Prove It!

Primary purpose

Prove It! was developed by **nef** in partnership with Groundwork UK and Barclays PLC to provide a method for measuring the effect of community regeneration projects on the quality of life of local people. This tool was originally conceived to help those managing neighbourhood renewal projects look beyond the physical and environmental changes that had taken place (e.g. the number of trees planted; amenities created) and be able to highlight the positive outcomes of regeneration that can often go unnoticed.

Prove It! is best suited:

- To helping understand the effects of small or medium-sized projects, (as opposed to larger-scale regeneration programmes).
- To looking at the effects of projects that involve local people as workers, volunteers or beneficiaries.
- To organisations concerned with local community involvement.
- To those interested in evaluating a project's effect on social exclusion and other quality of life issues.

Prove It! seeks to make data collection itself part of the process of regeneration, with local people involved in a project's evaluation as well as its delivery. The latest version has been designed to be manageable and possible to use within the limited resources that small-to-medium–scale projects have available to them. This ensures that evaluation becomes part of the culture of an organisation, rather than a burden. The evaluation process itself can contribute positively to the desired outcomes of the project.

Summary

Prove It! involves using three main tools:

- A **Storyboard** exercise for understanding how a project's intended activities will lead to change.
- A **Survey Questionnaire** to be used at the start and end of the project.
- A **Poster Evaluation** exercise in order to reflect at the end of a project on its impacts and the lessons that have been learnt.

In addition there are notes, guidance and templates provided to assist project managers in planning the evaluation process and presenting findings.

The **Prove It!** handbook describes the process of involving communities in agreeing on the most important issues, deciding on indicators and collecting data. It also provides the rationale for this type of participative evaluation and community engagement. The kit described below condenses much of this into a series of documents describing activities and illustrating templates, including spreadsheets, which simplify the important steps for those who may not have the time and resources to undertake the more in-depth version.

- The **Storyboard** provides a focus for talking to local people before the project has taken place. This can inform the organisation's thinking on the whole project. A group of people involved with the project or affected by it are invited to discuss eight questions that together describe the hypothesis, or 'story' about how they think the project will make a difference. Once the hypothesis has been established people involved (or potentially benefiting from the project) are better able to choose the indicators that will demonstrate whether or not the project has made a difference. When the storyboard is used during and/or after the project it provides a way for local people to be involved in the evaluation as well as the delivery of an initiative, project, or activity.

- The **Prove It!** toolkit provides a **Survey Questionnaire** that focuses on capturing the impacts of the project on people and their communities. This contains an MS Excel file of ready-made questions for the survey that can be adapted for use by any project. There is some flexibility in the survey if desired, with the option for organisations to add some questions. The toolkit also gives guidance as to whom to survey and on issues involved in conducting interviews with local people. Once the first round of surveys has been completed (ideally before the project has been implemented), the toolkit provides a series of ready made **data-entry sheets** directly linked to the **Questionnaire**, which automatically convert the responses into graphs that can be cut and pasted into other documents for analysis and presentation.
- The **Poster Evaluation** exercise is a ready-made workshop that offers people who have been involved or affected by the project, the opportunity to look back over the project, describe the impacts it has had, and to highlight the lessons learnt. It is based on using a large, interactive poster with a timeline upon which participants attach self-adhesive notes identifying the high points and low points of the project's history. The exercise is designed to acknowledge unexpected consequences of the project as well as intended outcomes. A facilitator uses a set of instructions to guide people through a series of stages, each focusing on different aspects of the project's outputs and outcomes. This part of the toolkit is based on another evaluation tool developed by **nef** in partnership with the Shell Better Britain Campaign, which is known as **Look Back Move Forward** or **LBMF** (see page 53.).

"It assists – it's not a burden. It isn't dry either – it helps you to be imaginative about the project."

Potential benefits

"Prove It! turns up different answers, exploration of softer outcomes and a chance for discussion." [28]

- This tool can help organisations answer the questions:

  "How can we go about measuring and documenting the 'outcomes' of our work?"

