

Measuring your impact

**Toolkit to help small and medium organisations
measure their outcomes**

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Section 1: Introduction

About

This toolkit is designed to help small and medium homelessness organisations monitor and evaluate outcomes, develop a theory of change and collect and report on the data they collect.

It aims to provide an accessible guide for small and medium homelessness charities to start considering how to demonstrate their impact.

This toolkit is based on a training course and workshop.

Introduction

Organisations are becoming more aware of the importance of measuring the impact their work has on the people they work with. This is in part due to increasing pressures from funders but also a sector-wide shift in valuing the need to learn from what we do, identify what we do well, and identify how to keep improving.

Small and medium sized organisations sometimes face challenges with designing and implementing effective outcomes measurement systems due to pressure on existing resources. Adding to this are the barriers that come from even just the language used around 'measurement' or 'measuring data', phrases like 'Theory of Change' that can sound off-putting or confusing. Even the term 'outcomes measurement' creates questions for some. For example, some may think what about all the other things that we need to measure aside from 'outcomes'?

This toolkit aims to breakdown some of these barriers and develop the capacity of staff from small and medium sized organisations to develop a measurement framework for their organisation. It is aimed at people with very little to no experience in developing and implementing measurement frameworks and is an introduction to developing a bespoke approach that suits your organisation's needs.

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit can be read as a whole, or sections can be read individually. The following table summarises a simple step by step approach for using this toolkit to develop your organisation's measurement of outcomes. The following table summarises a simple step by step approach for using this toolkit to develop your organisation's approach, signposting to the relevant sections in the toolkit.

1. Terms

The following table provides definitions of the key terms you will need to know to use this Toolkit.

Term	What it is	Example
Goal	The wider social change that a project or organisation is striving to achieve.	End homelessness in London
Impact/ the ultimate outcome	The effects that arise from an intervention. - positive and negative - planned and unforeseen	Increased sustainable employment
Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short term • Intermediate • Soft • Hard 	The changes, benefits, learning that result from the project/ programme(s) and can include: feelings, attitudes, behaviour, skills and abilities, living situation or relationships etc. They are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • short term (first month) • intermediate • soft (e.g. feelings and attitudes) • hard (e.g. skills and qualifications) 	Increased confidence
Activities	The things that an organisation does day to day to deliver a project.	Train individual in new workplace skills
Outputs	The services, facilities or products generated from a project's activities.	Ten skill development courses, a how-to video, group sessions etc.
Inputs	The resources needed to fulfil the objectives of a programme or project.	Staff, funding, physical space
Enablers	The factors, internal and external, that need to be in place to enable a programme to fulfil its aim.	Specific government policy or internal capacity.
Assumptions	Assumptions that the programme approach is based upon.	That being work-ready is a combination of both skill and confidence.
Evidence	Internal or external evidence to guide an approach.	Sector research or internal experience.

Case study: The Paint Project

'Paint' is a pilot project being launched in an inner-city area by an organisation which has 10-years' experience in delivering skilled-trade training to people who have experienced homelessness. The project addresses issues highlighted in a recent piece of research which identified a need to offer more skills-training to women who had experienced homelessness locally.

Long-standing partnerships with local employers in the construction industry and new development projects planned for the city, should increase available jobs for skilled painters and decorators to support the project.

Target Clients: The pilot project will take place over a 12-month period and involve 25 people recruited from 5 different homelessness partner organisations from across the city.

Organisations will be provided with guidance for participants the pre-requisites for participation, including being at a physical, mental and emotional place in their journey to commit to the project.

Approach: The project offers a three-pronged approach:

1. An accredited course in painting and decorating, providing participants with a nationally recognised qualification.
2. An employability skills course which will run simultaneously with the painting and decorating course, focused on supporting participants with developing the auxiliary skills to enter and thrive in the labour market, these are defined as:
 - a. An asset based approach focusing on enabling participants to increase their confidence, self-esteem and communication skills
 - b. job search, application and interview skills
 - c. soft-skills for the workplace
3. An internship programme, offering project participants a 3-month internship with local employers, to gain skills, confidence and experience to support them with applying for other opportunities.

Section 2: Developing your strategy through a Theory of Change

About

This is section 2 of the measuring outcomes toolkit and covers developing your strategy through a theory of change. This toolkit has designed to help small and medium homelessness organisations monitor and evaluate outcomes, developing a theory of change and collecting and reporting data they collect.

The purpose of the toolkit is to provide an accessible guide for small and medium homelessness charities to start considering how to demonstrate their impact.

This section covers

- Defining the Theory of Change (ToC)
- Getting the right people on board
- Theory of Change approaches
- The Charities Evaluation Services (CES) Planning Triangle
- Logic Models
- Outcomes Chains

Defining the theory of change

In its simplest definition a Theory of Change is a map that illustrates the pathway of change we want to achieve and shows the elements supporting that journey. There are a number of ways of approaching this, but in summary, a Theory of Change helps an organisation to:

- better understand the system they are part of
- approach change in a more strategic and responsive way, with desired outcomes at the centre of strategy rather than the more traditional output focused approach
- question the approaches used within an organisation, asking:
 - What is the change we want to make?
 - What is the cause and effect relationships between the actions/ services we deliver and the intended changes?
 - Why do we approach our work this way?
 - What is the evidence that this approach works?
 - What assumptions are being made?
- develop an encompassing foundation/map from which to build a robust monitoring and evaluation framework – this includes mechanisms and approaches to measuring impact

A Theory of Change can represent the organisations work at project level or organisational level, the former offering more detail on a programme or service and the latter offering a macro-level view of the organisation. This document focuses on ToC from a project level perspective, as the easiest and most accessible place to start.

We are going to look at three different approaches of increasing complexity:

- The CES Planning Triangle (easiest)
- Logic Models
- Outcomes Chains (most complex)

Whichever model you choose to develop, getting the right people to be part of the process is key to its success.

Get the right people on board

A Theory of Change (ToC) process should be ‘owned’ by the internal organisational stakeholders, rather than just the top-tiered decision makers in an organisation. In a small to medium organisation this may include staff, clients, volunteers and trustees. The aim is to get buy-in from everyone, however the process for doing this in a manageable way needs to be given consideration in terms of who, when and how? Stakeholders should be engaged with the process. Homeless Link’s toolkit on coproduction is a good starting point for how to do this well: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/co-production-toolkit>

Often a ToC is developed in stages starting off with a workshop to kick-start the process. The difficulty lies in getting input from everyone that needs to be involved without making the process messier than it needs to be. As a rule of thumb aim to have no more than six people in the first meeting, this group should represent different stakeholder groups from within the organisation and serve as the core team to drive the whole process.

