

Reflections

A series of insights from our day to day practice

USING WHAT'S ALREADY THERE

We sometimes rush into developing new approaches and tools for collecting data. But often, a lot of the information is already there – we just might not be making the most out of it. In this paper **Julie Meredith** of Cats Protection and **Nicola McIldoon** of CENI consider how they made the most of available data.



Cats Protection

Started in 1927, Cats Protection is now the UK's leading feline welfare charity. It helps over 200,000 cats and kittens every year through a national network of 250 branches, 32 adoption centres and over 100 shops.

The organisation is committed to developing and supporting its huge team of 11,000 volunteers. As part of this, in 2016, it developed a new Volunteer Champions in Practice (VCIP) initiative based on the Investing in Volunteers standard.

VCIP is designed to develop and recognise good volunteer management and leadership across Cats Protection's local networks. It enables volunteer managers to benchmark existing practice and then develop and implement an action plan for improvement.

By late 2017, VCIP had been rolled out across approximately 40 networks, supported by a regional team of Volunteer Best Practice Managers.



find-a-cat

Cats Protection's

Julie: What we wanted

The Volunteer Champions in Practice initiative was a new development for us and we wanted to know whether it was being successful.

We knew that it was not enough to measure success in terms of numbers of volunteers – we wanted to be more outcomes-focused. **VCIP is about behavioural change in terms of how volunteers in local networks are recruited, managed, supported and recognised.** We needed to think about how we would capture that change, and asked CENI to help us develop an impact measurement framework for VCIP. **We thought that we could develop some tools to gather the information needed to tell us how the programme was working.**

Nicola: What to measure?

Through our early discussions with Cats Protection's Head of Volunteering Development, we agreed that the starting point for VCIP was not 'how to measure?' but 'what to measure?'. We needed to clarify what 'making a difference' meant for the programme.

We worked with the regional volunteer management team to think about where change would happen and what this would look like. Obviously, the local volunteer managers were the key beneficiaries – in terms of developing their knowledge, skills and confidence in best practice volunteer management

and leadership. But this would then enable change to happen at other levels – for the local networks/branches, for volunteers themselves and for Cats Protection as an organisation – so we developed an outcomes framework to reflect the wider picture. We agreed on four longer-term impacts linked to the outcomes and connected these with Cat Protection's overall goal.

From there, we identified 'indicators of success' – the things which the team would see, feel or hear if the outcomes were being achieved across the different levels – and suggested possible sources of evidence.



Then the team came together to look at the information which they were already collecting to see where there were any gaps. It was quickly discovered that **much of the evidence was already there – the task was largely about aligning existing data against the outcomes** and fine-tuning some of the VCIP monitoring tools so that they could be used to collect additional information. We also agreed that the outcomes framework would be the basis for a structured review of progress by the team.

Julie: Making best use of resources

In our organisation, we can't ask our beneficiaries – cats and kittens – about what they get out of our service, so thinking about measurement brings its challenges. With VCIP, it was useful for the volunteer management team to think about how what was being done at a local level - and the outcomes we hoped to achieve – was contributing to our overall purpose.

It was also reassuring to find that we didn't necessarily need to go down the route of developing new tools and asking our staff and volunteers to collect yet more data. It was more about thinking differently about the information which was already there.

We were able to see the link between our existing data and the outcomes we were trying to achieve, and then use this to inform our discussions about how the programme was working.



Information



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