charities evaluation services

your project and its outcomes

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by Sally Cupitt with Jean Ellis

for Charities Evaluation Services

charities evaluation services

helping organisations to be more effective

Since 1990, Charities Evaluation Services (CES) has worked with a wide variety of voluntary organisations and their funders. Our aim is to promote accessible monitoring and evaluation practice, which organisations can carry out within the resources available to them. CES provides training, advice and technical help, and also carries out independent evaluations as part of its commitment to strengthening and improving the voluntary sector.

CES produces a range of publications including PQASSO, the practical quality assurance system for small and medium sized organisations.

Charities Evaluation Services
4 Coldbath Square
London EC1R 5HL
020 7713 5722
enquiries@ces-vol.org.uk
www.ces-vol.org.uk

Company limited by guarantee
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contents

introduction

What are outcomes?

Many voluntary sector organisations are familiar with describing what they do and who they work with. But you also need to describe the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of your work. These are your **outcomes**.

Why are outcomes important?

Information on your outcomes can help you make your work more effective, by helping you identify what works well and what you might change or improve. This will help you use your limited resources most efficiently to meet your users' needs.

Having outcomes information will help you report to your funders and attract further funding. It may help demonstrate that your organisation is one that learns from its experience in order to develop and improve – that it is a learning organisation. The Charity Commission also requires many voluntary sector organisations to report on their achievements, which would include outcomes.

There are other benefits of a focus on outcomes:

1. **Role clarity and shared purpose**. A shared understanding of what you expect the project to achieve can contribute to a sense of team purpose.
2. **Motivation for staff and users**. It can be very motivating for staff to see evidence of the outcomes of their work. It can also be encouraging for service users to see their own progress.
3. **Saving time**. Planning your work around what you know works could make it more effective and efficient in the long run. Also, focusing on the information you need to collect, rather than on what has always been collected, could reduce the time spent on monitoring.
4. **More useful information systems**. You may be able to use methods of outcome monitoring as an integral part of your routine work. For example, if you already keep case records of individual progress, you may be able to adapt these so that they are useful both for recording this information – case recording – and for outcome monitoring.
5. **Helping quality assurance.** Many quality frameworks (for example, PQASSO) require you to collect information on outcomes.

This booklet

This booklet has been written for trustees, staff and volunteers who are involved in planning, monitoring and evaluating their project. The aim of the booklet is to help you describe the outcomes you want your project to achieve. Working with outcomes need not be difficult. This guide offers a simple, step-by-step approach to identifying and assessing your project's outcomes.

- Chapter One explains what outcomes are.
- Chapter Two shows you how to identify outcomes for your project, and how to assess whether your project achieves those outcomes.
- Chapter Three describes how to use your outcomes information.

The guide also contains some sources of further help, further reading, and a glossary.

Chapter one

understanding outcomes

Defining outcomes

What outcomes are

Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of your work. They can be wanted or unwanted, expected or unexpected. For example, the outcomes for users of a refugee centre might include:

- improved English language skills
- improved access to services
- reduced isolation.

Some outcomes do not describe a change – they may involve keeping a situation the same or preventing something from happening. These outcomes still describe an effect of the activities of your project. If your project had not taken place, something else would have happened. For example, an outcome of a home-care project could be enabling older people to remain living in their own homes.

What outcomes are not

The term 'outcomes' is often confused with other terms used during project planning. The terms it is most often confused with are 'inputs', 'outputs' and 'impact'.

Inputs are all the resources you put into the project to enable you to deliver your outputs. Inputs may include time, money and premises.

Outputs are all the products and services you deliver as part of your work. Examples of outputs are: training courses, support sessions and publications.

Whereas an outcome is the change occurring as a direct result of project outputs, **impact** is the effect of a project at a higher or broader level, in the longer term, after a range of outcomes has been achieved. It often describes change in a wider user group than the original target, and many organisations may play a part in achieving impact. It is more difficult to assess this level of change within the lifetime of a short project.

The relationship between the terms *inputs, outputs, outcomes* and *impact* can be represented like this:

Inputs → **Outputs** → **Outcomes** → **Impact**

The inputs to your project enable you to deliver outputs. These bring about outcomes, which may eventually lead to an impact.

From inputs to impact
Case study: The Women's Project

The Women's Project aims to reduce unwanted teenage pregnancy by offering support and groupwork to young women.

