

### **Evaluation for change**

The evaluation is best done for this sort  
of programme by an independent person,  
someone who is specifically focused  
on the work of evaluation  
and has the time allocated to do the necessary work.

The external and independent evaluator is also able to draw on  
a lot of experience and information from other sources  
outside the organisation being evaluated.

They also have the advantage of bringing  
a different voice to the conversation and to the dialogues.

And I think, particularly, they can be  
in a position to really make sure  
that voices that are sometimes  
not heard within an organisation  
get their opportunity to express  
their opinion and share their view.

There are tensions and limitations  
in your role as an external evaluator.

I think one of the most important ones  
is that you don't make the decisions,  
you can advise or you can suggest,  
but you're not the person with real power  
in the situation and everyone has to remember that.

I think confidentiality is also an issue.

And although within the Our Museum programme  
we have a statement of confidentiality,

we sometimes have to remind people  
what that is and ask them to think about it.  
  
And thirdly, it's always possible  
for an organisation to try and spin the information  
that it gives an evaluator, to put a more  
positive spin on what's happening.

That's a very human thing to do.

I think it's up to the evaluator to test  
and assess the information  
they're being given and ask,  
"Are there other things we can find out  
if we go a little bit deeper?"

There's a real benefit from starting  
an evaluation process before  
the actual programme, because it enables  
everyone who's going to be touched  
by the programme to share; what it is  
the organisation is trying to achieve,  
what outcomes are being looked for  
and what change might look like.

At the start of an evaluation programme  
what I would do is to take  
a best-line assessment of the organisation.

In our case, for Our Museum,  
that was largely qualitative.  
  
Although we did use quantitative information.  
  
Now that isn't some sort of objective assessment.

It's the organisation assessing itself to say,

"This is where we were at the beginning of the journey,"

and then it's possible to look back and say

"This is how far we've come.

"This is the progress we've made on our journey."

And I think it's important to remember

that it's not about measuring

your organisation against other organisations

the critical thing is to measure

your current position against where you hope to be.

I think it's absolutely vital that

evaluation is part of a process

and not some written document that is

written up at the end and put on a shelf

and completely forgotten about.

It's important that it's formative,

that it informs the process so people

actually have a chance to change things as they're going along.

The way we've done that within Our Museum is partly through

a very formal process of a written report

that we send to organisations

after our annual evaluation visit

and written documents we send

to the steering group

and to the Our Museum director.

But it also happens in informal ways;

through telephone calls, through emails,

through face-to-face conversations.

And the point of that is that it gives organisations time to reflect on what the evaluator is saying and to think whether they want to make changes as they're going along, not just at the end.

In the Our Museum Programme risk-taking, calculated risk-taking, is encouraged to stimulate innovation and change.

The evaluation process supports that by making it very clear that we value hearing about what has worked well but also what has worked less well.

The Our Museum evaluation process is particularly interesting, I think, because although it's interested in the what; what happened, how did someone get involved in a particular activity, for example, we're also very interested in the process; so how did something come about, who made the decisions, why did that particular event happen at a particular time.

Because we feel there is an enormous amount of learning about change in the hows and the whys, not just the activity for its own sake.

As part of the Our Museum evaluation process we've been gathering four distinct types of evidence.

The first is known and easily shared evidence, such as an annual report.

The second is known but not necessarily shared or written down information, which is current within the organisation.

The third is to do with emerging or avoided issues and evidence.

And the fourth is what we've called 'unexpected discoveries'. The things you couldn't possibly have predicted at the outset but what we're trying to capture as the evaluation process unfolds.