Improving Lives

how we approach outcomes

Introduction

This guide is for those applying to our Improving Lives grant programme. It is designed to help you understand what we are looking for when we assess the outcomes in your application, and also covers what you will need to bear in mind when you are reporting to us, if you are successful in getting a grant.

What are outcomes?

When we assess an application we look at the activities you are proposing and what change you expect to bring about as a result. The activities you will deliver are **outputs** and the changes you hope to achieve are **outcomes.**

> **Outputs** are the activities you are delivering to achieve your outcomes e.g. the number of classes, 1:1 sessions or advice and information sessions delivered.
>
> **Outcomes** are the changes or benefits to people that happen because of your work. For people this might be things like improved self-esteem or confidence, new skills, or getting a job. Outcomes can be for individuals, families, or whole communities.

In your application we ask you to explain what difference you are trying to make to people's lives by setting out your intended outputs and outcomes.

What are we looking for when we make assessments?

1. What is being delivered?

The first thing we look for is a clear explanation of what the work consists of and the outputs you are planning to deliver. We need this information clearly and logically laid out so that we can understand what you plan to do and can put the outcomes of your work into context.

2. What outcomes will the service(s) deliver?

We want to be confident that the service(s) being delivered make a positive difference to the lives of beneficiaries. We are looking for practical results, changes and/or indicators of improvements. We want to know wherever possible that your service(s) have contributed to the reported outcomes.

We also want to understand what counts as a significant positive outcome in your area of work, with your service users, and what can be expected from your service in the future.

Sometimes applicants confuse outcomes and outputs. Outcomes should not be statements about activities to be delivered, or descriptions of services. Instead, outcomes should be expressed in terms of the change that has been brought about.

Outcomes should be clearly stated. Wherever possible, the outcomes you provide should be 'SMART'.

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SMART

Specific   well-defined and described in an unambiguous way.

Measurable using indicators that enable progress to be assessed. Please note that 'measurable' does not necessarily mean 'countable'. We are looking for credible evidence of change, which may be quantitative and/or qualitative. There are very few outcomes that cannot be measured if the outcomes and mechanisms for measuring them are thought about in advance.

Achievable   are realistic but also represent significant progress in the context of the work and the people you work with.

Relevant   have a strong connection to the overall purpose of the work.

Timetabled   can be achieved within the funded timescale outlined.

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3. Do your outcomes fit with our Improving Lives programme priorities?

Our Improving Lives outcomes grid sets out our six funding priorities and the outcomes we are looking for under each priority.

PRIORITIES	OUTCOMES		
Help at a Critical Moment Helping people to rebuild their lives following a crisis, critical moment, trauma or abuse	People are supported at a time of crisis, critical moment, trauma or abuse, and helped to move on positively with their lives	There is an improvement in how people feel about themselves e.g. improved confidence, self-esteem, resilience, or well-being	People have improved mental health and/or ability to cope
Positive Choices Helping people, whose actions or behaviours have led to negative consequences for themselves and others, to make positive choices	People have access to quality specialist rehabilitation services that enable them to move on positively with their lives	There is a change in people's ability to cope that results in them being less likely to engage in harmful behaviours	A reduction in harmful behaviours over time (e.g. a reduction in offending or alcohol/drug consumption)
Accommodation / Housing Support Enabling people work towards or maintain accommodation	People have access to support enabling them to gain and/or sustain stable accommodation	People have gained the skills needed to live independently and maintain a home	Vulnerable people in need of housing are given support to remain safe and gain the skills to live with greater independence
Employment and Training Supporting people to move towards or gain employment	People have improved soft skills, are moving towards employment and/or being work ready	People have developed appropriate technical skills (including literacy, numeracy and job-specific qualifications) and are more likely to gain employment as a result	People have engaged in training to reach their personal potential to work or volunteer
Financial Inclusion, Rights and Entitlements Supporting people to overcome their financial problems and ensure that they are able to claim their rights and entitlements	People have the support, information and advice to address their financial issues	People are able to navigate the benefits, migration and asylum systems and claim their rights and entitlements	People have improved financial literacy, are more able to understand their finances and have greater confidence when budgeting and managing their money
Support Networks and Family Working with people to develop improved support networks and family relationships	An individual and/or family enjoys positive and constructive relationships with others; feeling and being socially connected	An individual and/or family has the skills, understanding and emotional capacity to maintain and manage positive relationships	An individual, family or carer receives support that increases their resilience, independence and/or reduces mental health issues and isolation

A fuller description of each priority can be found in the Improving Lives funding guidelines.