Inputs ➔	Outputs ➔	Outcomes ➔	Impact
■ Staff ■ Budget ■ Venue ■ Advertising	■ One-to-one support sessions ■ Groupwork ■ Outings	Increase in young people's: ■ confidence ■ awareness of alternatives to young parenthood ■ access to education and training opportunities	Reduction in: ■ social exclusion ■ teenage pregnancies

Intermediate outcomes

Intermediate outcomes describe the step changes that happen before a desired outcome is reached. For example, users of a drugs project are likely to undergo various changes before they stop using drugs (the desired outcome). They need to want to give up, be confident that they can, and know how to do so. In this case, increased motivation, increased confidence and increased knowledge are all intermediate outcomes.

Service users, or the project itself, may not always reach a particular outcome within the project's lifetime, so it is important that you keep a note of the intermediate outcomes that do occur, in order to do justice to your project's work. Intermediate outcomes are especially important in some prevention work. For example, increased individual confidence or skills may be important for preventing unemployment.

Intermediate outcomes
Case study: The Training Service

The Training Service is an employment project, working with socially disadvantaged people. It offers long-term training courses and individual support. The service can describe many changes that its users often go through – their intermediate outcomes.

Overall aim	To reduce social exclusion
Intermediate outcomes	Users have: ■ improved motivation and aspirations ■ improved confidence and self-esteem ■ increased communication and social skills ■ improved job-search skills ■ increased work skills.
Outcomes	■ Users gain qualifications. ■ Users access mainstream opportunities, such as education and employment.

Outcomes are now beginning to come into focus. The next section explains where these changes, or outcomes, take place.

Where do outcomes occur?

Depending on your project, outcomes can occur in many places, including:

- individuals
- families
- communities
- organisations
- the environment
- policy.

A single project may identify outcomes in several places. For example, a family centre may identify outcomes for children, their families and for local schools.

Outcomes in individuals

These are some examples of outcomes in individuals:

- increased knowledge of the services available
- maintenance of independence
- increased skills in the arts
- being rehoused.

Note that outcomes may also occur in volunteers, staff or trustees as well as service users.

Outcomes for individuals
Case study: The Befriending Scheme

The older people's Befriending Scheme has two workers and many volunteers. The volunteers visit people at home and organise outings.

Overall aim	To enable older people to maintain independent living
Outcomes for older people	Older people are: ■ less socially isolated ■ less lonely ■ less frightened of crime ■ less anxious.

Outcomes in organisations

Some organisations, often known as sector infrastructure organisations or second-tier organisations (for example, a Council for Voluntary Service), do not direct their work to individuals. Instead, their users are other organisations. The outcomes for their users might include:

- more funding obtained
- better strategic planning
- better trained volunteers.

Outcomes for organisations
Case study: Local infrastructure organisation

The local infrastructure organisation offers training, information, support and networking opportunities to black and minority ethnic (BME) organisations.

Overall aim	To develop a stronger local BME sector
Outcomes for BME organisations	Local BME services: ■ improve their access to funding ■ increase their workforce knowledge and skills ■ develop partnership working ■ increase their sharing of resources and good practice ■ develop their services, to better meet local needs. The local BME sector: ■ is consulted by key agencies more often, and is better able to respond ■ benefits from more agreements with outside bodies ■ is involved in more local planning structures.

The local infrastructure example above draws some of its outcomes from the NAVCA (National Association for Voluntary and Community Action) performance standards for infrastructure organisations. These can be downloaded for free from the NAVCA website (see *Sources of help*, on page 20).

Outcomes in other places

This table shows examples of outcomes occurring in places other than individuals or organisations.

Target group or area	Examples of outcomes
Families	■ Reduced isolation ■ Reduced levels of conflict ■ Improved relationships
Communities	■ Increased levels of recycling ■ Less fear of crime ■ Reduction in vandalism
The environment	■ More green spaces created ■ More bird species sighted
Policy	■ New local authority policy on women's participation introduced ■ New government policy on vacant properties in London introduced ■ Changes in licensing regulations

Numbers and outcomes

Setting outcome targets

Sometimes you can express outcomes in numbers, for example by describing the number of people with improved skills. You might wish to identify in advance the level or extent to which outcomes will be achieved. These are called **outcome targets**. For example, a supported housing project used their previous experience to set the following targets:

- 60% of users will continue to live independently.
- 25% will take part in computer training and achieve a certificate.
- 25% will start voluntary work or community activity.

SMART outcomes

Big Lottery Fund (BIG) asks applicants to identify SMART outcomes at the point of application. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-based. In practice, this means that BIG expects applicants to include what is referred to in this publication as a 'target' in the outcome itself. BIG argues that using SMART outcomes helps staff and committees to make more informed decisions about which projects to support because there is greater clarity about what difference is anticipated to be made through BIG's funding.

