England

Your project and its outcomes

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Charities Evaluation Services

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Contents

Introduction
Outcomes and the Big Lottery Fund

Many voluntary sector organisations are familiar with describing what they do and identifying who they work with. But you also need to identify the changes that come about from the work you do. We call these 'outcomes'.

We want to show that our grants are making a difference and bringing about changes in people's lives. So in our grant-making we are now emphasising the difference our grants make.

Defining your outcomes

We want you to define the outcomes you expect from your project. As a result, you should think about outcomes when you are planning your project. Identifying the outcomes you want to bring about will help you decide what work you should do and what services and activities you need funding for. We have taken most of the examples in this booklet from projects we have funded. We have chosen them to help you think about your own outcomes.

Information on outcomes will help you to show us – and your other funders – that our money is making a difference. It will also help you to plan, develop and improve your work.

This guide

We have produced this guide to help you describe the outcomes you want your project to achieve. It will also help you to define and assess the outcomes of your project. We have split the guide into four parts.

- Part one explains what outcomes are.
- Part two shows you how to identify outcomes for your project.
- Part three explains how you can show that you are making progress towards your outcomes.
- Part four explains how you can show that your outcomes have been achieved.

Part one

What are outcomes?

Defining the terms

Aims: your aims are the areas of change you intend to achieve through your project and which stem directly from the needs of your clients.

Outcomes are all the changes and effects that actually happen as a result of your work, expected or unexpected, welcome or unwelcome. The outcomes you hope to see are all the specific changes that will help you to achieve your aims.

Different projects – different outcomes

There are many kinds of outcomes, but we are most likely to fund projects bringing about long-term change for:

- individuals
- families
- communities
- organisations.

But projects can have outcomes elsewhere, for example, in the environment or in a shift in government policy.

Outcomes in individuals

Many projects we fund work with individuals. We can often see outcomes in a change in an individual's:

- skills or ability
- knowledge
- attitude
- self-confidence
- self-image
- relationships
- behaviour
- circumstances
- health.

These are some examples of individual outcomes:

- increased knowledge of services available
- greater self-esteem
- improved relationships
- reduced offending behaviour
- being rehoused.

Outcomes can also be seen in volunteers, as well as clients.

Case study: individual outcomes

The Advocacy Service

The project

The older people's advocacy service has several paid workers and many volunteers. They provide information, support and skills to help people make their own choices.

Aim

To enable older people to get the information and services they want and need to live independently.

Outcomes

Older people using the service will:

- be more able to identify their own needs and consider a range of solutions
- have more confidence in communicating with professionals
- have increased independence and be less likely to have to go into care.

Outcomes for groups of people

Outcomes in communities

The range of outcomes in communities will depend on the work of the project. Examples of community outcomes are:

- more people using recycling facilities to get rid of their household waste
- less fear of crime
- a reduction in vandalism.

Case study: community outcomes

The Village Hall

The project

The old village hall will be replaced with a new purpose-built hall. This will enable a wider range of activities to take place. Planned activities include an older people's lunch club, a youth club and evening classes.

Project aim

To improve the quality of village life, especially for older and young people.

Outcomes

- Older people will feel less isolated.
- Local children and young people will make new friends and develop social and practical skills.
- Local people will gain new skills and qualifications.
- Local people will become more involved in community activities.

Outcomes in organisations

Outcomes may come about in your own organisation, for example:

- better-trained volunteers
- more time spent on working directly with clients.

As a result of your activities, outcomes may come about for other organisations working in your area. For example, the number of their clients may go up or down.

Some organisations do not target individuals — their clients are other organisations. We call these 'second-tier' organisations. Most of their outcomes will be 'organisational outcomes'.

Outcomes in policy

Some projects try to change local or national policy. Examples of policy outcomes are:

- a new local authority policy on rehousing homeless people
- a new government policy on encouraging disabled people to vote in national and local elections.

Case study: organisational outcomes

The Second Tier Organisation

The project

The Second Tier Organisation offers training, information, support and networking opportunities to Black and minority ethnic (BME) organisations. It also supports the BME Alliance to increase the local voice of BME organisations.