When you complete our application form you will be asked to identify which priority or priorities your work will be addressing. Your application will be assessed against the priority or priorities that you select and we will ask you to report on these if you receive a grant. Within each priority area we have three broad outcomes. These outcomes clarify what we are looking for when we assess an application in each priority area. An assessor will look at the outcomes your work is delivering and judge how well they fit with one or more of the outcomes in your selected priority area(s).

4. How are outcomes measured?

When we look at your application or progress report we should be able to understand how outcomes have been collected and why you have decided to measure outcomes in the way you have.

Outcomes can be measured using a variety of tools, including questionnaires, surveys, focus groups and one to one interviews. We are not prescriptive about which you should use and there is no 'one size fits all' approach. We are looking for organisations that measure outcomes in an appropriate, accurate and reliable way. When we assess the way you measure outcomes there are a number of things that we look for:

Outcomes measurement should be proportional and appropriate. We are looking for organisations where the time and resources dedicated to outcomes measurement are proportional and appropriate to the work being delivered.

The scale and scope of the services, the outcomes you are trying to bring about will have an effect on what proportionate outcomes measurement looks like. For example, the evaluation of a weekly lunch and social club for older people that aims to reduce loneliness and social isolation will look different to the evaluation of a long term mentoring project working with offenders that aims to reduce offending.

The method used to measure your outcomes should be reliable. Reliability refers to how well your chosen method measures the issue it is intended to evaluate. Questions you may wish to ask are:

- is the way you measure the outcomes of your work repeatable?
- would others get the same findings if they were to review your work in the same way?

The limitations of the approach to measuring outcomes are acknowledged. Be honest when considering the contributions made by others to the outcomes achieved; don't over or under claim. It is often more realistic to talk about the contribution you've made rather than to try to attribute impact to your work alone.

Learning is used to improve service delivery. There are two main uses for the information you collect; it helps to demonstrate the impact of your work to funders but, most importantly, should enable you and your organisation to learn from and improve your work.

We want to see that you are capturing information that is useful to your organisation and that this is used to help shape and, where needed, improve services.

Quantitative and qualitative information is provided. Ideally we are looking for both quantitative and qualitative data (no numbers without stories, no stories without numbers). Both have their uses; qualitative research gives insights into why and how things happen, while quantitative research provides more confident estimates of the extent of change, causes and effects and differences. A good description of the outcomes of service(s) is likely to use both approaches to some extent.

'Hard' or 'soft' outcomes are used as appropriate. We recognise the value of both 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes. 'Hard' outcomes are concrete, quantitative outcomes, such as the numbers moving into jobs or the number of people gaining qualifications. It is easy to measure whether these have been achieved; they either have or they haven't, there is no middle ground.

'Soft' outcomes are more intangible, subjective and generally a matter of degree rather than absolute. They are often an important intermediate step towards achieving the harder outcomes. It is often difficult to measure soft outcomes. Instead, appropriate indicators or measures of success may be used to provide evidence that a soft outcome has been achieved. For example, a soft outcome might be: 'parents using the service have more confidence in communicating with staff at their children's schools' and you might measure the degree to which parents feel their confidence has improved through the use of questionnaires or tools such as the Outcomes Star.

Follow up over time. Evaluations often stop when the intervention stops. However, in an ideal world evaluations would include a follow up to make sure that the results of an intervention are sustained over time to show, for example, how many of those who gained employment are still in their job six months later, or how many of the tenancies secured as part of a housing project were able to be sustained for a year or more. Evidence that your work is achieving this type of lasting change will be viewed positively, and strengthen an application.