

Evaluation glossary (revised June 2014)

This document defines some of the words you might come across when looking at evaluation and research.

Term used when designing a theory of change

A 'theory of change' involves mapping how a service or project is intended to deliver its outcomes and the evidence needed to assess whether this has happened. You can find more about this in our [Theory of Change guide](#). The following are key terms to use when designing a theory of change. There isn't complete consensus about these terms, but this doesn't really matter as they are only tools to help you organise your thinking, hence the following represents our suggestions rather than it being a definitive list.

Term	Description	Examples
Inputs	The resources a project or organisation needs to carry out its activities.	Funding, volunteer time, IT systems, training for volunteers, case work supervision
Activities	A description of a service's key components. An activity is something within your control that you plan to do or is an aspect of how you chose to deliver the service. Descriptions of activities should be quantitative.	Type of training delivered, or support provided, staff and volunteer, culture approach and outlook
Outputs	The quantity of activity you deliver.	For example, the number of users, how many sessions they receive and the amount of contact you have with them.
Engagement	This reflects the reality of how the project is delivered and what users make of it. Engagement is about the nature of the relationships you aim to establish but also about how service users engage with and use the resources you give them. A useful way to think about engagement is what you achieve with them on the day, or while you are working with people, and how you want service users to see you.	In the context of work with offenders, engagement includes critical issues like, drop out rates, service users' perceptions of your service, and the specific aspects of the relationship you establish with people

Outcomes are a way of describing what a service or project is *for*, what it aims to achieve, and how it will improve society. A good way to think about outcomes is that they are what funders should care most about. A good example of an outcome might be, for example: how many of your service users reduced their criminal behaviour, as opposed to how many completed a training course.

There are different types of outcomes and these are discussed below:

Term	Definition	Examples
Intermediate outcomes (also referred to as “short-term outcomes”, “performance outcomes”, “pathways”, “risk and protective factors”)	<p>These are how you want your service users to be influenced or changed by the service <i>in the short-medium term</i>. Or in other words the assets or strengths you aim to give them that will help them improve their lives.</p> <p>To help you articulate your intermediate outcomes it is useful to think in terms of changes in users’; i) knowledge/skills; ii) attitudes; or iii) behaviours.</p> <p>In contrast to outputs and engagement, the focus is on more enduring change that will lead users towards reduced offending (for example)</p> <p>A useful way to think about intermediate outcomes is the outcomes achieved <i>after</i> the project - what service users take away from it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased self-worth and aspirations for the future - Budgeting skills - Association with pro-social networks - Stronger family relationships - Reduced substance misuse
Final outcomes (also referred to as “impact”, “long-term goals”, “final goal”, “vision”. “population outcomes”)	<p>This is social phenomena or problem that you are looking to address in the community as a whole. It depends somewhat on what your funder is looking for; reduced substance misuse might be what one funder is looking for, while another will see this as an intermediate outcome on the journey towards reduced offending.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced offending - Entry into employment - Improved wellbeing
Soft outcomes ¹	<p>Outcomes that involve some form of change <i>within</i> people, such as a change in attitude or a change in the way they see themselves (often less easy to observe).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes in attitudes, outlook - Change in knowledge or skills
Hard outcomes	<p>Outcomes that are clear and obvious, or which involve a change in behaviour or circumstances which tend to be easier to record and measure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Registering with a GP - Achieving a qualification

¹ We don’t particularly like this term because it suggests they are less important than ‘hard outcomes’, but it is widely used.

Below is an illustration of how these four outcomes terms interact for a project that focuses on housing to reduce reoffending:

	Soft outcome	Hard outcome
Intermediate outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased self-worth and aspirations for the future - Improved budgeting skills - Association with pro-social networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take-up of volunteering opportunities - Sustained tenancies
Final outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved well-being - Reduced offending behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced convictions/cautions

Finally, other terms relevant to theory of change or logic models are;

Enabling factor: Something outside of your control that can help your project (or hinder it if it is absent).

Evidence: Information you already have or plan to collect that is relevant to supporting/testing the theory of change.

Assumption: The underlying beliefs about a program, the people involved, the context and the way we think the program will work. These are sometimes implicit in a logic model or theory of change, but it can be useful to state them explicitly.

Other evaluation terminology²

Here are some of the other words you will come across. It's not a complete list (that would be very long), but hopefully covers the main terms.

Attribution: The process of ascribing a *causal link* between observed (or expected to be observed) changes and a specific intervention or project. The strongest way to attribute outcomes to a project is to compare the outcomes achieved with a comparison group of people who have not received the services (i.e. through a randomised control trial or the Justice Datalab³). However, a theory of change combined with contribution analysis is an alternative approach to make claims of attribution (but it will not provide proof).

