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Final Report

Improving the Performance of Waste Diversion Schemes: A Good Practice Guide to Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating scheme performance is something that all local authorities should be doing as a matter of routine. Not only does it enable you to assess whether schemes are performing as expected, it also helps diagnose problems, design new approaches and ultimately improve efficiency and effectiveness. This revised document gives you practical advice on how to go about monitoring the performance of your schemes.

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WRAP helps individuals, businesses and local authorities to reduce waste and recycle more, making better use of resources and helping to tackle climate change.

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Executive summary

What are 'monitoring' and 'evaluation'?

'Monitoring' means regularly measuring what's going on with your service, your schemes or the effect of your communication activity. 'Evaluating' means drawing conclusions from the monitoring data on how well the service or schemes are performing or the effect of the communication activity. Monitoring and evaluation are therefore two distinct activities with monitoring being impartial and factual while evaluation tends to be subjective and value laden. Someone who doesn't know the local area can do most monitoring; only someone who understands the context and local environment can do the evaluation. This means that although you can commission somebody to measure what your service or schemes are doing, ultimately you will need to evaluate what that tells you yourself.

How monitoring and evaluation could help you

Monitoring and evaluation will give you a better understanding of how well your recycling, re-use and waste reduction schemes are working. It can help you measure and understand the impact of a communication campaign. It can also help you explain why your schemes, initiatives and campaigns have succeeded or failed. Provided you carry out the right type of monitoring you can:

- measure progress against objectives and targets, so you will know in advance if you are likely to hit or miss them;
- assess expenditure and control costs;
- evaluate return on investment (RoI) to justify your existing budgets or persuade budget holders that you need more money to achieve statutory and local targets;
- identify successful systems as well as problems or performance issues, so that you can target your efforts to those neighbourhoods where improvements will make the most impact;
- measure customer satisfaction and user attitudes to establish how these are impacting on the performance of your service / scheme;
- plan service / scheme expansions and design (or redesign) your service / schemes so that they target materials that will make the most impact;
- plan targeted communications to improve performance; and
- address the issues that are really impacting on your service / scheme success and not those that you think are.

This guidance is designed to be used by organisations responsible for running waste recycling, composting, reuse and reduction services / schemes and those running communication campaigns and outreach activities. It will help you to do the monitoring and evaluation work yourself and is also designed to be useful if you want to bring in external organisations to carry out this work for you.

Planning monitoring and evaluating the results

One of the main reasons you will undertake monitoring and evaluation is to understand how a service, scheme or communications campaign is performing so that you can identify opportunities for improvement. This applies to both the waste management services you deliver and the communications you undertake to promote them. Planning your monitoring is essential for it to be successful.

Chapter 2 outlines the process that you should be going through when planning to monitor. It describes how to set aims and objectives (both for the activity you want to measure as well as the monitoring you need to do), it gives examples of associated key performance indicators (KPIs) with which to measure activity performance, and it explores how you might use the results of evaluation to improve your service or campaign. Aims and objectives are important because they help you decide what to monitor and the method(s) that you will need to use, while KPIs are essential as they are the yardsticks by which you can measure your performance against an objective, and thereby assess how successful you have been.

Chapter 3 explains the basics of sampling including why we sample, how to decide your sample size and how to make sure the sample is representative. It also helps you to be clear about your target area, and how you can select and profile your target population. Sampling is not a particularly complex task but your ability to make valid statements about your results depends on a good understanding of sampling. In particular, you will want to be able to state what the results obtained from your sample say about the wider population from which the sample was drawn.

Monitoring awareness, claimed behaviour and satisfaction

Whether residents are aware of your service or schemes and happy to use them are important factors in determining if they are used properly. Chapter 4 looks at the different methods that you can use to ask your residents about what they think, how they claim to behave and how they feel about the waste-related services available to them. The information that you gather can help you design and improve your schemes to reflect the preferences of residents, and develop more effective communications with householders.

The kind of monitoring described in Chapter 4 relies on asking residents questions. It explains how to decide what type of investigation to undertake, how to conduct different types of surveys, how to sample and design questionnaires, and how to analyse and report data. The chapter covers both focus groups and surveys.

The main methods for delivering a survey are:

- face-to-face;
- telephone;
- paper-based self-completion;
- panel; and
- web-based self-completion.

WRAP recommends use of the first three of these methods in preference to the last two. They appear in a hierarchy, with face-to-face surveying being the most preferred and web-based surveys the least. Chapter 4 explains why.

To overcome the problems associated with asking people about their attitudes, WRAP has developed sets of questions that, when taken together, can give insight into attitudes about recycling and waste prevention. These are more robust measures as they use a combination of answers to questions to test commitment. These metrics, as they are known, include the following, and are particularly useful for measuring the impact of communications campaigns:

- committed recycler;
- committed food waste reducer;
- committed home composter; and
- committed peat-free compost buyer.

The committed recycler questions have been used to measure the impact of the ‘Recycle Now’ campaign and should be used in any survey about recycling. Similarly, the committed food waste reducer questions have been developed for use in measuring the success of the ‘Love Food Hate Waste’ campaign.

