Getting Funding and Planning Successful Projects:

BIG's Guide to Outcomes

Edited from website: www.biglearningzone.org.uk

The Big Lottery Fund is an outcomes funder and is driven by the difference its funding makes for individuals and communities.

1. Need

The starting point for any project is to be clear on the needs it is addressing. Need is the term we use to describe a problem or issue, or situation where something needs to change to make things better, for a person, a group of people, an environment or an organisation.

Why is it important?

Because:

- having a **clear vision** of what your project will tackle is fundamental to designing your project's approach
- being clear about the need helps you decide **how best to address it** or how to complement other projects
- it keeps everyone involved in the project **focused on the priorities**
- it helps you **revise and adapt** your project if necessary
- **funders want to know** that you have good reasons for your project

Need - key points checklist

- What is the problem or issue you want to address with your project?
- What evidence is there that this need exists?
- What are the reasons for the need?
- Have you carried out any research?
- Why have you prioritised this need?
- Why is your project an appropriate response to the need?
- Have you consulted with the people your project will benefit and other relevant stakeholders?
- Do you know about relevant local strategies or initiatives, or other projects working in this field and how your project will fit in?

Cause → Problem → Evidence → Need

More about need

Need: what's the problem?

If you have a good idea why you want funding, you will be aware of problems or unmet needs as a result of your own experience, through research or through being involved with an organisation or a group. When you plan a project, it is an easy mistake to make to start by describing who you want to work with and what you want to do without first being clear about the need you are addressing. **But careful analysis of the need is an important first step in project planning.**

Ways of defining need

Need is a complex issue, but can be broadly categorised by the following types[1]:

- **Material needs** - to be adequately nourished, have somewhere to live, be warm, have a decent home, adequate transport, adequate income, employment, basic possessions and activities, basic skills and qualifications
- **Psychological needs** - mental health, self-esteem, competence, autonomy, good quality relationships, security

One approach to defining need is to view those in need as *lacking particular resources or facing certain barriers*. in accessing the support, information or care they need[2].

For instance individuals or groups may have needs because they cannot readily access or negotiate services (perhaps due to a lack of language or communication skills) or because they do not live close to the services they need or lack transport. People may have needs because of barriers to accessing help or because of cultural barriers, discrimination, or a lack of trust in statutory organisations.

For example, consider a target group of women experiencing domestic abuse. The **main problem** identified is the continued domestic abuse experienced by women in the area. The **underlying reasons** for this are that the women lack personal and financial autonomy, have low self-esteem and do not see any alternative to their current circumstances. The **needs to be addressed** by the project are for a greater ability to make choices, the availability of alternative housing options for the women and their children, the development of confidence and self-esteem and for access to money and employment advice.

Some groups have needs that are more hidden than others. For example, many people with a learning disability who have high support needs also have needs related to connected problems, such as poverty, unemployment, social isolation and discrimination.

Those most in need include people with multiple, severe needs or those who have fallen through the net of support systems such as statutory services, family, or voluntary and community or private sectors.

It may be appropriate for a project to address several needs or to focus on one or two, depending on the organisation's size or specialist area.

Be as realistic and specific as possible about the needs you are addressing. There may be many unmet needs, so focus on the main need(s) you have identified and draw up a clear statement. This helps to ensure that other people involved in your project share an understanding, but also that we and other funders understand what you are trying to do. You may not be entirely sure or clear at the start, but working through this guidance may help you.

A project that chooses to address only one or two needs, but that can demonstrate a good understanding of what those needs are and why they exist, stands a better chance of achieving its outcomes than a project that aims to address a range of needs but offers little analysis about why.

Evidence: so how do you know?

How do you know the unmet need exists and why? You will have to provide some recent and relevant evidence. This can come from a combination of sources, such as:

- asking people with experience of the need
- your own experience, or what you have seen
- research into the scale of the need
- local statistics about the population in the area or levels of deprivation (such as from the census or other more recent surveys) or other statistics.
- local authority initiatives or partnership strategies between statutory and voluntary sector services that are in place because the need is already well known and evidenced

Some groups who are in most need do not engage with services and so current or recent evidence about their needs may be harder to access.

In general, the time you spend researching need will be in proportion to the size of your project. For example, larger projects will need to demonstrate how their project fits with local, regional or national strategies and the evidence underpinning them.

When analysing the needs you are aiming to address, it is important to keep asking the question "why?" There may be a number of underlying problems and probing the reasons can really help clarify which needs you will address and which you will not and the best approach to designing your project.

[1]Adapted from: Sinking & Swimming: Understanding Britain's Unmet Needs. Young Foundation 2010
[2]Adapted from: Deep and persistent exclusion: interrogating the idea of the "bottom 2.5%" Young Foundation 2008.

Help in defining Need

There are a number of ways you can identify need, for example by:

- getting together with people involved in your project
- holding consultation events
- using questionnaires
- drawing on surveys by others such as local authorities or national charities

Your potential beneficiaries and others may have very different views so think carefully about the best ways of consulting different groups.

