The Good Guide to
PERFORMANCE & QUALITY

Effectively running a group is no easy task. Especially when you also have to monitor your performance, keep the funders happy and keep up to speed with what is happening not only within your target group but also across the sector – both locally and further afield. Whilst most groups would like to have a three-year plan that can be regularly reviewed and updated, many struggle just keeping on top of everyday paperwork and lack the resources to be as organised as they might ideally like.

This document has been produced by Ealing CVS and funded by ChangeUp. It is one of a series of brochures designed to help the Ealing voluntary and community sector overcome barriers to working at their best – by providing clear, jargon-free guidance on how to increase efficiency and maximise performance.

This Guide is split into four key topics:

Strategic Planning	Monitoring & Evaluation
Quality Standards	Benchmarking

Under each of these topics you will find the following headings:

What does it mean?	When is it useful?	How is it done?

At the beginning of this guide there is a menu of **'good practice benchmarks'** and at the end there is a list of websites where you can find more information. Keep a look out for the

Quick Tips

Quick Tip symbols which have been designed to provide you with simple suggestions for getting started on particular topics

This document can also be found on the Ealing CVS website: www.ealingcvs.org.uk

Administrative policies

- Make visitors welcome and offer them refreshments when they arrive

- Display your 'mission statement' where users and visitors can see it

- Have a telephone script so callers are greeted professionally

- Have a personalised message on your landline & mobile phone

- Record all telephone messages in a book & respond within 24 hours

*Have **ID badges** for front-of-house staff and volunteers*

- Buy a domain name for your email address

- Have a 'signature' at the end of your email with all your contact details

- Answer emails within 24 hours or if you cannot check your email on a daily basis, set up an auto response

- Answer posted mail within five working days

Quality & Performance

- Produce a simple leaflet outlining your services and/or activities and consider producing it in different languages if it will enable more people to know about and use your service or activity

- Know what organisations (such as Ealing CVS) can support you and how

- Understand Goals, Inputs, Outputs and Outcomes

- Benchmark (formally or informally) against other groups (refer P7)

- Choose a Quality Standard that fits your organisation – seek advice if unsure which system is best for you refer P10)

- Find out how you can meet the needs of disabled users

- Carry out annual appraisals with your staff. Acknowledge work well done and be constructive in your criticism.

- Provide (or take up) training opportunities whenever possible (Ealing TIDE deliver an excellent training programme). To find out more log on to http://www.ealingcvs.org.uk/training/index.php)

- In funding bids always allow up to 10% for any additional costs you will have in running the project (such as project management and monitoring or additional admin and finance time)

Monitoring & Evaluation

- Always invite visitors/service users to complete a Service User Feedback Form
- Always use an Attendance Form when you run a workshop or event
- Ask users to complete an Evaluation Form at the end of a training session, workshop or event
- Have a visitors book and record all visitors and their contact details
- Learn some research skills that will enable you to undertake surveys and focus groups with your users
- Periodically undertake a survey of user needs
- Have clear guidelines on how to collate and process your data at regular intervals
- Establish regular dates to review your service so you can compare the data you have gathered over similar periods of time
- Think about the best way to get your research findings across e.g. posters, leaflets, articles, presentations, informal community networks, formal networking opportunities
- Network with other service providers & recognise informal opportunities to benchmark or set up benchmarking exercises either within your own group or with other groups doing similar work to you.

Strategic Planning

- Plan an away-day to explore ideas outside the normal working environment
- Set a time to start your plan and a deadline for when you would like it completed
- Think about who you would like to involve in the development process
- Be clear about your aims and objectives – and reflect them in a mission statement
- Produce a budget for running your organisation and look at where you should or could be spending more of less
- Produce a table of 'milestones' showing when you anticipate reaching your various goals
- Come up with a marketing strategy to publicise your services/activities
- Schedule dates to review your progress
- Monitor the impact if changes

"STRATEGIC PLANNING - What does it mean?"