WRAP generally recommends that surveys are carried out by experts in social research. This is because designing an effective questionnaire is a skilled task, and overseeing the fieldwork that’s required is time-consuming. Most local authorities have in-house expertise but it isn’t always easy to find. If you do decide to do it yourself, operational factors are important when conducting any kind of survey. It is important to remember to budget for fulfilling obligations to protect the health and safety of interviewers by carrying out a risk assessment and providing necessary equipment, for example. Hiring skilled and motivated interviewers is not always easy and random checking should be carried out. It is also worth giving some thought to the best and most appropriate places to survey from; town centres and shopping centres may be busy but door-to-door surveys sometimes find people with more time to talk.

Chapter 4 provides help for those wishing to design their own questionnaire and undertake their own survey as well as those who decide to seek assistance from specialists in this field such as a market research agency.

Monitoring scheme usage, participation and uptake

One of the most important measures of how well your services or schemes are performing is the extent to which they are being used. This is particularly important for kerbside services for reasons of cost efficiency and round planning, but also applies to bring schemes, household waste recycling centres (HWRCs), and other council initiatives such as reusable nappy schemes. Depending upon the types of scheme that you have in place, there are different approaches to measuring the extent to which they are used by householders. Participation monitoring is recommended for kerbside schemes while usage surveys are proposed for bring schemes, HWRCs and other initiatives. Chapter 5 explains how to approach these.

WRAP recognises that some local authorities choose to carry out participation monitoring themselves while others prefer to commission an agency to do it for them. Chapter 5 provides advice on both approaches. If you have limited staff resources, limited experience in dealing with data and/or little or no time to learn these techniques, then WRAP suggests that you make use of the expertise of these external organisations. If you have the capacity to carry this out yourself, Chapter 5 gives you all the background you need.

Monitoring quantities diverted

In addition to monitoring participation and usage of your schemes, monitoring the amount of material collected for recycling or composting, and determining how much waste is prevented through waste reduction schemes, is important in assessing how services or schemes are performing. Chapter 6 describes how to assess quantities of waste collected and diverted from landfill, and how to use this information so that opportunities for improvements can be identified. This information is relevant for local authorities, but also other organisations that are relying on local authorities to provide them with data.

Tonnage data are the most common form of data collected on waste quantities. Obtained via records such as weighbridge tickets, tonnage information is required by auditing bodies to assess the performance of waste services and is therefore collected as standard by all local authorities in the UK. Municipal waste data are reported through the online data reporting system, WasteDataFlow. This does not completely negate the need, though, to respond to requests from third parties for tonnage information, because there are time delays between submission of data and their release to such parties and there may be issues with the level of detail available.

If you are a local community or voluntary group involved in collections or communications activity, arrangements should be made with the relevant local authority to receive tonnage data. Where the activity being monitored takes place in an area that doesn't correspond to the whole of a local authority area, it may be possible to receive round-based data. Similarly, if what is being monitored is a particular site, then you should arrange to receive monitoring data relating to that site from the council or the organisation that manages or collects waste from the site. This should be discussed at the earliest opportunity. Round-based or site-specific tonnage data can be much more useful in monitoring scheme performance than overall tonnage data because it allows you to identify areas of good and poor performance standards.

The use of tonnage data is problematic for monitoring the impact of communications campaigns because so many factors other than the campaign messages may have played a part in changes detected. It is for this reason that it is good practice to gather participation/usage data as well as tonnage data. In particular, tonnage data are not an appropriate measure of the effect of a communications campaign if infrastructure changes have been made at the same time. WRAP recommends a suite of monitoring approaches are used, proportional to the size of the scheme, campaign or initiative.

Monitoring capture rates and contamination levels

'Capture' refers to the quantity of a particular target material that is 'captured' by the service or scheme designed to accept that material. Improving capture rates becomes increasingly important as a kerbside service / scheme matures and participation rates plateau as services or schemes that have reached this stage can improve by capturing more of the materials targeted. Monitoring capture rates is one of the more complex monitoring activities as it involves waste composition analysis of the residual and recycling / composting waste streams.

Chapter 7 describes how to measure capture rates and how to use the results to assess how your services or schemes are performing and the potential for improvements.

Identifying contamination is a particularly worthwhile exercise where kerbside collections expand and people who aren't so committed to recycling start to use them, as in these situations contamination may rise. Contamination rates can be reduced by redesigning services / schemes, changing work practices, and providing better information to residents about what is accepted, along with why certain materials are not currently accepted. Chapter 8 explains the various ways to monitor contamination. The focus is on kerbside collections as these tend to be more prone to contamination because more people use them and the expansion of materials collected. However, some of the techniques described are appropriate to bring schemes, especially where loads are taken to MRFs or bulking stations.

Capture and contamination rate analysis is particularly important for alternate weekly services or schemes where participation tends to be high. Relying on monitoring and tonnage data alone can be misleading because they mask the extent of incorrect participation. The main way for the performance of the recycling service to increase is by encouraging effective participation and thereby increasing capture (Chapter 7) and reducing contamination (Chapter 8).

