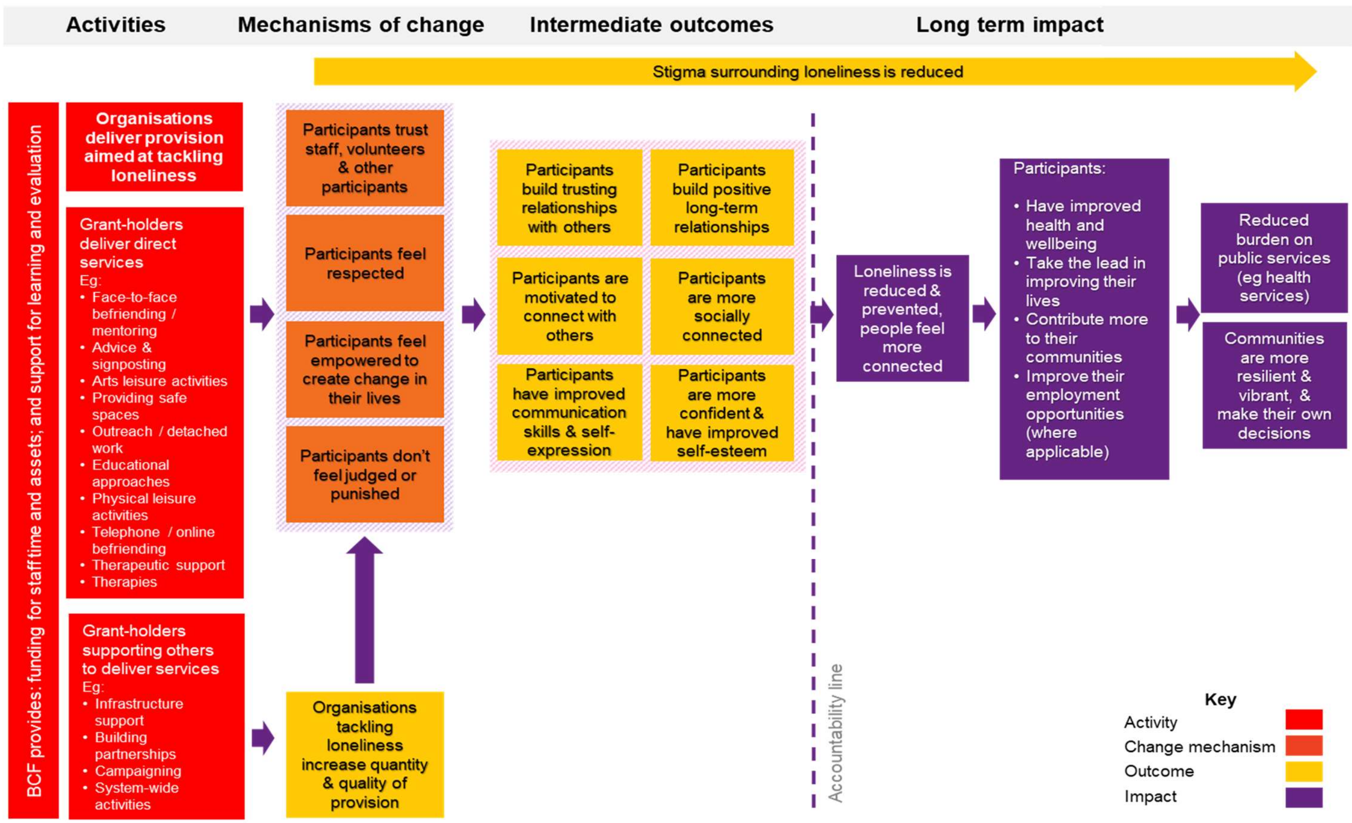
Measures	Items	Response categories
Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)[8]	I've been feeling optimistic about the future	None of the time, rarely, some of the time, often, all of the time
	I've been feeling useful	
	I've been feeling relaxed	
	I've been feeling interested in other people	
	I've had energy to spare	
	I've been dealing with problems well	

[8] If you use WEMBS you must register your use for copyright purposes.

	I've been thinking clearly	
	I've been feeling good about myself	
	I've been feeling close to other people	
	I've been feeling confident	
	I've been able to make up my own mind about things	
	I've been feeling loved	
	I've been interested in new things	
	I've been feeling cheerful	
WWCW Social capital questions: how people feel about their place in society, how they participate and their relationships	In the last 12 months have you given any unpaid help or worked as a volunteer for any type of local, national or international organisation or charity?	**Yes, no**
	Generally speaking would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?	0 – 10, 0 means you can't be too careful, 10 means most people can be trusted
	How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'If I needed help, there are people who would be there for me'	Definitely agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree, definitely disagree, don't know
	How often do you chat to any of your neighbours, more than just to say hello?	On most days, once or twice a week, once or twice a month, less than once a month, never
WWCW questions on domains of life	*Examples—relevance will depend on the nature of your activity.* **Relationships and social networks** Do you live alone? Are you happy in your relationships? How often do you meet up with friends or family? Do you feel you have someone to rely on? **What we do** Are you employed? How satisfied are you with their job or volunteering role? **Personal sense of wellbeing** How satisfied are you with your life overall? How much do you feel the activities you do are worthwhile? How anxious or happy do you feel?	
Objective measures	*Examples:* Level of education Work experience Employment Engagement with volunteering opportunities	
Demographic data	It is good practice to ask for information about some key characteristics of the people taking part in your project, eg. age, gender, ethnicity and location. This can be particularly important if you would like to compare your sample to a larger population. If you are able to survey or interview a large enough group, it could enable you to differentiate between different sub-groups (eg. people from different cultural backgrounds).	

