

## OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

### Overview



*“Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?”*

*“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to”, said the cat.*

*“I don’t much care where –“ said Alice.*

*“Then it doesn’t much matter which way you go”, said the cat.*

*Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll*

Understanding outcomes and evaluation in relation to your project is as simple as knowing ‘where you want to get to’, and being able to tell how far you’ve gone along the journey.

There is a lot of complex jargon that goes alongside this very simple concept. You need to understand this language because funders are using it more and more. You need to be able to explain your work in the same terms so that funders can see why they should be interested in you.

In this topic we show you what the key words mean, and how they relate to each other. If you come on the ‘Outcomes and Evaluation’ course, you will have a chance to apply the concepts to your own project and begin to plan your own project evaluation. You will also look at how to link your outcomes to funders’ outcomes to increase your chances of success.

This information will help you follow good practice with project planning as all projects should be monitored and evaluated even if your funder is only asking for maybe a one page report at the end of each project year.

### When do you need it?

Ideally, you need to plan your evaluation before you start work on your project. It is much easier at this stage, as you can plan how you will collect information about your work before you start doing it, and build this into your everyday activities.

Project already going strong? Don’t panic! It’s not too late to think about your outcomes and to plan your evaluation.

## What you need to know

### Why do it?

Because funders want us to, yes – but ALSO – and more IMPORTANTLY – it helps us to:

- Learn from experience
- Share learning with others
- Check progress
- Check whether there is still a need or demand for what we do
- Identify our strengths and weaknesses
- Inform future planning
- Demonstrate effective use of time and money
- Show and celebrate what we have achieved.

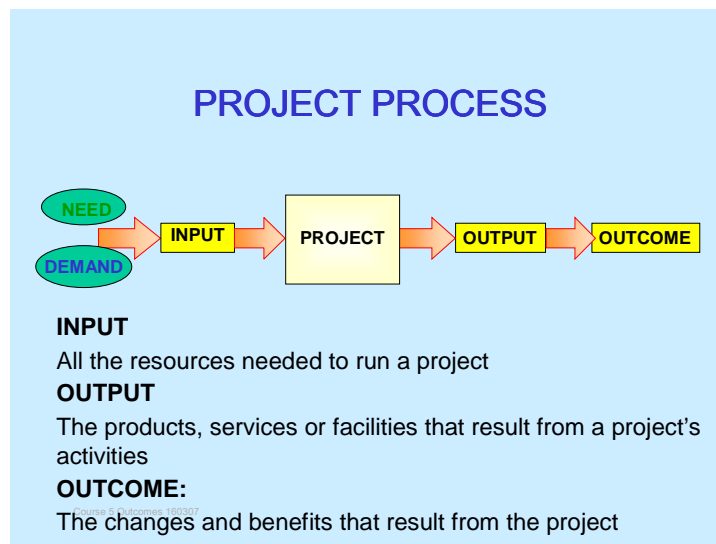
All funders have different requirements for monitoring and evaluation so you need to make sure, before you make an application, that you are aware of what they will be asking from you and then ensure that you follow their guidelines when the project is up and running.

### Definitions

**Monitoring** - Collecting and recording information in a routine and systematic way to check progress against plans and enable evaluation



**Evaluation** – using information from monitoring and elsewhere to judge the performance of an organisation or project



**Milestone** – a significant step towards achieving your outcomes – in other words, a time line.

For example, secure funding by December, recruit a Development Officer by March, advertise the service in doctors' surgeries and libraries in March, 20 people attending the courses by June.

**Indicators** – information that shows that the outcomes have been achieved.

For example, reduced number of hospital admissions, reduced number of incidents reported to the police, increased number of people with learning disabilities in employment or training.

**Hard outcomes** – quantifiable results – usually straightforward to identify and measure – 'counting things'.

For example, 10 people gained an OCN qualification or 5 people entered paid employment.

**Soft outcomes** – indicate 'distance travelled' – stepping-stones towards a hard outcome. These are often about changes in attitudes or skills, and are usually harder to define and measure than hard outcomes.

For example, increased confidence, reduced isolation.

**Smart outcomes** – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, with a timescale.

For example, 20 young people in Harrogate will have entered full time employment by March 2008.

**Baseline** – a comparative measure taken at the beginning of your project so you can compare future measurements and work out what has changed – are things better or worse?

**Benchmark** – another comparative measure but this time looking at what other projects like yours are achieving – are you doing as well or better than them?

