



Outcome Measures – meeting the evidence requirements

AHSW FACT SHEET

Arts & Health South West Fact Sheets provide you with a summary of information on a given subject based on a Frequently Asked Questions format. They also provide you with signposting for further research.

What are Outcomes?

*'Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as result of services and activities provided by an organisation.'*¹

On the Charities Evaluation Service website www.ces-vol.org.uk you can find the CES planning triangle which clearly explains the relationship between Aims, Objectives, Outcomes and Outputs.

What are Outcome Indicators?

*'Outcome indicators are pieces of information that show whether the expected outcomes have occurred. They can be qualitative or quantitative.'*²

- It is worth thinking about how to measure outcomes early on – this helps projects to gather the right data at the right time and set baselines if possible.
- Beware of mixing up participant feedback – which is often about what they liked or didn't like about an activity - and more outcome focused questions such as 'What are you doing differently?' 'What has changed?'
- It can be useful to identify a range of indicators – for example some quantitative, some qualitative, some participant focused and some independent observer focused.
- Qualitative data provides an insight into peoples' experiences, perspectives and attitudes. Qualitative impacts are often referred to as 'soft' outcomes as they are subjective, often intangible and more difficult to measure than quantitative or 'hard' outcomes.

¹ Definition from Charities Evaluation Service www.ces-vol.org.uk

² Definition from Charities Evaluation Service www.ces-vol.org.uk

- Examples of soft outcomes are self-reported accounts of confidence and skill, subjective assessments of personal wellbeing and observations of phenomena such as social cohesion. Soft outcomes are sometimes incorporated into evaluation to chart people's progress or distance travelled.
- Distance travelled refers to the individual's progress from their particular starting point or baseline, as opposed to the achievement of 'hard' outcomes. The progress made by individuals may be as important as the achievement of 'hard outcomes' or even more so. Using a narrow definition of health or wellbeing which requires the achievement of 'hard' outcomes may mean that opportunities to show real progress are missed.

Why measure Outcomes?

- Outcomes will help demonstrate what has been achieved, inform learning, improve project delivery and ensure quality.
- The NHS is moving towards outcomes and away from targets. The NHS Outcomes Framework is the first of its kind for the NHS, moving the focus on to the issues that patients care about most. Download the framework at the Department of Health website, under Publications: www.dh.gov.uk
- The IDE&A (The Local Government Improvement and Development Agency) launched an interim outcomes framework for culture and sport in September 2010. They state that more than ever before, the current budget situation means culture and sport must demonstrate the contribution the sector makes to better outcomes for individuals, communities and places³.
- Outcomes may also be set to help demonstrate to commissioners and funders that you have fulfilled their requirements. There is an increased focus on outcomes amongst funders and the decision of the [Big Lottery Fund](#) to build all their future grant-making around outcomes will intensify and increase these developments.
- Information about outcomes achieved can also be used to demonstrate the project's success and potential to future funders and commissioners.

How do I start?

- It is important to set outcomes that are achievable and realistic (or SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound)
- There is an up to date summary and a list of tools on the National Council for Voluntary Organisations website www.ncvo-vol.org.uk under measuring impact in the section on Advice and Support (search for measuring impact)
- The Charities Evaluation Service website www.ces-vol.org.uk also lists sources of outcomes measurement tools under Outcomes Resources.
- You might find it useful to look at the Outcomes Star as a tool for supporting and measuring change www.outcomesstar.org.uk. There are Outcomes Stars for

³ www.idea.gov.uk

measuring well-being, empowerment or mental health amongst other areas and Outcomes Stars specifically for a range of vulnerable groups.

- IDe&A have produced a guide to developing a Local Outcomes Framework for culture and sport. Go to Knowledge and then Culture and Sport at www.idea.gov.uk

Some points to think about

- Clarity about desired outcomes is essential. What exactly do we want to achieve? What change do we want to effect?
- What will progress towards final outcomes look like? What are the staging posts and way markers? Outcome measurement should consider not only the final outcome but intermediate outcomes too.
- Outcome measurement should be central to your evaluation but you will also need to record information about your outputs – for example how many people were involved, what activities they did and what the end product was. This helps to give a broader picture of **what the project did** whereas the outcomes focus on **what changed as a result of the project**.

Involving participants in planning your Outcomes Measurement

- It may not always be appropriate to talk to participants about outcomes at the start but, if it is, it can be a valuable way of setting outcomes and how they can be measured. The core question to ask your participants is **What changes would you like to see as a result of this activity and how would we recognise those changes?**
- INVOLVE www.involve.org.uk produces many useful publications about public participation

Influencing/Informing/Shaping External Environments

- Think about who to send reports to. This can be more than just partners, stakeholders and funders.
- It is important to share evaluation findings widely – particularly if they are robust evaluation findings as this helps build and share the evidence base.
- Consider submitting your findings to peer reviewed journals and other professional journals.

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GLOSSARY

There is an excellent Jargon buster which you can download free from the Charities Evaluation Services website www.ces-vol.org.uk . Here is a glossary of words used in this fact sheet.

- Aims** Particular changes or differences the project or organisation plans to bring about for its users.
- Baseline** Information about the situation that a group is trying to change, showing what it is like before they intervene.
- Distance Travelled**
Distance travelled refers to the progress made by an individual from their particular starting point or baseline
- Indicators** Well defined information which shows whether something is happening.
- Inputs** The resources that are to be used to run a service, project or programme; the money, people, facilities, equipment.
- Objectives** The areas of activity or practical steps a project or organisation plans to accomplish its aims.
- Outcomes** The changes, benefits, learning or other effects that result from what the project or organisation makes, offers or provides.
- Outcome Measure**
This is similar to an indicator; an indicator is something you can observe or measure
- Outputs** Products, services or facilities that result from an organisation's or project's activities
- Qualitative Information**
Information about what you do, achieve or provide that tells you the nature of the thing you are doing, providing or achieving.
- Quantitative Information**
Information about what you do, achieve or provide that tells you how many, how long or how often you have done it, achieved it or provided it.
- Stakeholder**
Person, group or organisation that has a direct or indirect stake in an organisation or project because it can affect or be affected by its actions, objectives or policies.

Target A defined level of achievement which a project or organisation sets itself to achieve in a specific period of time.