
New Initiatives Fund

Good practice and lessons learnt

This factsheet is provided to help and support your organisation if you are planning to run a community event or an externally funded project. It summarises the good practice and lessons learnt from the New Initiatives Fund projects that we have evaluated up to July 2005.

Evaluate

Develop your evaluation plan before your project starts: include what you intend to do and how you will measure your success. Acknowledge any limitations in collecting data from the start.

Think carefully about the targets that will be best suited to measuring the impact of your project. Impact cannot be measured through targets such as 'number of leaflets delivered'. Examples of methods you could use are as follows:

- If you are trying to raise awareness, ask participants at the beginning of your project what they know and ask them the same questions at the end of the project to see if their knowledge has increased.
- If you are encouraging people to engage with politicians, ask them at the beginning of the project if they have contacted their MP, councillor, etc. or if they would know how to; ask them at the end of the project if they would now contact their MP.

Report regularly against your targets. This will allow you to anticipate and react to emerging problems.

Questionnaires should be linked directly to your targets.

Produce a final report to recap on what you planned to do and record what actually happened. This will tell your story and highlight the lessons you have learnt.

Collect baseline data

Always collect figures for how many people you contacted, how many people attended your event or responded to your questionnaire.

Baseline measures will help you learn more about the best way to engage with your target audience.

Measure your participants' knowledge and attitudes at the start and finish of the project. Use the same questions to ensure consistency. This will provide you with evidence about how behaviours and attitudes have changed as a result of them participating in your project.

Techniques to improve your evaluation:

- Involve your participants in the project's evaluation so that you take their views into consideration.
- If you use questionnaires or surveys at an event, ask participants to complete them on the day. This will help you to achieve a higher response rate.
- Monitor the response rate to your questionnaire and take prompt action if it is initially low.

Improve project planning

Carefully and realistically forecast the time it will take to deliver your project. Identify any key risks to your project from the outset. This will allow you to address any problems as they emerge and to make adjustments to your planned activities as soon as possible.

Working with others

Before your project starts, brief teachers, staff and professionals involved to help them engage their audience. Give them the opportunity to ask questions or suggest improvements.

Conduct preparatory sessions with pupils to introduce them to your project and discuss any issues they have.

Brief politicians prior to the start of your project to educate them about the most effective ways to speak with your audience about politics and democracy.

Seek media coverage through local newspapers and radio to attract more interest for your project from your target audience.

When organising events especially for hard-to-reach groups, establish partnerships with like-minded organisations that already have expertise in working with the target group or can help to access them.

Share the results of your project with organisations that share your goals and target audiences to increase the impact of your project.

Invite local, national and European politicians, and cross-party political representatives to events. This will help to increase the profile of your project, motivate people to get involved, contribute to participants feeling their views are being heard, and generate more engaging discussions as well as help participants such as politicians to engage with your target group.

Information materials

Develop information materials in partnership with like-minded organisations.

Materials should be flexible enough to be re-used in the future, and by others, with limited extra effort.

Your materials should be designed to appeal to your intended audience. Consider using more than one type of media to reinforce your messages.

Consult your target audience about your information materials during the development phase.

Information should be provided in the first language of your target group whenever possible to increase participation. This includes informal information handed out at workshops.

If materials are being distributed to other organisations to use, make sure they are simple and cheap to copy. For example, produce the originals in black and white, or ensure they can be photocopied without any loss to the quality.

Projects with schools and students

Whenever possible, incorporate the project into the school's curriculum and actively encourage schools that might not otherwise be able to participate.

School schedules can create conflicts with your project, particularly during exam periods. Plan activities with schools from the beginning of the academic year and agree how many students will be allowed to participate.

If a school is expected to provide equipment to support the project, make sure that you have checked that it meets your technical requirements.

Provide teachers with guidance about how to plan, prioritise and deliver activities, as they often have limited time to dedicate to external projects.

Encourage politicians and students to develop their agenda together to create a more interesting interaction.

Encourage students to lead on the development of workshops and their content.

Use national teacher forums as an effective way to create more awareness of your project.

Use multiple methods to advertise your project and related materials to teachers

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to ensure your information is distributed beyond the person who opens the post.

Resources in hard copy and online will allow greater access and distribution between teachers. Providing one pack per school can limit the number of pupils and teachers who use it.

Target your project to specific age groups or needs to reflect the different academic needs of pupils. Also consider the needs of special schools and young people outside of mainstream education, e.g. youth offending institutes.

Events targeted at students of English as a Second Language (ESOL) and developed in partnership with teachers of those classes is an effective way of reaching a broad target audience.

Websites

When you develop your website make sure you are able to monitor the number of visitors to the site.

Promote your website in conjunction with special events to create greater awareness and attract more attention from your target audience.

Develop a long-term marketing plan to ensure adequate numbers of visitors are attracted to your website over time and to make it cost effective.

Set up systems to facilitate easy updates to your website. This will create a cost-effective and time-efficient way to communicate and update your messages.

If your website is to engage individuals in debate and discussion, consider linking the content with other activities such as workshops or face-to-face events.

Workshops

Develop a discussion guide for workshop presenters to ensure key points are covered and workshop leaders fully understand their role.

Invite politicians to participate in workshops to make discussions and debates livelier. Brief them in advance to ensure they are prepared to respond to questions at an appropriate level to your audience.

Pay travel expenses or provide crèche facilities if it is appropriate for your target audience.

Consider organising transport for participants, especially if the workshop is in a rural area or participants do not have their own transport.

Short ongoing workshops can be more effective at deepening understanding and knowledge than a single full-day session.

Use a variety of activities during your workshop, such as games, quizzes, presentations from politicians and group discussions to make your event interactive and engaging.

Events should be held where your target audience spends most of its time rather than inviting them to venues not of their choice.

Give your participants an opportunity to socialise with each other to share their learning and experiences.

Provide bi-lingual observers for minority ethnic communities to ensure participants can understand and engage in discussions.

Feedback

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