Once the first draft of the ToC is developed, the wider organisation should be invited to offer their opinions and suggestions. This can be facilitated through holding short workshops for the wider team or using an online approach or even putting the ToC in a suitable area of the workplace and inviting people to add comments and suggestions.

Approaches to Theories of Change

The CES Planning Triangle

This approach was developed by the Charities Evaluation Services and focuses on three key areas: Activities, Intermediate Outcomes and Final Goal, as illustrated in below. This is the simplest but least in-depth approach.

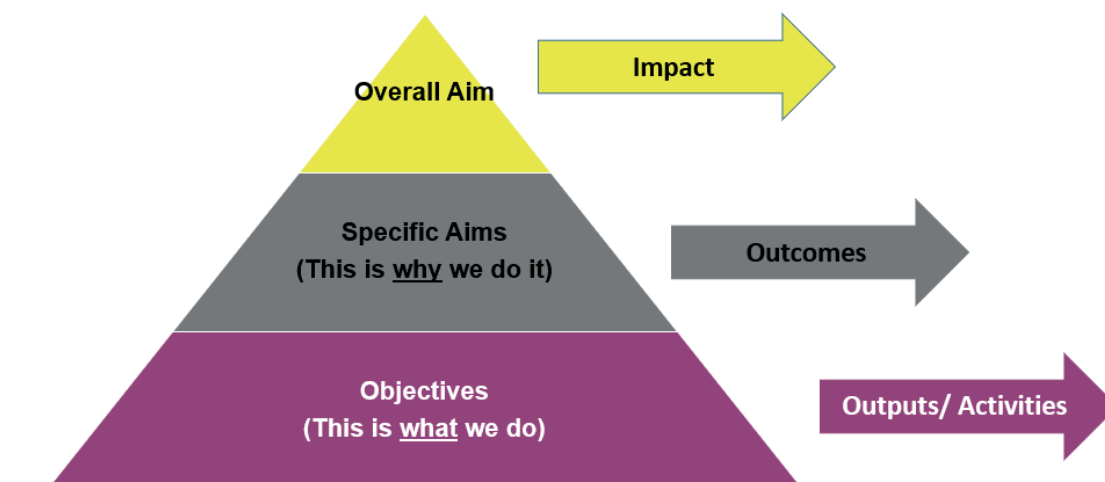
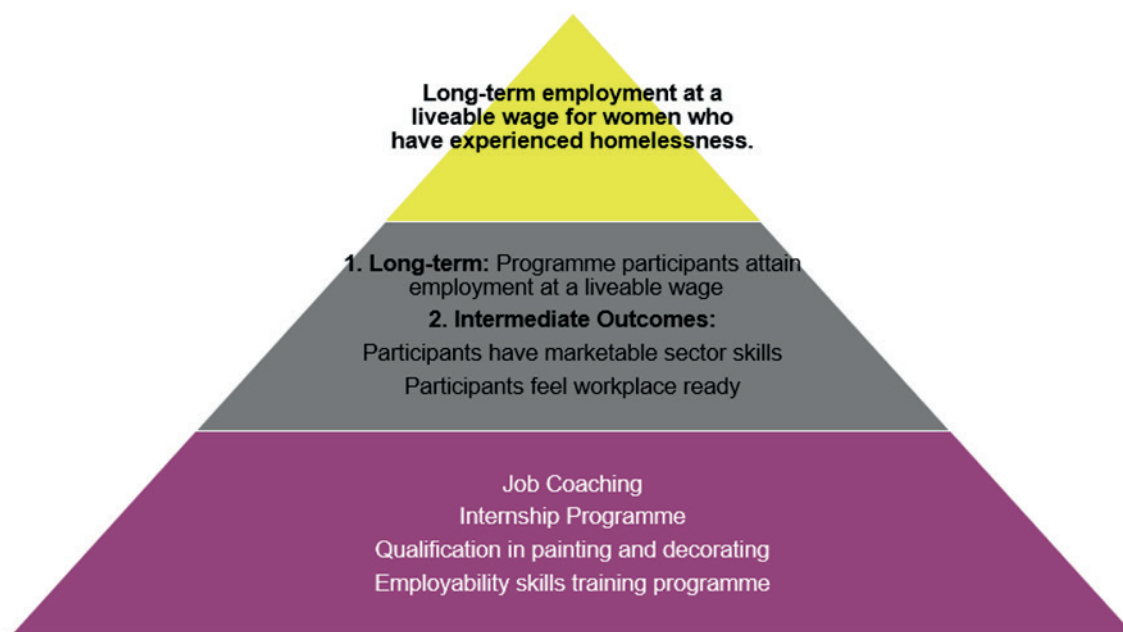


Fig.1 (Adapted from) CES Planning Triangle



Case Study adapted from CES planning triangle

For more examples of how Big Lottery Funded organisations are using the CES Planning Triangle have a look here: [https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/research/wales/planning-trianglesfile:///C:/Users/Steph%20Hill/Downloads/er_eval_big_triangles%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/research/wales/planning-trianglesfile:///C:/Users/Steph%20Hill/Downloads/er_eval_big_triangles%20(1).pdf)

As you can see, this approach is simple and accessible and an effective way to start thinking about the relationship between what we want to achieve in terms of outcomes and how we intend to get there in terms of outputs.

How to develop a CES planning triangle in practice

Step one

Identify the final goal you wish to achieve

Step two

Now think about the change that will happen within the project timeframe. What needs to happen during to achieve the final goal? When articulating the outcomes, use positive change-orientated words such as 'increase' or 'improve' etc.

Step three

Now you need to add the activities/ interventions that your organisation will do to help you achieve the outcomes. This stage enables you to question why you do certain things within the organisation/ project. If an activity doesn't relate to one or more outcomes within the upper layer, then ask yourself why you offer that approach and is it the right one.