Exercise:

Get together with other people involved with your project.

Write down the issue that you have identified, and get everyone to come up with possible answers to the following questions:

- What is the problem?
- What is the evidence for it?
- What is causing it?
- What is the need?

When you are asking what is causing the problem, try breaking it down by asking the question why, answering it, and then asking **why** again. This can help you ensure you have a full understanding of the need for your project.

You can then **prioritise** those issues, their **causes** and the **needs** that you will address with your project. Then think about any other needs that you do not plan to address. Why are they not as relevant? Perhaps someone else is dealing with them, and your project will complement what they are doing. Or maybe you need to rethink your assumptions about the need and consider adjusting your project scope to target need more effectively. **This should help you and others to get a clearer idea about the purpose of your project and what it will and will not do.**

For example:

What is the problem?

Some groups in the community are not using local services and there is little community engagement

What is the evidence?

A consultation exercise was conducted in the village and surrounding area and research was conducted on similar facilities in neighbouring areas. Information on patterns of usage revealed some groups were under-represented.

Why - what is causing it?

Reason 1: People don't like going to the village hall

Why? Access is poor for many disabled/elderly people; it's cold and badly lit; carpark is dark and potholed

Reason 2: Some people would like to be more engaged in local affairs but feel alienated

Why? There are no activities that interest them

Why? There has been little or no consultation about what activities are on offer

What is the need?

People decided that the priority was meeting the community's need for a flexible, accessible and safe place for meetings and activities. They also identified other needs that informed the ultimate design and scope of the project, to include more effective community consultation about what happens in the hall and how it is run.

Find out if any other projects or services are addressing similar needs or working with the same beneficiaries in your area. We and other funders will want to know how your project will fill gaps or complement existing projects. Other projects may also help you to find evidence about need and appropriate responses.

It may be helpful to classify the needs of your target group into categories. For example, the needs of drug users may be classified as:

- health-related
- addiction-specific
- accommodation-related
- employment-related

What BIG will ask

[This section includes the information on what BIG will ask from previous sections. It provides general guidance on what we are likely to ask for in applications for funding. However, we sometimes ask for specific information for different funding programmes so you should always refer to and follow the guidance notes and application form for the specific programme to which you are applying].

We will ask you in your application about:

- the need that your project is trying to meet and evidence you have about the need
- the types of people who will benefit from your project and evidence you have about their need and the level of that need
- why you think your project is the right approach to meeting the need

For larger projects, we are likely to want to know about local, regional or national strategies and how your project fits with them and the evidence that they have gathered.

We will want to know that you have consulted appropriately so it is important to ensure that you hear from people who can represent the whole range of beneficiaries.

2. Aim and outcomes

The aim is a brief statement of the **overall purpose** of your project. The outcomes are the **specific changes** that result from your project.

Why are they important?

Because they:

- help **focus** everything that you do
- **explain the changes** your project will bring about to meet the needs you have identified
- explain **why your project should be funded**

Aim and outcomes - key points checklist

- Does your aim sum up the overall purpose of your project in one sentence?
- Does your aim reflect the need you have identified?
- Have you used words of change (for example: 'more', 'better', 'less', 'improved') to describe your outcomes, to say what will be different by the end of the project?
- Do your outcomes link logically to the need you have identified?
- Are your outcomes short and clear?
- Have you limited your outcomes to a manageable number (we ask for up to four)?

More about aims and outcomes

What changes do you want to make?

Once you understand the need for your project there are two key elements to describing the difference you want to make:

- your **overall aim** - a brief statement of the overall purpose of your project
- your **intended outcomes** - the specific changes that you want to result from your project

Aim

The overall aim sums up the **purpose** of your project and the **effect** it will have. It helps focus everything that you do. Choose a simple aim and word it carefully. It should be **one sentence** and something that you can achieve or at least influence strongly over the course of your project, for example: "To engage young people positively in the community". The needs that you have identified should help you to write your aim.

Outcomes

Outcomes are the changes that your project can make over time to address the need(s) you have identified. They are the result of what you do, rather than the activities or services you provide. For people, this might be things like improved health, new skills, more confidence or getting a job.

Outcomes are best described using words of change, such as: more, better, less, improved.
In some cases outcomes may involve keeping a situation stable, or stopping things from getting worse.