  "How can we measure the ways in which communities' and individuals' quality of life are changing as a result of our endeavours?"
- Measuring social outcomes can help to demonstrate the full value of regeneration or other local improvement activities to external bodies, such as funders. There is widespread recognition among policy-makers that evaluation often fails to involve local people, which **Prove It!** effectively addresses.
- **Prove It!** can provide a comprehensive story or hypothesis for a project. With a strong hypothesis established at the start, a better case can be made at the end that a particular intervention has brought about the changes.
- The tool is relatively simple to use and has some scope for flexibility and adaptability to an organisation's specific needs and can be used for a wide variety of projects, not just regeneration.

- Its participative process can help involve local people and help contribute to the building of trust in the community so that the collection of data becomes part of the process of regeneration itself. This can help to build capacity of local groups and people and galvanise further action in other areas.
- **Prove It!** may be useful as a complement to the ABCD framework (see page 11.).

Potential limitations

- As with all participative forms of evaluation, there is a need for caution in labelling certain people or groups of people as 'local' or representative of 'the community'. There is potential for the exclusion of voices of groups or individuals in the local community as well as the potential for local pressure groups dominating the evaluation.
- A participative process may bias the answers of participants – people may tell you what they think you want to hear.
- **Prove It!** works best if there is a confident member of staff with some experience with working in a participative way with the community and stakeholders involved.
- **Prove It!** seeks to measure only the effects of a particular project or initiative. It may not identify activities within other people's lives that can have an affect on social capital and quality of life in a local area.

Who can use Prove It!?

Any social enterprise or organisation working on projects and initiatives involving a local community can use **Prove It!** It can meet the needs of regeneration and community development organisations, including development trusts.

It works best with smaller projects and less well for large projects or those with no community involvement.

"Prove It! Works best with projects that have a clear aim, a clear start and a clear finish. Harder with bigger projects."

"It's good for longer-term projects because we can track progress over time"

Prove It! may also be useful for project officers from agencies, local government and other decision makers who are likely to commission evaluations of specific initiatives and use the results to inform policy decisions.

What resources are needed?

Leadership

Prove It! requires leadership from someone who will plan and manage its use from start to finish. This role should naturally fall to a project's manager or someone within the organisation who can be the 'evaluation champion'. Because evaluation is necessarily a long-term, on-going process, the champion needs to be able to take responsibility for keeping track of the evaluation with enough information on file so that someone else can continue the process if they have to move on.

Of the three sections of **Prove It!** described above, the Poster Evaluation exercise is the only part that recommends the involvement of an outside facilitator to lead the session. This provides an opportunity for someone not directly involved in the project to review whether the findings from the evaluation make sense.

Proficiencies or skills

No specialist skills are required to use the tool, but it is helpful if the evaluation champion has previous formal or informal experience in collecting and presenting data for monitoring and evaluation, and an understanding of the processes and the problems associated with interviewing. Knowledge of or a background in involving people in participatory processes would also be useful in deciding how to facilitate the participative elements of the tool.

Staff time

Prove It! has been designed to be integral to a project as opposed to something that is undertaken after it has been completed. To avoid any extra burden to staff workloads this must take place as part of existing project activities. Because of the emphasis on self-appraisal (without relying on outside consultants) many of the data collection activities need to be undertaken by staff within the project.

It is vital that at the start of a project (and therefore at the start of its evaluation) the evaluation champion agrees with staff, volunteers or partners the extent to which they will be involved in the evaluation process. An **Evaluation Planning Template** is included in the materials to help guide this discussion. There is no hard and fast rule as to how much time to spend on the evaluation, but best practice suggests using 10 per cent of the initiative's or project's budget or time.

Time to involve the project's beneficiaries, including distribution and collection of questionnaires, or in a **Storyboard** and **Poster Evaluation** session will be required. The original **Prove It!** handbook describes in more detail how to involve local people in shaping and taking part in other aspects of an evaluation.

