

Toynbee Hall, Community Anchors and Impact **Milla Gregor, Evaluation and Research Manager, Toynbee Hall**

1. Toynbee Hall is a multi-purpose community organisation in Tower Hamlets. We have been implementing a series of organisational changes over the last two years in order to become outcomes-focused. We have based our approach on a combination of tools developed by Charities Evaluation Services (Ellis, J, 2005), new economics foundation (nef, 2005), other partner organisations and our own experience.

2. Our evaluation strategy states that we are committed to effective outcomes-focused self-evaluation, and that this is part of a project cycle. We also aim to develop our utilisation practice, so that evaluation (and research) findings are used in development and decision-making.

3. Each project team has a duty to complete certain tasks around planning, monitoring, evaluation and utilisation. Staff at all levels are supported in these processes with both formal and informal capacity building, tools and systems, by the Evaluation and Research team. Key planning tools including:

- Stakeholder mapping
- Setting overall and specific aims, objectives and associated outcomes and outputs
- Mapping these together to create a 'theory of change map'
- Developing outcome and output indicators, and associated measurement tools where appropriate
- Developing a monitoring system and associated monitoring plan
- Putting together an evaluation and utilisation plan

4. The process for this planning is a set of workshops and associated preparation, facilitated by project managers and the Evaluation and Research team. The planning process takes 8 – 12 weeks; the practice runs throughout the year.

5. Milestones to date include:

- Collaboratively setting aims and objectives for all 22 projects, 4 programmes and the organisation as a whole
- Developing indicators, monitoring tools and theories of change for projects where appropriate
- Developing monitoring and evaluation utilisation plans, through both a continuous improvement/reflection project development cycle ('push factor') and an internal performance management 'balanced score-card' system ('pull factor')
- Linking indicators from project through programme up to organisational levels

6. Our commitment to outcomes measurement is in part due to an interest in defining our impact, but also out of a wish to empower staff and service users, report effectively to

funders, and inform a cycle of continuous improvement. We believe that impact measurement must be based on robust outcomes information, in order to be meaningful.

7. We are in some respects a 'community anchor', depending on how that term is interpreted. We welcome feedback on this. 'Community anchors' may have value over and above simply being multi-purpose and local, but unless the model is made explicit and is tested, it will be impossible to assess. We may run the risk of underestimating their value (Thake, 2006), or indeed of over-stating it.

8. We propose that defining specific measurable characteristics (an organisational model) and specific measurable outcome indicators (as part of a change model or theory of change) for 'community anchor' organisations is a necessary first step to understanding their value.

9. There are many different definitions of 'community anchors'. Organisational characteristics that could be used to build a useful model include that they:

- i. 'are controlled by local residents and/or representatives of local groups'
- ii. 'address the needs of their area in a multi-purpose, holistic way'
- iii. 'committed to the involvement of all sections of their community, including marginalised groups'
- iv. 'facilitate the development of the communities in their area'

(Home Office, 2004)

and that they are perceived as:

- v. 'large' (HM Treasury, 2007)
- vi. 'independent' (DCLG, 2007)

and are

- vii. capable of bringing about significant change (in no small part due to their)
- viii. ability to facilitate community voice (Home Office, 2004)

10. Clearly an organisation that met all of these characteristics would be extremely valuable to the community and potentially to local and national Government, in its pursuit of local empowerment and poverty reduction. They would be engines of social capital – if indeed they can be adequately defined, and if robust testing and comparison can prove their value.

11. Toynbee Hall has a reasonable claim to characteristics ii, iii, iv and vi at the current time. We aspire to develop work towards others through local partnerships in the near future.

12. In the interests of promoting practically useful discussion to facilitate this development, we suggest the following desired outcomes for 'community anchor' organisations. The following list is intended solely as a 'straw man', to capture in some way the promise of the 'community anchor', in specific, potentially measurable terms.

For service users:

- More holistic needs assessment
- More holistic and personalised service design
- Greater control over the services they use
- Greater involvement and power in local change
- Greater voice in local and national decision-making
- Better, stronger communities

For funders interested in service delivery:

- More effective service delivery
- More efficient service delivery
- Better 'value for money' (Neitzert & Ryan-Collins, 2009)
- Better needs analysis information

For funders interested in community building, community voice and participative decision-making:

- Better community representation
- Better access to independent 'critical friends'
- Better access to community voice
- A more effective way to facilitate participative decision-making, in order to discharge the duty to involve
- Better community development
- Growth in social capital

For community anchors as organisations:

- Higher quality services
- Better decision-making

14. We suggest that a key outcome from this conference could be agreement on a list of desired outcomes, and a commitment as a group to developing and prioritising appropriate indicators. Otherwise, we may risk being distracted by fashionable political rhetoric – but with it we could drive forward useful strategic change.

15. By specifying an explicit testable USP we could promote its value in the context of Local Area Agreement and Public Service Agreement indicators and 'value for money', in its truest (i.e. long term, holistic) sense (Neitzert & Ryan-Collins, 2009). By working collaboratively with stakeholders to agree a shared vision of desired outcomes and models of change, we could involve funders and commissioners. This will also support public sector commissioners better to understand the benefits of taking an outcomes approach.

16. This collaborative approach to outcomes definition enables a pragmatic partnership on project planning and monitoring, and by extension an agreement on shared values and aspirations. Toynbee Hall has piloted a collaborative approach to outcomes definition within and between projects, although we have up to this point worked with service users and funders in only a limited fashion (we plan to do more). Camden Council also has some experience of the co-production of desired outcomes in partnership with organisations from across different sectors (Harrington & Ryan-Collins, 2009).

17. Some of the challenges which work of this sort would need to address include:

- Buy-in (both internal, and from external development partners and other stakeholders)

- Time and resource costs
- Resistance to change, particularly the practical and systems changes that result from changes to evaluation and monitoring frameworks
- Partnership-building, particularly around outcomes evaluation/success definition, which are inherently political
- Staff and stakeholder capacity-building
- Measurement tool and monitoring system development
- Fit with other strategic planning and decision-making processes
- Issues of power, particularly around the control and use of information as it is produced and analysed.

18. All evaluation, and particularly outcomes-focused evaluation, is inherently political. This is an opportunity to bring in those stakeholders who wish to influence the work, or contract through 'community anchors', such as those involved in Local Strategic Partnerships. Through making them part of a process of co-production we can develop meaningful partnership.

19. In summary therefore, in order for a case to be made for the special nature of 'community anchor' organisations, we need to work in partnership to agree the following shopping list:

- A testable organisational model
- Desired outcomes
- Measurable indicators for these outcomes
- A committed partnership to manage and drive forward this process

This conference is an ideal opportunity to form the right group of stakeholders to drive this process forward. We welcome feedback, and suggestions for how this can be done in partnership.

References

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