Depending on your project, outcomes can occur at different levels, including:

- individuals and families, for example fathers improve their parenting skills
- communities, for example people experience a reduction in anti-social behaviour in their neighbourhood
- the environment, for example more biodiversity
- organisations, for example charities improve their evaluation skills
- systems and structures, for example a decrease in congestion city-wide from an increase in cycle routes

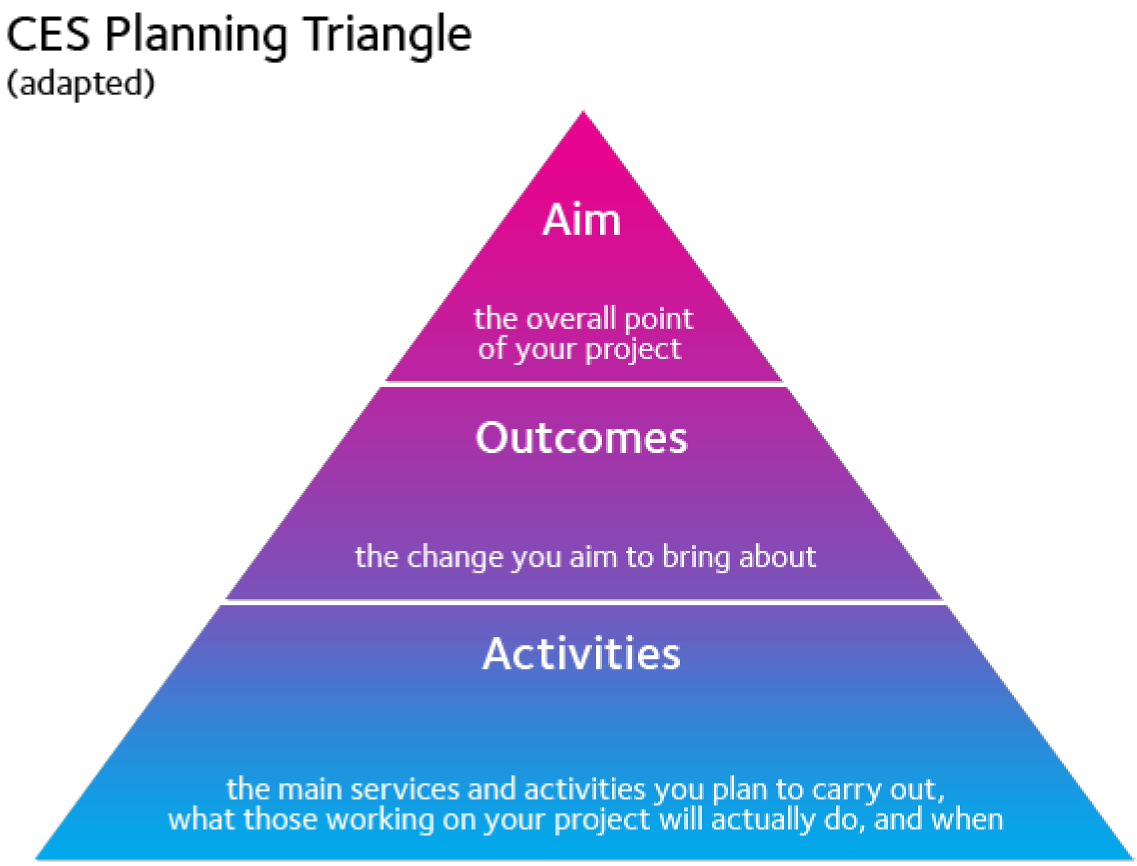
A single project may identify outcomes at a number of levels. For example, a family centre may identify outcomes for children, their families and for local schools.

Even in very small or highly targeted projects with only one or two outcomes it is still possible to differentiate between the aim and the outcome. For example, a small benefits advice project for lone parents could still have as its overall aim "to address poverty among unemployed lone parents in the area" with an outcome of "an increase in the number of lone parents securing their entitled benefits".

Help with aims and outcomes

Project planning

It is worth investing as much time as you can in planning your project. A helpful way of thinking about your aim, outcomes and activities is to use a **CES Planning Triangle**[4]. 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.



Put your overall aim at the top of the triangle

To help you set your aim, think about why you offer your particular service or mix of services. What do you hope the effect will be? The overall aim describes in broad, general terms the change you want to see. Being realistic with your aim will help you identify realistic outcomes.

Choose a simple aim and word it carefully. It should be something that you can achieve or at least influence strongly over the course of your project. For example, "engage young people positively in the community".

Remember that your aim is also the summary of how you will explain why your project exists - and why it should be funded.

Put your intended outcomes into the middle level of the triangle

What needs to change for your project to achieve its overall aim? What differences will your project help to make for your beneficiaries? The answers to these questions are your project outcomes. Some of these outcomes might happen quickly, while others may take longer and depend on meeting other outcomes - but they must be changes that will happen by the end of your project.

Be sure to **use words of change** when describing your outcomes, such as: more, better, less, improved. In some cases your outcomes may involve keeping a situation stable, or stopping things from getting worse.

You should also make sure that your outcomes refer to changes that are not simply related to the workings of your project. For instance, instead of saying "young people contribute to decisions about running the project", you should say "young people are more confident and able to express their opinions".