Monitoring waste prevention initiatives

Although waste reduction is at the top of the waste hierarchy, it is notoriously difficult to measure. The problem is simple – how do you measure something that isn't there? There are two approaches: measure before and after to work out the difference; or measure what has replaced it.

Chapter 9 describes techniques for monitoring and evaluating waste prevention activities. The topics covered include bag reuse, composting (both at home and community composting), food waste prevention, grass cycling, reuse (of items such as furniture, household goods and paint), unwanted mail and washable or 'real' nappies. The advice given focuses on measuring the impact of waste prevention work (i.e. tonnages prevented) relating to the specific topic areas covered. You will also need to read Chapter 10 to learn how to monitor the inputs of your waste prevention communications campaign and outreach activities.

Monitoring communications campaigns

Chapter 10 provides a starting point for anyone wishing to monitor and evaluate the impact of communications. It gives advice on measuring both high profile communications such as public relations (PR) and advertising as well as on-the-ground outreach activities. Many large-scale communications campaigns combine both types of activities in their delivery.

It is good practice to set aims, objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) for the monitoring of communications campaigns, as this will help you to decide what to monitor and the method that will be needed (Chapter 2). There are different types of objectives that can be set to help you monitor and evaluate communication activity. These include inputs, outcomes and impacts.

Monitoring your communication inputs will give you a good indication of the amount of effort you are putting into your communications. This information can be useful, for example, to keep track of progress on a campaign. It is also useful when planning future work because, if you know what you did in terms of inputs (e.g. staff time, money spent), you can use this to inform future plans. Monitoring the outcomes of your communications work will allow you to detect whether any changes are happening as a direct result of your inputs. Even if these changes are not your ultimate goal (i.e. the desired impact), they are a step on the way and are therefore a useful indication of change that you can measure. Monitoring of impacts is essential if you are to determine how effective communications have been in achieving their objectives and thus the ultimate aim. Knowing what impact you have had will help you to evaluate how effectively the communication activities have been delivered and how good they were at achieving changes you required.

Chapter 10 takes you through the basics of how to monitor a number of activities including opportunities to see (OTS) articles and adverts in the press, on websites and on posters; advertising value equivalent (AVE) of articles that mention your campaign or its key messages; face-to-face communications activities (e.g. roadshows); door-to-door canvassing; and schools outreach work.

What has changed in the 2010 revision?

The guidance has been substantially rewritten and reorganised, with a lot of new information:

- We have given a great deal of thought to how the material is presented, the best place for it to appear in the document and how it will be used. You will now find some new chapters and lots of changes to existing chapters.
- We have tried to include a lot more signposting to help you to find the information you require as easily as possible.
- We have moved all the information on sampling into a separate chapter (Chapter 2), as we recognise that sampling guidance in general is very important but that it also needs to be specific to each monitoring method. You will find a lot in the chapter on sampling that is new.
- There is a lot more guidance on monitoring waste prevention programmes (Chapter 9), linking with WRAP's Waste Prevention Toolkit, including: the impact of 'real' nappy schemes, unwanted mail, food waste prevention work and home/community composting. It also looks at monitoring reuse schemes like reusable bags, junk swap days and reuse in the home.
- The chapter on monitoring communication campaigns (Chapter 10) now includes new sections on monitoring door-to-door canvassing, work with schools, and monitoring other activities such as call centres, outreach workers, feedback from crews, residents and stakeholders.
- Annex 1 is new and is dedicated to providing you with some case studies that give examples of how others have used different monitoring methods in a variety of ways and how these have helped to identify potential improvements.
- Annex 2 is new and provides guidance on aims and objectives and how to construct the three key types of objectives (input, outcome and impact) that you can set to monitor your services / schemes and the communications undertaken to promote them. The key performance indicator (KPI) to use for each objective is also provided. Recognising that setting good aims and objectives are key to measuring performance and we give examples of these throughout the document related to specific monitoring methods and KPIs.
- The library of survey questions (Annex 3) has changed a lot. Many of the original questions have been redesigned and there are lots of new questions as well, including the WRAP metrics: committed recycler, committed food waste reducer and committed home composter. We advise you how to use these metrics and other associated questions that you will find useful. The question groupings have been reconsidered to enable you to find questions around specific subjects more easily.
- All the remaining chapters and annexes cover the main monitoring and evaluation methods and background information as previously but they have been updated to reflect current monitoring needs and good practice.

Summary

The guidance is aimed at helping both those who want to carry out monitoring themselves and those who wish to commission an external organisation. In some parts it is necessarily technical and detailed. Chapter 1 provides all the signposting you'll need to jump straight to relevant sections, so only in a few instances will it be necessary to read it all. There is also signposting available on WRAP's website www.wrap.org.uk/local_authorities.

WRAP intends this guidance to be accepted as essential reading for local authorities planning monitoring and evaluation activity whether that is related to infrastructure improvements, routine management of services or to a communications campaign. Please let us know if we have not achieved that. Waste management companies and community sector organisations planning monitoring will also find it useful.

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