

8) Follow-up. (Learning from evaluation?)

The evaluation represents the closing of the circle of the project, and in many ways it represents its end. The evaluation must lead to conclusions, as we saw earlier. The conclusions must address the different stages, dimensions, objectives and aims of the project. They must especially take into account and refer to the changes brought about or the impact had in the community and in the young people.

- Were there any changes created by the project?
- Are there new trends in the situation?
- Are there new problems, now?
- What needs further development and consolidation?
- Which changes are needed in the way of planning, managing and evaluating the (new) project?

In many ways, it is a new project that starts to be planned and is grafted onto the one just being closed.

The follow-up needs to be seriously addressed at the end of the project, even if those who started it are not able to continue. In some ways it is also their own responsibility to make sure that the expectations generated and the social dynamics brought about by the project are not abandoned. In some situations this could have a very negative effect on the community, besides tarnishing whatever good results may have been achieved.

When organizing the follow-up take into consideration following advices.

DO	DON'T
Consult the young people – and your partners – about the changes you propose in follow-up	Be discouraged by initial reactions
Consider different alternatives when drafting your conclusions and proposals for follow-up	Stay stuck in your proposals. Be ready to listen and to improve
Try to secure continuity in processes initiated by the same people	Bet everything on a single horse. (Keep different alternatives).
Stay realistic but not fatalist	Expect everyone to be as enthusiastic as yourself
Dare	Ignore the alliances you have created
	Give the impression that you are doing it for your personal benefits

There are no European requirements regarding follow-up of the evaluation results. But there is a suggested approach when talking about follow-up of the project.

Identify in advance what will be done afterwards. Before the evaluation is started it will be useful to identify what will be done with the evaluation afterwards. Some questions that should preferably be answered in advance:

- What is the purpose of the evaluation?
- What will be done with the results of the evaluation? What procedure will be followed? (e.g. will an action plan be set up in the Monitoring Committee?)
- Will the results be publicly accessible (e.g. will it be published on the website)?
- What type of recommendations/suggestions should be included? (on certain topics, or for certain target groups?)

Two major follow-up actions: learn internally and present externally
The evaluation is a tool which can help:

- To improve the programme: *learn internally*.
- To *present* the results of the programme *externally*.

Using the results of the evaluation is crucial to ensure that stakeholders are willing to remain involved in the implementation of the programme and to cooperate with a subsequent evaluation request.

1. Learn internally: implement recommendations

The implementation of most actions entails cooperation and communication with different stakeholders. In this regard it is worth underlining that evaluation can promote greater mutual understanding of problems and solutions and also bring further benefits in the form of involvement of all levels of government in the policy process.

Recommendations:

- The evaluation function must promote the use of evaluation in decision-making and organisational learning by ensuring that policy implications and lessons learnt from (and across) evaluations are synthesised and disseminated;
- The use of the evaluation results must be regularly monitored by the evaluation function;
- Make follow-up of the evaluation a regular item on the agenda of the Monitoring Committee;
- Organise a workshop on how to deal with the results and recommendations of the evaluation;
- Develop an action plan with follow-up actions. Specify what actions will be taken by whom and when;
- If there will be changes to the Operational Programme, approval will have to be sought from the European Commission.

The European Commission advises : evaluation results will have the strongest impact on decision-making, be more useful and better exploited if they are communicated effectively. The aim is to ensure that evaluation results are communicated to decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders in a clear and transparent manner to facilitate their use. This requires a careful assessment of what type of information is useful to whom.

2. Present externally: dissemination

To further strengthen the use of evaluation in decision-making, both the evaluation planning and the evaluation results generally need to be more effectively communicated to senior management and, where appropriate, to the Members of the Commission and political stakeholders such as the Parliament and Council.

Evaluation results should be communicated in such a way that they meet the needs of decision-makers. The information needs to be politically relevant, concise and easily comprehensible. Evaluation functions should therefore promote the use of evaluation in decision-making by ensuring that policy implications and lessons learnt from (and across) evaluations are synthesised and appropriately disseminated.

Results of the Community actions should also be communicated to the European citizens and tax-payers. This is an essential part of the political process and it involves dialogue, debate and transparency. Evaluation often brings the achievements of Community actions to light, and abstracts of these data can be used to demonstrate European added value. Communication to the public and media should take the form of short summary reports focussing on European added value, impact on daily life and sustainability. For this purpose the evaluation functions and the operational services need to cooperate closely with the information and communication units.

Recommendations:

- Posts the evaluation report on the internet;
- Includes the results in the programme's annual report;
- Includes the results in the programme's newsletter;

- Reports back to the policy-makers on the results of the evaluation and follow-up actions to be taken.
- Presents main findings at relevant meetings and events.

As a Tool: Checklist for follow-up of recommendations can be used.

