

OUTCOMES

What is an outcome?

Outcomes are the changes that will come about as a direct result of your work. They should not be confused with outputs which are the activities.

Why are outcomes important?

Many funders now use an outcomes-based approach to their funding and are more interested in the difference your project will make than the choice of activities undertaken. The assessment of your application will be based around how well your outcomes are meeting the identified need and how likely you are to achieve them. They will also assess how well they fit with the aims of their funding.

How to identify your outcomes?

Think about what is the difference your project will make and who it will make a difference to. You should also think about how you will demonstrate the difference your project will make.

Your outcomes need to address the following questions:

- What is the change you intend to make?
- Who will it benefit?
- How will it benefit your target group?
- Are your outcomes relevant to the activity of the project?
- Do you know how you will measure your outcomes?
- Are your outcomes specific and realistic?
- Can you achieve your outcomes within the lifetime of the grant?
- Is there a clear link between the evidence of need for the project and its outcomes?

Many funders talk about **SMART** outcomes and this means that they need to be **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Based**.

A helpful way to set out clearly what the need or problem is, and what difference you want to make is to use the CES outcomes triangle. It can help you to discuss and record what you want to change and how you will do it and then let you test how realistic your plans are.

Example Project Scenario—There are too many people on the planet. The world population has grown to such an extent that there is not enough space for everyone. Humanity needs more room to live and function.

Overleaf is an outcomes triangle showing how to reduce overcrowding on the planet.

Overall aim

Reduce overcrowding of the planet (within 20 years by 10%)

NB: It isn't necessary to make the overall aim SMART but sometimes it's helpful to give it a time frame to give some structure to writing your project's outcomes and the desired changes you want to make.

Outcomes

The key here is that outcomes must be SMART, for example:

- 3% of population relocated to 2 identified alternative planets by 2025
- 2% of population relocated to 2 new under-sea centres by 2017
- Birth rates reduced by 5% by 2027
- 2% of population have increased tolerance of living in small environments by 2012

Activities

Activities must also be SMART, for example:

- Launch space programme to identify 2 inhabitable planets in 2007
- Planets identified by 2009
- Alternative living structures tested, piloted and ready for use by 2015
- Adult and family orientation programme for space and under-sea living launched 2007
- 1 million adults and 0.5 million families identified by 2012 for alternative living environments
- Build 10 cities on suitable planets ready for habitation by 2020
- Pilot under-sea city living programme begins in 2012
- 2 children per family birth control programme implemented in 2007. Education programmes rolled out to schools, colleges, health centres, media, and libraries. Special adult workshops/education programmes
- 'Sharing programme' delivered. Population develops greater sense of sharing space, homes, public transport, open spaces, utilities, and recreation resources. 1 workshop per 1,000 of population delivered each year for next 20 years

How to measure outcomes?

Make sure that you have plans in place to measure your outcomes. Many funders ask for milestones which will show them how you will measure your progress and how well you are achieving the intended outcomes.

When setting outcomes you need to think about how you will know that change is happening and there has been progress towards your outcome.

Hard Outcomes are numbers of people obtaining a qualification or securing employment and are easier to evidence but **Soft Outcomes** are often changes that happen along the way such as changes in attitude, confidence or communication skills. These are often harder to measure.

There are a variety of tools that can be used to measure outcomes, including questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, video diaries and one-to-one interviews. You can also use personal stories to bring 'soft outcomes' to life or observation and case notes could be used.

Because outcomes are about changes it can be helpful to establish a baseline (or starting point) so that you have something to compare against later. You need to remember that it might be difficult to ask questions about self-confidence and this may have to be done by observation at the start of the project and progress recorded as the project goes along.

Using the Information

The results can help you to:

- Demonstrate your success to others
- Celebrate your achievements
- Improve the way your services run

Further Information

Explaining the difference your project makes—A BIG Guide to using an outcomes approach—available from **www.biglotteryfund.org.uk**

Outcomes Star—a tool used to measure soft outcomes. The Outcomes Star and the Outcomes Star Guide are free to download from the London Housing Foundation's website **www.homelessoutcomes.org.uk**