

**How Good is Our Public Library: a Public Library Improvement Model
for Scotland**

Gathering Evidence to Demonstrate Impact and Value

Guidance and Training Materials for Library Staff



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1. Introduction

1.1 Background - *How Good is Our Public Library* and demonstrating impact and value

How Good is Our Public Library: a Public Library Improvement Model for Scotland builds on a framework originally developed in 2007, *Building on Success: a public library quality improvement matrix for Scotland* produced by the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC).

How Good is Our Public Library framework provides a quality improvement tool to assist Scottish public libraries in meeting their service obligations and objectives in a challenging economic climate. The framework focuses on planning, service delivery, and continuous improvement through a process of self evaluation, and aims to demonstrate the continuing relevance, contribution and impact of public libraries, the ways in which public libraries make a difference in their communities. An accompanying *Toolkit* is available online, and provides tools and templates to support the self evaluation and peer review process.

1.2 Training for staff involved in gathering evidence to demonstrating impact and value

These guidance and training materials on gathering evidence and demonstrating impact, are part of the online *Toolkit* developed to support library services and staff in the self evaluation and peer review process

The training materials have been developed out of a short series of pilot workshops with library staff as part of the development of *How Good is Our Public Library* self evaluation framework. These workshops aimed to support improvements to (a) evidence gathering and (b) identifying and demonstrating impact and value of services.

The training exercises for library staff included here focus on exploring effective evidence gathering, recognising what 'good' evidence is, and identifying and demonstrating the impact and value that public libraries have in their communities.

Demonstrating impact and ways in which public libraries make a difference in their communities is one of the key outcomes of *How Good is Our Public Library*. So, how will you know if what you are doing, or planning to do, in the public library service will make a difference for individuals and groups in the community? We can describe, using the various 'inputs' and 'outputs', what the library does, the size of the adult fiction collection, the number of hours open, how many borrowers it has, the number of books issued to children, the various outreach programmes it is involved with and so on, but then we have to ask the question 'so what?'. How do you demonstrate the value that the various activities and services provided by the library service will have for individuals and communities served? This is where impact comes in, and involves the planning and gathering of evidence to demonstrate the value and impact of library services.

The training materials and guidance provided here offer an opportunity for library staff, ideally working in groups, to explore a range of issues associated with demonstrating impact, beginning by considering what self evaluation is and why library services do it.

2. What is self-evaluation and why do we do it?

The aim of the self-evaluation process is to support a continuous cycle of improvement in public library service provision. Self evaluation assists libraries to:

- Recognise strengths in their current service provision
- Identify areas for improvement and draw up plans for action
- Share best practice and establish benchmarks for services to aspire to
- Report to stakeholders on the quality of service provision
- Demonstrating the relevance and value of the library service to their communities.

The process of self-evaluation is based on three simple questions:

- how well are we doing?
- how do we know?
- what are we going to do now?

2.1 How well are we doing? Assessing current practice.

Library services need to assess the impact of their work with individuals and communities to know that the services are:

- appropriate and based on community need
- of high quality and in line with best practice
- in need of review or improvement
- improving by change and adaptation
- offering local cultural entitlements.

2.2 How do we know? Gathering Evidence.

Self-evaluation needs to be based on the collection and review of the evidence of outcomes and impact. The Quality Indicators provide a number of broad evaluation themes, and public library services are asked to identify ways in which they know and can demonstrate that they are performing well. Assessments should be made about the public library service's performance based on the evidence collected.

Range of evidence

Evidence helps to support self evaluation processes by demonstrating proof of activity and impact. It can help in establishing how well the service is meeting users' needs. Evidence can be quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative evidence reports what can be measured, for example numbers of registered learners. Qualitative evidence will seek to draw out the value which users may put on services, and this is often unstructured in format, for example feedback from users.

Evidence can be gathered by:

- consulting users, non-users and staff
- observing activities
- considering measurable outcomes
- examining documentation and resources

These sources of evidence are complementary. For example, a policy statement seeking to “promote learning for all” can be observed across the range of learning opportunities offered and backed up by feedback from learners.

(SLIC, 2014, “How Good is Our Public Library: a public library improvement model for Scotland”)

3. How Good is Our Public Library and the need to demonstrate value and impact

So, now move on to consider how will you know if what you are doing, or planning to do, in the public library service will make a difference in your community and to individuals?

The need to measure impact generally arises from a climate of financial constraint where public libraries need to be accountable to all their stakeholders, both internal and external (users, staff, funding bodies, partners etc). Very often the concept of *impact* can be difficult for some to grasp.

Activity 1: Group discussion and brainstorm

So, what do we mean or understand by 'impact', generally, and specifically in relation to public library services?