BIG has developed a general guide to identifying and developing outcomes and milestones, called *Explaining the Difference your Project Makes* (see *Further reading* on page 20). It includes specific guidance to BIG's approach, including the ways in which it differs from the approach set out in this and in other CES publications. So, if you are considering applying to BIG, it is important to read that guide first.

Thinking through whom 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. Chapter Two takes you through the steps involved in identifying and assessing your outcomes.

Chapter two

identifying and assessing outcomes

This chapter shows you how to identify outcomes for your project, and how to assess whether your project achieves those outcomes.

Getting ready for outcomes

If your organisation is ready for outcomes, your work on identifying and assessing outcomes is more likely to be successful. To help you get ready, think about the following issues:

Timing

- Allow a realistic amount of time to develop the system, remembering that some outcomes may take time to achieve.
- Build in time to test and review your methods, changing them if necessary.
- Collect information so that it can be ready in time to fit into your planning cycles.
- Remember this is an ongoing process; outcomes systems may need to change over time.

What resources might you need?

- Time, for staff involvement
- Money
- Staff skills, for example in client work or managing information
- An IT system capable of managing outcomes information

What people issues should you consider?

- Try to ensure that those who lead your organisation are actively involved – the director or chief executive, senior managers, trustees or management committee members.
- Identify one person to lead the process.
- People need to see the tasks as worthwhile.
- Staff need to be willing to change.
- Systems should be as simple and user-friendly as possible.
- Tell users what you are doing so they can make an informed choice about their involvement. Reassure them that you will keep the information secure and that they will not be identified in any report.
- If you are recording information about people, you will need to comply with the Data Protection Act. (For advice about the Data Protection Act, contact the Information Commissioner's Office on 08456 306060, or visit www.ico.gov.uk.)

How to identify your outcomes

There are four key steps to identifying your outcomes:

- Step 1 Involve other people.
- Step 2 Identify aims and objectives.
- Step 3 Develop outcomes from aims.
- Step 4 Choose appropriate outcomes.

Step 1 Involve other people

People with an interest in your project may include staff, volunteers, management committee members, service users and funders. These groups may think differently about which outcomes are important. For example, your users may have a variety of views about what would make the project successful, and these may be different from management committee views.

It can be helpful to consult a range of people before deciding what outcomes will be monitored. By involving other people, you are also likely to increase their understanding of outcomes and their commitment to giving you outcomes information or collecting information.

Step 2 Identify aims and objectives

Why set aims and objectives?

Identifying your expected outcomes is part of good project planning. The outcomes you expect to achieve are linked to your aims and objectives, so defining clear aims and objectives will help you identify your outcomes.

When you are identifying outcomes, it may be helpful to look at the existing aims and objectives of your project. However, be careful. The current aims and objectives may not reflect the main priorities. Many project aims are out of date. Or they may be inadequate because they simply describe the project's services rather than expressing a change that you hope the project will bring about. For this reason it may be helpful to set your aims and objectives again.

