

Working out what to measure (setting indicators for your outcomes)



Once you have clear outcomes for your project [see [Setting outcomes](#) support guide], the next task is to identify your **indicators** – i.e. work out what you need to measure.

What are indicators?

Indicators are the things you **measure** to find out whether you have made the differences you hoped to make (your outcomes). You need to look at all of your outcomes and come up with indicators for each.

Outcome type:	Example:	
	Outcome:	Possible indicators:
hard outcomes can be measured in numbers and usually have <u>straightforward</u> indicators	<i>More unqualified school leavers move into work or education.</i>	<i>Number of unqualified school leavers in education. Number of unqualified school leavers in paid work. Number of unqualified school leavers in unpaid work.</i>
soft outcomes seem more difficult to measure – but you can do it by setting indicators which might <u>reasonably</u> show whether or not your outcomes are being achieved	<i>Young people have increased self-confidence.</i>	<i>Ability to participate in group activities. Ability to express views clearly. Body language. Willingness to try new things.</i>

How to word indicators

1. Indicators often include phrases like **level of...**, **amount of...**, **number of...** or **ability to...**
2. They shouldn't have a change word in them (unlike outcomes). This is because you will probably need to **measure them more than once** to see change over time. For example:

- at the start of your project or with a new service user (baseline)
 - at various points part way through
 - at the end of your project or when you have finished working with a particular service user
 - possibly later on to see whether the difference you have made has been diminished, maintained or increased.
3. Don't include how you plan to measure your indicators. You might measure the same indicator in several different ways depending on the situation and the people you are working with. For example, the indicator "Ability to participate in a group" could be measured by young people telling you they can, or your own observation or a third party giving you feedback – it depends on the context.

How to come up with your indicators

It is a good idea to involve more than one person (and your service users if appropriate) in coming up with/reviewing your indicators.

1. For **each outcome** ask yourself **what it would look like** if you had achieved it. Draw on your life experience, common sense and the kind of things your service users might say.

What makes you think she has become more confident?

She looks me in the eye, she goes and talks to new people, she tries different things and she's really chatty... it's a real change for her.

Allow yourself to imagine all sorts of possibilities and **write down as many as you can think of**. This will give you a **list of possible indicators** for each outcome. (Don't worry about how easy it will be to measure them at this stage. It's important to set your outcomes first, then your indicators and, only then, to think about methods.)

2. From these lists, **choose a few** (no more than 4 or 5) **key indicators** for each outcome. These are the ones which you are going to measure routinely, so you don't want too many. Choose indicators which:
- are particularly important (i.e. if you saw this happening you could be very confident that your outcome is being achieved)
 - are likely to occur in most situations
 - are easy to measure.

You may find that some indicators are relevant to more than one of your outcomes. These will be especially important to measure. You may also find that some indicators will be appropriate for some settings and not others.

3. Don't completely discard all the **other possible indicators** you came up with. It's important to bear these in mind as you deliver your service – if you happen to see evidence of them you may want to record this too.

Example: South McDeeshire Carers runs a range of different support projects for unpaid carers. One of their outcomes is: **Family carers are more able to cope.**

They produce a long list of **possible indicators** for this outcome:

- ~ Number of hours sleep each night.
- ~ Amount of contact they have with people outside their caring role.
- ~ Number of hours a week they have a break from caring.
- ~ Mood.
- ~ How often they lose their temper.
- ~ How often they cry.
- ~ How often they feel happy.
- ~ Ability to pursue a hobby.
- ~ Having someone they can contact when they are struggling.
- ~ Feeling able to ask for help.
- ~ Knowing where to get information.
- ~ Having contact with other people in similar situations.
- ~ Having arrangements in place for regular respite.
- ~ Feeling they have time for themselves each week.
- ~ Feelings of guilt.
- ~ Having something to look forward to.
- ~ Ability to trust someone else to care for the person they look after.
- ~ Knowledge of their rights.
- ~ Feeling they are doing a good job.

However, that would be far **too many indicators** to measure.

Thinking about what carers have told them, they identify that “Amount of contact they have with people outside their caring role” and “Ability to share how they are feeling” are both particularly **important** indicators for the outcome “Family carers are more able to cope”.

These indicators are also relatively **easy to measure**. It will be straightforward to ask carers how much contact they have with people outside their caring role and there are many opportunities for carers to demonstrate “sharing of feelings” in their one-to-one and group work. South McDeeshire Carers decide to measure these two indicators for most of their services.

However, some of the **other indicators** are only relevant for **certain services**. The organisation therefore has to work out which indicators it wants to measure for each [see below].

examples of **key indicators** chosen for **different types of carer support services**:

peer support network for carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amount of contact they have with people outside their caring role. - Having someone they can contact when they are struggling. - Having contact with other people in similar situations. - Ability to share how they are feeling.
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sitting service for carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amount of contact they have with people outside their caring role. - Ability to trust someone else to care for the person they look after. - Number of hours a week they have a break from caring. - Having something to look forward to. - Feeling they have something else to talk about other than caring.
befriending service for carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to share how they are feeling. - Feelings of loneliness. - Amount of contact they have with people outside their caring role.
advice service for carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowing where to get information. - Having appropriate equipment to assist with practical tasks. - Confidence that they are getting all the support they are entitled to. - Knowledge of their rights. - Ability to cope financially.

Staff and volunteers will also be encouraged to keep the other indicators they came up with in mind, recording evidence of them on an ad hoc basis.

More help

There are some example indicator banks which you can download from ESS's website. Our training workshop **Getting started: Outcomes and Indicators** will help you at this stage. To book a place, visit the [workshops](#) page of our website.

What next?

The next step on the Evaluation Pathway is **Collecting Evidence**. You will design evidence collection methods to gather information about the indicators you have chosen. See our [Designing evidence collection methods](#) support guide.



You can download all our **Evaluation Support Guides** free from our website.

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