

## **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.