Understanding aims and objectives

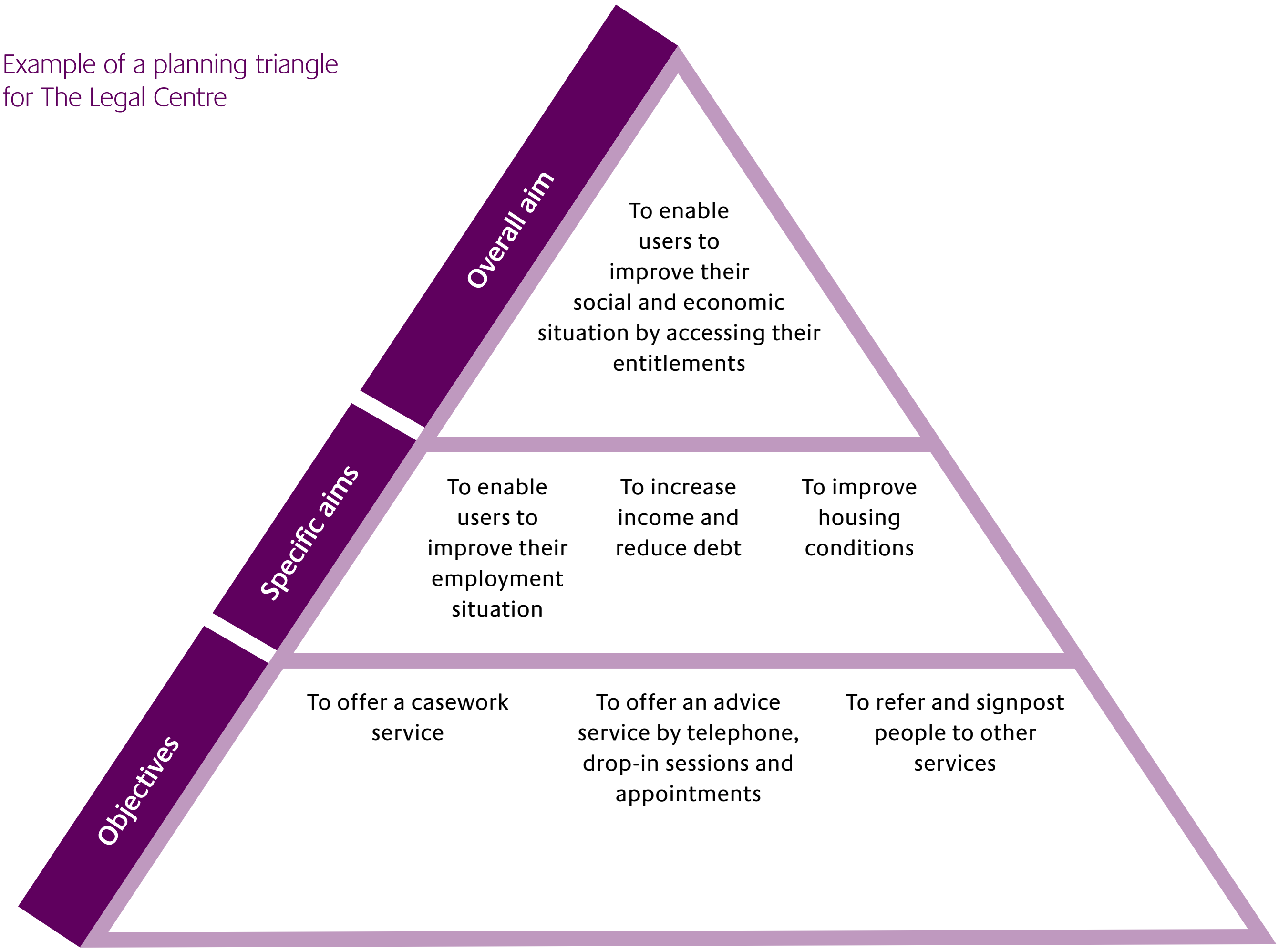
Aims and objectives always go together. They are quite different but are sometimes confused.

- **Aims** are the areas of change you hope to achieve as a result of your work.
- **Objectives** are the areas of activity you will undertake to make your aims happen.

It is helpful to think about overall aims and specific aims. The **overall aim** is like a mission statement. It tells everyone why your organisation or project exists and the broad effect it wants to have. It summarises the difference that your organisation wants to make for a specific target group. Because the overall aim is broad, it needs to be supported by specific aims. **Specific aims** are single statements about the changes an organisation hopes to make. There will usually be several specific aims.

CES has developed a well-tested, simple, but highly effective way of presenting aims and objectives – the CES **planning triangle**. An example of a planning triangle is shown below.

Example of a planning triangle for The Legal Centre



Setting your aims and objectives

The planning triangle should be completed from the top down; project planning should start with the changes you want to make for users. You can then identify the best services to make those changes happen.

To help you set aims, think about why you offer your particular service or mix of services. What do you hope the effect will be? The overall aim describes in broad, general terms the change you want to see. The specific aims are more precise statements about different aspects of the overall aim.

Make sure that the aims identified are changes within your project's remit and are achievable. Being realistic with your aims will help you to identify realistic outcomes.

The language you use is important. When writing aims, use words that describe a change, such as: *to increase*, *to improve, to reduce* or *to enable.* (Sometimes projects aim to avoid things getting worse, and words such as *to prevent* and *to maintain* might be used.) When writing objectives, use words that describe what you do, such as: *to run, to provide, to produce, to support* or *to offer.*

Step 3 Develop outcomes from aims

Once you have defined your aims and objectives, it will be easier to identify your outcomes. Desired outcomes relate to the specific aims of your project. Outcomes are all the specific changes that will tell you whether the aims have been met or not.

Each of your specific aims can be broken down into outcomes. Usually, each specific aim will encompass a few outcomes. (See the example below.)

Take each of your specific aims and think about all the changes you would see if the aim were met. If your project has service users, it may help to imagine a 'typical' service user when they first come to your project. 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 be different? The key changes you identify are the outcomes you expect to achieve.

Each outcome should represent a significant change for users, even if the step does not seem very great. The change should also be at a level you would want to report on.

Think about whether there are any intermediate outcomes. What changes often happen before outcomes are reached? Remember also the different places in which outcomes can occur (see page 8). Have you covered all the outcomes that are important to your project?

