CONDUCTING AN ASSESSMENT

1. WHO CONDUCTS THE ASSESSMENT?
   The assessment can be conducted as a self-assessment, peer assessment or external assessment. *Self-assessment* is conducted by the entire work community/actors of network. Each member of the work community/network completes their own personal assessment, after which the entire work community/network gets together to discuss the joint assessment. The decision-making process is based on reaching a consensus, meaning that the common values of the work community/network are not decided by a vote but through joint negotiations. *Peer assessment* is conducted by two employees/volunteers of another Meeting and Playing Place. *External assessment* refers to a situation in which a pair of third-party assessors conducts the assessment. This pair can consist of Family centre employees, administrative staff of support organisations or, for example, employees of a nearby youth centre, who may have experience conducting similar assessments. Experience has shown that a pair of assessors might be more appropriate than a single assessor. A team of three assessors is also an option, but it requires more staff resources than a single assessor.

2. ASSESSMENT GOALS
   The primary goal of the assessment is to improve the Meeting and Playing Place being assessed. In other words, the goal is not to rank M&P Places from best to worst but to provide support for the actors of the M&P Places so that they can develop their activities. Peer assessments help actors identify their strengths and areas for improvement, which they may not always notice or address as an 'internal operator'.

   Different locations have different strengths, and the assessment tool may provide an opportunity for benchmarking as for peer learning.

   When assessments are carried out regularly (once a year or every other year), they make it possible for Meeting and Playing Place actors to keep track of their development.

   Assessment is a quality assurance tool. It offers quantitative data – a numeric value based on external observations – about how successful a Meeting and Playing Place is at meeting the objectives set for its activities. As such, it is also a qualitative indicator for financiers, partners and support organisations.

   Finally, the assessment tool can also be used in the orientation of new actors/employees/volunteers, as it provides information about what the role is like, what kind of strengths should be developed and what kind of areas for improvement should be addressed first.

3. PEER AND EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS
   3.1. Preparation
   The assessors are given the assessment material and goals of the Meeting and Playing Place in advance so that they can go through them carefully. The assessors will also visit

the Meeting and Playing Place's website and go through any other up-to-date materials about the activities in advance.

Assessors working in pairs agree on the division of responsibilities with their partner. It can be a good idea to agree on what key criteria for each assessor is in charge of.

3.2. Collecting materials

Initial and final meetings are held with the actors of Meeting and Playing Place. At first, the actors will be told about the assessment procedure and asked general questions, and in the end, the assessors will review matters which were not observed but without giving any feedback.

The assessment materials include:

- Discussing with staff members/actors/volunteers, others
- Observing activities
- Discussing with visitors
- Materials on the website and other communications channels of the Meeting and Playing Place

The actors of the Meeting and Playing Place have their own duties to take care of – namely, they are there for the visitors who are participating in activities held at the M&P Place – so assessors must be subtle and not disturb activities when conducting the assessment. The most important aspect of collecting data is observing. Assessors must discuss with the visitors and actors sensitively and when a natural opportunity arises. The assessor's mission is to be a situationally aware observer – not a consultant or a promoter of their own experiences.

The time required for collecting the materials is about two hours. Halfway through the process, the assessors can get together to find out what materials they still need and to decide who will collect what.

Notes are taken throughout the entire observation process; for example, next to the criterion in question in the criteria form.

3.3. Compiling the assessment

Once they have collected all the materials, the pair of assessors will go to a private location where they will first present their own assessments one criterion at a time. After this, each criterion is individually reviewed and a joint assessment is agreed upon and drawn up. 'Strengths' and 'areas for improvement' are recorded in the summary form in full sentences and by both assessors.

'Areas for improvement' is the most challenging section, and the items listed under it must be based on the collected materials. When recording areas for improvement, assessors should provide honest (no sugar-coating of the observations for colleagues) and constructive (positive ideas for improvement rather than overly negative critique) feedback. Areas for improvement must be clearly expressed avoiding phrases such as "would need to be done" and "should".

It takes about one to two hours to compile the findings into an assessment.

3.4. Giving feedback

Reserve an hour for giving feedback. When giving feedback, the employees, other actors and coordinator of the Meeting and Playing Place should be present as a minimum, but other managers may also attend the discussion. Schedule permitting, a copy of the assessment form can be handed out to everyone who has been assessed before the feedback discussion.

The assessors’ attitude must be polite, respectful and encouraging – again, this is not the time to play the role of consultant. However, if the situation is appropriate for it, the assessors may talk about their own experiences related to matters addressed in the feedback.

The feedback discussion starts with strengths, which are then followed by areas for improvement. Areas for improvement must be described in a constructive manner, such as “It would be even better if you could...” If necessary, the list of criteria can be reviewed with the employees of the M&P Place. However, the time allocated for the feedback discussion will most likely be spent on discussing the strengths and areas for improvement, which is the main goal. The assessors must be able to justify their assessments and grades based on the materials they have collected.

If new points are raised during the feedback discussion, the assessors must be prepared to amend their assessments. The final assessment form is not given to the Meeting Place until any amendments have been completed. In this sense, the feedback discussion can be seen as a part of the assessment process.

Ideally, the assessors will discuss what measures the Meeting Place aims to take and on which schedule based on the assessment already given during the feedback session.