Strategic planning is the process of developing a clear, coherent and realistic view of how your organisation achieves its mission, interacts with its environment and adapts itself when circumstances change. It involves thinking about the long-term, often about the next three to five years, and focusing on the whole organisation. Strategic planning can be a creative process, encouraging fresh insights and facilitating conversations about big themes and important issues between staff and external stakeholders.

Strategic planning is an important element of managing effective voluntary organisation[1]. Get it right and your Strategic Plan can be a flexible document that can be reviewed and adapted to grow alongside your organisation and help you cope with competing demands.

*An **away-day** outside your normal place of work can help unlock new and creative ideas*

"When is a Strategic Plan useful?"

- When you want to develop/review a clear aim or purpose for your organisation
- When you are unsure of the external environment your organisation is operating in (and where you fit into this)
- When you want to improve your ability to anticipate threats or risks to your organisation
- When you want to improve your ability to anticipate new opportunities and areas for development
- When you want to find out how to use your resources more efficiently
- When you want to find out more about the level of need for your services[1]
- If you tend to focus on the next 6-12 months, and would like to think further ahead

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[1] All points reproduced with the kind permission of the Performance Hub

> **"How and when do you develop a Strategy?"**

You will probably realise you need a Strategic Plan when you have too much work and not enough time and find yourself wishing you were a bit more organised. Or it may be that it is the time of year when you fundraising and you become aware that your objectives aren't as clear as they once were. Perhaps you have new ideas about how to benefit meet the needs of your stakeholders or want to consult with your staff and volunteers to get feedback and ideas based on their experiences within the organisation.

> *"I'm so busy – I wish I had a plan that would help me **structure my workload**"*

> *"There's never going to be an ideal time so **commit to a date to get started** and put it in the diary now"*

It is unlikely there will ever be a perfect time but try and schedule a start when you think you may be under less pressure form both internal and externals factors. Producing a Plan can be a rewarding and motivating task and at the end of the **planning process** you will have working document (similar to a business plan) that may consist of a number of sections such as[2]:

1. Your aims and objectives, values and mission statement

2. A brief history of who you are and how you started

3. Your user group (and stakeholders): who they are, where they are based

4. What services and/or activities you deliver to meet the needs of your user group (outputs)

5. Your budget or finances: how much funding you need to run your organisation and how it will be allocated

6. A schedule showing what your goals (outcomes) are and when and how you hope to achieve them

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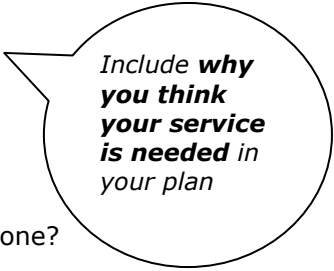[2] NCVO 2006: For more information visit www.ncvo.org.uk

- Let all the relevant people know that you are about to produce a Plan and how you would like them to participate in its development
- Decide when will you start your Plan and when would you like it completed
- Draw together any information that will be useful
- Decide if you want to plan an away-day or close the office for a day so you can dedicate some time undistracted by other demands

Start planning on paper[3]

- Identify your key stakeholders and assess their interests. Look at how you engage your users – and consider how effective it is
- Consider your mission, vision and values
- Identify where you could be spending more or less money and/or time
- Look at your staff training programme (internal & external)
- Set some goals and targets and assess what resources you need to reach them

Start writing your plan

- An overview of your organisation: values, objectives and desired outcomes
- Staffing and management structure
- Funding
- Marketing

*Include **why you think your service is needed** in your plan*

Review the Plan[4]

- Is it too generalised so it can mean anything too anyone?
- Is it too specific and detailed so will date quickly?
- Does it consider fundraising as an integral part of the strategy?
- Does it have a clear implementation timetable and a clear allocation of responsibilities?

Implement the actions into everyday life (Goals, Targets, Outcomes)

- Manage change and performance
- Project management

Monitor & Evaluate

- Schedule dates to review progress
- Monitor the impact of changes
- Evaluate progress and adapt accordingly

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[3] unless otherwise noted this section is reproduced with the kind permission of NCVO: www.ncvo.org.uk

[4] reproduced with the kind permission of Compass Partnership: www.compasspartnership.co.uk

"BENCHMARKING - What does it mean?"