Developing outcomes from aims
Case study: The Legal Centre

The Legal Centre has three specific aims. Each can be broken down into many possible outcomes. Some example outcomes for each aim are given below.

Specific aims	Example outcomes
To improve housing conditions	■ Users get accommodation. ■ Overcrowding is reduced. ■ Eviction is prevented.
To increase income and reduce debt	■ Users get compensation for unfair dismissal at work. ■ Users get more benefits. ■ Users' debts are reduced or written off. ■ Users' health and wellbeing are improved.
To enable users to improve their employment situation	■ Users retain their jobs. ■ A higher percentage of users get no less than the minimum working wage.

Step 4 Choose appropriate outcomes

When you are developing outcomes, follow the four points below to help you choose the most appropriate outcomes for your project.

1 Relate outcomes to the funded project

Think about what is being funded and why. The grant may have been given for a small project within an organisation. If so, you need to report on the outcomes of the project itself, not on those of the organisation as a whole. If the grant is given for a building, the outcomes should relate to the building itself rather than to the activities that are going to be held in the building. (See the example below.)

2 Relate outcomes to your activities

Think about your outcomes in relation to project objectives. The changes you wish to make must be reasonable and likely to occur, given the activities of your project. A small project offering limited services is unlikely to have ambitious outcomes.

3 Consider timescale

Think about what outcomes are achievable within the lifetime of the project. For some projects, longer-term outcomes may be hard to achieve within the funding period. Such projects may need to identify intermediate outcomes that are achievable.

4 Prepare for unwanted or unexpected outcomes

The outcomes you are working for will describe positive change. However, there may also be an outcome you don't want. For example, a youth club may get a new building. As a result, more young people benefit from activities. However, more young people in the area may result in complaints from local people. The youth club could think ahead and monitor the situation and, if necessary, involve local people more in planning services. This could help prevent or improve the situation.

Most projects have some idea of their outcomes. This is because projects are set up to meet identified need and make changes. However, it is not always possible to know what all your outcomes will be, especially for very new or pilot projects. Some things will happen that you did not plan.

Make sure your monitoring system lets you record any significant unexpected outcomes as they occur. 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 reduce or stop them.

5 Keep it simple

There may be many outcomes of your work, but it is usually wise to limit the number you collect information on. The level of outcomes monitoring should be in proportion to the size of your project. Also, you are more likely to succeed by starting with a very simple system, and extending it later, if necessary. To keep your outcome monitoring simple, you will need to prioritise key outcomes – the ones that tell you most about your progress. Ensure also that you only collect information you need.

Choosing appropriate outcomes
Case study: Community-building project

The local community association wants to refurbish its community hall, to make it suitable for more community activities.

Overall aim	To increase community participation.
Outcomes for the local community	■ New project activities ■ Increased attendance at activities ■ Increased user satisfaction ■ Increased sense of pride

Identifying your outcomes in this way when you start your project will help you set up a system for monitoring them as you go along. The next section gives information on how to assess your project's outcomes.

How to assess outcomes

Once you have identified your planned outcomes, you need to decide what information to collect, from whom, how and when. There are four steps in this process:

- Step 1 Decide what information to collect.
- Step 2 Use your existing systems and information wherever possible.
- Step 3 Decide how to collect information.
- Step 4 Decide when to collect information.

Step 1 Decide what information to collect

Identify the information you need

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

Outcome indicators can be quantitative or qualitative.

- **Quantitative** indicators count numbers of things that happen.
- **Qualitative** indicators assess people's perceptions and experiences.

You are likely to find many possible indicators for each outcome. As with outcomes themselves, identify and use only the most important ones.

Decide who to collect information from

You may not be able to collect information on all of your users. You could collect information on a smaller number of people – a sample. The most common form of sampling is random sampling, which means that everyone has an equal chance of being chosen. Make a list of all your users, perhaps alphabetically, and then choose, for example, every tenth name on the list. This is your sample.

Step 2 Use your existing systems and information wherever possible

In an existing project, it is likely that you will already have some monitoring systems and tools. Many organisations also find that they are collecting information on outcomes already, without realising it. Try to use or adapt your existing methods wherever possible to collect your outcomes information. However, if other aspects of your monitoring are not up to scratch, you may need to work on these.

Look at the indicators you have chosen, and identify:

- which indicators you are already collecting information on
- which ones you can collect information on simply by adapting your current system
- indicators which will need a new method for collecting the information.

There is no point in having two outcome monitoring systems. Make sure that one system gives you all the information that you and your funders need.