Overall aim

To develop a stronger BME sector.

Outcomes for BME organisations

BME organisations will:

- manage resources better
- have reduced staff turnover
- secure funding for projects
- be able to contribute to, and affect, local initiatives
- get more involved in policy issues
- communicate more effectively at all levels.

Outcomes for policy

- Government programmes have greater focus on the needs of BME communities.
- Any consultation carried out is more representative of the BME sector.

A variety of outcomes for a single project

A single project may have outcomes in several places. In the case study below, the Family Centre has identified outcomes that affect children, their parents and the schools the children go to.

Case study: a number of different outcomes

The Family Centre

The project

The Family Centre offers a home visit and playwork scheme providing support to parents and their children. Their overall project aim is to help children reach their potential through family support. They have identified the following outcomes for children, parents and schools. Thinking about who your work will affect and how it will affect them is important. It will suggest what information to collect and where to look for it.

Child outcomes

The outcomes for children may include:

- increased confidence
- the improved ability to read, write and communicate.

Family outcomes

The outcomes for the family may include:

- less conflict at home
- improved relationships.

School outcomes

The outcomes for the school may include:

- improved relationships with parents
- less pressure on teachers.

Why are outcomes important?

Improving your work

Information on outcomes can help make your work more effective. It can help you identify what works well and what you could change or improve. If you hold a grant from us, it should also help you to report back to us more effectively on how well your project is going.

If you do not achieve the outcomes you expected, you may need to think about changing your services. Or you may have to think again about what your project outcomes should be.

Take the example of a training project for homeless people. Your intended outcomes might be that trainees know more about the welfare benefits system and increase their take-up of benefits. If nobody on the course improved their knowledge, it might be that those taking part already knew enough, so they did not need help. In this case, the intended outcome would need to change. Or, it might be that the training itself needed to change, to bring about the expected increase in knowledge.

In this way, using information on outcomes will give you evidence to help you plan. This will help you develop services based on what you actually know works to meet your clients' needs rather than what you think works.

Other benefits

There can be other benefits to collecting information on outcomes.

1. A shared understanding of what you expect the project to achieve can contribute to a sense of purpose for your whole team.
2. It can be encouraging for staff to see evidence of the outcomes of their work and for clients to see their own progress.
3. Planning your project around what you know works could make your organisation more effective and efficient in the long run. Collecting only the information that you need could reduce the time you spend on monitoring.
4. Gathering information on project outcomes may help you prove to other funders that your organisation is a learning organisation — one that learns from its experience to develop and improve.
5. You may be able to use outcome monitoring as part of your routine work. For example, you may already keep case records of individual progress. Think about ways of collecting information that will be useful for both recording this information and monitoring the outcomes.

There will be outcomes from your work, whether you identify them clearly beforehand or not. However, if you clearly identify your desired outcomes right from the start, you will be able to plan your work better and satisfy the expectations of your funders.

Part two

How to identify your outcomes

Step one – involve other people

People with an interest in your project may include staff, management committee members, clients or funders. And, they may all think differently about which outcomes are important. For example, your clients may have a number of different views about what would make the project successful. These may also be different from your management committee's views.

You might find it helpful to consult a range of people before deciding what outcomes you will monitor. By involving other people, you are likely to increase their understanding of outcomes and their commitment to collecting information about them.

Step two – relate outcomes to the funded project

What is the funding for?

Think about what is being funded and why. If you have received the grant for a small project within your organisation, you need to report on the outcomes of the project itself, not on those of the organisation as a whole.

What is the project for?

Outcomes relate to your project aims. Your aims are the areas of change you intend to achieve through your project and stem directly from the needs of your clients. Outcomes are all the changes and effects that actually happen as a result of your work, expected or unexpected, welcome or unwelcome. The outcomes you hope to see are all the specific changes that will help you to achieve your aims.

