



## Defining and Describing Projects

Your organisation exists to meet the needs of a group of people and/or deal with problems you have identified. We often think about fundraising as getting enough money to run our organisations. But most funders give money for specific pieces of work – or projects. So an essential part of writing successful funding proposals is to design clear, realistic and effective projects.

### What is a project?

A project is a specific piece of work, a programme or a new initiative; it should be time-limited and have clear aims and outcomes and sometimes, targets.

### Definitions of aims, objectives, outcomes and outputs

When you are applying for funding, it is likely that you will come across at least some of the words below, so it is important to understand what they mean.

<u>Aims:</u>	The changes you are trying to achieve. They describe the difference you <i>plan</i> to make in the lives of the people you work with.
<u>Objectives:</u>	The <i>planned</i> activities which will enable you to achieve your aims.
<u>Outcomes:</u>	The changes, benefits, learning or other effects that <i>actually</i> occur as a result of your activities.
<u>Outputs:</u>	The detailed activities, services and products your organisation actually does or provides i.e. what is on the 'menu' for service users, what they're actually able to access

Examples of aims:

- To increase confidence and self-esteem
- To improve the mental health of women on Anyplace Housing Estate
- To enable women to find employment

Examples of objectives:

- To facilitate a support group for isolated women
- To provide training in job search skills
- To provide information and advice on local volunteering opportunities

Examples of outcomes:

- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Improved mental health
- Increased numbers of women taking up voluntary work

Examples of outputs:

- Befriending service for isolated women
- One to one counselling service
- Job search training

As you can see, aims and outcomes are linked. Aims describe what you *plan* to change and outcomes describe the change that *will happen* as a result of what you do.

Objectives and outputs are also linked. Objectives describe the activities you *plan* to run and outputs are the actual activities you *will run*.

### **Planning your project**

The people you are working with may face several difficulties and have many needs, so it may be necessary to design different projects to deal with different kinds of needs. The evidence of need should specifically relate to the particular project you are requesting funding for.

Most funders will be interested in the outcomes of your projects, not just the activities you are going to provide. Sometimes, they state this clearly (e.g. Big Lottery, Comic Relief); sometimes they are not so clear. These days, they are likely to ask you about the difference your project will make to the people you are working with i.e. the outcomes of your project. (See section on 'Funders' Questions below)

The first step is to design a project that addresses the problem or need you have identified.

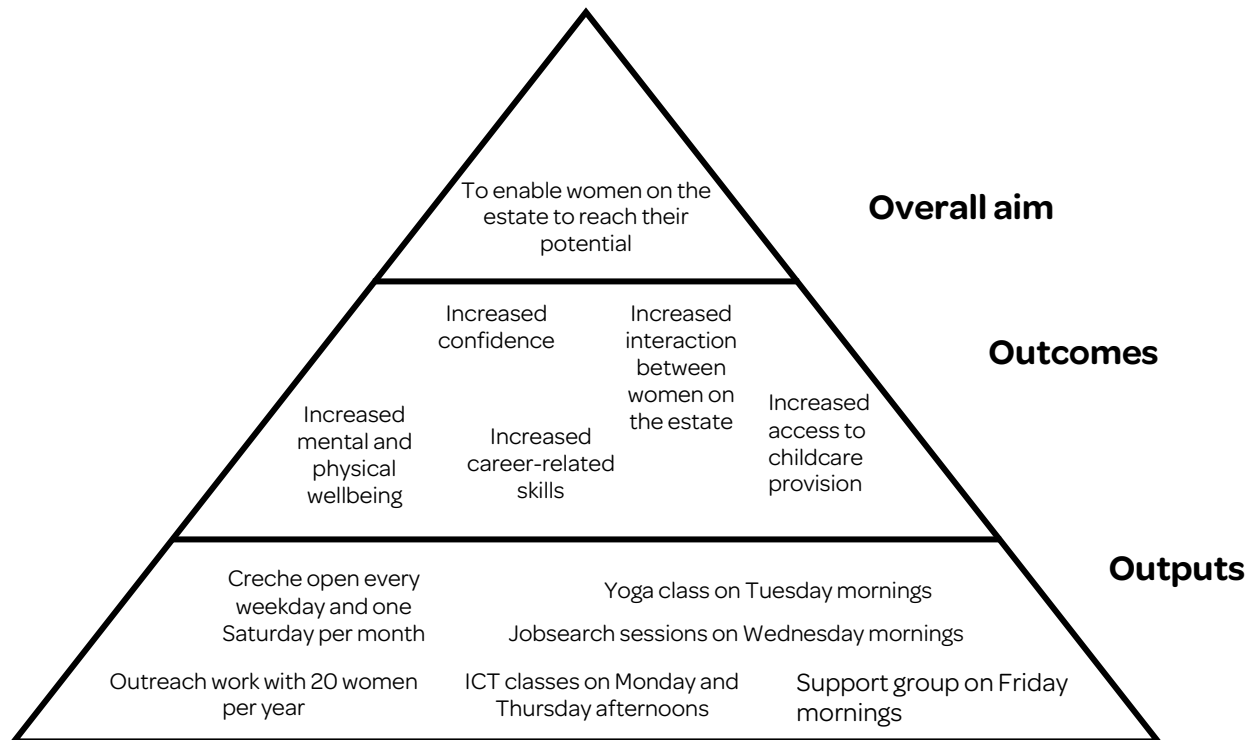
Often, when people start thinking about projects they think about the activities or services they want to run. Instead, it is very important to begin by thinking carefully about *why* you want to run a project – what do you want to achieve?