There are many definitions of benchmarking. If defined in its widest sense, it can include making informal comparisons and borrowing good practice in a simple way. It would include, for example, one organisation borrowing a procedure that it knows to be good from another organisation. It involves learning, sharing information and adopting best practices to bring about step changes in performance[5]. Benchmarking can be a useful process in a range of areas such as:

> Human Resources, Training, Marketing & Communications, Governance, Finance procedures, Monitoring & Evaluation, Value for money

Benchmarking has many benefits[6]. It can:

- Give you new insights on good practice & how to achieve it
- Provide reassurance about what is working well
- Provide evidence to support change
- Help you determine priorities for action
- Motivate staff & create a strong learning environment
- Strengthen your reporting to managers and trustees
- Enable you to make quantum leaps!

Be realistic when you set your targets

"When is it useful?"

- When you want to learn from other projects/organisations which have performed well and avoid re-inventing the wheel
- When you are unsure whether a particular process or service is being run in the most effective or efficient way
- When you want to build relationships with other providers/organisations
- When you have limited resources to invest in performance improvement and know which area you want to improve
- When you want to gather evidence to support proposals for change
- When you are looking for new ideas

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[5] The Performance Hub 2007: For more information visit www.performancehub.org.uk/

[6] Ibid.,

"How do you Benchmark?"

The first thing you need to do is identify the areas you want to improve. You can begin by asking[7]:

- What takes up too much staff time?
- What costs us too much?
- What areas are key to our future success?
- What areas have health checks or quality systems identified as weak?

What issues constantly crop up? Think about why.

Then there are a number of points you will need to consider[8]:

- Timescale & Resources
- How in-depth the information you gather needs to be
- what information you are prepared to reveal during the process
- Will you conduct the benchmarking exercise within your organisation (less time consuming) or externally (with a few partners or across the sector)
- What your benchmarking partners need to have in common - who has a strong track-record in the area you are seeking to improve
- Be aware of potential conflicts of interest
- Consider how formal or informal you want your benchmarking exercise to be. The Continuum below may be useful:

The Benchmarking Continuum[9]

Very Informal   **Very Formal**

| Chat at a conference or event | Planned exercise involving one or two contacts in similar organisations | Externally facilitated exercise involving lots of organisations with a detailed plan & a code of contact |

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[7] The Performance Hub 2007: For more information visit www.performancehub.org.uk/
[8] Ibid.,
[9] Ibid.,

You will need to find benchmarking partners – perhaps by:

- Checking local directories
- Identifying other groups that are doing well
- Organising networking events
- Facilitating a benchmarking exercise

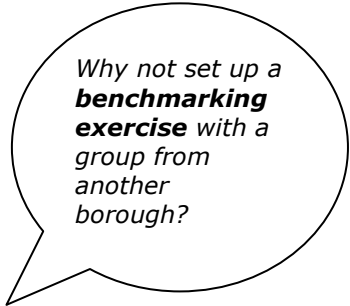**You may need to dispel some of the myths about benchmarking:**

- You probably do it already informally - just through talking to others in the same field
- It is not just for large groups or corporations – benchmarking is for anyone who wants to improve what they do
- Almost any area can be benchmarked

Benchmarking Guide

The following guide has been produced by the Performance Hub:

PLAN

- Decide on the areas you want to improve
- Decide what approach to take
- Decide who to benchmark against
- Decide exactly what information to collect
- Clarify confidentiality issues
- Clarify the process to follow
- Set realistic expectations

*Why not set up a **benchmarking exercise** with a group from another borough?*

DO

- Gather comparative information from your benchmarking partners
- Analyse and present the information using simple tables, charts and graphs
- Share the information with partners
- Ask how & why differences have occurred
- Decide on any changes you wish to make

REVIEW

- Have the changes resulted in improvements?
- Do you want to benchmark again?

