



Introduction to measuring outcomes

5. Indicators

Once you have your outcomes and intermediate outcomes in place, you need to then decide on your indicators.

Sometime people can get mixed up between outcomes and indicators. It can be useful to see the distinction like this:

- **Outcomes are what success would look like for your project**
- **Indicators are measures or signs which show to what extent you are achieving your outcomes**

While hard outcomes can often be measured with one simple indicator, soft outcomes often require a number of different indicators to paint the full picture.

Indicators

You need at least one indicator for each outcome or intermediate outcome. To help you to identify indicators, think about your clients and ask these questions:

- What would they be doing differently that would indicate this change was happening or had happened?
- What would they tell you?
- How would they behave differently?
- Would they look any different?
- What would you see or hear that would suggest to you that the individuals were making progress?

Examples of indicators

- Level of confidence reported by women
- Attendance at counselling appointments
- Amount of alcohol intake
- Level of isolation expressed by women
- Number of children enrolled in crèche
- Level of skills in literacy, numeracy and IT

The table below shows the kinds of indicators which might suggest an increase in self esteem:

Outcome	Indicator
Increased self esteem	Level of self esteem reported by client Number of negative comments about self Amount of care taken over personal appearance Amount of time spent on the enjoyable activities

You can also use the same structure when identifying indicators for intermediate outcomes. The below example is based on the alcohol misuse service discussed above:

Outcome	Intermediate outcome	Indicator
Controlled drinking and fuller lifestyle	Engages with service	Number of requests for help Number of times actively engages with service
	Starts to come on time and sober to appointments	Level of punctuality Level of sobriety

When planning for measuring your outcomes, brainstorm as many indicators as you can think of for each outcome/intermediate outcome (you won't be measuring them all, but this way you may hit upon things that you don't normally measure). Then, once you have them all in front of you, you can prioritise and decide which are the most important and practical for you to measure, taking into account the resources you have available and the practicalities of measurement. You don't want too many to measure - 2 or 3 for each outcome is normally plenty. Often, one indicator may relate to more than one outcome and if you can measure indicators which relate to more than one outcome, then this will make your life much easier!

This is a process of prioritisation. Some things will be more important and some things will be more measurable than others. While you shouldn't shy away from indicators which are less easy to measure in a more conventional way, neither should you give yourself an impossible mountain to climb.