You may find it helpful to look at your project aims when identifying outcomes. If you met those aims, what changes or effects would you see? However, be careful. Your current aims may not reflect the main priorities for the project. Many project aims are out of date, or inadequate, because they do not express a change, but simply describe the project's services.

Timescale

Think about what outcomes you can achieve in the lifetime of the project. For some projects, some longer-term outcomes may be hard to achieve in the funding period.

Step three – developing outcomes

Follow these three points below when you develop outcomes.

1. Think about the changes you'd like to see

Ask yourself what changes would make you think, 'We've been successful and made a difference'? Think about the clients who might use your project. You could imagine a 'typical' client when they first come to you. What are they like? What needs do they have? Then imagine that person leaving the project. If your work with them has gone well, what are they like now? How might their circumstances or behaviour have changed?

Not all outcomes are changes. For example, some outcomes may involve keeping a situation the same, or preventing someone from being harmed. These outcomes are still the effects of your project. If your project had not taken place, something else would have happened.

Think about what changes could happen before you reach your final outcome. Remember also the different ways in which outcomes can occur. Have you covered all the outcomes that are important to your project?

You will need to describe your outcomes to your funder. Keep the wording of your outcomes simple and clear. Describe each outcome individually and avoid repetition. This will make it much easier for you and the funder to be clear about what you want to happen and how you will collect information about it.

2. Prepare for negative outcomes
The outcomes you are working for will be positive changes. However, there may also be an outcome you don't want.

For example, your youth club may get a new building. As a result, more young people come to it and benefit from activities. However, more young people in the area may result in complaints from local people.

The youth club could think ahead and involve local people when planning its services. This could stop these complaints from happening.

3. Prioritise
There may be many outcomes of your work, but we advise you only to collect information on the most important ones. To keep things simple, you need to prioritise your main outcomes – the ones that tell you most about your progress. Remember that we will not expect you to collect a large amount of information. For small projects, we may only want details of one or two outcomes.

How you can track progress towards achieving outcomes

Once you have decided on your planned outcomes, you need a way track your progress towards achieving them. Setting and monitoring milestones and targets will help you and your funders to know if the project is on course to be successful and will act as indicators of possible problems early on.

Defining the terms

Milestones are essential steps that you will take along the way to successfully achieving each outcome. They help you to know whether you will get the planned result. They may include key activities or tasks, the services or facilities you will provide, or changes that happen on the way to achieving your outcomes. Milestones should have timescales for achievement to help track your project progress.

Targets show the level or extent to which you expect to achieve your outcomes and/or the milestones. They will usually contain numbers, for example the number or proportion of people who experience the desired change or effect. Targets should also indicate the degree of change expected. For example, 50 people feeling very much less isolated, doubling their circle of friends, may be a more significant outcome than 75 people feeling less isolated.

Setting targets

When you decide on your planned outcomes, identify the level or extent to which you expect to achieve your outcomes. For example, a housing project used their previous experience to set the following targets.

- 60 per cent of people will continue to live independently.
- 25 per cent will take part in computer training and achieve a certificate.
- 25 per cent will start voluntary work or some sort of activity in the community.

When setting your targets, it is important to remember that not everyone who takes part in your project activities will achieve the desired outcomes. People may drop out of training courses or carry on taking drugs after counselling.

Setting targets will help you to track your outcomes. This in turn will make it easier to assess the progress your project is making towards achieving aims.

Case study – setting targets

The Sheltered Employment Project

The project

The employment project provides training, work experience and employment for people with learning disabilities. They want to work with 100 people over the life of the project.

Project aim

To develop the skills of people with special needs so that they are better able to do paid work.

Outcomes	Targets
People will have improved social skills.	80 people
People will have gained basic qualifications.	50 people

Milestones – steps on the way

Key activities, tasks, services or facilities

There will be things that you will need to have done before you are able to achieve your outcomes. Key tasks and activities could include employing a new member of staff or creating training materials. Key services might be training courses or support sessions that users will attend.