"MONITORING & EVALUATION - What does it mean?"

Monitoring is the routine and systematic collection of information over a period of time. The information might be about activities, products or services, users, or about outside factors affecting the organisation or project. Evaluation is about reviewing the information collected and making judgements about progress and the value of any component part of an organisation or its products, services or benefits, or about the organisation as a whole[10]. Monitoring and evaluating are tools that will help your organisation to make sound decisions about implementing change. It will demonstrate to your stakeholders and funders your commitment to review and improve the services and activities you deliver. It is also as an important organisational learning, management and accountability tool.[11]

It will be helpful before you start to make sure you understand **Goals, Inputs Outputs and Outcomes** as you will want to measure these as part of your evaluation process. They can be summed up as[12]:

Goals   what you hope to achieve (through *outputs*) e.g. *making sure older people are able to access benefits to which they are entitled*

Inputs   the *resources* that you use to try and achieve your aims such as staff or funding *e.g. employing an additional young people's advisor*

Outputs   the activities and services you provide (*outputs* support the delivery of *outcomes*) e.g. *hold monthly open advice sessions for parents & carers*

Outcomes the changes and benefits that occur as a result of your *outputs* (the contribution to the *Goals*) *e.g. 10% increase in the number of new arrivals people accessing new benefits*

In addition there are **indicators** relating to goals, inputs, outputs and outcomes. These are characteristics that can be assessed or measured to show the quality and/or quantity of an organisation's performance or activities.

Like data, indicators can be **qualitative** and assess perceptions, views and feelings or **quantitative** when they often refer to number frequency.

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[10] The Performance Hub 2006: For more information visit www.performancehub.org.uk/
[11] Ibid
[12] ECVS Group Development Pack. For more information visit http://www.ealingcvs.org.uk/policy_swap/

"When is it useful?"

- When you want to improve your ability to demonstrate achievements or progress
- When you want to improve your ability to demonstrate social impact/outcomes
- When you want to know what works and what doesn't
- When you want to know whether your 'values' are being upheld in practice
- When you want to know what your users think of your services
- When you want to find out whether or not you are achieving your aims
- When you want to involve and focus more on your users

"How do you Monitor & Evaluate your service?"

Planning your method of **data capture** is an important process. If you are going to review the same information regularly then you need to ensure that there is continuity both in the style and content of you monitoring. You won't be able to compare data properly if you have changed your service user's feedback form halfway through the year. As such you need to ensure that your monitoring forms such as questionnaires and client records are asking for the right information from the outset. Ask yourself how best to pose questions to ensure that the responses provide you with meaningful data and that you have practical and useful structures in place to store and analyse the data.

It is also important to ensure that the **data collected is clear, readable and without ambiguity** and that the person collating and/or inputting the data (e.g. into spreadsheets) is provided with clear guidelines. If possible have the same person deal with the data that is collected. They will also develop a greater understanding of the data which will be useful when it comes to be analysed. You will also need to think about the **timing** of both your data collection and when you will produce and disseminate the findings so that they are produced at an appropriate time.

You may decide to conduct a **self-evaluation** and make judgements about your own performance. Alternatively, you might prefer to bring an **external consultant or agency** that guide you through the process or undertake an

evaluation independently and then present you with their findings and recommendations. Whatever you decide, if you want to monitor data and information (data in its meaningful form) over time you will need to begin by establishing a baseline against which future data capture will be measured.

There are a range of **methodologies** for collecting data including:

> Questionnaires, Focus groups, In-depth interviews, Log books,
>
> PLA (Participatory Learning & Action) or PA (Participatory Appraisal)

Survey Questionnaires are a popular and effective way of gathering useful information. They can be completed in two ways: *self-completed,* in which case the questionnaire should be self explanatory and without ambiguity, or the questions can be asked in an *interview* situation when someone asks the questions and record the answers. This offers the opportunity for clarification and assistance.

