# Evaluating Small Projects within the BSLA Programme

Public Libraries and Library Associations commonly collect performance measurement data that show how busy they are. (Examples include the number of members or visitors, numbers of events organised and percentages of categories of users of services.) These types of data will be useful when evaluating your BSLA Small Project but you will also need to see whether the Small Project is changing what people are doing and how they do it.

There is a growing world-wide interest in evaluating the impact of Public Libraries and Library Associations because, as competition for scarce national resources increases, Library Association and Public Library leaders need to be able to show evidence that they are making a difference to their communities. We hope that this guide will help you to make your case for better Public Libraries and Library Associations.

# 1 What is impact evaluation? Some definitions

First, here are some definitions of impact, outcome and impact areas, as used in the BSLA context:

**Impact:** Any effect of BSLA Small Projects on an individual, group, organisation or community.

[Examples: More engagement in advocacy for libraries by Library Association members; partner organisations engage in more complex long-term collaboration with Public Libraries; politicians show greater understanding of the role of Public Libraries in local development.]

Impacts:

* can be positive or negative (negative impacts may help in development planning)
* may be intended or accidental (we need to know what has happened that we did not expect)
* can affect Library Association staff, officers or members; managers and staff of Public Libraries; politicians and other policy makers; other stakeholders or the general public.

**Impact areas:** Main areas of the BSLA Small Project in which involvement should make a difference.

[Examples: Developing the Association’s vision and strategy; enhancing relationships between the Association and its members, potential members, other stakeholders and the world-wide library community.]

A list of the suggested impact areas for Small Projects can be found in ***Framework Part One*** below.

**Outcome:** For the purposes of the BSLA Programme, an **outcome** is any change in the Library Association or how it works that is attributable to BSLA Programme intervention. (Any such change is also an impact.)

[Example: The Association implements a programme to recruit more members to active roles in the Association.]

Performance data should tell you whether your service is efficient; impact evidence should tell you whether it is effective.

The main focus of the Framework is on any ***changes*** that may be brought about by these processes and outputs (that is, on the impact of the Small Project).

# 2 Why is impact evaluation important?

Impact evidence should:

* tell participants whether they are making real progress towards their goals
* help to build organisational capacity by giving staff the confidence to build on early small successes
* raise awareness of the Association in the sector and amongst decision makers
* give the Association evidence as a basis for sustained advocacy in support of programme goals, such as:
  + better services for members and users
  + more respect for the library sector and the library community
  + more collaboration with other associations, partnerships and regions
* help to secure the resources that the Association and Public Libraries need by providing evidence for advocacy.

# 3 How to use the Framework

**Step 1**: Decide where you want to focus your impact evaluation. Most small projects will cause some changes during the project but they will probably have more effect over time. Where do you think that any changes will show first? This is where your project evaluation should focus. For example, if you are trying to make your Library Association stronger, this may show fairly quickly with efforts to involve more members in its committees and decision making. By the end of the Small Project, members will probably be able to see some signs of change, but it will probably take more time before the Association becomes more strategic in how it works with government and other partners. However, change may happen more quickly or more slowly in your situation. You are best placed to make this judgement.

**Step 2:** Many small projects will work better if they can link up with potential partners or stakeholders (including government departments or agencies) who may share some objectives (impact areas) with the project. If you decide to work in this way it is important to choose impact indictors that focus on those objectives.

**Step 3:** You will need to judge how much time you have to complete the performance measurement and impact evaluation. Systematic evidence collection is time-consuming, whether you design, distribute and analyse the results of a questionnaire survey; negotiate, set up conduct and synthesize the results of interviews; or organise, conduct, record and analyse the results of focus groups.

* It is worth investing some time in showing the impact of your small project, because the evidence of impact that you collect will tell you much more than traditional service statistics about how to move forward.
* The aim should be to focus your choice of impact areas and indicators on what is most important for the development of the Association or Public Libraries.
* Then you should try to limit the amount of evidence collected to what is likely to be most useful. The Framework should help in highlighting possible impact areas and indicators from which to make choices.

