

Before even starting a community action project, it's helpful to plan how you will eventually evaluate it. Reflecting on the journey of a project and recording achievements has some distinct advantages.

Food bank
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- Knowing when original objectives have been achieved **encourages all those who have been a part of it**. This may be encouragement of their faith as you've prayed about certain outcomes, or simply looked back on how God has provided things that were needed.
- When a project gains momentum and shows a degree of 'success', whatever you define that to be, it could **encourage more volunteering** if you do something similar in the future. If people can see the difference being made, it can be a great motivator to get involved.
- **If you're looking for more funding** to keep the project going, or to repeat it, presenting your achievements and effectiveness can help. Government funding sources for example, increasingly look for 'outcomes' as the basis for commitment, and there are organisations which help with assessment of outcomes where public funding is being sought.
- Presenting information about the impact of your project can **gain the support of other professional organisations** too, which may share similar goals.
- Identifying areas where you didn't succeed in achieving your aims will help you **learn how to do better next time**, that is, if you're planning a 'next time'.
- Sharing the news of something good achieved by the local church for the community can inspire those on the fringes, or even those who are currently disconnected, to connect. **It's one method of witness** that can have a far-reaching mission advantage.

But it's important to know that this process begins long before any practical work has even started. Collecting data, whether it exists already, or whether you collect it yourself, is not something to be done at the end of a project. Ideally, it will be done before, during and after.

The data you collect *before* a project will help you set realistic goals that are measurable, the data you collect along the way will let you know how you're doing and where adjustments need to be made, and data collected afterwards will let you know if you achieved your goals.

Qualitative vs quantitative

Quantitative measurement will record facts and figures, for example how many people take up a particular service you're providing, how many people are visited by a dementia friend each week, how many volunteers are coming forward, etc etc. It's all about numbers over a period of time.

Qualitative measurement tries to identify the changes happening on the level of emotional response, so reviews, comments, feedback that expresses how people feel about the project, are qualitative. It often touches hearts, and forms the human element of the stories you can tell about your project in the future.

So for example, for a project tackling loneliness, a goal you set may well be based on some initial quantitative research you found out, such as how many people in your parish are identified as lonely/isolated.

Your initial goal might be: “to reach 50 people living in isolation in the parish each month with at least one hour of one-to-one or group contact”.

As the project got underway, you would keep track of how many people living in isolation you were reaching every month, and you would know when you had reached the goal.

Your next goal might be to increase that number, or to sustain it for one year. You might also want to keep track of how many of these are new beneficiaries, or regular ones.

The same project might have a qualitative measurement, asking beneficiaries what contact with people has meant for them. You could collect this using a questionnaire that offers a sliding scale of how people feel, or by simply collecting occasional feedback comments.

A note about data protection:

Anonymous feedback which doesn't in any way identify the subject can be published anywhere. If you identify the person with their name, or any other identifying details, their full permission must be confirmed before you publish it, and it must be clear to them exactly where it will be published. Never reveal the details of vulnerable adults or children without the full, written permission of their parent, guardian or official carer.

Photos taken along the journey of a project can be a really effective way of sharing your story, but again, take care to always have the necessary permissions to take photos of people, especially if you intend to publish them anywhere.

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