



Introduction to measuring outcomes

7. When to collect the data

So, once you've decided on how to collect the information on your indicators, you then need to decide when and how often to collect the information.

While this is relatively flexible, you need to keep to some basic principles:

- Measure a baseline and **at least** one other point
- The same questions should be asked
- Data should be collected in the same way (if possible)
- Data should be recorded in the same way

The definition of monitoring at the start of this guide included reference to the **regular** collection of data, so you need to make sure that you have a proper plan in place about when you are going to collect all your data.

For soft outcomes, the **baseline** data is especially important. You need to collect this data as early as possible, as this gives you something to compare your later results against.

Tips for measuring baselines:

- Take your time to measure them thoroughly– this means that the results will be more useful!
- Carry out assessments somewhere comfortable for both the client and the assessor (if possible)
- Combine baseline measurement with activities that are already part of the project (e.g. initial needs assessment) to reduce the workload.

The question of when to collect data is often obvious, e.g. if you are measuring level of knowledge gained from a training, you would measure the level at the start of the training and then at the end of the training. You might then do some follow-up interviews with attendees to find out the longer-term impact of the training and whether they had put their knowledge to use.

When would collection of complete data not be possible?

- Anonymous services (e.g. helpline)
- One-off users of a service
- Those who don't want to be contacted any further

How could you adapt your system to accommodate these changes?

- Observation/judgement of the counsellor (rather than relying on self-assessment by the client)
- Only surveying a snap-shot (e.g. all those who call over 2 weeks every 6 months)
- Use intermediate outcomes, as accessing the service is itself a move towards the desired outcome.
- Survey more people than your sample size, so that the sample size is not adversely affected by drop-outs or non-responses