# 3 | Evaluating your project's impact

Monitoring the impact of your project involves routine, systematic collection and recording of data about your activities. This can include metrics such as the number of people attending asession (quantitative data) or feedback from participants (qualitative data). At some point, usually annually or at the end of a project, you will use this monitoring data to assess the overall impact of your project.

For evaluation to be meaningful and useful, it needs to be integrated into your project from the vision and planning stages (see Section 1).

## PROJECT EVALUATION

Effective monitoring and evaluation help ensure that your project is having the desired impact and allows for informed decision-making.

Key benefits include:

- **Maximising impact:** Evaluation helps identify where resources can be allocated forthe greatest impact.
- **Demonstrating accountability:** It allows funders to see how their contributions are being used and what outcomes are being achieved.
- **Continuous improvement:** Evaluation identifies both successes and challenges so that you can adjust and improve your project to better reach your aims.
- **Learning and adaptation:** By reflecting on results, you gain insights into how to grow or improve your project.

## Principles for monitoring and evaluation

- **Transparent and unbiased:** The questions you ask and the way you evaluate and present the data should be as clear, fair, and unbiased as possible.

- **Multiple perspectives:** Collect input from participants, staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders so that you have a broad view of the project's impact.
- **Honest reporting:** Avoid exaggerating successes or concealing challenges.
- **Respect for individuals:** Every individual is made in the image of God and should be treated with dignity and respect. People and relationships are more important than numbers or efficiency.
- **Ethical data collection:** Ensure all evaluation tools and processes respect participant privacy, time, emotional well-being, and relationships.

## 12-MONTH EVALUATION TOOL

CUF and the Benefact Trust have developed a toolkit to equip churches and Christian charities engaged in small-scale social action projects to:

- **Define the impact** they want to have.
- **Select appropriate methods** for measuring success.
- **Use quantitative and qualitative tools** to gather data.
- **Analyse and reflect** on evaluation findings to enhance future work.

The full toolkit can be accessed here:
**Impact & Evaluation Toolkit.pdf** cuf.org.uk/resources/cuf-project-evaluation-tools

# [3] Evaluating your project's impact

## TELLING YOUR STORY

### Why storytelling is important

Facts and figures are important, but personal stories can inspire and create deeper connections. Telling your project story can:

- Communicate the passion, motivation, and impact of your work.
- Help funders and supporters understand the need for your project, your expertise and the change your project brings.
- Inspire your community and increase engagement and support for your project.
- Encourage and empower the person telling their story, amplifying voices that need to be heard.

### Whose voices should be included?

Decision-makers often have priority areas of support focus but may not have direct access to the personal stories that smaller grassroots and community projects encounter daily. Through your relationships and community engagement, you may gain insights and experiences that demonstrate the real impact and necessity of your project—stories that people trust you to share.

If relevant to your project design, look for opportunities to include perspectives from three key project partners when developing your story. Their experiences can help illustrate your responses and introduce new themes.

### Consider drawing from these perspectives:

1. **Service users/clients/guests** – Those who benefit directly from your project.
2. **Project staff and volunteers** – Those who contribute to making the project happen.
3. **Project partners/supporting organisations** – External stakeholders who support orcollaborate with your work.

### Gathering personal stories

If your project is in its early stages and you're developing a project story to support a funding application, consider these suggested questions to ask when gathering personal stories:

