

Getting started on impact measurement

5 minute read

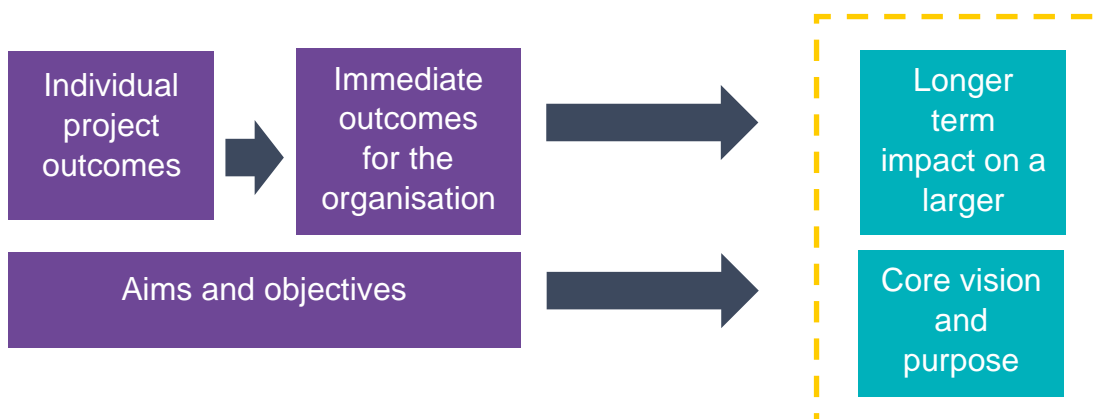
What this guide is and who it's for

This is a short guide to starting your impact measurement journey. It covers the process, indicators to measure and what to do with the data you collect. It's designed for community organisations that are starting out with impact measurement.

What do we mean by impact?

Impact is the difference you make through the work that you do.

Thinking about impact involves a shift in thinking from aims and objectives to long-term achievement of purpose and vision.



Impact is:

- Long term
- About the core mission
- About the community's wellbeing
- About how projects work together
- About capturing the unexpected!

Where to start

The good news is that impact can help with planning, evaluating and promoting your work.

However, it's often easy to get *paralysis by analysis* i.e. you get so worried about what to measure, how to measure it and the accuracy of it all that you end up doing nothing.

As Richard Piper from Fresher Outcomes said:

"Some people in our sector concentrate more on the technical problem of measuring outcomes, and less on the strategic problem of achieving them.

he argument here is not that measurement is unimportant. But it is less important than actually making a difference to people's lives".

Start somewhere and aim to develop and refine your measurement over the years – measuring impact is a marathon and not a sprint!

The impact cycle



Here's what you should think about for each of the seven steps.

Step one: review your vision and mission

Impact is about your core vision and purpose and the way in which your activities relate to them. This should help you develop your theory of change in the next step.

It may be helpful to talk to your Board, staff/volunteers and service users when you do this.

Step two: develop a theory of change

Develop a theory of change to help you explain how your work has an impact on the people you work with. Your theory of change should include activities, short-term outcomes, long-term outcomes and ultimate impact. You may also want to include a narrative that explains the wider context, influencing factors, how the activities relate to each other as well as the outcomes.



Step three: decide on your indicators

You need **indicators** to help you measure your impact. You may want to talk to funders and/or commissioners about indicators that they think will help you demonstrate your impact.

Indicators are things you can **observe** or **measure**. They help you see that your **activities** are helping you to achieve your **outcomes** and **impact**.

Indicators can be **qualitative** or **quantitative**. They can be **objective** or **subjective**.

Here are some guides that might help you choose your indicators:

- [The National Lottery outcome frameworks](#). This could be helpful to demonstrate impact against employment, training and education, housing and financial inclusion.
- [Locality's economic impact guide](#). This guide helps organisations to demonstrate their economic impact.
- [What Works Centre for Wellbeing impact guide](#). This tool helps measure wellbeing indicators and includes a survey builder to capture your indicators.

Step four and five: consider how you'll collect and analyse your data

You will need to think about how you collect and analyse your data. Some of this may be numerical data which is quantitative. Some data may be collected through interviews or case studies, which is qualitative. It's good to have a mix of both to tell the whole story.

Step six: tell people about your impact!

Don't forget to tell people about the impact you're making. If you have permission you can publish stories or use infographics like this one from [Ideal for All](#):



Step seven: shape your business plan

Finally, use the data you've collected to help shape your business plan. Ask yourself if you are meeting the outcomes you intended (or are there any unintended outcomes) and if you understand why? What do you need to do differently (and therefore what should you add into your business plan)?

Remember because impact is long-term and there are multiple external factors that influence it, it's often hard to attribute your activity to the long-term outcome. Look for things that help you make the case that you have contributed to the long-term impact through the work that you are doing.

Further reading

Other useful impact measurement tools include:

- Inspiring Impact <https://www.inspiringimpact.org/>
- Good Finance <https://www.goodfinance.org.uk/impact-matrix>