

Outcomes

Funders all share the desire to make a real difference to people's lives with their money. They want to give money to organisations that can show that they have made real changes to the lives of the people they help. To be sure of this, they will ask you to explain in your application what *outcomes* your project will achieve, and how you will show that you have met these outcomes.

This is an area where groups applying for grants often struggle. Many funders report that applicants for their grants do not answer these questions well, and struggle to show at the end of the grant, what difference it has made. So it is important to put a bit of effort into getting it right if you are applying for grants.

Some funders will ask you explicitly to describe the outcomes your project will bring about, but other funders might not use that word, and instead ask you about the *difference* or the *change* that your project will bring about, or the *benefits* to the people you support.

You also need to know that what you do is effective, and your work makes a positive difference to people, so that you can change what doesn't work.

This information sheet is designed to help your group start to think about what difference your work makes, and help you make better funding applications, and better end of grant reports, and do better work for your communities.

Outcomes Illustrated

Outcomes are the *changes* that happen in people's lives as the result of what your group does. Here are some examples:

A community centre runs some confidence building courses for people with mental health problems.

*The **outcome** is that as a result of the courses, people feel more confident, and are able to do things they didn't do before.*

A voluntary organisation recruits volunteers to befriend lonely older people and support them in getting out to do things in the community, and build social networks.

*The **outcome** is that as a result of having a volunteer befriender, older people feel less isolated and lonely, and feel happier, so they no longer become depressed.*

There is a direct relationship between the Outcomes you say you will bring about, and the *need* you have identified. If the need describes the *problem* that people face, then your outcomes should be the *difference* your project will make *to that problem*. For example if your outcome will be that people are more confident, then in describing the “need” you will describe how people lack confidence, and how that affects their lives. If your outcome will be that people will be less isolated and lonely, then the “need” you describe will be about how they are isolated, and how that affects their lives.

Monitoring and Measuring Outcomes

Somehow, you need to find out what difference your activities have made to people. Probably, you already keep information about how many people participate. You might keep signing in sheets, and you might take photographs. You might even ask everyone if they enjoyed the activity, or are satisfied with the service provided. These are important to prove your activities happened, and that people came and benefitted.

But just because people *take part*, it does not *necessarily* mean that you have met your outcomes, and it does not *necessarily* mean that people’s lives have changed in any way. For example:

- The Community Centre running its confidence building courses might get lots of people attending, but those people might finish the course without feeling any more confident, and they might just go back to living the same unhappy life as before. So nothing really changes for them.
- The voluntary organisation recruiting volunteer befrienders might manage to introduce 20 volunteers to isolated older people. But those older people might carry on feeling lonely and isolated, and never go out except with their volunteer befriender, and never make new friends. So nothing really changes for them.

If these organisations don’t *check* whether and how well they are making positive changes in people’s lives, then they don’t know that what they are doing is effective and may be wasting time and money. This is why funders ask this question, to be sure that the money they give you will really make a positive difference.

How do you find out what difference your work makes?

There are a variety of ways you can find out what difference your project makes to people’s lives. You can do these things by asking people to fill in a questionnaire; holding a focus group and asking people to discuss your questions; or by noting the things you see and hear. The important thing is to ask the right questions.

Ask closed questions

You could just ask people whether they feel more confident/less lonely or whatever outcomes you are hoping to achieve. For example:

- If your intended outcome is that people feel more confident, you could just ask people “do you feel more confident?”
- If your intended outcome is that people are less lonely, you could just ask “do you feel less lonely?”

This might give an indication, but beware, people might just say “yes” to be polite, or because they haven’t really thought about it.

Ask more complex questions

You could ask people more questions to test your outcomes. For example:

- If your intended outcome is that people feel more confident, you could ask something like “On a scale of 1 – 10 how much do you feel your confidence has increased?” or “My confidence is much better –strongly agree/agree/no opinion/disagree/strongly disagree”.
- If your intended outcome is that people are less lonely, you could ask “what, if anything, has changed in your life?”

Questions like these force people to think a bit about what has changed. They can’t just say “yes” to be polite.

Monitor Indicators

You could think of some signs (*indicators*) that your outcomes are being met, and find ways of recording them. For example:

- If your intended outcome is that people feel more confident, think about what changes you might notice about people if their confidence increases? For example, if people are more confident, they might speak more, be more likely to speak up in groups, ask questions, their body language will be bolder. They will tell you about doing new things. Things in their life will change.
- If your intended outcome is that people are less lonely, what change might you notice about them? They will almost certainly look happier. They might be more talkative if they were quiet before, or you might see them chatting quietly with someone else when they used to just sit by themselves. They might tell you about the things they have been doing, meeting friends, joining clubs for example. You might see less of them because they’re busy doing other things.

Monitor Progression

Progression means what people go on to do after your project. For example, starting voluntary work, enrolling in education, getting a job. You would need to contact people after the end of your project to find out some of these things. And you need to check that these things would have been less likely if the person had not taken part in your project.

Distance Travelled

This means comparing how people are at the beginning and at the end of your project. You could ask them to rate e.g. how confident or how lonely they feel (or something more applicable to your outcomes) *before* they start your activity, and then at the end ask them *the same* questions again, and see if their answers show an improvement.

External Evaluation

You could pay a consultant to come in and carry out an evaluation of your project. NB this is likely to cost a lot of money. If you will be applying for grant funding, you might be able to include the costs of an evaluation in your grant.

More Information

Charities Evaluation Service

The Charities Evaluation Service runs training and publishes a variety of information sheets and booklets on monitoring and evaluation, and outcomes. Visit www.ces-vol.org.uk or contact Charities Evaluation Services, 4 Coldbath Square, London, EC1R 5HL, phone: 020 7713 5722

Outcomes Star and Soul Record

The Outcomes Star and the Soul Record are two tools designed to help measure distance travelled. Find out more at www.outcomesstarsystem.org.uk and <http://soulrecord.org/>. Both of these cost but again, you might be able to include the costs of these tools in a funding application.

It would also be worth talking to other organisations doing similar things – they might have created their own methods, and might let you copy and adapt them.

Consultants

If you would like to appoint a consultant to carry out an external evaluation, you can find lists of consultants on the websites of Humber Learning Consortium www.hlc-vol.org/resources/trainers-consultants, and NAVCA (The National Association of Voluntary and Community Action) <http://www.navca.org.uk/services/tcd>. Hull CVS publishes a free information sheet on Employing and Working With Consultants <http://hullcvs.co.uk/downloads/employing-and-working-with-consultants/>.

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