Outcome indicators
Case study: The Training Service

Outcomes	Outcome indicators
Increased work skills	■ Level of punctuality ■ How often users attend ■ Ability to communicate appropriately with colleagues ■ Ability to complete tasks
Users gain qualifications.	■ Number of users gaining qualifications ■ What qualifications they gain
Improved motivation and aspirations	■ Extent to which users express a desire for change ■ Level of interest in education or employment

Step 3 Decide how to collect information

Where you cannot use your existing methods, you will need to find new ways to collect outcomes information. When choosing new methods, think about:

- the depth of information you need
- whether you need to use the method repeatedly with different people in different situations
- what method is most likely to get accurate information
- how easy it will be for you to collect and analyse the information
- what methods would be appropriate to your service.

You may collect outcome information in more than one way. Projects often keep records and notes relating to outcomes, and also collect further information on the same outcome, for example through interviews or self-assessments. Collecting information in more than one way can strengthen your findings.

Below are some of the methods most frequently used for collecting outcomes information:

- questionnaires
- observation
- interviews
- keeping records and notes.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a good way of getting responses from a large number of users relatively quickly and easily. Self-assessment tools are a common form of questionnaire, in which users answer a series of questions about themselves, often giving themselves a 'score' on a range of criteria. 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 someone's ability, attitude and satisfaction levels. You can also ask how good or bad something is, or how often someone does something, for example, giving them the following options:

Often / Quite often / Seldom / Never

When using scales, give enough scale points so that you can record a change as people move along the scale over time. A four-point scale is usually the minimum, with 10 points the maximum. It is helpful to define the scale points where possible. This makes it easier for people to fill in, and easier for you to analyse and present the information later.

An example of part of a self-assessment questionnaire, with a four-point scale, is shown below.

Example of part of a self-assessment questionnaire

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

Observation

Staff can watch and make notes about how people behave. Sometimes this can be more accurate than recording how people think they behave. Done properly, this is quite a formal process, often involving scales against an indicator. For example, staff might watch a young person's communication skills when they are involved in groupwork.

Interviews

Interviews involve going through a series of questions or topics with someone. They can be a good way of exploring difficult issues, especially with people who are not able or do not want to write things down. Interviews can be formal or informal, and may include the use of visual tools, such as pictures, to 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. For example, you may keep notes on:

- the success rate of funding applications
- the numbers and types of organisations using a recycling scheme
- the level of welfare benefits that users have received
- the progress of individual users.

Some projects have an outcome sheet for each user or keep keyworking notes, or users may keep diaries of their experiences.

Often many people are involved in record keeping, and they may not all keep records to the same quality. It helps to have a standardised outcome-monitoring sheet, as this will help you summarise the information later. An example of a very simple outcome-monitoring sheet is shown below.

Example of a simple outcome-monitoring sheet

Outcome: Improved social interaction				
Date	**Name of user**	**Outcome indicator**	**Evidence**	**Staff member**
Outcome: Improved finances				
Date	**Name of user**	**Outcome indicator**	**Evidence**	**Staff member**
Outcome: Getting employment				
Date	**Name of user**	**Outcome indicator**	**Evidence**	**Staff member**

Further information on collecting information can be found in the CES publication *Practical Monitoring and Evaluation* (see *Further reading*, on page 20).

Step 4 Decide when to collect information

Monitoring – regular information collection

Collecting information regularly on your outcomes is a form of **monitoring**. This will help you to check your progress against your plans, and give you information for evaluation.

For many projects, information on expected outcomes should be collected more than once. It is important to make the first collection before the project starts or before you begin work with the user. If this is not possible, do it as soon as possible. This is called **baseline data**, giving you a baseline against which to compare later information. The last collection will be at the end of the project or the work with the user.

You may need to collect information more than twice, particularly if there is a long time between the first and last information collection. It is useful to collect outcome information at regular points throughout the project's lifetime. However, think carefully about how often you should interview users and others involved, or have them fill in questionnaires.

You may also consider contacting users 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 have to carry out some follow-up, say six months later, to find out whether the training actually made a difference. If you want to do this, think ahead about recording contact details and getting consent for future contact.

One-off information collection

Many organisations collect one-off information, usually at the end of a project. This can be to gather information to supplement monitoring information. This may be simpler than more regular information collection. However, if you only collect information at the end of your project, you will have to rely on people's memories about what happened, and memories 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 such as a helpline. In this case, consider carrying out a snapshot exercise, for example, surveying all your users over two weeks of every year.

Identifying simple tools and processes will help you collect outcomes information. Once you have collected the outcomes information, it is important that you make the best use of it. This is covered in the next chapter.

