Evaluation Support Guide 1.1 Clarifying your Aims, Outcomes and Activities

Evaluation can help you to work out what difference you make through your services or activities.

Before you can evaluate successfully you need to think about what differences you hope to make. Only then can you work out whether you have made a difference! This is different from describing your services and activities.

This guide can help you to clarify your aims, outcomes and activities. You may find it useful to use a **Weaver's Triangle** (based on the Charity Evaluation Services Planning Triangle) to help you think about your work (see Appendix).

Clarifying your aims

Your **overall aim** tells everyone why your organisation or project exists and the broad, longer-term **impact** you want to have on the lives of the people you work with.

Example: The *Stobswell Community Project* aims to improve the quality of life for families living in Stobswell in Dundee.

Your overall aim should be brief, focused and guided by your organisation's vision and strategy. It should say what you want to achieve. It should not describe your services. That comes later. Each project or service you run should have an aim.

Clarifying your activities

You next need to think about the *activities* or *services* that you provide. Some people call these **outputs** - the things you deliver.

You may have a programme of activities that you have run for many years. Or you may have developed new activities to fit in with what local people want. In both cases, activities are what help you to fulfil your overall aim.

Clarifying your outcomes

Think carefully about how your activities can change the lives of the people who take part. The changes that your activities make in people's lives are your **outcomes**.

Outcomes:

- are about change or difference.
- are *not* the activity – they are the **result** of the activity.
- must link logically to the activity.
- use words like improve, decrease, develop, expand.
- should be realistic – achievable in a few years.
- should be (largely) in your power to deliver.
- should be simple.
- answer the '*so what?*' question.

So What?
If you're not sure whether you're looking at an outcome or an output, asking '*So what?*' should help:

Stobswell Community Project runs cookery classes – SO WHAT?
20 parents attend each class – SO WHAT?
These are important, but not outcomes. So…what came out of the classes?
The parents learn about healthy eating - OUTCOME
The parents start to cook healthy meals for their families - OUTCOME
The families' health improves - OUTCOME

Don't set too many outcomes – 4 or 5 are enough. You should focus on the changes that are most relevant to your overall aim.

Example: The *Stobswell Community Project*'s intended outcomes (the differences we want to make) are:

- improve community contact and mutual support between local families
- increase positive parenting skills
- help parents to have access to healthy food at low-cost
- increase opportunities for safe, constructive play for children aged 5 - 11
- reduce the levels of debt and hardship in the area
- increase volunteering in the local area

Your outcomes should be clear and focused. This is because:

- You need to know what you are trying to change before you can evaluate to find out whether you have made a difference.

- The people who use your services need to know what they can expect to gain from working with you (and they won't have unrealistic expectations).

- Many funders want to fund or purchase outcomes. They want to know what difference their money makes and how it helps people to have a better life.

Some outcomes can be measured numerically, such as the number of volunteers in the area or the number of people who have reduced their debt. These are called **hard outcomes**. Other outcomes are qualitative, such as improved parenting skills. These are called **soft outcomes**. Although you cannot *count* soft outcomes, there are equally valid ways to measure them. You can find out more about this in **Evaluation Support Guide 2.1.**

Clarifying the Link between Activities and Outcomes

Whatever problem you are trying to tackle, you need a logical connection between what you plan to do (your services or activities) and the impact you are trying to make (your aim and outcomes). The example below lists the activities or *outputs*. The *outcomes* that the activities should achieve are shown in brackets. This information is shown in the form of a Weaver's Triangle in the Appendix.

Example: The *Stobswell Community Project* will:
- provide regular community events (to improve community contact and mutual support between local families).
- run a products and services exchange scheme (to improve community contact and mutual support between local families).
- run parenting workshops (to increase positive parenting skills)
- offer cookery sessions (to help parents to have access to healthy food at low cost).
- run after-school clubs and holiday play schemes (to increase opportunities for safe and constructive play for children aged 5 to 11).
- provide a benefits advice and debt-counselling service (to reduce the levels of debt and hardship in the area).
- offer structured volunteering opportunities (to increase volunteering in the local area).
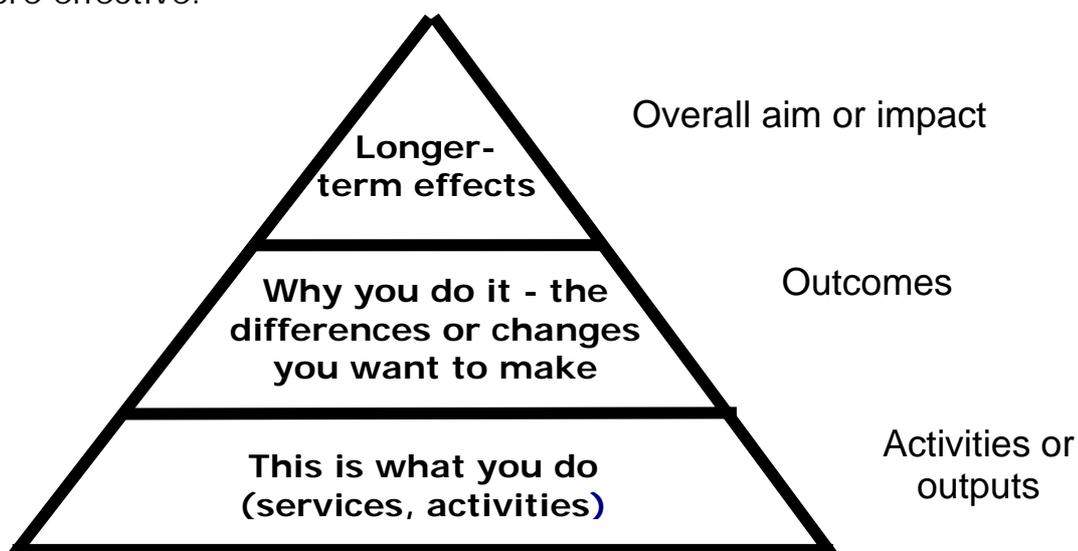

What next?

Now that you have clarified your aims, outcomes and activities, you are ready to think about how you will know if your outcomes have been achieved – in other words, your indicators. You can find out more in **Support Guide 2.1**: *Developing and Using Indicators.*

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Appendix: Weaver's Triangle - a model to help you clarify your aims and activities

Weaver's Triangle is adapted from the Charities Evaluation Services Planning Triangle (please see www.ces-vol.org.uk for more information). Jayne Weaver worked for CES and developed the Triangle for the BBC Children in Need Appeal. It is a simple logical framework to help ensure that a project's activities are consistent with the results it wants to achieve. Research by the Kellogg Foundation in the USA has shown that working to a logical framework helps everyone involved in a project focus on what the project is trying to achieve. This in turn makes their work more effective.

Longer-term effects — Overall aim or impact

Why you do it - the differences or changes you want to make — Outcomes

This is what you do (services, activities) — Activities or outputs

Example:
The Stobswell Family Centre

To improve the quality of life for families living in Stobswell

- increase positive parenting skills
- increase volunteering in the local area
- reduce levels of debt & hardship in the area
- help parents access healthy food at low cost
- increase the opportunities for safe & constructive play for 5 to 11 year olds
- strengthen levels of community contact & mutual support between local families

Community events

Local exchange scheme

Parenting classes

After school clubs & holiday play scheme

Benefits advice & debt counselling

Cookery sessions

Run a Volunteering scheme