

## Monitoring

Monitoring is about systematically collecting and analysing information. It allows groups to keep a check on what they are doing.

Monitoring also allows you to consider what has changed over time. Because the information is collected and analysed in the same way each time you can compare what happens at different times.

**For example** it is often useful to know whether the number of people coming in is more, or less, or about the same as last year. Does the way people use the organisation change at different times of the year? Do users still think you are doing a good job?

## What do you need to do before you start monitoring?

It helps to know what you expect to be happening. To do this you need to first set out your aims and objectives and usually list out a plan of actions. These can be brief and simple, or detailed and complicated. It all depends on what type of organisation you are and what your activities are. The essentials are that you:

- Know what you are aiming to achieve (**AIMS**)
- Know broadly how you will do this (**OBJECTIVES**)
- Have thought about how this will be put into practice and the approximate timescales for this (**PLAN/STRATEGY**)
- Have some way of knowing when you have achieved what you set out to do (**TARGETS**)

Monitoring involves keeping an eye on your progress and considering whether this is OK in the circumstances and if necessary, making minor changes to activities or readjusting a plan and targets.

## Why monitor what you do?

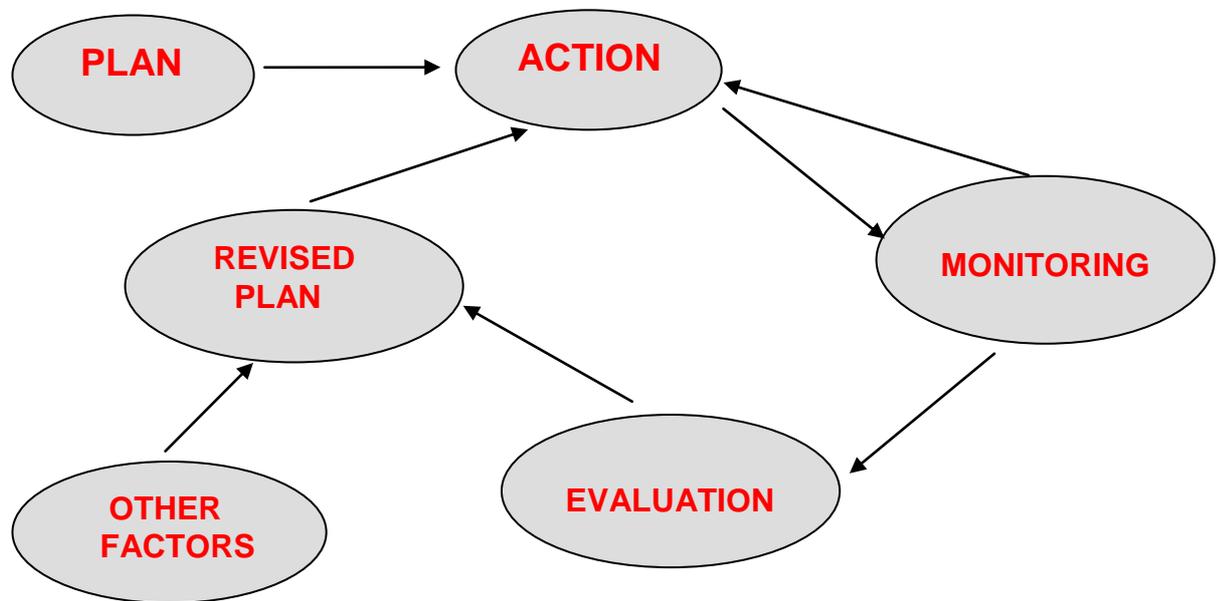
There are two basic reasons for wanting to know what is happening. The first – and more important – is to enable you to give a good service. The second is to enable you to tell other people about your experiences

Another important reason for monitoring is that people who give out funds to carry out activities increasingly expect it.

It is often a good idea to have a regular ‘stop and think’ every so often. This gives you the opportunity to check whether you are still happy with your current range of activities or even the aims and objectives.

Have local circumstances changed since the project began? Could you better meet your users' needs by doing something else? This is evaluation and is a separate stage. Please see our Evaluation Information Sheet.

The diagram below shows how the different stages in monitoring relate to each other.



Monitoring helps you provide a good service by giving enough information to:

- Know things are going well and that you don't need to worry.
- Identify problems at a stage when they can get sorted out.
- Manage the service or organisation eg do you have enough volunteers each day or are there times when extra help would be available?
- Plan for the longer term.
- Make the best use of resources that you have – staff and volunteers, buildings, equipment and money.

Telling other people about your organisation also matters

- Other groups can learn from your experience.
- You might gain publicity – eg to attract more service users or volunteers.
- It can contribute to good relationships within the local community
- You need to feed back progress to other people who rely on you - eg other voluntary groups or professionals who direct users to you.
- You need to give feedback to funders.

### Checklist

It is helpful to bear in mind the following points when you are deciding how to collect monitoring information:

- Think about ways of collecting information that will fit best with your activities.
- You may want to collect information by carefully observing your activities.
- Alternatively you could ask questions using a written questionnaire or by holding group or individual discussions
- You could use registers, databases, diaries or other notes to record information
- Try to think creatively of other ways of collecting information.
- Be clear about who will collect each piece of information and when to do it
- Make sure you explain to people collecting information why they are doing it and how you will use it.
- Make sure that all monitoring records are completed fully and accurately and stored safely and confidentially.

### What information to collect

#### *Issue*

#### *Choice*

What to monitor?

All aspects of the activities or only part?

Service delivery aspects or how the organisation is managed?

What types of information?

Factual matters (how many users, their ages, where they came from etc) or people's views?

How will the results be used?

Within the organisation or in a report to people outside

Part of the planning process will be deciding whether you want to look at outputs, outcomes or both.

### What are outputs?

These are what you produced; how many training packs, poster campaigns, volunteers placed etc

### What are outcomes?

These are what has changed; what people learned, whether attitudes to volunteering changed etc. In some circumstances the most important outcomes are the things that didn't happen, such as when you have delayed or prevented something that is best avoided.

### Benefits of Monitoring

Monitoring is a tool which is there to help you be a successful organisation and to show other people what you have achieved. The advantages of monitoring your own activities



is that you can monitor what is important to you and how you can do this in a way that suits your circumstances.

Remember that it is what a voluntary or community organisation exists to do and what it does that are important.

***Monitor what you value, rather than value what you can monitor and you will be on the right track.***

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