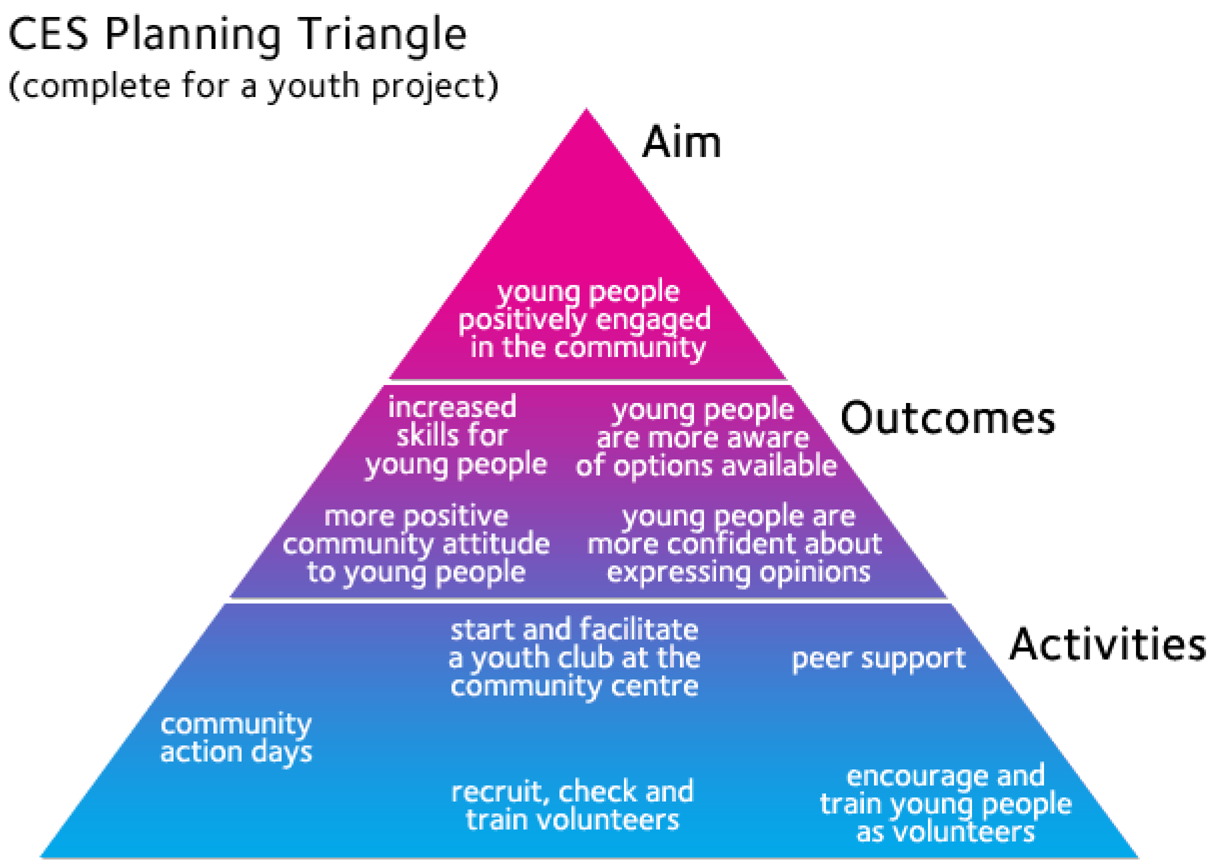
It can be hard to think in terms of outcomes. If this happens, start by looking at what activities you intend to do and ask yourself why you are running them. What changes will those activities lead to?

Don't write too many outcomes. Keep them short. It is better to focus on fewer outcomes and be absolutely clear about what you are trying to achieve.

Put your project activities in the bottom layer of the triangle

See Section 4 for advice on activities

An example of a completed planning triangle for a youth project



Reviewing your planning triangle

When you have filled in a triangle, check the following:

- Have you used **words of change** in the top and middle and words of action in the bottom of the triangle?
- Does the middle of the triangle describe **what changes will result for your beneficiaries** (or for organisations, the community or environment)?
- Does the bottom of the triangle describe **what staff or volunteers will do**?

Now you can look at the triangle as a whole, to check that the plans for your project are realistic:

- Look at each of your outcomes in the middle level. Will the activities you have listed at the bottom realistically help you to achieve one or more of your outcomes?
- Now look at the activities. Does each one have a direct link to one or more of the outcomes? If not, why is the activity included? You may need to consider whether the activity really is important. It may well be that the activity will help you to achieve another change. If this is the case you may need to include another outcome. It may help to do this if you number the outcomes and put the relevant number(s) against each activity.

Here is a link to a blank version of the triangle for you to use:

http://static.socialgo.com/cache/187252/assets/files/4cc8c8ec2df39-187252-PlanningTriangle.doc

[4] The CES Planning Triangle is used and adapted by kind permission of Charities Evaluation Services.

What BIG will ask

We will ask you to be clear about your project's aim and the outcomes that you intend to achieve. What you say is an important part of the decision about which projects we fund and of the way we will monitor your grant.

When you apply to us, you will be asked for up to four outcomes. They should not be too detailed and should focus on the most important changes you want your project to make. You will also need to explain how your project outcomes support the overall programme outcomes that will be described in the programme guidance notes.

While you can identify up to four outcomes, your project may be effective by focusing on fewer outcomes than this (and in some cases, a programme may require a specific number of outcomes). What matters is that the outcomes clearly show the change or difference that will happen for individuals, communities or organisations as a result of the project.