Courses, support, and information

The **Prove It!** handbook provides useful support and information. **nef** may be able to provide limited telephone and email support if staff are available. The handbook can also be used by evaluators or outside consultants to guide an assisted process.

Development, ownership and support

nef developed the tool with Groundwork UK and Barclays PLC in 2000. The handbook, ***Prove It!*** *Measuring the effect of neighbourhood renewal on local people,* can be downloaded for free from the **nef** website www.neweconomics.org

Social enterprise examples

Some organisations that have used **Prove It!**:

- Groundwork UK
- British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
- British Waterways
- Lea Rivers Trust
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Brinnington Community First SRB (Liverpool)

Further sources of information

The handbook, also includes appendices with further information on indicators, surveys and social capital, of which there is also a rich and varied literature in the public domain.

www.neweconomics.org/gen/newways_proveit.aspx

More information on experiences of using **Prove It!** can be found at www.community.barclays.com or www.groundwork.org.uk

References

1 The AA1000 AS (2003: 5) defines assurance as, "an evaluation method that uses a specified set of principles and standards to assess the quality of a Reporting Organisation's subject matter, such as reports, an the organisation's related systems, processes and competencies that underpin its performance. Assurance includes the communication of the results of this evaluation to provide credibility to the subject matter for its users".

2 AccountAbility defines stakeholders as "those individuals and groups that affect and/or are affected by the organisation and its activities". The AA1000 Framework details how an organisation can map its stakeholders, and build a systematic process of stakeholder engagement. At time of publication, AccountAbility had begun work with the UNEP on a stakeholder handbook and the next module in the AA1000 series, which will focus on stakeholder engagement.

3 The AA1000 Series defines 'accountability' as consisting of: "Transparency: to account to ones stakeholders. Responsiveness: to respond to stakeholder concerns. Compliance: to comply with standards to which one is voluntarily committed, and rules and regulations that one must comply with for statutory reasons. These aspects of accountability may in practice have very different drivers, including legal compliance, stated policy commitments, reputation and risk management, and the company's sense of moral and ethical duty." (AA1000 AS, 2003:33).

4 Organisations adopting the AA1000 AS commit themselves to the practice of 'inclusivity'. In brief, this means an organisation's commitment to identify and understand its performance and impact and associated views of its stakeholders, its commitment to consider and coherently respond to the aspirations and needs of its stakeholders, and its commitment to provide and account to its stakeholders. For more information see www.accountability.org.uk.

5 This list does not represent a hierarchy of assurance.

6 The Big Picture suggests that non-prescriptive changes should relate to the needs of an organisation not an external set of rules laid down by others.

7 Some of the indicators, e.g. those measuring environmental impact, are widely-used standard measures.

8 www.emas.org.uk/

9 The Excellence Model defines 'customer' as "Anyone outside the organisation who receives products, services, or some other benefit form it, such as service users, clients, beneficiaries, members, funders, the general public, other services, stakeholders, and targeted groups."

10 Those results, not covered by Customer, People and Society that it is imperative for the organisation to achieve.

11 EFQM describes this as "managers and leaders set up ways of working that get everyone involved in never-ending improvement in the meeting of internal and external customers' needs".

12 www.bqf.org.uk

13 www.bqf.org.uk/pi_introworkshop.htm

14 www.efqmforum.org/

15 More information about beta™ can be found at: www.cforc.org/organisationalreview/beta.htm

16 EMAS objectives are overall goals; targets are a series of stepping-stones toward these goals. Both elements should be measurable wherever possible.

17 Every Member State has designated a Competent Body that is responsible for registering organisations and for maintaining the list of registered organisations in their country. This is the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) in the UK. www.emas.org.uk

18 This evaluation is based on a survey of 125 Belgian companies in the year 2000. Source: www.inem.org/new_toolkit/comm/environment/emas/toolkit

19 The GRI Guidelines organise 'sustainability reporting' in terms of economic, environmental, and social performance (also know as the triple bottom line). They reflect what the members of the initiative think is currently the most widely accepted approach to defining sustainability. GRI recognises that the definition has its limitations but sees the definition as a starting point that is comprehensible to many and has achieved a degree of consensus as a reasonable entry point into a complex issue. More information on sustainable development can be found in the Guidelines.