Chapter three

using outcomes information

Having spent time collecting your outcomes information, it's important to make the best use of it. This chapter describes how to use your outcomes information.

Understanding outcomes information

Putting outcomes information in context

Outcomes information often needs to be presented with other information to make sense of it. Your outcomes monitoring will only tell you whether an outcome has occurred or not. For example, if a project stated that half of its users had improved their literacy skills, we might also want to know things like:

- the resources the project had used
- how many of the users had needed to improve their literacy skills when they started the project
- what services the users had used to bring about this change
- internal and external factors affecting outcomes, such as staffing changes within the project, or services that users had received from other organisations.

Linking outcomes to your work

Proving your role

Even when you have convincing signs of change, you may find it difficult to provide 'proof' that the change 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 users and other professionals what helped to bring about the outcome, or what role they think the project played.

Whose outcomes?

It may not be possible to link an outcome to a specific project activity. And many organisations working in your area may have an effect on the situation. Get information from more than one source if possible, to strengthen the case for your role in the change. You can also show how you have worked together with other agencies to obtain outcomes.

Sharing your outcomes information

After collecting your outcomes information, you may wish to share it. Summarise and order it logically to make it easy for people reading it. Think about the needs of the people you are reporting to – just tell them what they want and need to know, and keep it simple and brief.

You may also want to present the information in different ways to different audiences. Some people may like a formal report; others may prefer a verbal presentation or even something visual like a poster. You might also report in a newsletter.

Remember also to give feedback to the users who gave you outcomes information and to the staff who collected the outcomes information. This will show you value their time and input, and may encourage them to be involved in outcomes monitoring in future.

Using outcomes information to benefit your project

Using outcomes information to plan and improve services

The information you collect can be used when you are developing strategy and can help you assess progress in achieving your strategic and operational plans. Information on your outcomes can help you make your work more effective, by helping you identify what works well and what you might change or improve.

If you don't achieve the outcomes you expected, you may need to:

- think about providing different services, or the same services in different ways, to achieve better outcomes
- reconsider what your project outcomes should be
- reconsider what your project aims should be
- reconsider the way in which you select your users – they may not have needed the service
- seek further funding to enable you to deliver services better.

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 know works to meet your users' needs, rather than on what you think works.

Outcomes information is most likely to be used effectively if it is made available regularly, at times when decisions are being made about the project.

Using outcomes information to improve work with users

Outcomes monitoring can help increase the effectiveness of your work with users. It can help ensure that staff focus on users' needs, and how best to meet them, instead of focusing on services to be delivered. It can also provide a structure for regular reviews of user progress.

Reporting on your work

You might use your outcomes information to improve communication with current funders and for future fundraising. Sometimes outcomes information will help you identify gaps in services, and this information in particular may be useful in fundraising.

Other uses for outcomes information

You might also use your outcomes information:

- to motivate staff in their work, and encourage users in their progress
- to provide information for quality assurance systems
- to market your service.

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

sources of help

Charities Evaluation Services (CES)

4 Coldbath Square
London EC1R 5HL
Phone: 020 7713 5722
enquiries@ces-vol.org.uk
www.ces-vol.org.uk

CES offers training and consultancy, and publishes information on monitoring, evaluation and quality systems. Training courses on outcomes are provided.

Outcomes online

www.outcomesonline.org.uk

Outcomes online is a section of the CES website dedicated to outcomes. It contains useful resources for those interested in implementing, or already implementing, an outcomes approach within their project or organisation.

London Housing Foundation

www.homelessoutcomes.org.uk

This website offers useful resources on outcomes in homelessness organisations. The information is very useful for other voluntary sector organisations as well.

Local infrastructure organisations

Your local infrastructure organisation – for example, a CVS – may also be able to help. To find out about the nearest one to you, visit www.navca.org.uk – the website of NAVCA (the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action). Or call NAVCA on 0114 278 6636.

further reading

Burns, S (2001) *Evaluation Discussion Paper 7: Outcome Monitoring.*

Charities Evaluation Services, London. Available from CES on 020 7713 5722.

Burns, S and Cupitt, S (2003) *Managing Outcomes: A Guide for Homelessness Organisations.*

Charities Evaluation Services, London. Available free from: www.homelessoutcomes.org.uk/resources/1/PDFs/HomelessnessOutcomesGuide.pdf

Burns, S and MacKeith, J (2006) *Explaining the Difference Your Project Makes.*

Big Lottery Fund, London. Available free from: http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/er_eval_explaining_the_difference.pdf

Cupitt, S. (2004) *Measuring Up: Assessing Outcomes in the Voluntary Sector.*

Association of London Government, London. Available free from: http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/doc.asp?doc=13621&cat=1789

Ellis, J (2005) *Practical Monitoring and Evaluation: A Guide for Voluntary Organisations,* 2nd edition.