Step four

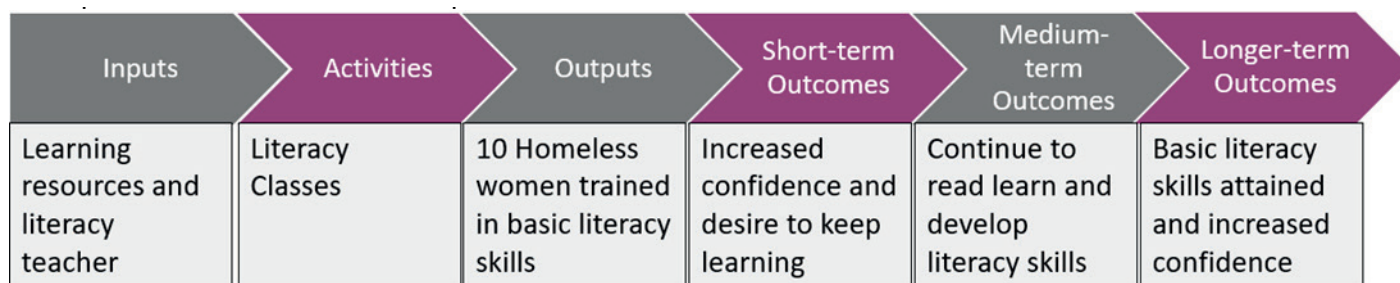
It's now time to attach indicators to the activities and outcomes, the first stage in taking our ToC approach into a Measuring Framework. There are several ways to approach this, one is to simply number the activities and outcomes in the CES Planning Triangle and then list the indicators next it. We'll explore 'indicators' more in the upcoming sections and how to develop a Measuring Framework from your ToC approach.

Logic Models

There are numerous ways a Logic Model can be depicted, but they are all graphical representations of the causal relationship between the following elements:



By ‘causal-relationship’ we mean the effect different elements have on each other. Let’s take a simple example from a literacy programme delivered at an inner-city homeless shelter for women and look at the examples of the causal relationship between elements:



We are going to focus on a Logic Model, called The Logical Framework Analysis (Log-Frame), an approach modelled in a 4x4 matrix. The table below illustrates Log-Frame and summarises each element, before looking at it, let’s just discuss indicators.

Aside from modelling the causal relationship between the inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes, Log-Frame also requires the identification of indicators. Indicators are what we measure to see if we’d expect to see if the desired change has happened at each stage of our project. Let’s look at some examples taken from the example we used above:

Project component	Example of indicator
Activity: literacy classes	Classes successfully delivered
Short-term outcome: increased confidence and desire to keep learning.	Participants report an increased confidence and a desire to keep learning.
Longer-term outcomes: Basic literacy skills attained and increased confidence.	Participants achieve level 1 or above in literacy test and report increase in their self-confidence.

To support the indicators, the Log-Frame approach asks us to include information on the Means of Verification/ Data Collection Tools – which basically means, how will we prove that this indicator is there. For example, if an indicator is that X number of literacy classes have taken place then a means of verifying this may be the attendance records from the classes.

This column is in practice, the start of the Monitoring and Evaluating/ Measurement Framework.

Logical framework analysis (Log Frame)

Project Summary	Indicators How we will know that each stage has succeeded/ what will success look like?	Means of Verification/ Data Collection Tools The data collection tools we will use to verify the respective indicators.	Assumptions Assumptions about external factors / conditions that need to be in place to enable each stage.
1. Goal/ Impact What is the overall goal your project aims to contribute to?	What will be the signs that the project goal has been achieved?	How our contribution will be measured. (Which is not always possible at this level).	
2. Outcomes (Long Term, Intermediate, Short Term) What changes are intended to be made during the project period	Signs the intended changes have occurred and are sustainable.	How we intend to measure changes e.g. interviews, surveys etc. (Evaluation)	
3. Outputs What will be the tangible results of each activity	The expected results of our activities.	How we will measure the results	
4. Activities Tasks needed to achieve the results	Inputs/ Resources Resources needed to carry out tasks	Evidence that each task has been completed	

- What we are trying to accomplish**
- How we will measure success**
- How we will achieve our plan**

So, other than the causal relationships between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and goals, you’ll notice the Log Frame also has **Assumptions** down the right-hand column. This is to recognise the external factors that may influence the various stages of the project, and outlines what needs to occur for the proposed approach to go to plan. This right-hand column can include Risks and Enablers as well as Assumptions, as we have in our Case Study example below.

The table below illustrates how we should read through a Log Frame i.e. “if we do X (and as long as Y is in place) then Z will happen” and so forth up through the diagram.

How to read a log frame

Intervention logic aka project summary	Objectively verifiable Indicators	Sources and means of verification	Assumptions
1. Goal Then			And
2. Outcomes If Then			And
3. Outputs If Then			And
4. Activities If	Inputs/ Resources	Costs	

Although when completing Log Frame, one usually works backwards between the far left and right columns and then finally returns to the middle two columns.

Let's see what our case study looks like in a Log Frame

Log Frame for the Paint Project

Activities	Inputs/ Resources	Cost	
1. Enrolment: work with partner organisations to identify and enrol programme participants 2. 2 month employability skills course (1 day a week to run alongside painting and decorating course) 3. 6 month accredited course on painting and decorating (2 days a week) 4. Work with employers and participants to establish working agreements 5. 4 month internship 6. 4. Job coaching	1. # Staff/ roles 2. # Logistics 3. # Resources	Project cost summaries	That there are enough women who both match the pre-requisite criteria and would like to commit to the programme

How to develop a log frame

There are various ways to approach the Log Frame, some prefer working bottom (activities) to top (outcomes). However, the danger in doing this is that the approach can become guided by the resources available and activities the organisation presume are needed rather than the change making itself. Try working top down, mapping backwards to keep intended change at the centre of your approach. Another tip is to start with working on the far left and far right columns first as you map backwards and then return to the middle two columns, an approach explained below:

- **Step One:** First, identify the overarching goal your project is feeding into. For example, 'Long-term employment for women who have experienced homelessness'.¹

For each of the outcomes consider the Assumptions that are being made for that particular outcome and note them in the corresponding box on the far-right column.

- **Step Two:** Now, Identify the outcomes that lead to the Goal. What are the Intermediate, Immediate and Short-Term changes/ outcomes intended? Again, consider and note any 'Assumptions' in the far-right column; what external factors need to be in place to achieve these outcomes?
- **Step Three:** Now consider the interventions needed to achieve your desired outcome. Good practice is to number the Outputs respective to the Activity they relate to.
- **Step Four:** Now map the indicators; what will success look like once this is achieved? E.g. For Outcomes, we are looking at what the change will look like in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour. Whereas outputs and activities will provide more tangible indicators, e.g. X number of courses run etc.

The table at the end of this section of the toolkit includes a checklist to support you with developing robust indicators.