These can all be used as milestones to help you track the progress of your project. It's particularly important to tell us about the key milestones that are crucial to making outcomes happen. It may be useful to record the numbers of people who will use a service or have access to facilities, as this might be a helpful comparison with those who actually achieve the outcome.

Changes on the way

Your project may bring about some changes before you reach your final outcomes. These changes can be used as milestones to help you track the progress of your project. For example, someone who uses a drugs project is likely to change in various ways before they stop using drugs (the desired outcome). They will want to give up, be confident that they can, and know how to do so. In this case, you could mention increased motivation, confidence and knowledge as some of your milestones.

Case studies – setting milestones

These case studies show the relationship between outcomes, targets and milestones and how tasks, services and changes on the way can all be used as milestones.

The Training Service
The project

The Training Service is an employment project, working with socially disadvantaged people. It offers training courses and individual support. The service can identify many changes that its clients go through.

Project aim

To reduce social exclusion

Outcomes	Targets	Milestones	Timescales
Users gain qualifications	65 users gain qualifications.	Plan and promote training programme (task) Programme of training provided to 100 users (service)	December 2004 By end of each project year
Users have increased work skills	15 users gain employment	Users have improved job search skills (change on the way)	End of job-search training
Users have improved motivation and aspirations	20 per cent of users demonstrate improved motivation and aspirations by taking up further education or training opportunities	Provide one to one support sessions for users (service). Users have improved confidence and self-esteem (change on the way)	Monthly After six months on the programme

Second Tier Organisation

The project

The second tier organisation offers training information, support and networking opportunities to Black and minority ethnic (BME) organisations. It also supports the BME Alliance to increase the local voice of BME organisations.

Project aim

To develop a stronger BME sector.

Outcomes	Targets	Milestones	Timescales
BME organisation will reduce staff turnover	20 organisations reduce their staff turnover	Provide training on staff development for 50 organisations	Every six months
BME organisation contribute to and affect local initiatives	One member organisation on each Local Strategic Partnership subcommittee	Representative of Local Strategic Partnerships to give a presentation to members	September 2004

Part four

How to show that your outcomes have been achieved

As well as tracking progress towards achieving outcomes you will need to provide evidence to show whether or not the planned outcomes were achieved. You need to decide what information to collect, how and when.

Step one: decide what information to collect

Identify the information you need

You now need to identify what information will show whether or not your project has achieved its outcomes. For this you will need to set outcome indicators. These show that the outcome has happened, or that you are making progress towards it.

Outcome indicators can be:

- quantitative – where you count numbers of things that happen, such as the number of people who found jobs following some computer training; or
- qualitative – where you assess people's views and experiences, such as how safe older people feel going out at night.

You are likely to find many possible indicators for each outcome. Only use the most important ones.

Case study: indicators

The Training Service

Outcomes	Indicators
Users have increased work skills	Levels of punctuality How often people attend Ability to communicate appropriately with colleagues Ability to complete tasks
Users have improved motivation and aspirations	Ability to describe own skills How far clients express a desire for change Level of interest in education or employment
Users gain qualifications	Number of clients gaining qualifications

Use your existing systems and information wherever possible

You might already have some monitoring systems in your current work. Many organisations find that they are collecting information on outcomes already, without realising it. Look at the indicators you have chosen, and identify those that:

- you are already collecting information for
- you can adapt your current system of collecting information to
- you need to find a new way of collecting the information for.

Step two – decide how to collect your information

There are a number of different ways of collecting information on outcomes. Further information on collecting information can be found in Ellis, J Practical monitoring and evaluation, Charities Evaluation Service, London (2002).

Here are some of those most frequently used.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a good way of getting responses from a large number of clients relatively quickly and easily. A common form of questionnaire is one in which the user answers a series of questions about themselves, often giving themselves a 'score'. For example, they may rate how confident they feel, or how much they know about something.

Using a scale can help you to measure change. You can use scales to assess attitude and satisfaction levels. You can ask how often someone does something, for example:

Often

Quite often

Seldom

Never

When using scales, make sure you give people enough choice so that they can accurately tell you what they think. A four-point scale is usually the minimum, with 10 points the maximum.