When designing your questionnaire:

- Keep your questions clear and concise: use jargon-free language
- Make sure the design and layout are clear and a simple font is used
- Give clear completion guidelines and an explanation of why the questionnaire is being undertaken
- Use sub headings to lead into new survey areas
- Code the questions so that the resulting data can be more easily handled
- Use different completion methods to minimise boredom such as open/closed questions, multiple answer, ranking.
- You may want to use symbols such as smiley faces for satisfaction levels

Focus Groups are also commonly used. A focus group is a topic led discussion between (ideally) 5-8 people that reflect and represent certain characteristics i.e. they all have something in common. Normally a focus groups is led by a 'facilitator' who is supported by a 'scribe' who takes notes. A **topic guide** is used to introduce issues of interest to the respondent/s. The same issues are introduced at each focus group or interview. The topic guide serves as a 'check list' to ensure that all issues are introduced and nothing is omitted**.** However, unlike a survey questionnaire, a topic guide is *not* a list of questions; it is a guide to aid the interviewer.

"QUALITY STANDARDS- What does it mean?"

Assessing and improving quality is essentially about learning what an organisation is doing well and using this information to do it better. It also means finding out what may need to change to make sure users' needs are being met. An organisation may wish to compare how it is doing against a set of recognised standards, in which case it may use an off-the-shelf set of standards (e.g. PQASSO, Investors in People etc) or create their own set of standards. The organisation can then develop a quality assurance system to enable them to improve their performance against these standards[13]. According to Ealing TIDE **Quality** is …

- a journey, not a destination.

- trying to do better: better in both the services the organisation offers and in the way the organisation runs.

- the degree to which a product, service or process meets or exceeds the requirements which have been agreed with stakeholders.

- about doing the right things, in the right way, and continuously learning and improving

According to Investors in People, investing in a **Quality Standard** (or System) results in[14]:

- Improved Earnings, Productivity and Profitability
- Customer Satisfaction
- Improved Motivation
- Reduced Costs and Wastage
- Enhanced Quality
- Competitive Advantage Through Improved Performance
- Public Recognition

Standards are principles that help to guide and take forward actions that result in increased efficiency and enhanced outcomes. There are also recognised Standards that are achieved through **Quality Systems** such as the Investors in

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[13] The Performance Hub 2006: For more information visit www.performancehub.org.uk/
[14] ©Investors in People 2007. Reproduced with kind permission of Investors in People UK

People Standard which is based on three key principles: Plan/Do/Review. **Indicators**, such as those in bullet points below, are used to assess, to what extent the principles (Plan/Do/Review) are being employed and achieved[15].

PLAN: Developing Strategies to Improve the Performance of the Organisation

- A strategy for improving the performance of the organisation is clearly defined and understood
- Learning and development is planned to help achieve the organisation's objectives
- Strategies for managing people are designed to promote quality of opportunity in the development of the organisations people
- The capabilities managers need to lead, manage and develop people effectively are clearly defined and understood

DO: Taking Action to Improve the Performance of the Organisation

- Management Effectiveness - Managers are effective in leading, managing and developing people
- Recognition and Reward - People's contributions to the organisation are recognised and valued
- Involvement and Empowerment - People are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility by being involved in decision-making
- Learning and Development - People learn and develop effectively

REVIEW: Evaluatiing the Impact of the Performance of the Organisation

- Performance Measurement - Investment in people improves the performance of the organisation
- Continuous Improvement - Improvements are continually made to the way people are managed and developed

"When are Quality Systems useful?"

- When you want to demonstrate conformity to generally held standards
- When you want to ensure consistency across different services/processes
- When you are unsure whether you're fulfilling your legal obligations

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- When you're unsure what areas you need to improve or how
- When you need to adhere to a set of standards set out by an umbrella/regulatory body
- When you want to reflect on and review all aspects of organisational life

"How do you choose a System?"

There are a number of systems developed for, or used by, community and voluntary organisations. Each will involve your organisation in differing levels of expense and staff time. Below are the most common, with a brief description of their approach. The following list has been produced by TIDE. A list of contact details has been included at the end of this guide. You can use the lists to find out more about the systems which interest you.

PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations)

This is designed specifically for small to medium-sized community and voluntary organisations. It helps you to assess and improve almost all aspects of your work. It is fairly easy to use, you can introduce it at your own pace and it is not externally assessed.

On a budget?
PQASSO can cost as little as £75

Investors in People

The Investors in People Standard is a business improvement tool designed to advance an organisation's performance through its people. Investors in People provides a flexible framework, which any organisation can adapt to its own requirements. Costs vary depending on the size and complexity of your organisation as the external assessment requires a sample of people to be interviewed (assessment costs £550 per day).[16]

Community Legal Services Quality Mark

This is designed for organisations providing legal information and advice to the public, and is free to those in receipt of public, local authority or charitable funding. There are 3 standards relating to Information, General

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[16] ©Investors in People 2007. Reproduced with kind permission of Investors in People UK

Help, and Specialist Help. The system is fairly easy to use, but potentially time-consuming and involves external assessment.

Matrix

This is a quality standard designed for organisations which provide advice and guidance on learning and work or which provide support in these areas to socially excluded communities. It is demanding and it is recommended that groups work with a Matrix advisor before moving to accreditation. The costs, in time and money, could be high - accreditation costs £550 per day.

Quality First

This is designed specifically for small to medium-sized organisations without any paid staff. It is very cheap, easy to use, you can introduce it at your own pace and it is not externally assessed.

ISO 9000

This concentrates on service delivery and will help you improve how you run your activities or provide your services. It is expensive and time-consuming, and a fairly complex system.

Charter Mark

This is a system for organisations which provide services to the public and helps ensure that you put those who use your services at the heart of everything you do. You carry out self-assessment before applying for external assessment, with re-assessment every three years. The cost varies.

EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) Excellence Model

This is not strictly a quality system, but is designed as a framework for continuous improvement. It helps you to map out stages for assessing every aspect of your work, identify where improvements are needed and compare your organisation with others. It is demanding and usually takes an organisation a year to work towards external assessment.

Social auditing, reporting and accounting

These processes are designed to help your organisation improve its ethical and social approach by increasing its accountability and the involvement of different 'stakeholders'. They are fairly complex and time-consuming, but you introduce them at your own pace.

Sources of further information, support and guidance

Agenda Consulting: *Benchmarking, financial management, HR*	www.agendaconsulting.co.uk
Charities Evaluation Service	www.ces-vol.org.uk
Compass: strategic planning	www.compasspartnership.co.uk
Ealing CVS: Development	www.ealingcvs.org.uk/development/index.php
LVSC	www.lvsc.org.uk
NCVO	www.ncvo-vol.org.uk
Performance Improvement Hub	www.performancehub.org.uk
South London CVS: Capacity Checking Framework	www.slcvspartnership.org.uk
The Public Sector Benchmarking Service	www.benchmarking.gov.uk
UK Evaluation Society	www.evaluation.org.uk
VolResource	www.volresource.org.uk
Social Audit Network: a tool for monitoring performance	www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk

Quality Management Systems – Useful Contacts	
British Quality Foundation	www.quality-foundation.co.uk
BSI Management Systems UK	Telephone 0845 080 9000
Charity Commission	www.charitycommission.gov.uk
Charter Mark	www.chartermark.gov.uk
Commission for Social Care Inspection	www.csci.org
EFQM *Excellence Model British Quality Foundation*	www.quality-foundation.co.uk
Investors in People	www.investorsinpeople.co.uk
Investing in Volunteers *Volunteering England (London)*	www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk
ISO 9000 *British Standards Institution*	www.bsi.org.uk
Legal services commission	www.legalservices.gov.uk/qmark
Matrix Quality Mark	www.matrix-quality-standard.com
PQASSO *Charities Evaluation Services*	www.ces-vol.org.uk
Quality First *Birmingham Voluntary Service Council*	www.bvsc.org
Social Accounting & Auditing *New Economics Foundation*	www.neweconomics.org