

# Evaluation related FAQs

We know that, when working with young people experiencing barriers to music making, evaluation might not always feel like it sits at the top of the list of priorities. It can feel like a huge task, particularly if you or your organisation don't have much capacity or experience with evaluation. Our comprehensive evaluation resources, [Plan, Do, and Review](#), will guide you through this process, but you might have questions that aren't covered fully by those guides.

Here are some commonly encountered questions we have received from applicants and grantholders when it comes to evaluating a Youth Music project, and our suggestions on how you can overcome them.

**“The number of outcomes to report on has changed since my grant was awarded. How many outcomes do I report on in my evaluation?”**

In 2020, Youth Music reduced the number of outcomes we required Fund A and Fund B grantholders to set in their application and report on in their evaluation. If you are a new grantholder, or you hold a different type of grant, this should not affect you. However, for those grantholders who made their application before this change was put in place, we understand there may be some confusion as to how many outcomes you should be working towards and reporting on.

For Fund A grantholders, the minimum number of outcomes you are required to report on is two. The maximum is three. If you set three outcomes in your application, you can either choose two to report on, or report on all three.

For Fund B grantholders, the minimum number of outcomes you are required to report on is three. The maximum is five. If you set five outcomes in your application, you can choose to report on three, four or all five outcomes.

**“The young people we work with aren't interested in evaluation. They don't want to fill in the scales and we're worried it will put them off coming to sessions.”**

We understand that it can take time to build up a trusting relationship with the young people you're working with, and that handing them a questionnaire from the word 'go' might feel alienating to them. We recommend, if you choose to collect data from the young people near the beginning of the project, that you do this after a couple of

sessions rather than from the very first session, giving them a little time to get to know you and become engaged with the project.

We also recommend inducting young people into the evaluation process so that they understand why it's important and what will be asked of them. See our ['Do' guidance](#) for more information on how to do this in an effective way that doesn't put them off. This could include asking for their input on the data collection tools you choose, including involving them in designing the questionnaires or interview schedules.

If scales and questionnaires in particular are causing concern, why not try a collection method that feels more appropriate to the group of young people you're working with? Having a conversation with them or using creative methods may work better – and there are even ways you can involve young people in collecting the data themselves that might serve as a more engaging, exciting way to give them ownership over this element of the project. See our [Data Collection Tools](#) and [Peer Research](#) resources for more ideas.

**“Data collection and evaluation eats into the little delivery time we have. Young people are there to make music.”**

We understand that there are multiple competing priorities in the lives of young people and that you want to spend the time you have with them on doing the things that matter most: bringing them quality music making experiences. That's why we want to help you make your evaluation process as suitable and manageable as possible for you and the young people your project serves. It is a rigorous process, but that doesn't mean it has to be time consuming or difficult: there are so many ways you can collect evidence to support your evaluation, and it is important that you choose methods that best suit your project and target group. See our [Data Collection Tools resource](#) which offers a rundown of the pros and cons of the different types of research you can do with young people. If you have time to do in-depth interviews with your young people outside of the sessions, that is fantastic – but if you don't there are plenty of lighter touch alternatives that can take place during music sessions and don't have to steal away from your delivery time.

Remember that evaluation is a core part of your project, and as such, we recommend that you build adequate staff time and resource into your project's plan and budget request. It doesn't have to be an additional unrealistic expectation of your staff to spend time collecting and analysing data without being paid properly for it: the most successful approach is to timetable evaluation into your overall project plan, and your budget request to Youth Music should reflect this. You could also consider involving an external evaluator.

“Some of our data suggest that we are moving further away from our intended outcome rather than progressing towards it – can I still share this with you and what should I do about it?”

There are lots of reasons why your data might suggest a move away from your intended outcome rather than towards it.

Take young people’s musical skills for example: you might ask the young people to score themselves on a self-assessment questionnaire. In the past, some of our grantholders have found that the young people’s assessments of their own skills might actually *decrease* as the young people’s benchmark of musical skill *develops* – i.e., they might start the project feeling confident in their skills, but as their knowledge and understanding actually improves over time, they might realise how much more there is to learn and end up feeling as though they have not improved at the end of the project. Overall, this is a good thing, but it can feel difficult to present this to an external audience in a positive light!

If your data suggests a move away from your intended outcome from one group, we recommend sense-checking it against data from other sources, e.g., music leaders, teachers or parents. This process of using data from multiple sources to reinforce your conclusions is called triangulation.

However, if you’ve done this and you still find that all your data suggests that you are not progressing towards your intended outcome(s), there is still great value in using this data and sharing it with Youth Music. We want to know about the challenges and what didn’t work just as much as we want to know about the successes. Submitting an evaluation with a less than perfect success rate does not count as a reason for us not to consider awarding your organisation funding in the future. Youth Music are interested in how organisations learn from evaluations and adapt accordingly. Use this as an opportunity to reflect on the project, find out what could have been done differently, and learn from the experience for next time.

“The young people’s responses on their forms/in their interviews don’t match up with what the delivery staff observe in their behaviour. How do we reconcile these different viewpoints?”

The process of using data from multiple viewpoints to reinforce your conclusions is called triangulation. But what happens when those viewpoints say different things? As with the concern in the question above, there are many explanations as to why data from different sources or viewpoints might not match up with one another.

Considering external factors or biases in the data may help you to work out which data collection tool is a more accurate gauge of what's happening in your project. For example, if data from your young people suggests no progress towards your intended outcome, but data from music leaders, parents, and accreditation suggests good progress, you might want to think about the other possible reasons for the opposing results from the young people. Did they under-rate their skills due to lack of confidence? Did something happen outside of the session to affect their mood on the day of the interview? Think about what could have influenced the conflicting information and make an informed decision about how to interpret the data. Disharmonious points of view don't hold any less value in the evaluation process: rather, they present an opportunity to discuss the different perspectives with the young people and understand a little more about their responses.

**“Some young people quickly tick “5 (best)” for everything on their scale without engaging with it and hand the form over to us. How do we ensure these scores are accurate?”**

There are plenty of data collection tools alternative to scales that young people might find easier to engage with – see our Data Collection Tools resource for more information. However, if a scale still feels like the most appropriate tool for your evaluation, there are other ways that you can identify any cases where the scores might be inaccurate.

For instance, some grantholders have found that inserting some additional questions into your questionnaire that most people would be unlikely to score themselves 5/5 on can help to highlight any instances where the person filling in the scale might not be reading the questions or answering them entirely accurately. For example, below you can see part of the Youth Music Agency and Citizenship scale, which measures progress towards social outcomes. Questions **3, 5 and 7 in bold** have been added in, and are questions that most people would be unlikely to score themselves 5/5 for. If a young person scores themselves 5/5 for everything, including these questions, you might be able to draw assumptions around whether or not to include this person's scale in your analysis. Indeed, you could go back to them and talk to them about it to get a better understanding of whether they truly feel this way.

1. I feel listened to by the people around me.

1 2 3 4 5

2. I make decisions that are good for me.

1 2 3 4 5

**3. I like everyone I meet**

1 2 3 4 5

4. I feel like what I say and do will make a difference to my life.

1 2 3 4 5

5. I always tell the truth

1 2 3 4 5

6. I know where to get help from if I need it.

1 2 3 4 5

7. I always share

1 2 3 4 5

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