[Activity: Brainstorm, either individually or ideally in a working group, what 'impact' means to you, and make notes here of everything you come up with, however relevant you think it may be at this stage. There are no 'right' answers and many different perceptions of 'impact']

Impact evaluation is a complex issue. Impact is notoriously hard to measure as so many variables influence people's lives. For example, measuring the impact on an individual who attends an IT workshop in the library, may mean also gathering evidence from partners as that individual moves on to a college course or to new employment or career path.

Understanding Impact : You can now turn to the Additional Resources section at the end, to see the results from brainstorming sessions with workshop attendees to see what they came up with regarding what we understand by 'impact'.

It is perhaps useful as a reminder here to define what is meant by **inputs, outputs** and **outcomes**, as the various measures we use to determine performance in a public library.

Inputs are the resources that your library has available, and uses to provide services, i.e. the raw materials of the library service (staff, users, space, money, resource collections, equipment etc).

Outputs quantify the work done (i.e. the number of books issued, number of reference questions answered, number of internet sessions booked etc.)

Outcomes are sometimes referred to as "indicators of impact" or "impact indicators", outcomes are the benefits to people as a result of your library services; specifically achievements or changes in skills, knowledge, attitude, behaviour, condition or status for users. These outcomes tend to be qualitative in nature. This can also be thought of as how the library makes a difference in the community, and the evidence of this demonstrates 'impact'.

We can describe, using the various 'inputs' and 'outputs', what the library does, how many borrowers it has, the number of books issued to children, the various outreach programmes it is involved in, but then we have to ask the question 'so what'?

How do we demonstrate the value that these activities and services have for the individuals and communities served? This is where impact comes in, and involves planning and gathering evidence to demonstrate the value and impact of library services.

4. Planning to gather evidence to demonstrate impact and value

As previously mentioned, the need to demonstrate value and impact generally arises from a climate of financial constraint where public libraries need to be accountable to all their stakeholders, both internally and externally, (users, staff, funding bodies, partners etc). However one significant aspect of undertaking a self evaluation process such as PLQIM is to identify areas for improvement, and also to share good practice with colleagues and other library services. This process also assists staff in making sometimes difficult decisions, and asking themselves questions such as 'should we really be doing this piece of work with partner x', 'will this piece of work really make a difference', 'can we amend or work with other partners in order to deliver better outcomes', and so on.

In planning to gather evidence you may need to act strategically, or politically, and the evidence may include both qualitative and quantitative evidence. Sophisticated quantitative data and good quality impact information should complement each other strongly. They each have different roles and purposes, sometimes it is the quantitative data that can reassure stakeholders, and this, presented alongside the qualitative data that tells the story and demonstrates value and impact, becomes persuasive and effective.

Activity 2: Evidence gathering - Purpose and Audience

Who are your stakeholders?

Why are you gathering evidence?

You can now turn to the Additional Resources section at the end, to see some of the results from workshop sessions to share what they came up with regarding who their stakeholders are and why they are gathering evidence.

It is recognised that gathering evidence to provide an indication of impact is neither an easy nor simple task.

There are a number of questions that also need to be asked early on in the process, and we will explore these later in the workshop, such as:

- Who will be involved in the process?
- What evidence will need to be gathered?
- Will this be on the shorter or longer term (impact may only be obvious some way down the line)?
- Planning projects and service delivery with partners, to what extent will they be involved in gathering evidence of impact, and how feasible is this?

One of the first steps to identify evidence that demonstrates impact and value involves breaking down projects, initiatives and activities into small chunks.

Activity 3: Review a previous Quality Indicator self evaluation process using the following template. Select a Quality Indicator that was previously reviewed as part of either the previous self evaluation framework, PLQIM, or How Good is Our Public Library. Choose from one of the key themes and work in your groups to complete the following template.

For this exercise you will need a copy of the either PLQIM or *How Good is Our Public Library* framework as appropriate.

How Good is Our Public Library – Quality Indicator Self Evaluation

QUALITY INDICATOR					
Theme:				Library Self Evaluation (1 – 6)	
				Peer Review Evaluation (1 – 6)	
Key question:					
Key areas	Evidence	Strengths	Areas for Improvement	What difference have we made? Evidence of Impact:	Rating (1 - 6)
Identifying Areas of 'Good Practice' to Share – Library Self Evaluation:					
Other comments on reflection (in hindsight)					

It is clear that an important part of the self evaluation process involves identifying in advance what evidence needs to be gathered, and planning how this will be done.

Activity 4: Review a new Quality Indicator - Optional

Repeat this process but this time for a Quality Indicator that you plan to self evaluate, using the template provided in the Additional Resources section at the end of this document. Choose one of the 3 key themes, and consider the 'Questions to ask' and 'Things to think about', then work through the process of identifying what the evidence might consist of that will demonstrate value and impact.

For this exercise you will need a copy of the *How Good is Our Public Library* framework.

