

VCS Health and Wellbeing

Factsheet 6: What will you do with your data?

After reading this you should be better able to make use of the data you have collected to help you show your work has made a difference.

What will you do with the data?

Data is only useful if it tells you something and you then do something with that information. Your users will want to know they are making progress. You, as an organisation, will want to know your activities are working and are the best way to achieve your aims. Your funders and supporters will want to know you are making a difference. So you need to:

- Analyse
- Interpret
- Communicate
- Take action

Data analysis

You could use individual scores to help show progress for each user as a sort of feedback loop. However as an organisation you will want to look at your work as a whole. The commonest way is to compare averages before and after, and perhaps at other times of assessment. In most cases using a spreadsheet programme (e.g. Excel) will be adequate and hopefully you can find someone (you could advertise for a volunteer) who can create worksheets that will analyse your data once it is entered.

Although you might see a difference between averages you might also want to know if these are significant. Again spreadsheet programmes can calculate this by working out the standard deviation to see if the difference is any more than the random spread of individual scores. For instance an average of 6.1 with a standard deviation of 0.25 means that we are 95% confident that anything less than 5.6 or more than 6.6 (i.e. plus or minus twice the standard deviation) is significant.

You might want to use IT tools to give you more fine grained information. There are a lot of software solutions out there (see More Information below).

What does it mean?

Nef in their Measuring Wellbeing publication recommend three simple questions to start a conversation within your organisation about what your results mean:

1. Are the results surprising in any way?

Do they show you what you expected to see? If there were surprises, or differences from your expectations, why were you surprised? Why did you expect results to be different? If there weren't surprises, what did you know in advance that allowed you to be accurate in expecting what the analysis would show?

2. Can you see patterns within the overall results?

Did some questions produce answers which were not in line with the others? Why? Did some types or groups of people answer questions very differently than other types or groups? Why?

3. How did results change over time?

Why do you think this is the case? Did they change for some people and not others?

Tell people about your results

Keeping the results and what they tell you to yourself is not very good practice! There are three reasons why you should tell others about your results:

- Improve services, these could be your own or those provided by others
- Showing the difference your work makes is good feedback to your trustees/ committee members, staff, volunteers



- and supporters that it's all worthwhile!
- By showing you are effective it could help increase support such as fundraising, tenders, attracting volunteers

You will want to let people who need to know what difference you have made, some may require this e.g. funders, but your trustees/committee members, supporters and users will be interested to know that you have made a difference. Also others might want to learn from your work (both about what works and has not worked). So, think about who you should tell, what you will tell them and how.

How to tell people?

Once you have identified who you want to tell, and what they might want to know, you can think about the best way of doing it. A good maxim when reporting results is 'no numbers without names and no names without numbers'. So don't only use statistics and numerical results but flesh it out with quotes and mini-case studies (remembering to think about confidentiality).

You will almost definitely want to tell your users individually. You can sit down and talk through the results and what they mean for them.

For others you could use (depending again on the message and audience):

- Short or long reports
- Presentations
- Graphs and other diagrams
- Infographics and posters
- Videos and interviews

Remember to think about how you will let people know you have something to share so:

- Write press releases and articles
- Promote on your website and social media
- Include reference to your 'report' in e-mails or newsletters
- Send to your key stakeholders like funders and partners
- Put up posters

Improving your own work

The results will help you to improve the work you do. Your work should use methods that bring about the greatest amount of change in the most efficient way. So use the results to answer the following questions and take appropriate **action**:

- Is our way of doing things working?
- What is working well or not working so well?
- Can we improve the way we do things to increase the difference created and/or satisfaction of our users?

More Information

- NPC's publication [Principles of Good Impact Reporting](#) that sets out six principles about how you should, and what you should communicate in any report.
- This Factsheet and Case Studies are available from Bournemouth CVS (01202 466120) or at www.bournemouthcvs.org.uk/healthandwellbeing.asp