Outcome and Impact
Understanding key terms in funding applications

Outcome and Impact – understanding key terms in funding applications

Grant funders are increasingly interested in outputs, outcomes and impact to help them understand what your charity does and the difference their donation could make. Understanding the terminology is key to writing clear funding applications, as well as helping you to improve the work you do.

The difference between outputs and outcomes

If you can clearly articulate your project outputs and outcomes, your application is more likely to be understood by a potential funder. In turn, this can make them more inclined to support your project.

Some funders such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) base their entire grant-making criteria (and therefore grant committee decision-making) around outcomes. How well a proposed project can articulate its outcomes will influence the success or failure of an application. NLHF also expects to see clearly defined outputs.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund website has useful guidance on how to meet their outcomes criteria. The guidance is relevant when applying to all potential funders.

An output is the services or goods that are delivered. An outcome is the difference the output will make. The examples below provide a quick and easy way to remember the difference between an output and an outcome:

- Your charity may run a sports club for young people. The output of this project is free 90-minute training sessions for 50 young people at your after-school football club. The outcome is that more young people have increased health and wellbeing and improved social skills.

- The output of your charity's activity may be that you provide 100 bereaved people each year free counselling services. The outcome is that more people have improved mental health and feel less alone.

A common mistake is to confuse outputs and outcomes with inputs. Inputs are the people, objects and resources you use to deliver your project or activities. For example, an educational charity may use teachers to deliver training. Here, the number of students receiving training is the output, as they benefit from the activity, and the teachers are the input, as they are helping to deliver the activity.

Deciding what your organisation will measure and report on

When you apply for a grant, you will be asked how you will measure and report success. To answer this question, your organisation will have needed to identify some outputs and outcomes that you want to achieve.

The first step is to decide on the desired project outcome. What difference you actually want your project to make to people's lives?

Once you have decided upon the desired outcome, then think about your outputs – the service or goods that will help you get to this outcome. For example, if your desired outcome is to reach young people and reduce antisocial behaviour, your outputs will be to reach 10 young people every day by employing a sessional youth worker to run daily drop ins.

These desired outputs and outcomes then become the basis of what you will measure and report on. Be sure to sense check them with the following criteria:

- Do the outputs look reasonable for the cost?

- Are the outcomes a logical result of the outputs?

- Are the outputs clearly attainable?

- Are the outcomes ambitious but achievable?

- Are the outcomes things you really want the project to achieve.

How to measure your outputs and outcomes

Once you have decided on your desired outcomes, it is useful to create a table to show how you are going to measure them.

The importance of measuring the success of your project

Once you have received a grant, some funders will expect you to report back to them, and inform them on the success of your project. They will tell you the timelines and format for this.

It's important to remember why project monitoring, evaluation and reporting is in place. It is not just for the benefit of funders, although they may have particular formats and timelines that you need to stick to. If you approach it with the mentality that this is just a hoop to jump through for funders you will have entirely missed the point and it will be very tedious!

The fundamental reason for project monitoring and evaluation is so that you can do more of the things you want to do as an organisation. It is there to help your organisation ask important questions about what is and isn't working well.

Example table of outcomes and measurement

Outcome	Target values after 1 year	Target values after 2 years	Measured by
The parent and toddler group will provide support to the most vulnerable families and create a strong network of support for families	· 20% increase in attendance (to 24 children) · 60% of parents report the group is a significant support to them	· 100% increase in attendance (to 40 children) · Increase in proportion of single parents from Y1 baseline	· Weekly count of attendance · Create an annual survey to send to attendees of the group
The pet rehoming scheme will rescue vulnerable animals, and ensure they have love and care	· 40% increase in pets successfully re-homed · 85% of rehoming successful after 6 months (both pet and new owner happy)	· 60% increase in pets successful re-homed · 95% of rehoming successful after 6 months	· Rehoming records and files to count number · Create a survey to send to new owners after 6 months