**Step 4:** You will need to be clear about what evaluating impact cannot do, as well as what it can do. You won’t be able to show that the Small Project **causes** any changes that follow. Instead focus on the **contribution** that your project made to meeting your goals.

**Step 5:** A big challenge is to move beyond collecting quantitative performance data to focus on how people are changing. This includes surveys, interviews and focus groups.

**Step 6:** When you have chosen the impact areas to evaluate your Small Project, you will need to select appropriate impact indicators (to tell you where to look for changes) and evidence collection methods. We have offered a Framework below to help you to do this.

**Step 7:** Doing the evaluation. We recommend that you:

* Tell everyone involved what you are evaluating and why you are doing this. People are more likely to cooperate if they know why you are doing the evaluation, what will happen to the results and, importantly, what you are not doing (for example, undermining the Library Association or threatening people’s jobs)
* Look for help. You may be able to interest academic staff in a Librarianship Faculty in helping with the evaluation directly, or by arranging for students to do some of the work as part of their coursework
* Most of the work can be shared, providing that people understand the whole process and where their part of the work fits in.

**Step 8:** Writing the report. You will need to prepare a report on the results and to make conclusions about what you have learnt and what to do next. We recommend that you:

* Again, look for appropriate help to analyse the evidence and prepare the draft results
* Arrange a project evaluation workshop and invite the people who are interested in the work (e.g. Library Association activists, library managers, project partners).
* At this event, share the key results of the work (not all at the beginning: divide the day into bite-sized chunks) and set up discussion opportunities for the participants to:
  + comment on the results (are they surprised, pleased, concerned?)
  + suggest conclusions (what do these results tell us?)
  + think about what to do next.

If you are able to do this, and to capture the discussion and incorporate it into the report, this feedback will form an important part of the impact evidence for your Small Project.

# 4 Tools to use with the Framework

The tools likely to be required to collect impact evidence will be sent to you by IFLA when it is time to use them. These are:

**Tool 1: Training Evaluation Interviews or Questionnaires** to assemble evidence about the effects of the training provided.

**Tool 2: Collecting and presenting stories** toexplore whether and howthe BSLA trainingand the Association leadership training changed the perceptions or behaviour of those involved.

**Tool 3: Questionnaire survey of Association members,** ideally conducted at the beginning and the end of the programme. This focuses on whether and why people joined, their level of involvement or contact with the Association, their awareness of what the Association does, their views on its effectiveness and on what else they would like it to do.

**Tool 4: Perceptions of change reporting instrument** designedto find out whether the colleagues of the people who went through the Association leadership training noticed any change in the behaviour or actions of the people trained. [only a small number of projects will be asked to use this tool]

# Framework Part One: The BSLA Small Projects Impact Areas, Performance and Impact Indicators and Suggested Data Collection Methods

Most projects will choose impact area 1, those with an impact focus will also choose impact area 2.