3. Tracking progress

Now that you are clear about your aim and outcomes, you need to work out **how you will show the change your project is achieving over time.**

There are two key steps to this process:

- understanding and identifying the **signs of change** (using **indicators**)
- **measuring the extent of change** that is happening

Why is it important?

Because it will help you to:

- **know** if your project is making the difference you intended
- **understand** what's working and what isn't and **help you make changes** to your project, if you need to
- **track progress** and provide information to your funder(s)
- learn from your project

At BIG we are interested in understanding how much change or improvement will result overall from funding a particular project

Tracking progress - key points checklist

- Have you identified at least one indicator for each outcome?
- Do your indicators describe the signs that will tell you if a change is happening?
- Have you described the scale or level of the change you wish to achieve at key points during the project, and by the end of the project?

- How will you collect information on your indicators?
- How do you know if this is the most appropriate way to collect information?
- Are your indicators realistic?

More about tracking progress

Indicators

Indicators help us understand the signs of change and track progress towards achieving that change.

An indicator is a sign that the outcome, or change, is happening. Indicators are often expressed as:

- the extent of ...
- the ability to ...
- the amount of ...

In order to know whether you are making progress towards achieving outcomes, you need to set at least one indicator for each outcome. Your indicators and their level will help you know whether a particular change is happening, and to what extent a particular outcome is being achieved over the life of the project.

When you have identified the change that you wish to make (your outcomes), the indicator is the answer to the question: "if a change is happening, how will we know?" It's helpful to think of this question first, before thinking about how to measure it. For example:

Outcome	How will we know?
Reduced isolation for older people	There will be a change in the number of older people stating that they feel isolated
Reduced vandalism in the area	There will be a change in the number of incidents reported
Small voluntary organisations have a better understanding of income generation	There will be a change in the level of understanding of income generation within small organisations in the area (and longer term a change in income)

Measuring progress

You will also need to establish:

- the scale or level of the change you wish to make, such as how many people overall will experience the outcomes from your project, and
- how you will measure the change so that you can tell how much progress you are making towards achieving your outcomes.

Outcome indicators can be expressed in terms of numbers (for example a reduction in the amount of pollution), or in terms of words (for example where you assess people's views or experiences, such as young people's feelings of self-confidence, or parent's ability to cope with their children).

For each indicator you use for measuring progress, you will need to show how much progress you have made year on year. This will mean estimating levels and timescales for your indicators, for example "200 local residents will have a more positive attitude towards young people by the end of the second year".

A way of thinking about measuring progress is to imagine meeting one of your beneficiaries for the first time and then again after a week, month or year:

- What are they doing when you first meet? What might they be saying? How do they engage (or not) with the project? How do you know they have needs?
- How would you answer these questions in the middle of the project, or at the end of their involvement with your project? What will be different for them in terms of their skills, attitude or knowledge?

You could lay out this information in similar way to the following example:

Outcome	Indicator	Indicator level	Timescale
Reduced isolation for older people	The number of older people stating that they feel isolated	50 older people report that they feel less isolated	By year 1
		100 older people report that they feel less isolated	By year 2
		A total of 250 older people report that they feel less isolated	By the end of the project
Reduced vandalism in the area	The number of incidents of vandalism reported	10 incidents reported per month	By year 1
		5 reported per month	By year 2
		1 reported per month	By the end of the project
Small voluntary organisations have a better understanding of income generation	The level of understanding of income generation within small organisations in the area	100 people attend training	By year 1
		150 people attend training	By year 2
		A total of 400 people have attended training (follow up surveys with participating organisations show an increase in income generation activities in years one, two and three)	By the end of the project

In some projects, there may be intermediate outcomes i.e. the step changes that happen before the ultimate desired outcome is reached. If that is the case, you can identify and fill in the steps on the journey, describing how you know that beneficiaries have moved through a stage - see the exercise in the *help with...* section for an example of this.

In some projects, such as helping people to eat more healthily, the real benefits such as reduced heart disease and other types of illness may only emerge in years or decades to come. In this case, it will be more realistic and practical to measure changes in things like knowledge, attitudes and behaviour: steps along the way.

During the lifetime of many projects there will be some unexpected outcomes, either desirable or undesirable. It may be helpful to record these unexpected outcomes, as this information will help you learn from and adapt your project as you go along.

We and other funders will ask you how far you have progressed towards meeting your outcomes as time goes along, so you will need to build up this information year on year. Therefore, identifying practical and realistic ways of measuring progress is critical to your project success and your relationship with your funders.

Help with tracking progress

Exercise: Coming up with clear progress measures

If possible, work with staff, volunteers and beneficiaries. List each of your outcomes, and then get everyone to consider what would tell you change is happening (the indicators) and discuss the progress you would expect to make towards those changes through your project's lifetime.

Do you agree on your answers? How might you measure progress?

