



THE 8 STEPS OF SELF-EVALUATION

Commitment, communication and planning are key to successfully undertaking a self-evaluation exercise. The following eight steps are offered as guidance in planning and delivering your self-evaluation.

Gain and retain management commitment

Undertaking self-evaluation does require a commitment of time and resources. Outlining the benefits and securing high level agreement from board members or a corporate or departmental management team is crucial. Benefits which make a compelling case for the investment of time in the self-evaluation process could include:

- Preparation and readiness for legislative compliance
- Improved processes and efficiencies in service delivery
- Improved communication and consistency in record keeping across the organisation
- Improvements in ability to contribute effectively to organisational outcomes

If management are kept informed of the outcomes of the self-evaluation process, your service will benefit from recognition for what you already do well, and for your service's proactive approach to areas in need of improvement.

In addition to securing management approval, you should consider the scope of who and what is to be included in the process:

- Key partners and stakeholders?
- Services?
- Community and users?

Most services will be able to easily identify an aspect of their service where improvements can be made or where change or assessment will be beneficial to address and deliver on key priorities (i.e. legislative compliance, archive accreditation). Some services might decide to select and evaluate more than one QI when embarking on the process however, selecting and focusing on one QI at a time has been found to be the most effective and manageable approach.

Communicate what you are doing and what you're trying to achieve

Once you have considered the scope of your exercise and internal or external stakeholders who need to be included in the process, communication and an invitation for their participation should address the following points:

- **What** self-evaluation is - scope of exercise

- **Who** is involved – leadership support
- **Why** are you doing it – why *now*
- **How** the process will work
- **When** will it happen – estimated timescale

Plan the self-evaluation process

Once you have secured the commitment of colleagues to participate in the process, create a project plan to chart the process, set deadlines and itemise tasks. To create a simple and effective project plan, break down the 8 steps into SMART objectives:

- Specific – focussed tasks not wish lists
- Measurable – how and who?
- Affordable – resources?
- Realistic – feasible?
- Timely – by when?

Drawing up a simple project plan and agreeing upon realistic deadlines should help the process stay on track.

Brief and develop those directly involved in the process

Once you have set up self-evaluation team(s), assign clear roles and responsibilities, establish preferred mechanisms for ongoing communication and feedback and brief team members on:

- Purpose of ARMS and self-evaluation
- Benefits, Process, Outcomes
- Involvement and contribution of individuals
- Timescales and key milestones

Conduct self-evaluation

5.1 Establishing a clear process

In undertaking your self-evaluation and evidence gathering, using a systematic approach will help to ensure that the judgements formed by the team are consistent and balanced.

- Examine QI service description and illustrations
- Work through 'prompt' questions
- How does your organisation measure up?

5.2 Gather the evidence:

- Performance data
- Relevant documentation
- Stakeholder views and feedback
- Direct observation of practice

- Think beyond KPIs, policy documents and strategy
- In gathering evidence, the focus should be on the quality and relevance of the evidence-more is not necessarily better.

5.3 Form a judgement on the gathered evidence

- Apply 5-point scale (unsatisfactory to excellent)
- Reference evidence against QI
- Consider approach – why are things done this way?
- Consider deployment – how do you implement your approach?
- How do you assess, review and improve your approach?

5.4 Test the judgement – validation

It is highly recommended that validation forms a part of the self-evaluation process. Validation allows for an independent challenge to the self-evaluation, it can provide objective insights, it assists in substantiating and corroborating the judgements of the self-evaluation team and it can result in valuable contributions to draft improvement plans. Any of the following could be approached to provide independent validation of your self-evaluation conclusions:

- Peer reviewer
- Strategic body (e.g. NRS, SCA, HMIE representative)
- Consultant
- Combination