Baseline: Information about the situation that a project or organisation is trying to change, showing what it is like before it intervenes.

Benchmark: A standard of achievement that other organisations or projects have already achieved and that you can compare your own achievements against.

² Much of these are based on <http://www.jargonbusters.org.uk/alphabetical-summary-of-terms/>

³ For more information go to <http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/MoJ%20Data%20Lab%20briefing.pdf>

Cost-benefit analysis (CBA): A technique in economic evaluation which assesses the monetary social costs and benefits of project. A key output is a benefit-cost ratio which reports the value obtained for each pound spent.

Contribution analysis/triangulation: The process of combining all the evidence you have available from different sources to test the extent to which your theory of change has been achieved.

Control/comparison group:⁴ A group of people or conditions that is matched as closely as possible to the group receiving an intervention, but crucially does not receive the intervention. The control group is used to assess the counterfactual (see below) and may refer to a real group of people or be created using statistical techniques.

Counterfactual: An estimate of what would have happened without a particular intervention.

Economic evaluation: A branch of evaluation that focuses on understanding the costs and benefits of a project in financial terms.

Evaluation: Using information from monitoring and elsewhere to judge and understand the performance of an organisation or project, and how it could be improved.

Indicator: Well-defined information which shows whether something is happening. For example, attending appointments or listening and engaging in conversations can be indicators of a positive mindset towards change.

Logic model: A graphical description of the logical relationships between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes of an intervention or project (similar to a theory of change).

Longitudinal research: Research that involves talking to the same people more than once, so you can better understand how they have changed (can be either qualitative or quantitative)

Monitoring: Collecting and recording information in a routine and systematic way to check progress against plans, assist with service management and enable evaluation.

Pre and post analysis: Commonly referred to as 'before and after studies', this is simply observing a particular outcome for a group of people before and after an intervention.

Process evaluation: An evaluation that focuses on *how* a service has been delivered. It is sometimes – wrongly – associated with qualitative research (process evaluation can be qualitative and quantitative and employ a wide range of analysis techniques). It's essential because it demonstrates the link between what you do and any outcomes achieved and will highlight learning points.

Proxy variables/indicators: These are variables that indirectly indicate a change. For example, registering with a GP might be regarded as a proxy for leading a healthier lifestyle.

Qualitative research:⁵ is an exploratory technique that aims to provide in-depth understanding of issues and the reasons behind them. As well as investigating *what*, *when* and *where*, qualitative research also aims to understand *why* and *how*. Common data collection methods used are: focus groups, in-depth interviews, bulletin boards, and ethnographic participation/observation.

Quantitative research: aims to be conclusive in quantifying a feature, problem or outcome within a population. Data is collected through measurement frameworks, monitoring systems and surveys

⁴ Please see our separate guide <http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/UsingControlGroupApproachesToIdentifyImpact.pdf>

⁵ Please see our separate guide: <http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/QualGuidanceFinal.pdf>

(face-to-face, online, phone, paper). Another source of quantitative information is official statistics such as Police National Computer data on outcomes.

Randomised control trials A type of experiment in which individuals are randomly assigned to receive an intervention or not. Data on both groups are then collected and compared to assess the impact of the intervention.

Sampling:⁶ The process of selecting a group of people to participate in research from a wider population. This can be helpful if you don't have the resources to speak to everyone, however it brings a risk of bias if your sample is not representative. Sampling people randomly is the best way to minimise the risk of bias.

Selection bias: Refers to biases that may occur based on how individuals are selected into an intervention. For example, if individuals chose to receive a particular intervention they may be more motivated than a control group and thus the results are potentially biased as a result.

Social return on investment (SROI): A form of economic analysis which aims to take into account the social benefits of a project when reporting its achievement. It builds upon an organisation's theory of change and stakeholders' assessments of value to forecast the impact a project achieves in financial terms.

Theory of change: A process of review and analysis which can lead to the development of a diagram which represents how the intervention is expected to bring about the outcomes it is aiming for (similar to a logic model or outcomes framework). It defines the steps towards achieving a given long-term goal.

Tool:⁷ A method for recording information from service users. There are many commonly available tools (such as the Outcomes Star and NPC's Wellbeing measure), but you can also design your own⁸. Other words for tools include 'questionnaires' or 'scales'.

⁶ Please see our guide to sampling http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/IntroductionToSampling_0.pdf

⁷ Please see our guide to using off the shelf tools to measure change
<http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/UsingOffShelfToolsToMeasureChange.pdf>

⁸ Please see our forthcoming guidance on designing your own questionnaires