



Self-Evaluation a Process In Community Learning and Community Development And Its Social Significance

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Introduction

Community development is exclusively based on understanding the community in-depth. Understanding the community means understanding the needs and processes of the community (Kanaskar, 2013, Bossel, 1997). The indicators to be used to understand the community should be very clear, objective and applicable to respective area, conditions and situation (Kulkarni, 2013). Self evaluation is one of the approach to learn the community for community development. The aim of this paper is to understand and evaluate the community learning and development. This process is based on a set of quality indicators to help to:

- Recognize key strengths of the community
- Identify areas where good quality needs to be maintained
- Where improvement is needed
- Identify priorities for your community learning
- Report on the quality of provision of community learning and development.

It will be of interest to both the main provider of community learning and development and a range of other agencies and voluntary organizations who work in this area. Three basic questions are at the heart of the process of evaluation.

- How are we doing? _ asks us to consider how we are performing in relation to the aims and objectives we have identified and suggests how self-evaluation can help us.
- How do we know? _ describes the use of quality indicators to measure how we are doing within key areas of provision and indicates reference points for evaluation.
- What are we going to do? _ describes how to report and take forward what we know about standards and quality.

Self Evaluation concept and relevance

Self-evaluation means taking the initiative to understand and assess the work that you do. It is a way of learning from experience so that resources can be used in the most productive and effective way. This paper seeks to help community learning partners, managers and practitioners answer the question *How good is our community learning and development?*

By regularly evaluating ongoing programmes the community development professionals can:

- Learn systematically from experience
- Improve short-term and long-term planning
- Assess how your organization is performing
- Improve your decision making in regards to the allocation of resources, the training of staff and volunteers, and the overall management of provision
- Maximize both overall effectiveness and staff's capacity to improve and innovate.

To be fully effective, self-evaluation should be an ongoing process rather than an add-on activity carried out at one particular point in the year. You should build in both the criteria and the arrangements for evaluation from the earliest plan-

ning stages of an activity. Self-evaluation should always lead to quality improvement. The *Learning Evaluation and Planning* scheme needs to be developed to assist stakeholders in community learning and development systematically plan and evaluate the community development work. A good community development professional knows:

- What it is aiming to do
- Whether it is meeting its aims successfully
- What needs to be maintained or improved
- Whether changes are working.

If a provider then acts on this information, it is well on the way to having a good quality assurance system. Self-evaluation is at the heart of quality assurance.

The self-evaluation process

To be effective, the self-evaluation process requires staff, volunteers, managers and users of services to reflect on the quality of each aspect of provision. It involves- a **broad view** of performance across what are known as Key Areas and a **closer look** at specific areas viewed as successful or causing concern. By reviewing all Key Areas over a number of years, providers of community learning and development are able to use clearly defined measures of success to see what needs to be improved or maintained.

Relation of self-evaluation with planning

In order to plan effectively you need to know how you are doing. Therefore, effective self-evaluation provides a strong basis for good planning. Planning takes place at all levels within community learning and development. Priorities are identified and community learning partnerships establish local priorities taking account of their own circumstances. Community development service providers use this information as a basis for developing their own priority projects and targets for action. This process is informed by healthy audit of need, particularly for priority groups.

Each local authority area has a community learning strategy partnership. These partnerships bring together providers of learning opportunities, voluntary organisations and representatives of communities, to deliver learning programmes and activities more effectively. The community development professional is co-ordinating the partnership. A wide range of organisations, whose primary role is not educational, also adopt a community learning approach for part of their work. The themes and objectives of community learning strategies are implemented through community learning plans. This publication can be used within community learning partnerships. Overall, self-evaluation helps you to make better planning decisions (Giovannini, 2007).

We all need to have an external measure of how we are performing. Evaluation of performance in community learning and development is carried out by NGO. Evaluation by NGO covers exactly the same ground as self-evaluation, using the indicators developed for this purpose. The particular

importance of self-evaluation lies in locating ownership of the improvement process with those participants, staff, volunteers and managers who have a direct involvement in the work. The indicators and themes in this publication have been developed in consultation with experienced practitioners and try to take account of the diversity of community learning and development. Some elements may not directly apply to the context in which you work. Equally, there may be aspects of your work which are not fully covered by the indicators. This self-evaluation framework can be modified to suit the context you are working in.