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| **Impact areas** | **Suggested Performance Indicators** | **Suggested Impact Indicators – choose 1-2 from each box** | **Suggested data collection methods – choose 1-2 from each box** |
| 1. Making the Library Association Stronger   [*Possible areas on which to focus impact indicators, collection methods and tools:* values, representation, governance, identifying Association needs, strategic planning, advocacy, partnerships, and regional collaboration] | # of workshops at existing events using BSLA content  # of participants who completed workshops at existing events ...  # of Association leaders who participated in all/most leadership training sessions [in any of the possible areas – column 1] | 1. Did the workshops help participants to contribute to Association development?  2. Are they doing anything differently as a result of the training?  3. Do members of the Association see any change in the Association?  4. Do Association leaders feel that the training has enhanced their Association leadership capabilities?  5. Have Association leaders changed their behaviour and actions? | 1. Collect views of workshop participants *(See Tool 1: Training Evaluation Interviews/ Questionnaires)*  2. Collect participants’ stories of significant change achieved through contact with these workshops *(see Tool 2: Collecting and presenting stories)*  3. Surveys of Association members *(see Tool 3: Questionnaire Survey of Members)*  4. Collect participants’ stories of significant change achieved through contact with these workshops *(see Tool 2: Collecting and presenting stories)*  5. Ask the colleagues of the Association leaders whether they have seen changes. You will need to get the permission of the leaders before doing this. *(See Tool 4: Perceptions of change reporting instrument)* |
| 2 Securing library policies | # of national policies that specifically mention libraries # of legislature members expressing support for Libraries Act  - Draft Library Law prepared  - Libraries Bill submitted to legislature  - Libraries Law approved | Are libraries included in key national policies (eg broadband plan, social inclusion policy)  2. Support for Library legislation secured from key policy makers | 1. Collect documents relating to meeting requests, meeting reports  2. Evidence of support for library-specific policies, or inclusion of libraries in national policies |
| 4 Creating a culture of professional ethics in the library community | # of participants who completed workshops on professional ethics | 1. Do participants think that these workshops helped to enhance their understanding of professional ethics?  2. Have they begun to adopt more ethical professional practices?  3. Have participants helped to promote ethical professional behaviour since their workshop? | 1 and 2. Collect views of workshop participants *(See Tool 1: Training Evaluation Interviews/ Questionnaires)*  2 and 3. Send e-mail to workshop participants one year later. Explain that you are gathering evidence to help evaluate the Small Project. Ask:  i. Have you changed your professional behaviour in any way as a result of attending the ethics workshop? If so, in what ways please?  ii. Have you organised or supported ethics workshops or meetings for library staff? If so, please give details of when and who for. |

# Acknowledgement

These guidance notes draw at various points on an impact evaluation Framework prepared for the first phase of the BSLA Programme. The groundwork for that Framework was carried out through a workshop held at IFLA Headquarters from 6-8 April 2010. The workshop participants were:

Tore Andersen, Norway; Fiona Bradley, IFLA; Colleen Cook, USA; Sandra Fried, USA; Stuart Hamilton, IFLA; Federica Marangio IFLA; Ugne Rutkauskienė, Lithuania; Paul Sturges, UK.

We would like to renew our thanks to all the participants for their very constructive contribution to that Framework, which has made the work of preparing this guidance easier.

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Information Management Associates, March 2015

# References

Fullan, M. (2007), *The New Meaning of Educational Change,* 4th edition, London: Routledge/New York: Teachers’ College.

Markless, S. and Streatfield, D.R. (2013), *Evaluating the Impact of your Library* London: Facet Publishing.

# APPENDIX A

# The Input, Process, Output model

The **Input, process, output model** is the one that most people think of when they discuss performance measurement. The three key elements of this model (as defined by Wavell and colleagues, 2002) are:

***Inputs*** - the resources the service requires in order to function (e.g. buildings, raw materials, staff and information)

***Processes*** - what are done with the inputs; this may involve all sections of the service (e.g. organising and collecting membership subscriptions; conducting library advocacy events, preparing an educational programme or website; developing partnerships)

***Outputs*** - the direct result on the service of combining inputs and processes. Outputs provide a measure of efficiency and are traditionally measured quantitatively (e.g. number of services provided and number of people provided for; physical outputs such as reports or documents; proportion of the members attending learning sessions; numbers of visitors to an exhibition). Output indicators are sometimes called service indicators.

Impact evaluation moves beyond the Input, process, output model whilst recognising that Associations will still need to continue to gather traditional performance data.

**Reference**

Wavell, C., Baxter, G., Johnson, I. and Williams, D. (2002) *Impact Evaluation of Museums, Archives and Libraries: available evidence project* Prepared by the School of Information and Media, Faculty of Management, The Robert Gordon University London: Resource ISBN 1 901 085 716 [http://www.mla.gov.uk/documents/id16rep.doc](http://www.resource.gov.uk/documents/id16rep.doc)