20 In the Guidelines, indicators are defined as "a measure of performance, either qualitative or quantitative".

21 For Investors in People, this is anyone who helps the organisation to achieve its objectives – whatever role they play, including part-time workers and voluntary workers. It would also include self-employed people who do a lot of work for the organisation or people on renewable short-term contracts and regular casual employees.

22 An Adviser helps organisations put in place the practices and processes they need in order to gain the maximum benefit from the Standard in a cost-effective way. The Adviser provides client-focused feedback on an on-going basis and works with the Assessor to help customers plan their assessments and reviews. Advisers are licensed practitioners and have to keep up to date with good practice. They must follow a programme of continuous professional development.

23 For further details visit www.investorsinpeoplechampions.co.uk

24 For ISO, 'Management system' refers to the organisation's structure for managing its processes – or activities – that transform inputs of resources into a product or service which meet the organisation's objectives, such as satisfying the customer's quality requirements, complying to regulations, or meeting environmental objectives.

25 The British Standards Institution website also features training information in the UK: British Standards Institution, Tel: 020 8996 9001 www.bsi-global.com

26 When ISO began to develop a set of generic quality management standards for worldwide application, it drew upon existing national standards and military quality assurance specifications. The ISO 9000 'core series' was first published in 1987 and revised, improved editions published in 1994 and 2000.

27 See the Resources book in this toolkit for chart on other consultation methods

28 *All quotes taken from, *'Prove It!: Its development and its potential for evaluating community-based regeneration projects'*, **nef**, to be published 2005.

29 For SIGMA, sustainability may best be defined as the "capacity for continuance into the long-term future". Anything that can go on being done indefinitely is sustainable; anything that cannot is unsustainable.

30 SIGMA identifies a 'business case' for sustainable development: "A body of evidence and arguments highlighting how improved sustainability performance can maximise opportunities and minimise potential risks for an organisation. The SIGMA Guidelines focus on making a business case within a specific organisation."

31 The SIGMA brochure gives a definition of a management system, as "a means by which organisations can formalise, document and improve their management practices. A management system usually incorporates consideration or development of organisational policies, programmes, procedures, structure and resourcing; staff roles, responsibilities and training programmes; operational controls; planning (strategic and operational); internal audits, management reviews, etc. The management system is intended to facilitate the delivery of continual improvement in overall business performance."

32 www.projectsigma.com/default.asp

33 www.bsi-global.com/Seminars/SIGMA/index.xalter for more details.

34 The SIGMA brochure lists a variety of perspectives on 'sustainable development' including: The UK Government's definition in the Sustainable Development Strategy, published in May 1999, that defines sustainable development in terms of four objectives: social progress which recognises the needs of everyone; effective protection of the environment; prudent use of natural resources; and maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

35 The Social Audit Network is a collaboration of individuals that works with many social enterprises and other organisations in the social economy/ third sector.

36 Cost-Benefit Analysis: A method of reaching economic decisions by comparing the costs of doing something with its benefits. The calculation of a benefit to customers accruing from a particular cost; for example, how much extra will consumers pay to get a special service? Is the benefit to be gained from buying that service at a premium price higher than the cost of purchasing the enhanced service? The concept is relatively simple, but difficulty often arises in decisions about which costs to include in the analysis and which benefits to include. CBA also becomes complex when the benefits being measured do not have a price. SROI is one form of cost benefit analysis that tries to address this difficulty by associating some impacts of social enterprises, offerings with monetary values and in the **nef** model values costs and benefits to multiple stakeholders.

37 Discounted Value of Money: a '£' today is worth more than a '£' tomorrow, because its value will have decreased by a certain percentage, known as the discount rate.