5. Gathering evidence to demonstrate value and impact

It is recognised that gathering evidence to provide an indication of impact is neither an easy nor simple task. Very often the concept of *impact* can be difficult for some to grasp. The gathering of evidence is often regarded as the biggest hurdle of all for staff taking part in this type of self evaluation.

The process of self-evaluation is based on three simple questions

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know?
- What are we going to do now?

Range of evidence

Evidence helps to support self evaluation processes by demonstrating proof of activity and/or impact. It can help in establishing how well the service is meeting users' needs. Evidence can be quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative evidence reports what can be measured, for example numbers of registered learners. Qualitative evidence will seek to draw out the value which users may put on services, and this is often unstructured in format, for example feedback from users.

Some questions to ask yourselves at this stage might be:

What is the evidence we already have?

What is the evidence we need?

How do we get it?

What does it say about our service?

And crucially 'So What?'

Evidence can be gathered by

- Consulting users, non-users, partners and staff
- Observing activities
- Considering measurable outcomes
- Examining documentation and resources

These sources of evidence are complementary. For example, a policy statement seeking to "promote learning for all" can be observed across the range of learning opportunities offered and backed up by feedback from learners.

How are you going to find the evidence?

Public library services have a long history of collecting statistical information on how they provide services. This guide is a framework for drawing these strands together and shaping the evidence-base for an evaluation of quality. There are multiple sources of evidence which can be considered and compared in order to make an assessment of the contribution of the public library service. Here are some examples:

Consult users, non-users and staff

- Feedback, oral or written, from discussions with individuals and staff about specific activities

- Formal discussion with individuals, non-users, elected members, other council officers and library staff, possibly as part of community engagement activities forming part of the local Community Planning process
- Surveys and questionnaires run nationally or locally

Observe activities

- Examine the use of the library
- Review the range of resources and services available
- Observe individuals and staff across a range of activities
- Review the library environment

Consider measurable outcomes

- Analyse quantitative evidence from sources such as statutory performance indicators, CIPFA and library management system

Examine documentation and resources

- Local authority strategic/corporate plan
- Community Learning and Development Strategy
- The Community Plan and other Community Planning information relevant to library services
- Best Value self-assessment
- Charter Mark or Investors in People reports
- Public library service objectives and improvement plan
- Event programmes for range of individuals
- Lifelong learning programmes and materials
- Range of resources in relation to community diversity profiles
- Public information documentation
- Marketing and publicity strategies and documentation
- Local press coverage
- Action plans for innovation
- Staff training programme
- Evidence of library staff involvement in internal and external partnerships
- Evaluation of externally-funded programmes
- Notes of planning meetings

Activity 5 : Gathering Evidence

Consider again (ideally working in a group) the Quality Indicator you looked at for Activity 3 or 4 (if undertaken). Considering **one** of the key themes and the related 'Question(s) to ask', discuss and complete the following grid to work through the process of gathering evidence to demonstrate value and impact:

Remember some questions to ask yourselves at this stage might be:

What is the evidence we already have?

What is the evidence we need?

How do we get it?

What does it say about our service?

And crucially 'So What?'

<p style="text-align: center;">Library programme, initiative or service to self evaluate</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Where are you going to find the evidence to show you have achieved what you planned, and that it is making a difference</p>



<p style="text-align: center;">Who will you consult, e.g. users, non-users, staff, partners:</p>



Which activities are you going to observe or undertake, when and who else might be involved:



What measures will show you progress and do you need to review these so that they really do demonstrate what you need?



What else are you going to consider to find additional evidence and is there anything you need to research?



Are there any other sources which you can consult?

If you are going to ask other colleagues to collect evidence on your behalf, what would that be, and how would you organise this?

What would 'good' evidence consist of, or look like?

What are some of the challenges or barriers associated with gathering evidence to demonstrate value and impact?

What Does Good Evidence Consist Of or Look Like? A Summary

You can now turn to the Additional Resource section to see what workshop attendees came up with regarding what good evidence might look like or its characteristics.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Activity 1: Group discussion and brainstorm – Understanding Impact

So, what do we mean or understand by 'impact', generally, and specifically in relation to public library services? Included here are some of the results of this brainstorming exercise from workshop attendees to share what they came up with, but by no means a definitive list, but might spark discussion.