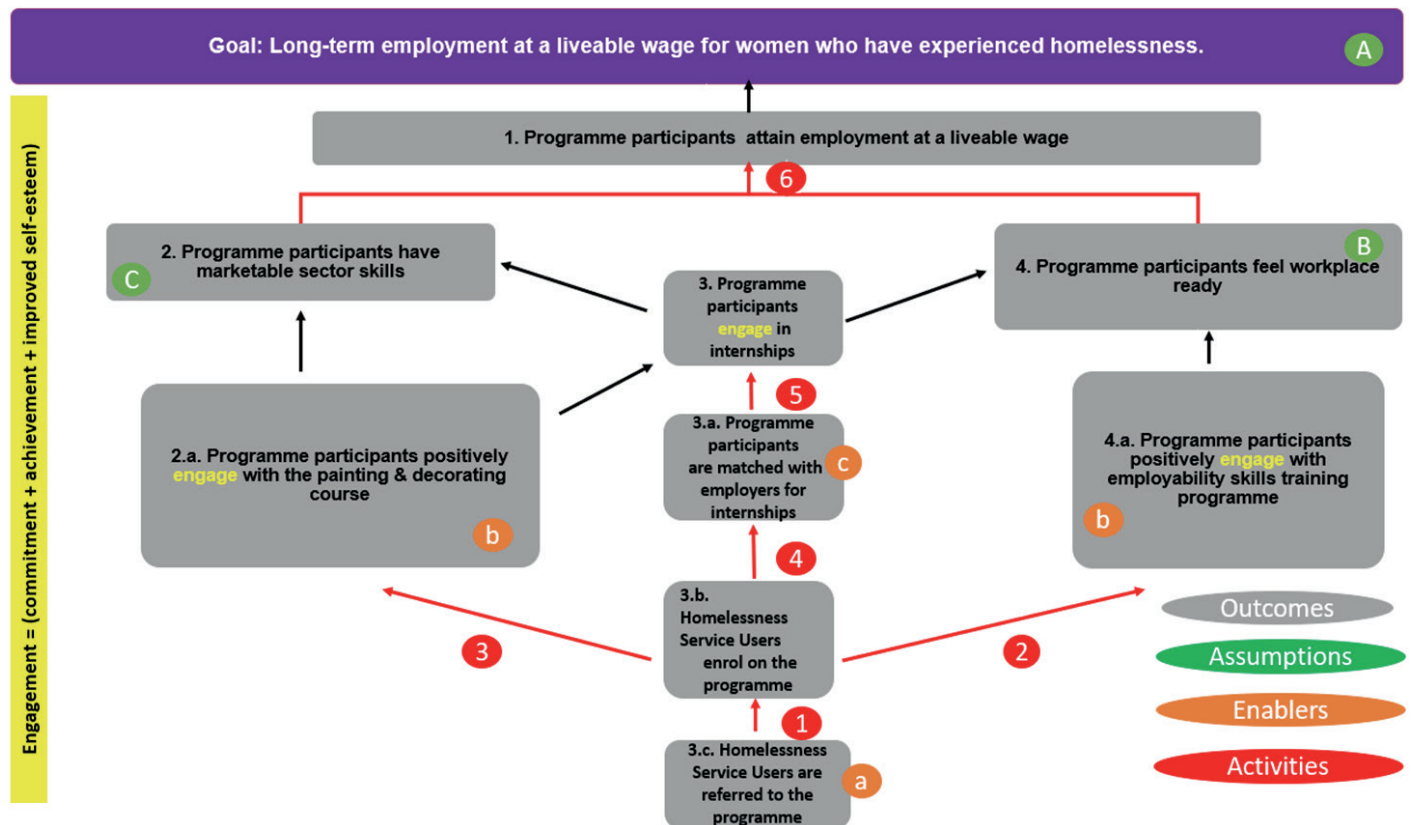
- **Step Five:** This is where we start thinking about how exactly we plan on measuring this and thinking about tools for data collection, which is covered in other sections of this toolkit.

Outcomes chain

Outcomes Chain Models are often associated with Theory of Change. They have all the components of a Logic Model, (Goal, Outcomes, Outputs, Activities, Inputs, Assumptions and Indicators), but are not structured in a matrix and they also include Enablers as a separate entity, rather than in Log Frame where they are grouped with 'Assumptions'. This enables more scope for illustrating the causal relationships, although as the diagrams below demonstrate, this can sometimes leave Outcomes Chains looking a little daunting to the untrained eye. Used well, the Outcomes Chain can be very effective at capturing the complexity of our work. The diagram itself is accompanied by a written narrative.

Let's see our case study in an outcomes chain and discuss the steps taken.

¹ Note, some projects or organisational level Logic Models will attach their goals to national or even International level frameworks, such as government targets around homelessness. It's a similar process to this, just recognising how the project/organisation is contributing to higher-level collective targets around the issue.



How to develop an Outcomes Chain

Step One: Ultimate goal

We identified the Ultimate Goal (Purple) of our programme ‘Long-Term employment for women who have experienced homelessness’.

Step Two: Outcomes mapping (long-term)

We identified the top level of Outcomes (numbered 1-4) that would need to be in place to achieve this goal, rule of thumb is that there are usually 2/3 at this level.

Step Three: Outcomes mapping (intermediate – short-term)

We then looked at each outcome individually and identified the necessary pre-conditions i.e. “For this outcome to be achieved, this would have to be achieved beforehand”. The preconditions would then become the next row of outcomes. When we think of these Outcomes/ pre-conditions we should always have the participant/ clients journey in mind.

Step Four: Assumptions

We reviewed our Outcomes chain and asked ourselves what kind of Assumptions (Green) we were making about stakeholders or external factors to enable our desired outcomes to happen. We plotted them onto the Outcomes Chain as alphabetical letters in green circles, these will then be explained in the narrative accompanying the Diagram, e.g.

- a. That these jobs are available and offer women a sustainable livelihood on a liveable wage.
- b. That women who have experienced homelessness need more than just the practical work-focused skills to do a job, they also need further auxiliary skills such as communication in the workplace as well as support with increasing emotional wellbeing and confidence.

- c. That a combination of formal qualifications, auxiliary-skills and confidence and the experience gained through an internship will provide marketable skills.

Step Five: Enablers

We identified any enabling factors that our project was dependent on and plotted them onto the Outcomes Chain in (lower-case letters in orange circles), for example:

- a. Local homelessness organisations are aware of the programme and have clients that both match the prerequisite criteria to join the service and are interested in committing.
- b. That the content, pedagogy and training delivery support participants to engage with the programme.
- c. Employers have the capacity to support the internship programme for its duration.