The links with Best Value

Best Value is concerned with both quality and cost. Building on experience over the past few years, local authorities will be required to pursue continuous improvement in performance in a way that maintains an appropriate balance between quality and cost. The philosophy and practice of Best Value can be extended more widely to public sector agencies, including some partners in community learning strategies. This self-evaluation framework provides a useful foundation for Best Value reviews. Evidence gathered through both the self-evaluation process is likely to be of considerable use to services that are being reviewed in relation to Best Value.

The links with the quality development frameworks

Many local authorities are developing approaches to quality assurance and improvement based on self assessment and accreditation systems. These systems, like the quality indicators are based on the principles of self-evaluation and continuous improvement and are consistent with the local authority's Best Value obligations. All these models share with *How good is our community learning and development?* a belief in the importance of improving standards of provision and achievement, and a desire to provide the best possible service to the communities we serve. This paper will provide support for those involved in community learning and development who are working towards assessment or recognition within these quality development frameworks.

The relevance to key policy areas

Community learning and development is a major contributor to a wide range of policy areas across social inclusion, active citizenship and lifelong learning. It is therefore important to have clarity about the linkages between this evaluation framework and these areas, particularly in relation to evidence gathering. Social justice is at the heart of the work of the community development (Armstrong, 2009). The social justice milestones set out targets for reducing poverty and injustice for children, young people, families, older people and communities. Community learning and development activities contribute directly and indirectly to achieving many of these improvements (Frones, I. 2007). Providers, therefore, need to be aware of how their work contributes to this. This is particularly important when partners are developing the outcomes they seek from community learning plans and how they will measure success. Community learning and development has a key role in promoting active citizenship and in community regeneration. Emerging legislation in respect of community planning places considerable emphasis on community involvement and empowerment in improving public services and the quality of community life. The self-evaluation framework provides a basis for establishing how well we are doing in building community capacity.

How do we know?

We can see how we are doing by comparing our achievements with the expectations expressed nationally, within our service

plan and the community learning strategy. This can be done using the quality indicators, supported by other evidence such as the results of needs assessment exercises and satisfaction surveys. Quality indicators help us make judgments on the quality of community learning and development provision. They relate to a range of factors which influence the effectiveness of participants' learning and over which the provider has some control. The quality indicators help us to:

- judge the quality of performance against a set of criteria
- identify areas which require detailed investigation
- highlight best practice for further dissemination
- enable service managers to come to decisions about the overall pattern of strengths and weaknesses in the service's performance.

The quality indicators

The set of quality indicators as discussed below provides comprehensive coverage of the key aspects of community learning and development.

How do we use quality indicators in self-evaluation?

These quality indicators can be used to evaluate at four levels of performance as follows

- 4 very good – major strengths
- 3 good – strengths outweigh weaknesses
- 2 fair – some important weaknesses
- 1 unsatisfactory – major weaknesses

An evaluation of **very good** applies to provision characterized, overall, by strengths. An evaluation of **very good** will imply that it is fully appropriate for a provider and its partners to continue its provision without significant adjustment. However, it would always be expected to continue to take advantage of opportunities to improve. An evaluation of **good** applies to provision characterized by a number of strengths. There are not weaknesses, but neither singly nor collectively, do they have a significantly adverse impact on the learning experience. An evaluation of **good** may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. An evaluation of **fair** applies to provision which may have a number of strengths but also important weaknesses which are sufficient either individually or collectively to diminish the learning experience in significant ways. In general, an evaluation of **fair** will imply the need for specific and planned action on the part of the authority and its partners. An evaluation of **unsatisfactory** applies when there are major weaknesses in provision, requiring urgent remedial action on the part of the provider. The learner experience is inadequate in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for provision evaluated as **unsatisfactory** will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside effective peers from within or out with the provider's staff. Using quality indicators in self-evaluation simply enables staff and volunteers to ask the right questions. They do *not* represent a set of answers. It can also be very useful to look at patterns of evaluations across particular indicators, as these can help to identify whether a particular strength or weakness is localised or replicated across an area. This can help staff to focus on the underlying causes of weaknesses, and identify appropriate staff development priorities, or resource allocations. Over time, trends can indicate whether a particular action has brought about the improvement sought.

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