



Prove it! Toolkit

Background

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Background to the *Prove It! Toolkit*

Prove it! was developed by **nef** (the new economics foundation) in partnership with Groundwork UK and Barclays PLC to provide a method for measuring the effects of community regeneration projects on the quality of life of local people. It was originally conceived as a handbook¹ (guidance and templates for participatory exercises) to help those managing neighbourhood renewal projects to look beyond the physical and environmental changes that had taken place (e.g., the number of trees planted; amenities created) and be able to highlight some of the positive **outcomes** of regeneration that can often go un-reported, and therefore appear unnoticed.

Prove it! is best suited:

- To help understand the effects of small or medium-sized projects, (as opposed to larger-scale regeneration programmes).
- To look at the effects of projects that involve local people as workers, volunteers or beneficiaries.
- To organisations concerned with local community involvement.
- To those interested in evaluating a project's effect on social exclusion, social capital and other quality of life issues.

Prove it! seeks to make data collection itself part of the process of regeneration, with local people involved in a project's evaluation as well as its delivery. It has been designed to be manageable and possible to use within the limited resources that small- to medium-scale projects have available to them to ensure that evaluation becomes part of the culture of an organisation, rather than a burden. In this way the evaluation process itself can contribute positively to the desired outcomes of the project.

This *Prove it! Toolkit* was developed as a way to assimilate some of the principles of effective outcomes evaluation practice into a project's day-to-day running. It is made up of a series of MS Word and Excel files containing instructions for running participative workshops, designing a simple questionnaire and inputting data that allow an exploration of a project's impact. The aim is to make it easier for organisations to take those first steps towards undertaking effective outcomes measurement.

¹ Walker, P et al, *Prove it! Measuring the effect of neighbourhood renewal on local people*, nef, London, 2000. This publication can be downloaded for free from <http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/nrir51m3fwdtanbj2mehub4516012006142151.pdf>

Why we should measure?

Measuring should be for proving as well as improving. As such, it needs to be conducted with a view to fulfilling some basic principles.

- *Measure more than targets and outputs.* The numbers alone do not tell the whole story. To evaluate change means looking at *outcomes*, very often at the level of the individual.²
- *Story-telling.* Be clear about the link between activities and actions and the change that they are designed to bring about. Seek to understand the *theory of change*.
- *Conversation.* A search for a meaningful narrative requires dialogue, rather than merely extracting data. By providing a common language for this dialogue to take place, measurement can become a tool for enhancing the quality of people's involvement in a project.
- *Choose indicators that matter.* Where possible, *ways of knowing* that change is taking place must be chosen based on what stakeholders themselves have identified as important to measure, and not just what is easiest to count.

The *Prove It! Toolkit* is designed to help you, as project manager, fulfil all of these principles; however, incorporating measurement practice at the heart of a project's day-to-day activities will mean getting agreement and commitment from the people who are responsible for delivering the work itself. The following points describe a number of the benefits to a project that incorporating a measurement approach like *Prove It!* can bring about. You may find these helpful for making the case for evaluation to other people involved in the project, as well as to funders if asking for extra resources for evaluation.

1. *Making good decisions.* Understanding the link between activity and change informs where it is most important to allocate a project's time and resources.
2. *Involving people.* When stakeholders are involved in planning and evaluating, they can help to gather meaningful information for decision-making and contribute to achieving the project's goals.
3. *Accountability.* For projects that rely on people's support and good will for their sustainability, communication and transparency in reporting progress are vital for building mutual trust and understanding.
4. *Being in control.* When a project or organisation is in charge of its own plans, targets and reporting, it can ensure that it is not driven off track by the measurements that funders, lenders, and others need to ensure their own accountability.

² For more on measuring outcomes, there are many points of reference. Two that are particularly worth a look are the BIG Lottery Fund's guidance to applicants *Explaining the Difference* (2006) Available at www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/er_eval_explaining_the_difference.pdf. In addition, for a comprehensive comparison of outcomes measuring tools and approaches, see Chapter 5 of Ellis J, Gregory T (2008) *Accountability and learning: developing monitoring and evaluation in the third sector* (Charities Evaluation Services: London) Available at www.ces-vol.org.uk

5. *Not starting from scratch.* Measuring need not be about collecting new information. Sometimes it is more fruitful for an organisation to make the link between the stuff they already know and what that is saying about impact.

Using the *Prove It! Toolkit*

The *Prove it! Toolkit* has been designed to assist you . project managers and participants . reach a better understanding of the effect of your work so that you can celebrate success, learn from your experiences and demonstrate to others what you have achieved. The elements of the *Toolkit* represent the stepping stones for managing the project cycle; from planning and scoping, to collecting data using a simple survey, to reflecting back on what the project has achieved and what has been learnt. There are many different tools and methodologies that you, as project manager, can choose from to carry out each of these important functions, and the *Prove It! Toolkit* is designed to complement rather than replace these. So when deciding which elements of the *Toolkit* to use, or whether to use them at all, you must use your own experience and the experience of those you are working with to choose the right tools for the job.