Step Six: Activities

We reviewed the whole diagram and identified activities and high-lighted them with red arrows (the black arrows illustrate that there is no extra intervention required and that the Outcomes will happen as a kind of domino effect).

The activities are labelled using numbers in red circles and then further details provided in the narrative, e.g.:

1. The enrolment process:
 - a. Work with partners to market the programme and ensure partners understand participant requirements to take part in the programme. Women need to be at a level in their journey where they are physically, mentally and emotionally ready to take part in the programme.
 - b. Work with women participants to ensure they understand and feel comfortable with the requirements of the programme.
2. Employability skills training programme, including:
 - a. An asset based approach focusing on enabling participants to increase their confidence, self-esteem and communication skills.
 - b. job search, application and interview skills
 - c. soft-skills for the workplace.
3. Internship programme:
 - a. Work with employers to ensure they understand the requirements of the programme.
 - b. Work with project participants to ensure they understand the requirements of the programme.
4. Accredited course in painting & decorating
5. One to one coaching support for searching and applying for jobs.

Step Seven: Indicators

As we've already covered in previous sections, Indicators are where we start to think about measuring the effectiveness of our approach. With an 'Outcomes Chain' rather than plot the indicators onto the Outcomes Chain Diagram, which may add to the complexity of it, you can include them in your accompanying Theory of Change Narrative. We will discuss 'Indicators' in Chapter Three.

Step Eight: Narrative

Although lots of people associate Theory of Change with a diagram, it is this and more. The diagram is the road map or overview that should be supported with an accompanying narrative that provides more depth. Suggested elements to include in your Narrative are the following:

- An Overview
 - The background to the organisation or programme
 - What problem it aims to address and how you came to the decision on how to approach it (a useful tool for this is a Problem and Solution Tree)
 - Any relevant evidence that guides/ underpins your approach i.e. the PERMA Model in our Case Study
 - Who took part in the Theory of Change Process
 - The process itself
- An explanation of the Theory of Change Diagram
 - Outcomes: and the evidence to support them
 - Assumptions and Enablers: the reason behind them
 - Inputs Activities and Outputs: Why? What? When? Etc.
- The Measurement Framework (more on this in Section two)

Whichever approach your organisation chooses to take in creating your Theory of Change, it should be looked at like a living and breathing strategy; based on evidence, but also recognised as needing constant reviewed and adaptation to suit the complex and dynamic needs of the people we work with, our organisational capacity and the ever-changing socio-political climate in which we operate. Your Measurement Framework will be the mechanism for shaping how your Theory of Change/ programme strategy evolves over time, supporting your organisation to understand what you're doing well, what needs improving and how to make those improvements. The combined approach, helps us to be more efficient, effective and accountable to our internal and external stakeholders, including funders.

Checklist for developing indicators

The following checklist offers some guiding questions to help you identify indicators.²

Indicators checklist	
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it feasible to attribute the impacts described in your indicators to your project outcomes?
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do your outcomes indicators draw on existing data wherever available? • Do they describe the perceptions and experiences of program participants? • Are your outcome indicators relevant, measurable and realistic? • Do they include information that is important to key stakeholders, funders and intended beneficiaries? • Would a non-specialist be able to interpret the results? • Do your indicators describe issues that are important to vulnerable groups, and can you disaggregate the results to describe the experiences of women, girls and other vulnerable groups?
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have indicators for all of the outputs that you expect to contribute to project success? • Do you have some measures which describe the quality of outputs, as well as the quantity? • Do your output indicators provide information necessary for replication (e.g. by providing a clear connection between project activities and outputs)?
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do your indicators describe the range of activities that are essential for your project's success? • Do they describe who provided what and where? • Do they include cost measures, to determine project economy and efficiency? • Do you have a system that allows you to track activities (as well as outputs and outcomes) on an ongoing basis?
Inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you identified input indicators that describe the resources that are available and where those resources are located? • Do you have indicators of 'intangible' inputs like staff qualifications? • Will your indicators allow you to identify the cause of shortfalls in resources?

² (Adapted from: Parsons, J., Gokey, C., & Thornton, M., (2013) *Indicators of Inputs, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts in Security and Justice Programming*. Department for International Development)

Section 3: Developing a Measurement Framework

About

In this section we cover:

- The definition of a Measurement Framework
- Who to involve and how
- How to select measurement priorities
- Selecting means of verification/ data collection tools

The definition of a Measurement Framework

There is not a one-size-fits-all way of developing a Measurement Framework, but it should outline how you intend to capture data to:

- Monitor programme inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes
- Carry out periodic and end of programme evaluations
- Measure the impact of your programme/ organisation.

Your Measurement Framework should answer the following questions:

1. What are we measuring? (Impact/outcomes, outputs/activities, input)
2. What will tell us that we are being effective? (Indicator)
3. How will we collect data? (Data source)
4. Where are we starting from? (Baseline)
5. What is our target?
6. How frequently will we collect data?
7. Who will be responsible for collecting the data?

Example of Measurement Framework using the Paint Project

Project Summary	Indicator (What will change look like?)	Baseline (Where are we starting from?)	Target (Our aim)	Means of Verification / Data Collection Tools	Frequency	Responsibility
Goal Long-term Employment at a liveable wage for women who have experienced homelessness.	Participants remain in employment for 6+ months on liveable wage	0	90%	Post-programme Survey	9 months post-project	Programme Coordinator
Outcomes a. Participants have marketable sector skills	a. Participants: gain painting & decorating qualification and successfully serve an internship.	Baseline based on pre-course questionnaire focused on participants existing qualifications and experience.	90%	a. Course certificates, references and interviews with participants and employers.	a. End of programme. b. At project quarterly milestones	Programme coordinator
Activities and Outputs Training programme	# of training courses delivered # of participants attending the programme	N/A	90%	Course attendance lists	Weekly	Trainer
Inputs	Resources (X,Y,Z)	N/A		Budget Tracker	Weekly	Programme coordinator

The measurement framework should also include a narrative to further explain the different elements of the approach and links to the different tools that are used.

Who to involve and how

The golden thread through the 'Measurement' process is our obligation to be accountable to our stakeholders, including our clients, funders, trustees, supporters, staff and volunteers. The List will be different for each organisation and so will the criteria and expectations of each stakeholder.