Continuous improvement

The difference we make

Something that is noticed – negative and positive

Quality of lives / communities

Enabler for lives / communities

Empowerment

Partners enhancing

Making change

Effectiveness

Best Value

Scalability

Long term view / change

Value

Performance measure

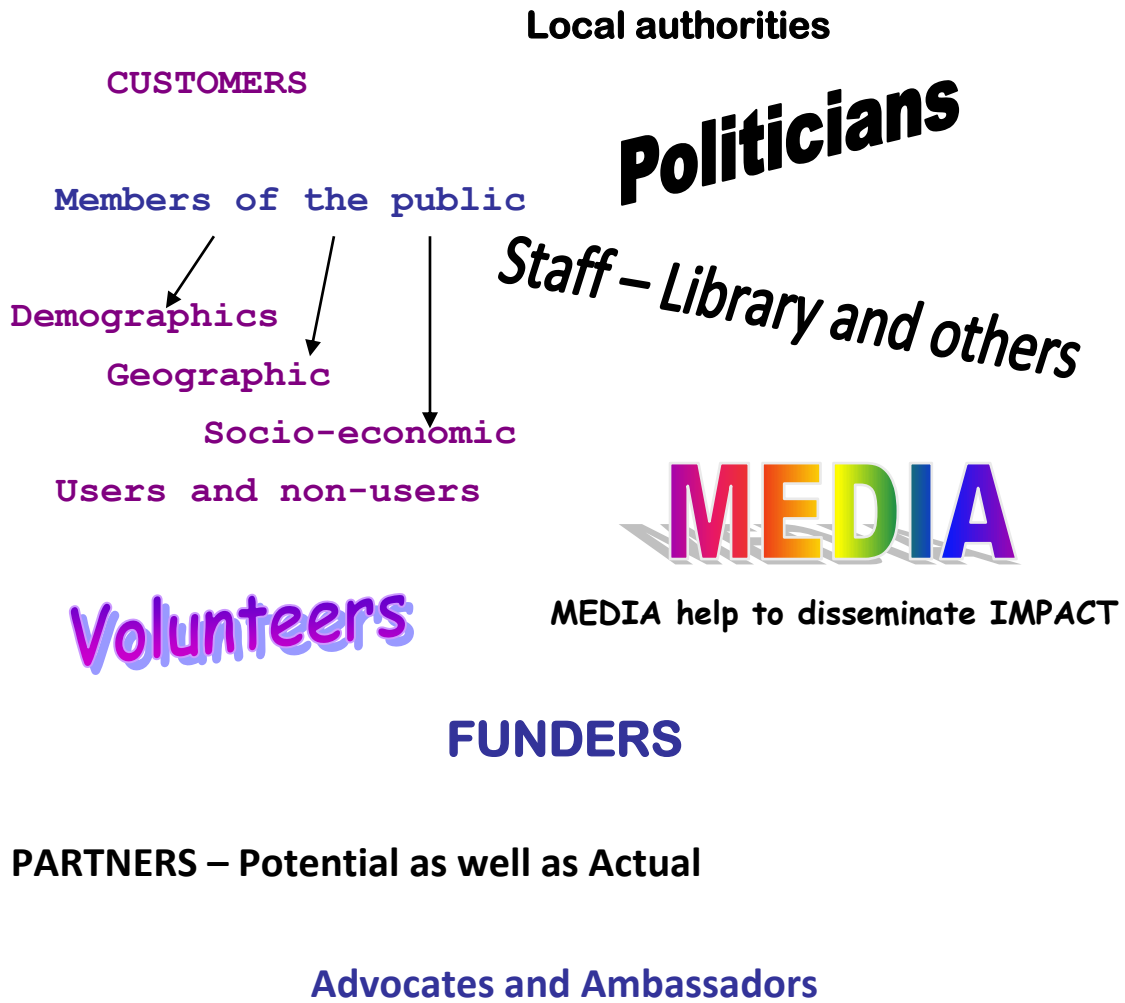
Quality indicators

Case Study

Evidence Gathering – Purpose and Audience – Results from workshops

Activity 2: Evidence gathering - Purpose and Audience

Who are your stakeholders?



Why are you gathering evidence? (Results from workshops)

Because It's GOOD

TRENDS

CASE STUDIES AND SNAPSHOTS OF GOOD PRACTICE

Many Reasons

Motivation - STAFF

Required to "because we have to"

PROOF

ATTRACT FUNDING

Feel Good Factor

Demonstrate IMPACT

PRESS / MEDIA

To Manage Service

DEVELOPMENT

ENHANCEMENT

To Make Stuff Work

BENCHMARKING

GOODWILL

What would 'good' evidence consist of, or look like?

Some General Characteristics (Results from workshops)

Reliable source

In writing, or other physical form

Specific as possible

Current

Relevant

Measureable

Demonstrating Impact, progression, continuous improvement

Personalised

Authenticated

How Good is Our Public Library – Quality Indicator Self Evaluation

QUALITY INDICATOR					
Theme:				Library Self Evaluation (1 – 6)	
				Peer Review Evaluation (1 – 6)	
Key question:					
Key areas	Evidence	Strengths	Areas for Improvement	What difference have we made? Evidence of Impact:	Rating (1 - 6)
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