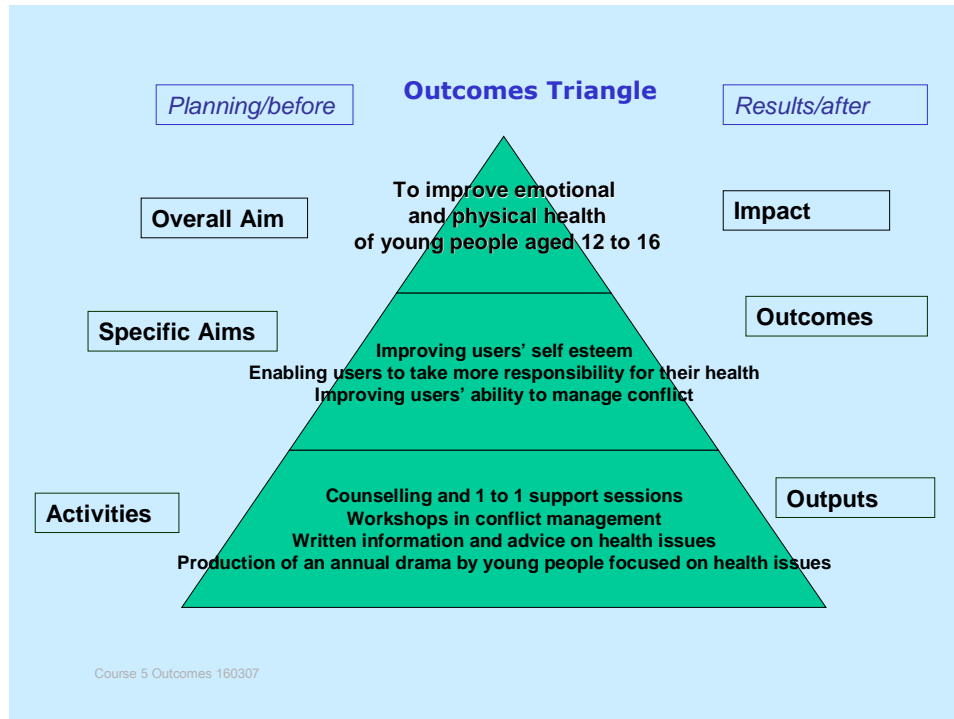


Every organisation has an **overall aim** or sense of purpose for what it does. For most voluntary and community organisations, this will be set out in its **governing document or constitution**. It defines in broad terms what it is trying to achieve.

Underpinning the overall aim, most organisations will have a number of **specific aims** that describe more closely defined changes that the organisation is trying to bring about. These link directly to the '**outcomes**' or changes that the organisation is trying to achieve.

There will then be a number of **activities** relating to each specific aim. The activities are what you actually do, and result in **outputs**.

Most of us find it very easy to talk about our activities and outputs, as these are what we are busy with every day. But when we evaluate, we need to focus on outcomes, and on whether we have managed to bring about the positive changes described in our organisation's specific aims. (It is usually not a good idea to try to evaluate progress against an overall aim as these tend to be stated very broadly and will be very difficult to assess.)



### Measuring outcomes

Measuring outcomes involves choosing the right indicators that will tell you something about whether the change you want to see is happening. Hard outcomes are obvious things that are easy to count (for example, if the outcome you are after is less vandalism in your area, a suitable indicator could be the numbers of incidents reported to the police or Council). Soft outcomes are usually to do with changes in how people feel, and are harder to measure (for example, if the outcome you want is for people to feel safer in a particular area, you will need to find ways of measuring how safe people feel).

The training course on Outcomes and Evaluation shows you how to measure hard and soft outcomes in your project.

### Linking your outcomes to funders' outcomes

Many funders now identify the outcomes they want to achieve through their funding – that is, the change they want to bring about in the world through giving you money to do particular things.

They will want to know how the thing you want them to fund will help them to meet their outcomes. It can be difficult to do this if you only talk about your activities and outputs – what you do. But if you talk about your outcomes – which are really about why you do what you do – then it is easier to show how the change you want to achieve is the same (or contributes to) the change they want to achieve. The better you can make the match, the more likely you are to get funding.

Your evaluation will help you to show how good you are at bringing about the desired change, and give you lots of useful information to help you do even better in the future!

## **CONCLUSION**

You should now have a clearer idea about how to measure outcomes and how to evaluate your project. If you attend Course Five of the Funding Training Programme you will be able to acquire a deeper understanding of this information and how you can apply this to your own organisation.

Your local Funding Adviser is available to support you on a one to one basis with monitoring and evaluation. They can also help you to develop your project, research the right funder, plan a funding strategy, and give you advice about any funding applications you would like to submit. Visit the contacts page of this website for the contact details of your local Funding Adviser so you can make an appointment with them.

Also, download the other factsheets in this website to assist you along the other fundraising steps.