With this in mind, we recommend doing a stakeholder analysis. Your stakeholder analysis should clarify the different stakeholders involved, what type of information they would be interested in and how may they be involved. For example, they might be part of the research team, take part in interviews or just receive information. This will help you decide who is responsible for each part of the process.

Establishing measurement priorities

When creating the Measurement Framework, the first decision to make is 'what' do we need to measure? And to what extent? The Theory of Change for the programme will form the foundation of that (see Developing Your Strategy with a Theory of Change in this Toolkit). The Stakeholder Analysis, which will also influence your measurement priorities, in terms of what information stakeholders are interested in, especially donors.

So, working from the Theory of Change to identify measurement, start by looking at all the outcomes identified on your Theory of Change and identifying those which can be addressed by secondary data, i.e. other people's research to illustrate the causal relationships between outcomes. This may or may not be an option for you, but worth exploring.

Review the rest of the Outcomes in your Theory of Change asking:

- Do you directly influence this outcome through your project? (i.e. is it going to be possible to attribute change through your intervention)
- How important is this outcome to the overall project?
- Are key stakeholders, such as donors, especially interested in this?
- Do you have the resources to realistically measure the outcomes?

Make a list of your priorities which can be further reviewed using a Stakeholder Analysis, explained below.

Once you have prioritised the outcomes you wish to measure, select the activities, outputs and inputs related to them, look back at the template we created earlier in this section.

Selecting means of verification/data collection tools

Once you have established your measurement priorities and corresponding indicators, the next stage is to decide on how you will collect the evidence to verify whether the indicators are being met i.e. your data collection tools. The sections of this toolkit which relate to data collection tools provide more in-depth guidance on design and analysis.

To identify the type of data collection tool you need review your indicators and unpack the research objectives attached to them i.e. what kind of information will enable us to evidence this?

For example, do we need:

- Numbers to illustrate attendance/ attrition rates and trends? (e.g. attendance records, database etc)
- To look for opinion trends? (e.g. rate a service using a 1-5 scale)
- To explore the reasons behind trends? (e.g. interviews and focus groups)
- To monitor the journey of clients service users as they progress through a programme? (e.g. using a distance travelled tool like the Outcomes Star)
- To use innovative and engaging mediums to capture people's feedback? (e.g. video story).

The next stage is to decide whether you have existing data collection mechanisms which are fit for purpose or can be amended, or whether you need to design new tools, buy in existing products. We discuss this in the section on 'Getting Started with data and the Data you Already Collect', along with some good practice principles that underpin all data collection methodology. Be sure to familiarise yourself and then move onto the sections of this toolkit devoted to data collection tools:

- Quantitative data: Working with numbers
- Qualitative data: Working with words
- Participatory research methods

Section 4: Getting started with data and working with data you already collect

About

In this section we cover:

- Data definitions
- How to work with data you already collect
- Good practice when dealing with data

Data definitions

	Format	Tools	Examples
Quantitative	<p>Statistical data on questions such as: who, what, when, where, how often, how many and how much?</p> <p>Can be used to gather data from a larger sample size and make generalisations about a population.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires • Surveys • Databases • Participatory research methods. 	69% of participants rated the drop-in advice service at the day centre as being 'excellent'.
Qualitative	<p>Word-based data that supports a more in-depth understanding of the reasons, opinions, attitudes and motivations of individuals within a population.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Focus groups 	"A common theme which emerged from the focus groups was how much the women felt their self-esteem had grown through participating in the project".
Participatory research methods	<p>An approach which requires a greater level of participation from the population being researched. Methods are more interactive and can focus on a group or an individual.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes star/ distance • Travelled tools • Mapping • Group voting • Video story 	A map created by the group of the local area in which they sleep rough, with 'hazards' marked on it as identified by them.

Data You Already Collect

Most small and middle-sized organisations have been collecting some sort of data since they were founded, some of it is structured, some ad hoc and some to address the needs of specific funders or donors. Therefore, it's no surprise that one of the most popular questions when it comes to establishing a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework, is 'how do we use the data we already collect?'

The way to approach using existing data is to use this toolkit to develop your desired approach to M&E and then review your existing data collection tools through this lens, in terms of whether they are fit for purpose in their current state or need to be amended or scrapped altogether and replaced by a new approach. Some points to bear in mind as you do this are as follows:

1. Existing data collection processes shouldn't be kept, just because they already exist – they need to be **fit for purpose**.
2. Remember **Less is More** – a classic rookie error in data collection is to gather as much as possible. However, this is a strain on everyone's resources, including the patience of staff and clients who have to carry out or take part in the process. This is a big reason why monitoring and evaluation often gets pushed towards the bottom of 'to-do-lists' in smaller organisations.
3. **Are tools harmonised?** Often organisations will have evaluation forms developed for things such as training courses they run for example. However, are those forms the same across departments? Or do they differ? Whatever systems you use – harmonise them so that they can be compiled and cross analysed etc.

If once you've reviewed your existing tools you decide that you do need to develop new tools, then it's also worth exploring what tools you can buy-in. For example, 'Distance-Travelled' tools like the Outcomes Star³ may look simple; but, a good one is based on evidence and rigorous testing, therefore it may be worth investing in an established one, such as the Homelessness Star.⁴

Good Practice when dealing with data

The following sections provide guidance on good practice that should underpin our M&E Frameworks:

Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are at the core of delivering high quality evidence and minimising distortion and bias in our approach to M&E.

Reliability refers to what extent our assessment methods and the data collection tools we use are consistent. In terms of Outcomes assessment this means that our tools should deliver consistent findings/ trends will appear. E.g. How can we support an interview process to offer a reliable mechanism for capturing data from different participants.

Validity refers to the accuracy that a tool delivers on what it is designed to deliver on. e.g. Do our interview questions actually achieve their questioning objective in the first place?

3 <http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/>

4 <http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/using-the-star/see-the-stars/homelessness-star>

So, basically the two are interrelated concepts - our research methods need first be Valid in terms of offering a true representation; and then be **Reliable**, in terms of consistently delivering.

As a small/ medium organisation you will not be expected to approach M&E with academic rigour. What is expected is that you are aware of the limitation of your approaches and transparent about what they can offer in explaining findings.

Sub-divide the population

Your data collection tools/ approaches should allow you to sub-divide the total population into sub-categories ('data disaggregation' as we call it in research terminology). This will allow you to cross analyse the data based on different variables, such as:

- Gender
- Age
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Housing status
- Health status
- Employment status/ history
- Education

Etc. the list is un-limited and up to you as an organisation to define what suits your needs. The reason that we do this is to enable us to identify whether there are any disparities within the wider population in terms of impact.