Consider the following questions:

- What needs to change in order to deal with the problem or difficulties faced by people in your community?
- What will people's lives be like when this change has happened?
- How can you bring about this change?
- Who (specifically) and how many people can realistically benefit from your project?
- How long will it realistically take for change to happen?

Most funders will want to know what the overall aim (or purpose) of your project is and will expect you to include this in your project summary. They will also want to know about the specific outcomes of your project, and the activities you will run in order to achieve these outcomes.

The planning triangle below is useful for visualising a project. This is an example for a women's centre on a housing estate.



It is also important to remember that you will have to be able to MEASURE whether or not outcomes have happened. For this reason, they need to be SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time-bound

It is a good idea to set (realistic) targets and often funders will require this. For example:

- 25 women per year have increased confidence and self-esteem
- 40 women per year have improved mental health
- 15 women per year have participated in voluntary work

A note of caution: funders are not always clear themselves what is meant by 'outcomes'! it is useful to check their guidelines to see how they describe outcomes and check if they provide any examples.

The next step is to plan the activities or services you will run in more detail i.e. your outputs. It is very important that the funder can get a clear picture of how the project will work in practice.

Your project description needs to explain:

- What you are going to do
- How you are going to do it (including the resources you will need)
- When you will do each thing you need to do

- Who will be responsible - both for individual activities and for the overall management of the project
- How you will know you have done it<sup>4</sup>

For example, a more detailed description of the women's centre's outreach service would be:

*We plan to provide an outreach service for isolated women on the Anywhere estate, including older women, new mothers, those with mental health issues, etc. We will support 20 women per year.*

*The service will include five home visits each week and a drop-in session at the community centre on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.*

*The home visits and drop-in sessions will be run by a part-time support worker (16 hours p.w.) and the overall project will be co-ordinated by a part-time project manager (21 hours p.w.)*

*The support worker will keep records re: the women who access the service, including demographic information, case notes and feedback from 6-monthly reviews. The project manager will evaluate the service each year and write a report for the Management Committee.*

## **Understanding funder's questions**

We've talked about need, outcomes, project descriptions, and a bit about monitoring and evaluation. Funders' application forms will ask questions about all of these aspects of your project, but the questions vary. It is important to understand their questions – here are some examples:

1. What difference do you want to make, and how will your organisation achieve this? [The difference you want to make refers to outcomes, and how you will achieve it refers to outputs]
2. What do you want to achieve as a result of the funding? [This question refers to your outcomes.]
3. How will your project address the need? [An answer to this question would involve describing your project outputs and possibly, outcomes.]
4. Why is your project the best way of meeting the need? [An answer to this question would involve providing evidence of your previous success, outcomes you'd achieved before and perhaps other external evidence such as research, quotes from referral agencies supporting your work etc. – this evidence should show the funder why the specific project you have designed will provide a solution to the problem you have identified.]
5. How do you intend to monitor the work, measure its success and ensure its quality. [This question is about monitoring and evaluation, but in order to evaluate your project effectively, you must have clear, measurable outcomes.]

Further issues to consider:

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<sup>4</sup> See 'Six Steps to a Good Application', available on the Big Lottery website: [http://www2.biglotteryfund.org.uk/downloads/pub\\_six\\_steps\\_application.pdf](http://www2.biglotteryfund.org.uk/downloads/pub_six_steps_application.pdf)

- Can you realistically address the problem you have identified? It is important to design realistic projects – clearly related to the need you are trying to meet and the capacity of your organisation to meet this need. Funders will have a sense of what is realistic or not (usually).
- Consider how this project will impact on other areas of your work (staff time taken away from working on other things etc)...
- If there is anyone else locally providing similar services (who may also be applying to the same funder)? If so, highlight how you are different and focus on what you do well (talk about any successes and awards you have achieved). Acknowledge that other services exist and focus on how good you are, instead of being negative about others.
- Give your project a catchy title! Or at the very least not a long, long one...