



Professional Matters

Neal Anderson
- IOL Professional Standards Manager

For many individuals and providers, Spring will represent a new start and a fresh team. Whether that is physically or mentally, the changing colours of the season can signify an increase in energy and enthusiasm for working with new clients, trusted groups, and energised staff teams. Desired outcomes are set, but...

How will you know if your participants have achieved the outcomes of a session? How do you know if your team has the required knowledge and skills to be competent? How do you know when you have learned something?

The answer to these questions is of course to collect evidence of learning. It is something all instructors, leaders and teachers naturally do and have been doing throughout their career. Evidence comes in different kinds at different levels and can be collected in two main methods, direct and indirect.

Direct Evidence

Tangible, visible, and self-explanatory evidence of what participants have and haven't learned. For example:

- Observing a participant performing a taught skill such as belaying a peer, performing a transect, using a J stroke, lighting a fire, etc.
- Review questions that link directly to desired outcomes. E.g. "what factors would you take into account when planning an expedition?"
- A staff member achieving a qualification or award in a subject or activity
- A personal reflection on values, attitudes and beliefs (if developing those is an intended outcome)

Indirect Evidence

Signs that imply participants have probably learnt, but the evidence of exactly what they have been learning is less clear. For example:

- Number of hours spent on an activity, subject or session
- Rebooking rates for a particular programme
- A staff member with 10 years experience with a particular client group
- Feedback from participants to an open question. E.g. "how was that?"

Whatever form of evidence is captured, you must decide its importance and weight. For example, if the outcome of a session is "to have an enjoyable first



experience of caving” then you might place importance on the direct evidence of the group members smiling, asking questions and laughing during the session as well as the indirect evidence of booking a follow-on experience.

The Rules of Evidence

When making decisions about the quality of evidence gathered, the “rules of evidence” are a useful set of principles to apply. Some questions to ask when looking at the value of a piece of evidence are:

- **Fair – Did everyone have an equal chance to provide evidence?**
- **Authentic – Is the evidence from the participants you are assessing?**
- **Valid – Is the evidence you have relevant to what you want to assess?**

- **Current – Is the evidence from this particular session/ programme?**
- **Sufficient – Has it happened enough times, is the evidence repeatable?**
- **Reliable – Would an equivalent colleague make the same assessment?**

In the outdoor sector, assessing evidence is a core skill for practitioners and leaders. Assessing evidence is also central to the RPIOL / APIOL / LPIOL process where the team of coaches and assessors help candidates gather and demonstrate meeting the criteria. The passion and expertise of IOL members to effectively capture, assess and celebrate what people can do helps us make the biggest impact in our work on an individual, local and national level.

Reflection:

Do you plan how you will gather evidence of meeting outcomes in advance or do you tend to rely on experience to guide you?

How often do you stop and reflect on how well the evidence you gather is matched to assessing whether participants are achieving the desired outcomes?

What is your organisations approach to gathering and assessing evidence that the individuals and groups you work with have achieved the agreed goals and outcomes? ■