APPENDIX 3: ILLUSTRATIVE THEORY OF CHANGE DIAGRAM FOR LONELINESS INTERVENTIONS

This theory of change diagram illustrates how activity funded by the Building Connections Fund is expected to lead to reductions in loneliness, and can be used for ideas on what to include in a single intervention's theory of change, which would usually include more detail. The proposed mechanisms of change and outcomes are based on existing evidence and typical theories of change for the type of interventions funded, and have not yet been informed by consultation with Building Connections Fund grant-holders. This theory of change will be tested, developed and enhanced during the Building Connections Fund evaluation project.



APPENDIX 4: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Campaign to End Loneliness guidance for measuring impact on loneliness later in life.

Centre for Youth Impact—Resource Hub: An online information hub to help youth charities navigate the wide range of tools, resources, reports and guidance available on impact and evaluation. Inspiring Impact: A programme to support improved impact practice within the UK charity sector, run by a consortium of sector bodies and evaluation specialist including NPC. It provides a searchable database of measurement tools and an online step by step self-assessment to help you understand and improve your organisation's impact practice.

Impact Management Programme: Free guidance for charities and social enterprises on using information and data to improve a service or programme.

ONS Measuring loneliness: guidance for use of the national indicators on surveys: Methodological guidance on how to use the recommended loneliness questions for adults and children and how to interpret and report the findings.

Measuring ageing: An introduction to the Ageing Better measures framework: A compendium of 63 measures, survey scales and their associated data sources looking at outcomes at the individual level related to ageing and later life.

Money Advice Service Financial Capability Evaluation Toolkit: An online set of evaluation resources to help organisations delivering programmes that seek to improve people's financial capability. It includes four outcomes frameworks, with indicators and beneficiary survey questions for interventions targeting adults, children and young people, teachers, and parents.

NCVO Know-How Non-profit: Knowledge and e-learning for charities, social enterprises and community groups.

NPC measurement and evaluation resources:

> *Building your measurement framework: NPC's four pillar approach*
>
> *Creating your theory of change: NPC's practical guide.*
>
> *Balancing act: A guide to proportionate evaluation.*
>
> *Stories and numbers: Collecting the right impact data.*
>
> *Listen and learn: How charities can use qualitative research.*

Research Methods Knowledge Base: for information on sampling and other methods of social research.

APPENDIX 5: GLOSSARY

Attribution: Isolating and accurately estimating the contribution of an intervention to an outcome.

Baseline: A minimum or starting point in an intervention used for comparisons.

Causality: The relation between an event or events (cause or causes) and a second event or events (effect or effects), where it is understood the second is a consequence of the first.

Contribution analysis: A technique generating evidence on the role and influence of an intervention on an outcome, in the absence of experimental data.

Counterfactual: An estimate of what would have happened in the absence of the intervention or organisation.

Efficacy: The ability to produce a desired or intended result.

Evaluation: The use of information from monitoring and elsewhere to judge and understand the performance of an organisation or project.

Experimental approach: An evaluation that compares outcomes of recipients of an intervention to those of a control group who did not receive the intervention.

Impact: Usually the broad and/or long-term effects of a project's or organisation's activities, outputs and outcomes, after taking into consideration an estimate of what would likely have happened anyway (ie, the outcomes that can be reasonably attributed to a project or organisation).

Impact measurement: The set of practices through which an organisation establishes what difference its work makes. Can be used interchangeably with *impact evaluation*.

Monitoring: A systematic way to collect and record information to check progress and enable evaluation.

Outcomes: The changes, benefits, learning or other effects that result from what the project or organisation makes, offers or provides.

Validity: The method which most accurately measures the issue you want it to.

Systematic review: A type of literature review that collects and critically analyses multiple studies or papers.

Qualitative: Research used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivation.

Quantitative: Information or data based on quantities obtained using a quantifiable measurement process.

Pre and post: Research into beneficiaries and outcomes before and after the receipt of an intervention.

Triangulation: The use of multiple data source and types of data collection to test a particular research question.

TRANSFORMING THE CHARITY SECTOR

NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy. Over the past 15 years we have worked with charities, funders, philanthropists and others, supporting them to deliver the greatest possible impact for the causes and beneficiaries they exist to serve.

NPC occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

Increasing the impact of charities: NPC exists to make charities and social enterprises more successful in achieving their missions. Through rigorous analysis, practical advice and innovative thinking, we make charities' money and energy go further, and help them to achieve the greatest impact.

Increasing the impact of funders: NPC's role is to make funders more successful too. We share the passion funders have for helping charities and changing people's lives. We understand their motivations and their objectives, and we know that giving is more rewarding if it achieves the greatest impact it can.

Strengthening the partnership between charities and funders: NPC's mission is also to bring the two sides of the funding equation together, improving understanding and enhancing their combined impact. We can help funders and those they fund to connect and transform the way they work together to achieve their vision.

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