Exercise: The journey from identifying need to intended outcomes

Write the current situation on the left of a large sheet of paper and the outcome you want to achieve on the right. Work with others to fill in the journey.

For example:

Young people involved in anti-social behaviour

Young people positively engaged in the community

Example: steps along the way

Need
Young people need opportunities to engage positively with community in order to divert or distract them from antisocial behaviour

→

Indicator
Young people engage with project and talk about the difficulties they are experiencing

→

Indicator
Young people start trusting and building relationships with those running the project

→

Indicator
Young people start to take responsibility for running activities with support

→

Outcome
Young people positively engaged in the community and stop behaving in an antisocial way

Then set clear levels for your indicators, to show progress towards achieving the outcome, for example:

- 75 young people have felt able to engage with project workers to discuss their problems by the end of year one, another 100 by the end of year two, and a total of 200 by the end of the project
- 60 young people report that they trust the project workers by year one, another 60 by year two, and a total of 180 by the end of the project
- 10 young people are taking responsibility for running the project by year one, another 10 by the end of year two, and a total of 30 by the end of the project

Setting indicator levels

You will want to be able to track how much progress you are making - this will mean setting some estimates for the level of change you hope for, for example "200 local residents will have a more positive attitude towards young people by the end of the second year".

It may be difficult to estimate the scale of change you should aim for, especially if you are starting a new and innovative project and trying to be clear about outcomes. Be as realistic as possible and base estimates on any information you have, such as:

- your experience or that of similar projects
- your capacity (time, people, money and other resources) or
- the scale of the need you want to meet.

Collecting information to measure change

Measuring changes for your beneficiaries or the environment will involve measuring things like changes in attitude (e.g. increased confidence) or behaviour (e.g. a reduction in the incidents of anti-social behaviour) or physical changes (e.g. an increase in the variety of life in a nature reserve).

When deciding what information to collect, it is worth considering:

- the depth of information you need
- which method will get you the information you need
- how easy it will be for you to collect and analyse the information
- what methods will be appropriate for your beneficiaries or service

Try to gather information from more than one source, such as beneficiaries, project staff and volunteers. This helps make your information more reliable because it balances different points of view and different types of evidence.

You may collect information in more than one way and this can strengthen your findings. Some of the most frequently used methods for collecting information are:

- questionnaires
- observation
- interviews
- keeping records and notes

If you work with individuals in a small project, you will generally collect information when you begin work with each beneficiary, at regular intervals after that (such as every three to six months) and at the end of their involvement with the project. You should also take account of how often and how far your funder will want you to report on your progress: you should plan to collect the necessary information shortly before you need to complete that report.

Some further tips on measuring your outcomes

- Think about how you identified evidence of need for your project. This may give you further ideas about how you can measure your outcomes. If someone else regularly collects statistics, you might like to look at them again (but remember that other factors might affect figures). Or if you surveyed potential local beneficiaries, you could survey them again once you have started running your project.
- Involve beneficiaries at all stages as well as filling in questionnaires themselves, they can help to identify outcomes and outcome indicators, test new forms, and encourage others to get involved. Your project is likely to be more effective if it gives the people it sets out to help a genuine say in the project.
- Be creative. Many projects have used drawing, role-play or other methods to gather information. Think about your beneficiaries and what is most meaningful and appropriate for them.
- Remember that other people and organisations can help you.

Reporting on progress

Measuring progress will enable you to report on and review how much change is being achieved such as:

- 30 young people started taking more responsibility
- 26 parents said they felt less isolated
- 35 households/families started recycling for the first time

There are lots of tools to help you with measuring outcomes that are tried and tested in a wide variety of projects and settings. See the *Resources* section for more information

What BIG will ask

We will ask you to set outcomes, indicators, indicator levels and timescales for your project, and will use these as part of your grant contract, so it is important that you are realistic and confident about your project planning. This should not stop you from being ambitious when you plan and set out your project. Our staff may be able to discuss your outcomes and indicators with you during the assessment of your application.

Unless the programme guidance notes indicate otherwise, we will ask you to set outcomes, indicators and indicator levels that you can achieve within the lifetime of your grant. This means that in some cases, such as long-term improvements to health, you will probably only be able to identify outcomes in the short term. In some programmes we will only fund the first part of your project, but may still ask you to identify your outcomes after funding ends if, for example, we have funded building work that then enables you to run a range of services. In such a case we are interested in how the building is used and whether it improves life for its users

Each indicator, for each outcome, must include a final indicator level that shows the total change that will have happened by the end of our funding.

We ask about your plans for tracking progress as part of your application. This means that you will have to:

- explain in your application the level of the change you hope to achieve (e.g. how many, how much) and your indicators for measuring progress towards it year on year
- explain how you will collect information
- report on how far you are meeting the outcomes at regular intervals, usually every year
- tell us about any problems you have in meeting your outcomes and if necessary, work with us to overcome them or revise your approach

We understand that circumstances change, and that you may need to adapt your measures as your project progresses. We are happy to discuss changes like this with you during the lifetime of your project.