For example: If we were to disaggregate the data in our Paint Case Study, we may wish to cross-analyse the impact on participants based on age or ethnicity, to see if women of a certain age group or ethnicity benefited more or less from the project than another sub-group.

In terms of tool design, consider what demographic data we include in our tools as per the list above. E.g. when designing a questionnaire be sure to include demographics such as age and gender in the questionnaire that you can later use to cross analyse.

Use multiple data sources

Using multiple data sources works two-fold, by minimising bias through offering a dual perspective (Triangulation in research terminology); and, also offering a richer perspective e.g. questionnaires of clients' feedback on a new system for running the night shelter tells us that they rate the system as 'poor'. However, if we also gather feedback from interviews/ focus groups, we can explore why it's rated as 'poor' and how it could be improved.

Collect baseline data

Baseline data forms the point from which to measure the extent of change for our population; the reading taken before the intervention begins.

It is often overlooked as a priority or forgotten about until a review is due and impact data is required. However, don't underestimate how valuable it is to collect baseline data before you begin a programme, it forms the foundation for attributing change to your intervention.

However, all is not lost if you are reading this whilst halfway through a programme and didn't take a baseline reading. It is possible to reconstruct baseline data – it won't be as reliable, but it will be of some compensation.

To reconstruct base line data there are a number of options:

- Use secondary data from other relevant research or projects
- Use programme administrative records
- Use a recall process, asking participants to reflect on aspects prior to the intervention

Where reconstruction has been used, be transparent about it and explicit about the approach used.

Be strategic about who you collect data from

The best indication of impact would be to get feedback from everyone who participates in a programme/ service. This is called a census approach. However, the majority of the time it isn't possible to get feedback from everyone.

However, we still need to aim to provide information that represents the wider population and its sub-groups as accurately and fairly as possible. How do we do this? The answer is by employing a methodical strategy to how we select the few participants to represent the group as a whole – this is called 'sampling'.

There are two different overarching types of sampling:

Probability Sampling: which involves the use of mathematical rules (don't be scared it isn't difficult when you know how) to randomly select individuals from the wider/ or subsets of the population. In theory this means that each individual has the same chance of being selected to take part.

Non-probability Sampling: which does not involve randomised selection, instead participants are selected due to a reason. This of course leaves more scope for bias but is sometimes necessary due to accessibility or feasibility reasons.

As a small/medium organisation you can only approach sampling with the capacity you have, what is important is that you are transparent about this and the limitations it puts on how you can measure impact. i.e. be honest about that although your interviews showed that clients all benefited from a mobile hot food service the organisation is offering, on the day you carried out interviews you were only able to speak to 5 people, all of which were male and in a particular age range.

When carrying out a sampling technique the starting point is to develop a **Sampling Frame** which is basically the source of the eligible population from which a sample can be taken. i.e. a list of participants who took part in a programme we want to evaluate. From this we can apply the relevant sampling strategies, which are summarised in the table.

Table of non-probability sampling techniques

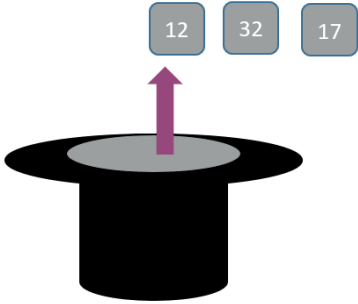
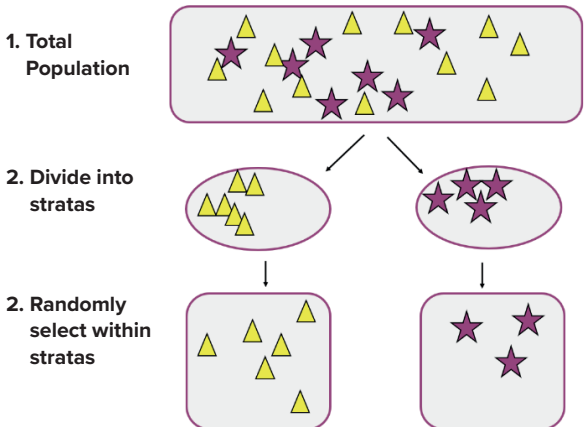
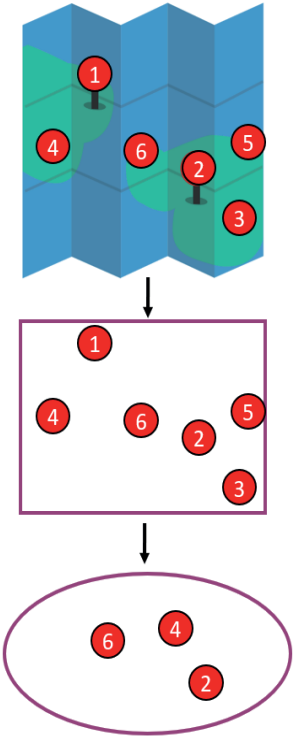
Method	Description	Example
Convenience sampling	The easiest but most biased approach, it is simply to ask those who are most convenient to ask.	
Selective sampling	Identifying quotas to represent the population	
Snowball sampling	In this approach, the researcher identifies one or two of the population of interest then relies on those individuals to introduce them to others from within the group and so on.	
Simple random sampling	This is the easiest probability sampling method to carry out, basically it's like drawing a lottery. It can be as easy as literally putting all of the names of eligible participants into a hat and pulling out the desired number at random. A more sophisticated approach is to give all participants a number to represent them and use one of the free online random number generators to produce a list of the chosen numbers. You then match the numbers with the names they belong to and you have your list of participants to speak with.	
Systematic sampling	Similar to random sampling but instead of a lottery system, you pick participants from a list using a formula based on how many participants you wish to reach.	<p><u>Total Population</u></p> <p>No. of research participants</p>
Stratified random sampling	This technique is useful when we have specific quotas within the total population that we need to get a representation from. For example, if we have a mixed gender programme and want to get a proportional representation of both male and female. If we use one of the previous techniques of either random sampling or systematic sampling, there is a danger that there will be an unfair bias towards either gender i.e. we may select nearly all women and have very few men in our sample. We sub divide the total population into strata's (e.g. gender, age etc) then randomly select from each stratum.	