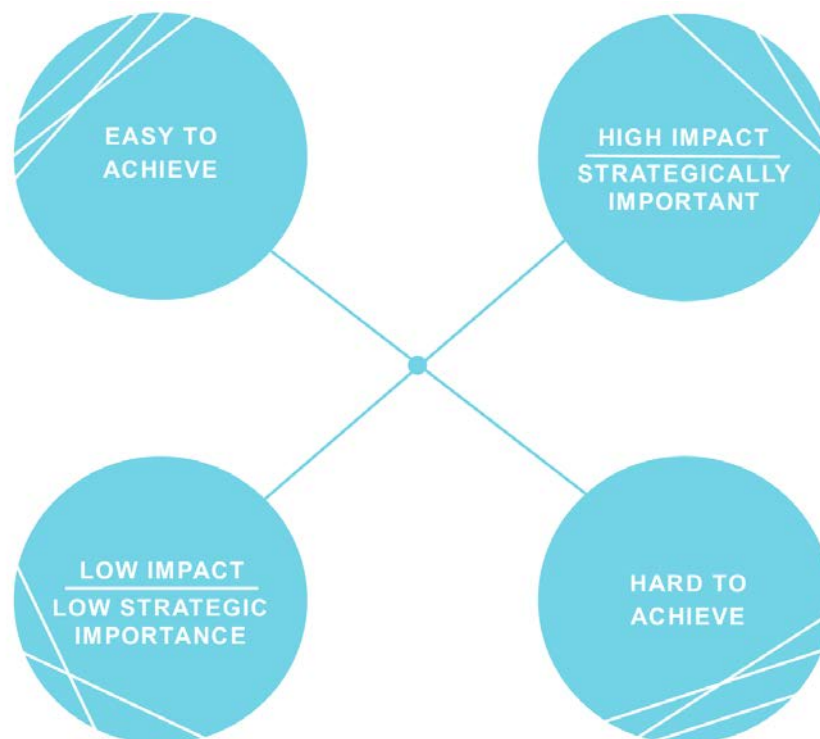
Independent validation will normally include most, or all, of the following elements:

- Random check of evidence against QI criteria
- Meeting with self-evaluation team
- Observing the service
- Interview staff at all levels of organisation
- Discussion with partners / stakeholders
- Application of the principle of triangulation

If you are uncertain about who to approach to assist with validation, the Scottish Council on Archives can assist in offering advice or facilitating contact with potential validators.

1. Consider outcomes and priorities

Establish a clear process for managing your improvement plan and for prioritising areas for improvement. Priorities should be assessed in line with strategic priorities and available resources:



2. Establish and implement action plans

Create a realistic and achievable improvement plan. This should include giving consideration to how improvements can be measured and evaluated.

1. Consolidate strengths
2. Address weaknesses
3. Create SMART actions for improvement

4. Prioritise actions
5. Include measures – how will you assess whether your improvements make a difference?
6. Communicate your findings and objectives

3. Monitor progress, review and maintain momentum

Self-evaluation is a continuous improvement process requiring the regular monitoring and review of the progress of the improvement plan. As the process of self-evaluation is ongoing, the process itself should also be reviewed and evaluated:

- Did we achieve what we set out to achieve?
- Did we involve the right people?
- Was the methodology and communication effective?
- What problems did we encounter – how to avoid / overcome?

Ongoing Process

Self-evaluation should be structured around three key questions:

How are we doing?

Services need to assess the impact of their work with individuals and with communities in order to know those services are:

- appropriate, i.e., based on community need
- high quality, and in line with best practice
- in need of review and improvement
- improved by change and adaptation

The QIs can be used to form an initial high level view of quality and performance across the services provided. Broad strengths and weaknesses can be identified by using evidence gathered in day-to-day work and service delivery. This approach makes an immediate evaluation of areas of major strength or those requiring more attention.

How do we know?

The QIs provide broad themes on which to build the gathering of evidence. Self-evaluation is evidence-based: collection and then review of the evidence for outcomes and impacts. The service undertaking self-evaluation must identify how it knows and, more importantly, can demonstrate that it is performing well. *Judgments are made strictly on the basis of evidence.*

Suggestions – they are no more – as to possible evidence are included against the evaluation questions. Individual services may find a range of other evidence that supports robust assessment.