Charities Evaluation Services, London. Available from CES on 020 7713 5722.

glossary

Aims
The particular changes or differences the organisation or project plans to bring about.

Baseline data
Facts about the characteristics of a target group or population and its context, ideally gathered before the start of a project.

Impact
Broader or longer-term effects of a project's activities, outputs and outcomes.

Inputs
Resources put into a project to carry out an activity. Inputs may be human, material or financial, or can be expressed as time.

Intermediate outcomes
Steps along the way to end outcomes. They are often smaller changes that need to happen before the final, desired outcome can be reached.

Monitoring
The routine, systematic collection and recording of information about a project, mainly for the purpose of checking its progress against its plans.

Objectives
The areas of activity a project plans to carry out in order to achieve its aims.

Outcome indicators
Pieces of information that show whether expected outcomes have occurred. They can be qualitative or quantitative.

Outcomes
The changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of your work.

Outputs
All the detailed activities, services and products you do or provide.

Overall aim
Describes why an organisation or project exists and the broad effect it wants to have. It may be contained within the mission statement.

Qualitative
Qualitative information is descriptive, and is presented in words.

Quantitative
Quantitative information is given as numbers.

Targets
A defined level of achievement that an organisation or project sets itself to achieve in a specific period of time.

about Charities Evaluation Services

Charities Evaluation Services (CES) is an independent charity with unrivalled expertise in monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance systems in the voluntary sector.

CES produces a range of publications, including PQASSO, the quality system specially designed for small and medium sized voluntary organisations.

How will CES work with you?

Phone us on **020 7713 5722** for free advice.

Our consultants will talk to you about your organisation's particular needs and offer you practical advice about monitoring, evaluation, self-evaluation and quality systems.

What services does CES offer?

In-house training

CES offers training in monitoring, evaluation and quality systems. Training courses can be run in-house and tailored specifically to the needs of your organisation.

Open training

We also run a programme of training courses covering monitoring and evaluation and quality systems from our accessible central London venue. Courses include:

- Implementing PQASSO
- Quality: choosing between different approaches
- Using the EFQM Excellence Model for continuous improvement
- Foundation course in monitoring and evaluation
- Advanced course in monitoring and evaluation
- Collecting quantitative and qualitative data
- Analysing data
- Presenting evaluation findings effectively
- Monitoring and evaluating grant-making
- Involving service users in evaluation
- Evaluating diversity.

Contact us for our full training brochure on **020 7713 5722**, via our website, **www.ces-vol.org.uk** or email **enquiries@ces-vol.org.uk**

Consultancy

Our consultancy service is flexible and provides support for organisations that want to understand and implement monitoring, evaluation and quality systems.

External evaluations

CES has carried out evaluations of a large number of organisations over the last 15 years as well as working with funders to evaluate their programmes and funding strategies.

Other publications from Charities Evaluation Services

- First Steps in Quality (2002)
- First Steps in Monitoring and Evaluation (2002)
- Practical Monitoring and Evaluation: A Guide for Voluntary Organisations, 2nd edition (2005)
- Managing Outcomes: A Guide for Homelessness Organisations (2003)
- Measuring Up: Assessing Outcomes in the Voluntary Sector (2004)
- Monitoring Ourselves, 2nd edition (1999)
- Managing Evaluation, 2nd edition (1999)
- Developing Aims and Objectives (1993)
- A Rough Guide to Change (1998)
- Does Your Money Make a Difference? (2001)
- CES Discussion Papers
  Paper 1 The Purpose of Evaluation (1998)
  Paper 2 Different Ways of Seeing Evaluation (1998)
  Paper 3 Self-evaluation (1999)
  Paper 4 Involving Users in Evaluation (1998)
  Paper 5 Performance Indicators: Use and Misuse (1998)
  Paper 6 Using Evaluation to Explore Policy (1998)
  Paper 7 Outcome Monitoring (2000)
  Paper 8 Benchmarking in the Voluntary Sector (2000)
  Paper 9 Assessing Impact (2005)
- PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations) 2nd edition
- PQASSO CD Rom registered
- PQASSO CD Rom demonstration

For prices, contact CES on **020 7713 5722** or email **enquiries@ces-vol.org.uk**

charities evaluation services

4 Coldbath Square
London EC1R 5HL

t + 44 (0) 20 7713 5722
f + 44 (0) 20 7713 5692
e enquiries@ces-vol.org.uk
w www.ces-vol.org.uk