4. Activities

Activities are the **tasks, actions or services** that take place in your project to achieve its outcomes.

Why are they important?

Because they:

- specify **what** will be done, **how** it will be done, **who** will do it and **when** in order to achieve your outcomes
- form the main content of your **project planning**
- determine the **resources and budget** that you need to run your project

Activities - key points checklist

- Does each activity have a direct link to one or more of your outcomes?
- Have you used words of action to describe your activities?
- From your activities, can you develop a project plan showing what you will do, how and by when in order to achieve the outcomes?

More about activities

Having identified the changes you want to achieve, you can now plan how to make it happen. Activities are the **tasks, actions and services** that will bring about the changes that your project will deliver. They are the core of the **project planning** process, setting out **what** will happen, **how** it will happen, **who** will do it and **when**. They should be the most appropriate and effective way to address the need(s) that the project is addressing.

Activities are best described using words of action to describe what those working on the project will actually do, such as: to provide, run, organise, or produce.

At the **initial planning** stage of a project (for example when you are using the planning triangle), activities are best identified at a broad level by considering how best to achieve the outcomes, before moving on to specify activity levels and timescales.

When you get to the **detailed project planning** stage (for example before you prepare your application for funding), the activities should be **specific** and **measurable**, so rather than simply stating "talks at the community centre", you should specify something like "one talk at the community centre each month for two years, each attracting an average of 30 young people".

The more specific the activities are, the more accurate you will be able to be in setting your budget and planning your resources.

What BIG will ask

Your application will need to set out the main activities that you will carry out in order to achieve your outcomes, along with an explanation about who will perform the activities and the timescales involved. There is more detailed information on this in our programme guidance notes. For some programmes, we require you to provide a detailed business plan and we will explain our requirements fully in the relevant programme guidance notes.

5. Learning

This section is about how you learn from your project's achievements or the experience of running your project and what you do with that information

Why is it important?

Because it enables you to:

- explore the reasons why things are (or are not) working well and make changes to help you achieve your outcomes
- gather information that will help you report to funders and others about how your project is performing and how you've adapted it to changing circumstances
- talk about and provide evidence of your achievements and your experience and identify good practice
- build a culture of reflection and analysis within your organisation, that helps people to improve the quality of their work

Learning - key points checklist

- Have you included key review points in your project plan?
- Does your approach take into account our monitoring and evaluation requirements?
- Is there anything else you want to collect for your own learning?
- How will you use your learning to improve your project delivery?
- How will you share your learning beyond the project?
- Have you considered using an external evaluator

More about learning

Monitoring and evaluation

You may be gathering information on a regular basis to see how your project is doing. This monitoring information will help you check progress against agreed plans, and will be useful to report back to others in your organisation, to trustees and to funders. You may also wish to answer key questions, for example, how and why certain outcomes were achieved. This will mean bringing your monitoring information together and collecting additional information, analysing it, then reflecting and learning from your findings. This is usually called self-evaluation.

One way of making the distinction between monitoring and evaluation is to consider them in the context of a car journey:

"Monitoring collects information on matters such as average speed, distance travelled, fuel consumption and whether the journey is following the pre-planned route and is on time. Evaluation addresses questions such as whether the route followed was the best one, whether it might have been better by train and whether the journey was worth undertaking in the first place."

(Scottish Homes, 1991)

Using your learning to improve your project

The approaches discussed in this guidance should help you to meet our requirements effectively. But reporting is not always enough. While it can measure progress, it will not always explain why your project has performed well or not so well. So it is essential to look beyond the figures (and particularly unexpected ones) so that you can try to understand what has happened. You should ensure that you take time to consider what the findings tell you and whether you have to take action to improve your project, or whether they raise matters that you should investigate further.

The information you collect can be used when you are developing strategy and can help you assess progress in achieving your strategic and operational objectives. Information on your outcomes can help you make your work more effective, by helping you identify what works well and what you might change or improve. If you don't achieve the outcomes you expected, you may need to:

- think about providing different services, or the same services in different ways, to achieve better outcomes
- reconsider what your project outcomes should be
- reconsider what your project aim should be
- reconsider how people can access your services
- seek further funding to enable you to deliver services better

It can be useful to distinguish different groups of beneficiaries, and to collect outcomes information in a way that allows you to record and analyse the type and level of outcome achieved by these different groups. This will help you to answer questions such as:

- Do young people under 15 achieve better outcomes than those over 15?
- Do men achieve better outcomes than women?

Wider benefits of learning from outcomes

This kind of learning from outcomes can strengthen your organisation by enabling you to review your work effectively using evidence about what works, which in turn supports you to improve and refine the services you provide. It can help you identify innovative approaches and contribute to your annual reports to stakeholders. Learning from your project's outcomes and how these were achieved may inform your organisation's strategic planning, implementing and reviewing processes. Learning from how you are achieving your outcomes can provide insight into how you plan and operate internally or work with external partners.