Range of evidence – evidence underpins self-evaluation processes by demonstrating proof of activity and, even more importantly, impact. It can help to establish how well the service meets users' needs. Evidence can be qualitative or quantitative:

- *quantitative evidence* - what can be measured, e.g., the number of FOI requests received
- *qualitative evidence* - draws out the value users put on services, and this is often unstructured in format, e.g., feedback from users

How to gather evidence – evidence can be gathered by assessing key sources such as:

- performance data
- relevant documentation
- consulting users, non-users and staff
- direct observation of practice

These sources of evidence are complimentary. No single source can on its own supply evidence for robust evaluation. Yet, it is important to avoid unnecessary duplication in the evidence collected. If several pieces of evidence are illustrating the same point, it is advisable to select the best example. The principle of triangulation is widely used to test evidence: scrutiny of one evidence source backed up by another and corroborated by at least a third line of enquiry. Thus:

- Performance data: e.g., statistical data relating to service provision
- Relevant documentation: e.g., strategic plans and policies supporting service delivery

- Users, non-user and staff views: Views can be gathered systematically when individuals are accessing and using the service. The same systematic approach should be used for non-users. Organisations should have in place user surveys, i.e., questionnaires and/or focus groups. Unless information is gathered from users, non-users and staff, it would be difficult to understand the impact of the services. Indeed, absence of such information would make it almost impossible to have any degree of confidence in the outcomes of self-evaluation
- Direct observation: This involves visiting activities and observing first-hand the inputs of staff/volunteers and the outcomes for users. It also involves looking at the delivery models, methodology and resources as well as individual motivation and performance

What are we going to do now?

As services progress through the self-evaluation process, strengths in provision and areas for improvement will be identified:

- Strengths in provision need to be celebrated, maintained and continuously reviewed
- Areas for improvement require discussion and analysis

Self-evaluation provides a strong basis for the planning of those actions that will result in service improvement. The action plan should be documented and implemented. It is important that it feed into a continuous cycle of review and improvement, i.e., self-evaluation is definitely not a one-off exercise.

Levels of Effectiveness¹

On the basis of evidence gathered during self-evaluation, the particular aspects of performance or practice chosen should be deemed to fall within one of 5 levels of effectiveness, from excellent to unsatisfactory. The levels of effectiveness must be seen within the context of resources available to a service. The process is not judgmental but rather is about improvement.

It is important to balance a firm commitment to improvement with an equally firm focus on the realities of limited resources. Improvement plans must be stretching. However, they must not be so unrealistic as to be undeliverable and therefore doomed to failure.

Level 5: Excellent

- clearly excellent or outstanding
- very best practice worth disseminating beyond the service
- individuals' experiences and achievements of a very high quality
- very high levels of performance that are sustainable

Level 4: Very Good

- major strengths
- high but achievable standard of provision
- very few weaknesses – if any – that do not diminish individuals' experience
- services seize opportunities to improve and strive towards raising performance to excellent

Level 3: Good

¹ The levels of effectiveness have been adopted from the Building on Success: A Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix for Scotland, Scottish Library and Information Council, March 2007. These are compatible with the levels of excellence adopted in HGIOCS

- provision with important strengths that have positive impact
- areas requiring improvement in some way diminish the quality of individuals' experiences
- services seek to improve further areas of important strength while taking action to address some areas for improvement

Level 2: Adequate

- provision where strengths just outweigh weaknesses
- individuals have access to basic level of provision
- strengths have positive impact on individuals' experiences
- weaknesses do not have substantially adverse impact, but do constrain quality of the individuals' experiences
- services seek to address areas of weakness, while building on strengths

Level 1: Unsatisfactory

- major weaknesses in provision that impact negatively and significantly on the quality of individuals' experiences
- the weaknesses will require immediate remedial action that is structured and planned
- improvement requires strategic action and support from senior managers
- it may involve work alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the organisation

ARMS and the Future

A Changing Framework

The ARMS Framework has been designed to be a flexible tool. That flexibility extends to its adaptation and evolution as the pool of experience grows. As more archives and records management services in the public sector opt to use the tool, their insights will help it to evolve and to meet the challenges of tomorrow. The 'Feedback and Contact' page within the online tool is there to allow users to both seek assistance and submit feedback. Users are encouraged to use this facility to help shape and improve the tool.

The Future

The maintenance and further development of ARMS will require commitment not only from the sponsor of the Framework – the Scottish Council on Archives – but also, and more importantly, from those who use the tool and are in a position to share their experience and insights.

ARMS will achieve maximum effectiveness only if:

- it is shown to be evidence-based and robust
- it results in benefits for the individual services that use it
- it creates a community of users who, having gone through the process, see the benefit of mutual support and co-operation
- it inspires users to sign up for an SCA-supported validation team that examines and tests the evidence put forward by a service and that reports on it
- it has an impact that helps to produce the step change needed to deliver improved archives and records management services, business improvement in participating organisations and a significant contribution to the National Outcomes