

Why bother with measurement?

Measure your organisations success and learning from weaknesses is crucial to ensuring your organisation is meeting the needs of your beneficiaries. No doubt you are already collecting a plethora of information – often specified by funders – but do you know why you are measuring what you are measuring? Is it the right information and how could you measure more effectively?

While looking to write a factsheet on just this, we came across the blog below, which neatly sums up much of what we wanted to say!

Once you have read this blog, if you have questions or would like support, please do contact the Development Team at Community Southwark: development@communitysouthwark.org to find out how we can support you.

Why bother with measurement? 10 tips for making the case and finding the time

*** Article published by [Demonstrating Value](#)

Among competing management and planning priorities, it is not always easy to make time for improving systems to measure and communicate organisational performance and impact. You also need to have solid buy-in for the process from others around you, including both leadership and front-line staff. I've worked with many different organisations over the past few years, and along the way I've gathered a few observations for how organisations can successfully move ahead.

1. You are already spending lots of time measuring. Be more effective. Rare is the community-based organisation that is not already spending lots of time hunting down and pulling together information for various reasons, including making a case for fundraising and support. You will keep more hair and pull out less if you have better systems to do this, and can pinpoint the best evidence to gather to make your message more effective. You will also have the information you need quickly to make the best decisions.
2. It isn't urgent, but it's important! According to Stephen Covey's time management grid, we should focus our activities ultimately on what is important but not urgent, while keeping in mind that we do have to respond to urgent tasks as they occur. Taking a step back to critically review and improve how you manage and use information can be a big help for a variety of functions: attracting and keeping great people, making sure you are responding to a need in the best way possible, becoming more financially sustainable, showing your value to the public, to name a few.
3. Push ahead when you can. Recognise that there are good times and bad times to do this work, much like spring cleaning and renovating a room. Anticipate that you can push ahead effectively at times and will need to switch gears other times. A good time frame for doing this is three months to a year, with bursts of activity to move things forward.

4. Don't tackle everything at once. Devise easy wins that will gain organisational buy-in. For instance, you can improve measurement within a program or department that is straight forward, and later move on to other things that may be more complex and ambitious. Keep in mind that as you go, you will need to take steps to improve not only data collection and management tools, but also processes to share and use the information once you have it.
5. Connect this work with planning processes and retreats. A shift in strategy and vision can generate excitement, and good reason to invest in system improvements. See my blog last year for how Demonstrating Value tools can tie-in with planning processes.
6. Make measurement relevant to what is already happening. Measurement has to be relevant and directly useful to both front line and management staff. They have to see themselves in it. It is important to keep in mind that even in cases where there is little or no formal measurement and evaluation, there are informal processes. Successful measurement projects build on those efforts by making them more systematic and easier to do.
7. Stop trying to measure vision and big societal impacts. Focus on what you influence and what is directly important to those you empower and work with.
8. Find the right team and resources. Rarely does measurement fall neatly in one program or department. It often will cross the 'silos' in an organisation, and can be useful tool for bringing people together. A team should include one person who has some dedicated resources to focus on this for a while. Involve somebody too who has authority to move this along and can see the bigger picture.
9. A single software solution likely not solve all your problems. Pinpoint your needs and uses for data before you shop for a system!
10. Take control of what you measure (before others do). Be in the driver's seat when it comes to measurement. Don't wait for others to tell you to measure what indicators they see as important. That will leave you trying to fit a square peg in a round hole! Make measurement matter fundamentally for your management and planning decisions. If you are a funder or investor reading this blog, empower and support community-based organisations to build good measurement that meets their needs, and which you can learn from. This means making measurement part of a conversation and relationship, rather than something just dictated in application forms and reporting templates.

Support

If you would like any support with evaluation and impact please contact Mariana Meirelles at mariana@communitysouthwark.org or for any other issues facing your organisation, please contact the Development Team at Community Southwark: development@communitysouthwark.org.uk or 020 7358 7020.