- **How did you first hear about this project?** (To understand access, reach and interest.)
- **What motivated you to get involved?** (For both participants and volunteers.)
- **Have you built new relationships through this project?** (Social impact and community-building. This can be replaced with partnerships if more appropriate for story contributors.)
- **How has this project changed your life or circumstances?** (To show impact)
- **Have you gained any new skills or confidence through this project?** (To highlight long-term benefits)
- **Would you recommend this project to others? Why?** (To gauge advocacy and support)
- **If this project didn't exist, how would things be different for you?** (To emphasise necessity)
- **What gives you hope for the future?** (Space for personal reflection, aspirations and inspiration, further insight into motivations.)
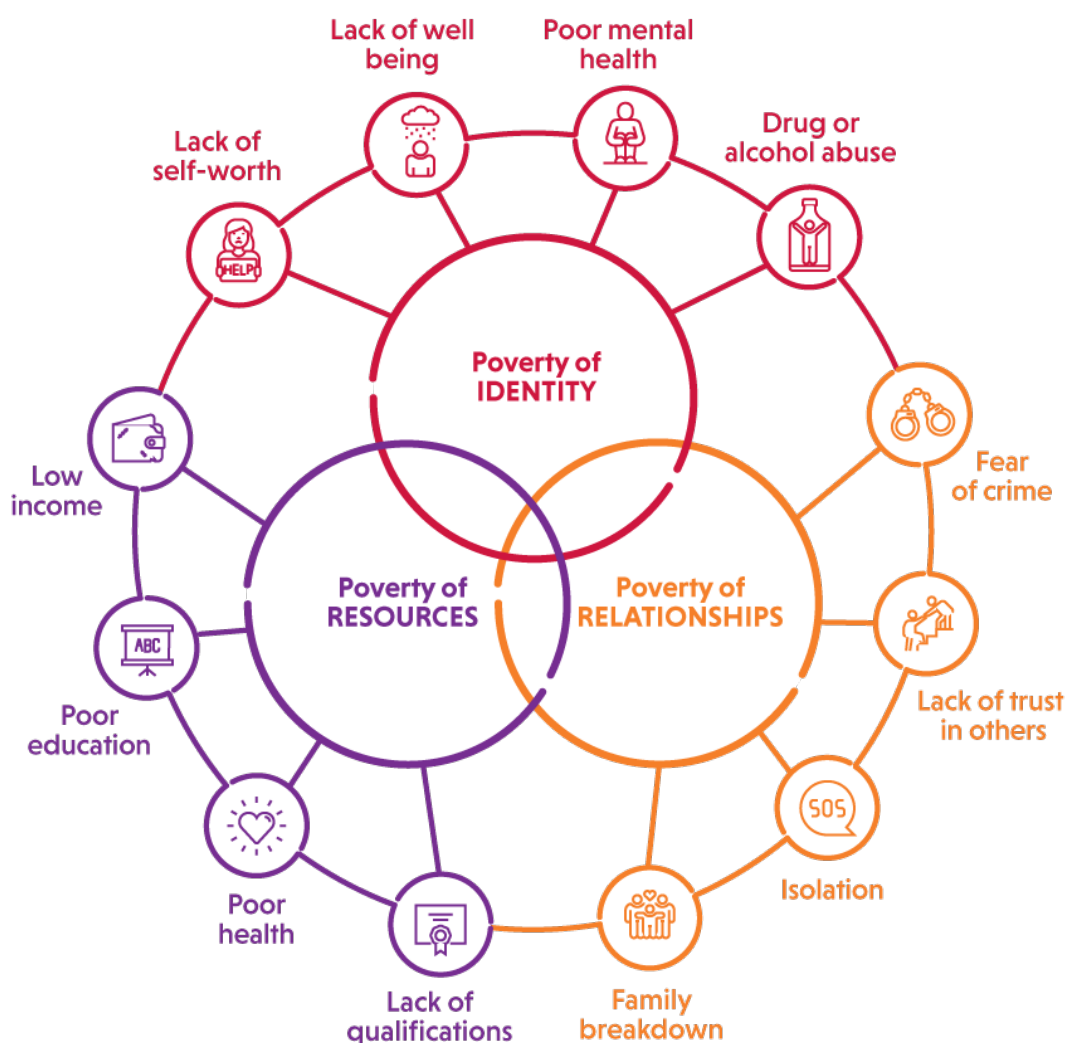
# [3] Evaluating your project's impact

## Developing your project story outline

The **web of poverty** can be a useful reference for framing the challenges your project aims to address while also recognising the complexities surrounding poverty in your project's narrative. With this in mind consider the following outline to help shape your story:

Figure 1: Web of poverty

- **Who are you?** Describe yourself as an individual and share the ethos of your organisation.
- **How have you identified the need for this project in your context?** Discuss any research, pilot projects or consultations that informed your understanding.
- **What do you aim to achieve?** Explain the impact you hope the project will have.
- **Why is now the right time?** Highlight the opportunities, partnerships, interest, and urgency that make this project necessary.



Figure 1: Web of poverty

# 3 Evaluating your project's impact

## EXAMPLE STORY

### A Place of Welcome in Birmingham

> **A participant who attends the cafe with her mum:**

I've been a carer for nine years for my mum who has dementia and we had been going to the Over 55's group when we heard about the Community Cafe.

It's been lovely to see my mum engage with other people and feel comfortable at the cafe. She also helps out a little bit, with cleaning the tables and things like that, it makes her feel useful. She's eighty-seven now and to see her find that purpose here is so good, it's a safe place for her to make friendships. Sometimes everyone will sit and sing songs and she really enjoys that. Mum met a couple of ladies the other week who didn't know how to knit, so she taught them. It was nice for me to stand back and watch and I could see the joy in my mum as she did that.

I've met lots of new people here and have made some really good friends. Particularly for me buddying up with ladies who also care for their mums, we can support each other. So there's lots of coffee drinking, going on and chatting. There's people meeting here from different nationalities and backgrounds too, sometimes different languages. It's a really good opportunity where we can share information.

This is a friendly place and I'd recommend it to anyone, if you're feeling lonely or just moved to the area it's ideal, it's really helped us."

## Tips for ethical and effective storytelling

- **Engage and listen:** Take the time to connect with your project partners. Their insights could form a central part of your project story!
- **Use a mix of formats:** Written testimonials, video interviews, and photo stories can all help illustrate the human impact of your project.
- **Clarify usage:** Ensure that those sharing their stories understand how their insights will be used in project stories, proposals, planning, or fundraising efforts.
- **Provide Information:** Develop an information guide for partners including your contact details and share where a project story has been featured, this is a helpful way to ensure partners are co-producers rather than being used solely for content.
- **Give them a choice:** Some people may prefer to be anonymous or share only certain aspects of their story.
- **Obtain permission:** If using a participant's name or identifiable details, obtain written permission and store consent forms securely.

### The consent form should include:

1. Agreement to participate.
2. Indication of whether they are comfortable being named in project stories, proposals, or other communications, or if they prefer to remain anonymous.
3. Consent for the story conversation to be audio recorded (while not essential, it can be helpful for writing up).
4. A method of contact if an update is needed (optional).
5. Signature and date.