Recommendation of evaluation	Action to be taken	Who is responsible and who should be involved	When will the action be taken & deadline?	Status

Source: INTERACT

To make follow-up activities effective and have bigger impact, it is better to think about participatory dissemination. There are a number of reasons to do participatory dissemination, particularly if we are working with a participant group that is usually marginalized in decision making, such as youth. First, youth participation in these activities provides an opportunity for youth to engage positively with their communities, as well as an opportunity for youth to express their needs more constructively, advocating for supports and resources they need. In this way, participation becomes a means of seeding long term engagement in a knowledge sharing process that effectively supports a long term change process. Second, participatory dissemination products open a direct link between the voices of participants and our research audience. Creating this link has its own implications. Our research audience receives messages that more accurately represent young people’s lived realities, which means that whatever action/ applications come out of the findings will possibly be more appropriate for young people and their communities. Furthermore, when we open up an opportunity for young people to communicate directly with people who have the power to affect their wellbeing, we legitimize young people’s knowledge, we demonstrate that this knowledge is valuable and can be useful for improving their lives and those of their families and communities. This helps build their communication skills as well as their sense of agency, ownership and responsibility in the world. Third, dissemination products created by participants, who are untrained as researchers, starts to address the problem of inaccessible and jargon-heavy academic and policy writing and variety of audiences or people who can access and engage in the knowledge production process. Participants can support academics in producing research products that are accessible non-academic audiences.

To create participatory dissemination product:

1. Choose which findings to focus on

After you’ve completed your data collection and data analysis, the next step is deciding which findings should be communicated to which audiences. Because research studies often produce several findings, or complex findings with several components that explain that complexity, it may be better not to crowd all your findings into one dissemination product. Perhaps there are some particular findings that are more relevant for community-based service providers, and others that are more appropriate for policy makers. Participants are best suited to make decisions about which findings, or aspects of the findings are most critical to them, and should therefore be disseminated.

Once the data analysis was complete and you have a series of themes related to the overall findings, participants can rank the importance of these themes to them as a group.

For example, using the following methods, in one site all the themes generated through the data analysis on large sheets of paper should be listed. Youth then placed post-it notes next to each theme, rating (from 1-6) the theme that was the most important to

them, what they spent the most time doing, and then in an ideal world, how they would like to be spending their time. In this way, a conversation could be facilitated that helped youth reach consensus on what themes they wanted to share. There are some great resources on advocacy and media that can support you to do this.

2. Choose a dissemination product

One of the most important decisions to make in this process is what dissemination product(s) should be created.

Here is a set of questions to ask yourself in order to determine what format might be the right fit for your findings. Many of these questions intersect, and should be considered simultaneously

Who are the research participants?

And what skills would they gain from creating a dissemination product?

What level of engagement do participants want in a dissemination process, and what are they able to do?

The answers to these questions depend on their interests, ages, and if and how easily they can come together as a group.

How much time do they have to lend to the process and how often?

How long would it take them to create a mural vs. a postcard?

How many participants are interested?

What skills do participants have, and what do they want to learn?

Ultimately, participatory dissemination processes shouldn't only benefit the research study, but should have a positive impact for everyone participating in the process.

Working collaboratively on the data gathering and analysis process should provide the research team with a good sense of what skills participants already have and what skills they might want to build.

3. Create the product

Once you've determined what findings you're going to share and in what format, now your task is to synthesize the research findings into a cohesive product that can then make its way out to the intended audience. How this process unfolds will be very much informed by the way the questions above were responded to. Again, the research team can drive this process, as long as you are checking in with youth to make sure you're accurately representing the findings.

In order to successfully lead a group of youth through a participatory dissemination process, it can be helpful to brush up on your skills for facilitating groups. If you have little experience with facilitation, consider having someone on the research team who has skills in this area, or take advantage of one of the many training opportunities available. You already have some facilitation skills if you've conducted interviews or focus groups, and the addition of some basic principles of workshop sequencing, pacing, and reading the group can be enough to equip you to lead an effective participatory dissemination process with young people.

4. Distribute the product

If youth and community members have been meaningfully involved, either just during dissemination or from the start of the research process, they will ideally have developed a sense of ownership and responsibility for making sure that their family and friends know about the study's findings. Videos and websites allow them to share their work on social media. Effective dissemination to service providers and policy makers can be boosted if you have developed strong relationships during the project with your community partner and other relevant organizations. Local advisory committee members will have their own networks, and community partners can tap existing relationships with government ministries. Use all opportunities to publicize your findings. Short, easily

digestible dissemination products can be cleverly slipped into reports, newsletters or conference programs.

There is ongoing discussion among researchers about how much responsibility and choice to give youth during the participatory research process. The balance between youth-driven and researcher-driven is different for every project, but it is essential not to burden young people with more work or decision making than they want or can handle. Especially for youth who are already facing challenges like poverty, home stress, low academic performance or disability, a highly involved participatory process might have the opposite effect of what you're trying to achieve with your research. The key should be respecting participant's wishes regarding levels of engagement and involvement.

Through our experience doing participatory dissemination in three different research sites, we discovered that each group wanted a particular type of engagement. Based on the level of engagement that worked for the youth, you as a youth worker should take on more or less responsibility for making certain decisions and moving the process forward.