

## How to show you've made a difference

One of the things that community development programmes and projects are often asked to do is to show what kind of impact their work has made, often to funders.

It tends to be easier to show what activities you've been involved in, especially the things that are easier to count – how many events you've held, how many people attended, how many newsletters you've produced and so on. What's harder is to convince others about the impact or, in the jargon, *outcomes* of your work.

Sometimes projects are not always very clear about what outcomes they were expecting anyway and even if they do, they're not sure how to measure them in a way that doesn't just tick the box, but actually gets to the heart of the matter.

In the world of community development, we're often working with some fairly woolly and abstract ideas about outcomes. For example, things like "*community capacity*", "*strong communities*", "*quality of life*" and "*wellbeing*".

We may not actually be that sure what *we* mean by these outcomes. In fact, when we do take the time to talk about what they mean with other people involved in the programmes we're interested in evaluating, we might find that there are quite different views about what they actually mean in practice. Not a promising prospect when you need to find some convincing evidence.

One of the best ways to tackle this kind of problem is to develop outcome indicators in a participatory way. Involve all the key people in the process and use methods that allow them to engage in the process and with each other.

First, it will be important to check out all the different understandings of the ultimate outcome. So, if you're interested in 'community capacity' don't ask yourselves straight away "*Does this community have capacity?*" but ask yourselves "*What would a community with capacity look like?*"

Ask these questions in a group setting. It is often a good idea to mix people up, so that local people, project staff, managers and funders all get to hear what each other have to say. Write down all the things that people say. It can be helpful to map this out in a large spider-diagram or something like that. This will probably produce a long list or a rather messy diagram of the different dimensions of community capacity. The next stage is to make these dimensions of the outcome more specific and measurable.

One way to do this is to write them as positive statements such as "*We feel confident that we can take part in meetings or events organised by others*". It's now possible to begin to think about how you might collect data to show whether your community has this capacity and who you will need to collect the data from.

Only when you've broken down the abstract concept '*community capacity*' should you begin to think about how you might collect data about whether that capacity exists or not in your community.