Part of a questionnaire might look like the following:

How good am I at:	Excellent	Good	Not very good	I really need to work on this
Budgeting	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cooking	☐	☐	☐	☐
Paying my bills	☐	☐	☐	☐

Observation
Staff can watch how people behave and make notes. Sometimes this can be more accurate than recording how people think they behave. Done properly, this is a formal process, often involving measuring against a scale. For example, staff might watch a young person's communication skills when they are taking part in group work.

Interviews
Interviews involve going through a series of questions or topics with someone. They can be a good way of looking at difficult issues, especially with people who are not able, or do not want, to write things down. Interviews can be formal or informal. Using pictures and images can help communication and encourage people to take part.

Keeping records and notes
Many projects record changes and effects as they happen. This is a flexible and user-friendly way of collecting information. You may keep notes on, for example:

- the success rate of funding applications
- the numbers and types of organisations using a recycling scheme
- the number of benefits clients have signed on for
- the individual progress of your clients.

Some projects have an outcome sheet for each client, or clients may keep diaries.

Many people may be involved in record keeping, and they may not all keep records to the same quality. It helps to have a standard outcome-monitoring sheet, as this will help you summarise the information later. Take the case study on The Training Service on page .

A simple outcome-monitoring sheet for that project and its outcomes could look like this:

Outcome – increased work skills		
Date	Staff member	Comments on progress

Outcome – improved motivation and aspirations		
Date	Staff member	Comments on progress

Outcome – clients get qualifications		
Date	Staff member	Comments on progress

Outcome – confidence and self-esteem		
Date	Staff member	Comments on progress

Step three – decide when to collect information

Monitoring – collecting information regularly

Collecting information regularly about your outcomes is a form of monitoring. It will help you to check your progress against your plans.

For many projects, you should collect information on expected outcomes more than once. It is important that you have information at the beginning of your project or before you start working with your clients so that you can describe your starting point. This is called 'baseline data'. You can use this to compare with later information. You will probably have some of this information in your application form or project plan.

You should also collect information at the end of the project so that you can see what difference your work has made. You may need to collect information more than twice, particularly if your project runs for a long time.

You may find it useful to collect outcome information at regular points throughout the lifetime of the project as people may start and leave at different times. However, always think about what information it is sensible to collect. Some outcomes take time to achieve and it may not be useful to collect information on all your outcomes every time.

Think carefully about how often you should interview clients and others involved or have them fill in questionnaires.

You may also consider contacting your clients again some time after they have left the project to see what has happened after a longer period. For example, collecting information on the outcomes of a training course will mean you need to carry out some follow-up to find out whether the training actually made a difference.

Collecting one-off information

Many organisations collect one-off information at the end of a project to add to their monitoring information. This may be simpler than collecting information regularly. However, if you only collect information at the end of the project, you will have to rely on people's memories of how it went, and they are not always reliable.

There are circumstances when it may be difficult to collect information on individuals over time, for example, in services used anonymously, like a helpline. In this case, consider carrying out a 'snapshot' survey, for example, surveying all your clients over two weeks of every year.

Hints and tips

Good practice for collecting information

1. Keep it simple. You are more likely to succeed by starting with a simple system, and making it more complex later, if necessary. Try to collect information that is easy to bring together and analyse. Make sure you do not collect any more information than you need to.

   You may collect information on the same outcome in more than one way. For example you can keep records and notes on your clients and collecting information through interviews.

2. Consider sampling. You may not be able to collect information on all of your clients. You could collect information on a smaller number of people – a sample. The most common form of sampling is random sampling. Make a list of all your clients, perhaps alphabetically, so that everyone has an equal chance of being chosen. Then choose, for example, every tenth name on the list. This is your sample.
3. Use one monitoring system. There is no point in having two outcome-monitoring systems. Make sure that one system gives you the information that your project and your funders need.
4. Consider timing. Collect information so that it fits into your planning timetables, but remember that some outcomes may take time to achieve.
5. Test your methods. Once you have designed a questionnaire, try it out for a short period to make sure it works, changing it if necessary.
6. Be honest with clients. Most people are happy to give personal information if you explain clearly and honestly what the information is for and how you will use it. Some even enjoy the chance to tell their story. However, information should always be given voluntarily.
7. Reassure clients. Collecting information more than once means that you cannot collect information anonymously. However, reassure people that you will keep the information secure and that they will not be identified in any report or other public documents.