Use your outcomes information to highlight your success. You could distribute a summary of your key outcomes and learning to other projects and organisations you know, make it available to your beneficiaries, or use it to apply for funding to continue or develop your project. Even learning from what does not work or from unexpected outcomes can be very valuable in developing new approaches or contributing to policy development and debate.

If there are concerns about how you are doing, it is always worth discussing these with us or your other funders and preferably before the reporting deadline. It is best to show that you have considered any problems, why they have arisen, and what you can do about them. Sometimes there will be external factors that you could not have predicted and that are outside your control. Or you may find that some aspects of your work are proving unexpectedly popular and more successful than others. We will normally want to work with you to deal with the unexpected and may be happy to negotiate changes to agreed outcomes.

What BIG will ask

We will ask you to report on progress towards your intended outcomes, but we also encourage you to undertake self-evaluation for your own benefit. You can do this yourself, or you can employ an outside evaluator to help you (and to support the way that you gather information to report on your outcomes to us). We believe that self-evaluation, and learning from it, helps projects and organisations to develop and improve, so we are happy to consider funding the cost of it.

The good news is that there is likely to be a big overlap between the information that you collect to report to us and what you need for self-evaluation, although you may want to collect more information for self-evaluation, depending on the particular learning you have identified as useful to your organisation, or perhaps to collaborate with others working in your field.

The guidance notes for each of our programmes will tell you whether we have any specific requirements for self-evaluation, or support in place for you. To find out more information about self-evaluation, please visit the *Research & Learning* pages.

Example Building Project (for other examples see website)

Need

There is a need for the provision of a variety of local community services and activities, and to encourage more community engagement.

The community needs better facilities in which to access these services. The existing hall is in a very bad state of repair and has poor access for those with mobility issues. Due to its run-down state, many current and potential users are being turned away. It is also too small for the current demand with no more than one activity being able to take place at the same time.

Evidence

- A consultation exercise was conducted in the village and surrounding area about the kind of services and activities people would like to have access to, and their priorities for the type of facility needed. Every residential property in the village was given a questionnaire with a 60% response rate received, with 95% of respondents in favour of a new hall. Efforts were made to ensure that the survey respondents were representative of the local population who would be using the facility.
- A variety of multi-generational services and activities were identified through the consultation, including yoga, keep fit, parents and toddlers groups, adult education, and various musical and dancing groups. The existing hall does not have the capacity to cater for many of these.
- Information on patterns of community hall usage over the past year revealed the hall is currently used by many groups and is completely booked up for at least one month in advance. Only one group are able to use the hall at a time due to its poor design and layout. This also revealed that some groups were under-represented.
- Feedback obtained over the past year from existing users identified the need for better facilities. The building is often out of use due to poor ventilation and heating systems.
- Research conducted in the surrounding area revealed that five out of seven neighbouring villages have either no hall or have had to close theirs. The nearest hall is 20 miles away and fully booked.
- Local authority data on deprivation identified significant levels of rural deprivation and isolation, poor access to public services and transport (with appropriate reference e.g. website).

The overall aim for the project

To provide a community facility that will offer a range of services and be able to hold community events for the village.

Outcome(s) for the project

- Improved access to existing and new community services, activities and events by local residents.
- Greater involvement by a more representative range of people in local meetings and other activities.

Tracking progress

Outcome	Indicator	Indicator level	Timescale
Improved access to existing and new community services, activities and events by local residents	Number of people benefiting from local youth, training, healthcare and leisure services from building	The number of people accessing services, activities and events will increase by 100	By the end of year one
		The number of people accessing services, activities and events will increase by 200	By the end of year two
		The number of people accessing services, activities and events will increase by a total of 550	By the end of the project
	Number of new services/activities	There will be three new services/activities aimed at currently under-represented groups (e.g. older people, disabled people)	By the end of year one
		There will be three new services/activities aimed at currently under-represented groups (e.g. older people, disabled people)	By the end of year two
		There will be a total of ten new services/activities aimed at currently under-represented groups (e.g. older people, disabled people)	By the end of the project
Greater involvement by a more representative range of people in local meetings and other activities	Number and range of people taking part in public meetings	The number of people taking part in public meetings will increase by 25	By the end of year one
		The number of people taking part in public meetings will increase by 35	By the end of year two
		The number of people taking part in public meetings will increase by a total of 110 and will include younger and older people and those with disabilities	By the end of the project

Activities

- Launch a refurbished, energy efficient building.
- Provide a variety of adult education and training courses.
- Feedback obtained from new and existing users on the new hall and the services being provided.
- Local volunteers and beneficiaries to be directly involved in the management and running of the building and project.
- Representation on the management committee from local people and beneficiaries of all ages.
- Continuous consultation and community engagement to take place in the local village and surrounding area.

Please note that Activities listed in Big Lottery Fund applications must be **specific** and **measurable**, unlike those listed here which are intended for guidance only.

Learning

The project learned that some groups were still not using the building - so another survey was done to find out why and inform the services on offer. The project revealed some interesting learning about barriers to local participation in decision-making that was shared with the local authority as part of its consultation on its community engagement strategy.