(If you are recording information about people, you will need to keep to the Data Protection Act. You can call the Data Protection Advice Line on 01625 545745 for advice.)

Record unexpected outcomes

Most projects have some idea of their outcomes. However, it is not always possible to know what all your outcomes will be. Some things will happen that you did not plan.

Record any unexpected outcomes as they happen. If they are outcomes you want, you may be able to repeat them. If they are outcomes you don't want, you may be able to stop them.

Linking outcomes to your work

The problem of proof

Even when you have convincing signs of change, you may find it difficult to prove that this was the result of your project. Perhaps change would have happened anyway, or other factors may have caused the change. Build up the best case possible by asking clients, carers or other professionals what helped to bring about the outcome, or what role they think the project played.

Whose outcomes?
You may not find it possible to link an outcome to a specific project activity. And, many organisations working in your area may also have an effect. The more long-term the change, the harder it is to link it to your work. Try to identify how your project has worked together with other agencies or partners to produce certain outcomes and what contribution they have made to your work. Your funders and the other agencies will value this information.

Remember to carry staff and volunteers with you when you follow the steps in this guide. The system you have set up should then allow a simple but effective method of monitoring and reporting on the outcomes of your work.

Glossary

Aims are the areas of change you intend to achieve through your project and which stem directly from the needs of your clients.

Baseline data: Information collected on outcomes at the start of the project, against which you can compare any change.

Evaluation: Using monitoring data and other information to judge your project's success, often against its original aims, and to identify what you have learnt from the project.

Milestones: The essential steps on the way to successfully achieving your outcomes.

Monitoring: Regularly collecting and recording information to help you judge the success of your project. You should do this systematically.

Outcomes are all the changes and effects that actually happen as a result of your work, expected or unexpected, welcome or unwelcome. The outcomes you hope to see are all the specific changes that will help you to achieve your aims.

Outcome indicators: Things you can measure to show whether you have achieved your desired outcomes. This will show progress towards meeting your aims.

Social exclusion: A short-hand term for the way that problems such as unemployment, poor skills, poverty, bad housing, living in a high-crime area, bad health and family breakdown can link together to make it tough for people or communities to get what they need to improve their situation.

Targets: The level and extent to which you will achieve your outcomes. These are usually numerical.

Tracking outcomes: Finding out if and how you are meeting your outcomes by collecting monitoring information

Sources of help

Big Lottery Fund
1 Plough Place
London
EC4A 1DE

Phone: 020 7211 1800

Your local Big Lottery Fund office will be able to advise you on how to use outcomes in your application. You can find their address on our website at: **www.biglotteryfund.org.uk**

We will add details of further sources of help to our website as and when they become available.

Charities Evaluation Services (CES)
4 Coldbath Square
London
EC1R 5HL
Phone: 020 7713 5722
Email: enquiries@ces-vol.org.uk

Charities Evaluation Services offer training and consultancy, and publish information on monitoring, evaluation and quality systems. They also provide training courses on outcomes.

The United Way website offers useful resources on outcomes. Their address is: **www.unitedway.org/outcomes**

Your local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) may also be able to help. Find their address on the national website: www.nacvs.org.uk or call 0114 278 6636.

Further reading

Burns, S Evaluation discussion paper 7 (2001) Outcome monitoring Charities Evaluation Services, London (2000)

Burns, S A DIY Guide to implementing outcome monitoring. Alcohol Concern, London, Second edition (2000)

Ellis, J Practical monitoring and evaluation: a guide for voluntary organisations
Charities Evaluation Services, London (2002)