Table of non-probability sampling techniques continued

Method	Description	Example
<p>Cluster sampling</p>	<p>This approach involves dividing the population into a number of units or ‘clusters’ which themselves will then be selected as a whole group, at random from the total population of clusters. This is a useful approach to use when exact numbers may not be clear in dispersed populations or could also be used with a transient population, where you identify a physical structure such as a shelter or distribution point as the research sample and whichever individual is there during the times of data collection become your participants (if of course they are willing).</p>	 <p>1. Define the ‘Clusters’</p> <p>2. Treat each ‘Clusters’ as a whole entity, like you would an individual participant.</p> <p>3. Carry out a Random Sample from the ‘Clusters’</p>

The above sections summarise good practice, small/ medium organisations should approach this to the best of their ability/ capacity but also to not burden themselves with the pressure of achieving perfection. What is important is that honesty and transparency are applied to an organisations approach to M&E, and that any constraints to data collection are explicitly made clear.

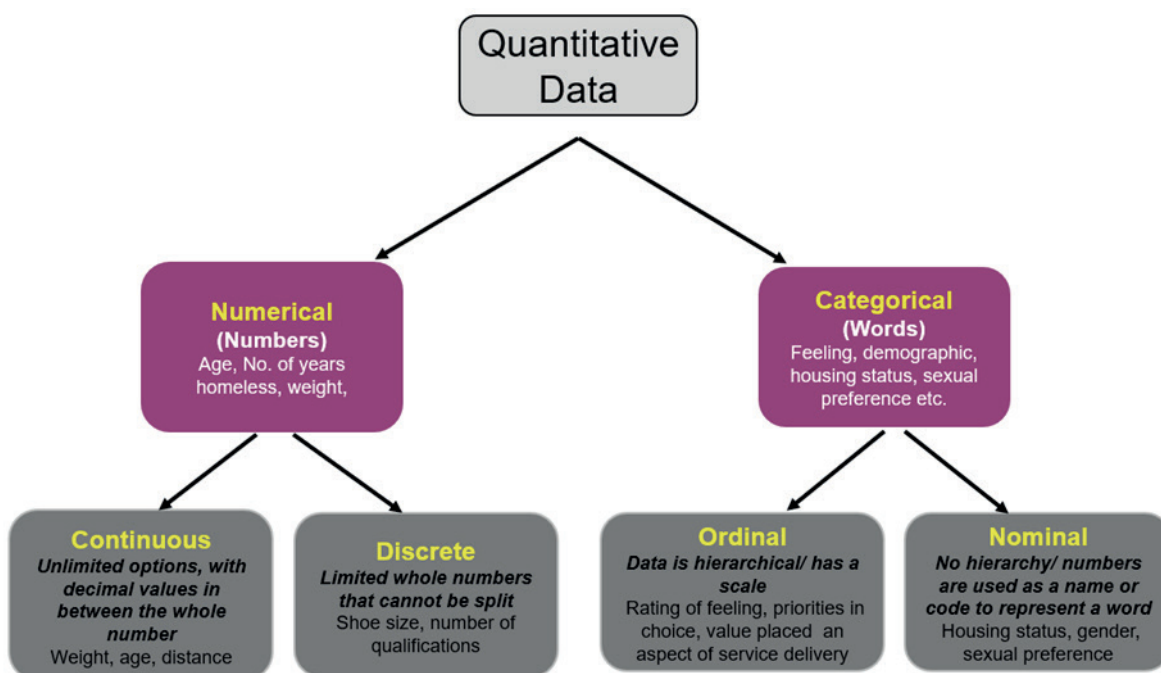
Section 5: Quantitative data: Working with numbers

Quantitative data allows us to capture information on inputs, activities and outputs. This allows us to:

- Monitor the programme’s deliverables
- Manage and be accountable for resources (internally, and to funders and other partners)
- Report a wide view of our programme or service.

This diagram models the different types of quantitative data in terms of those which are numbers in their ‘raw’ form and the use of numbers to represent words (e.g. 1 = blue eyes, 2 = brown eyes) or scale (e.g. 1 = Excellent and 5 = very poor).

Summary of Quantitative Data Typology



Numerical data can feel more straightforward to work with because when we are measuring out comes we are often used to working with numbers that have a numerical value, calculating things like mean, modes and averages.

Categorical data involves more thought about the way we store and process it, which we’ll explore later in this section.

Let’s look at some of the tools and methods for collecting quantitative data.

Tips for databases and participant records

The following are tips that can be used to either review your existing database or spreadsheet system for collecting new data, or a guide to establishing a new approach.

- **Do an organisational mapping exercise** to clarify who is already collecting what and how you can align your systems. Sometimes organisations find that they are using numerous system to capture similar data. The key is to make sure all your systems work together – this way you can cross-analyse the data you are collecting and look for trends across the organisation. A review can also make them easier to use.

For example, if you are running different types of training courses, make sure all your evaluations follow the same format. You can then develop a spreadsheet that can be used to store the data from all of them. This will allow you to summarise all the data from all your course and analyse participant feedback to analysis trends for all the training in your organisation.

- **Be clear on what demographic details would be useful** for you to include. In the section of this toolkit on ‘Getting started with data’ we look at how important it is to sub-divide our target population by criteria such as gender, age etc. This helps us to cross-analyse data with these variables to identify trends.

For example, in a programme which aims to increase employability skills for people who have experienced homelessness, it is useful to evaluated things like increased confidence and knowledge and be able to look at these things against other variables such as age and gender. By doing this you can look for patterns like whether the programme or service is working more effectively for a particular age group or less for men or women.

- **Consistent language is key** to developing a system that works. You should decide on a common approach to the words you are going to use, ensure it’s consistent and stick to it. You can communicate this to colleagues by doing things like providing a glossary or including comment boxes in columns in your spreadsheet.

For example, if we have a column in our spreadsheet that records client’s history of substance misuse, there are many different ways this can be inputted – one member of staff may use the name of a substance, while others may use generic terms like ‘drugs and alcohol’. This will cause problems if we want to run reports form an excel spread sheet and will make analysing trends difficult.

- **Consider coding your data** rather than inputting words every time.

For example, let’s take the example we used on substance misuse. Rather than using a list of consistent wording, it may be easier to allocation different numbers to different categories. For example, drugs = 1, alcohol = 2, drugs and alcohol = 3. Of course, this can be broken down to as many different workable options that are relevant to your organisation. Be aware, however, not to break it down to too many different options, as it will only make data input more laborious, and could also reduce the capacity of data sets for identifying trends.

- **Think backwards and practically in your design.** Start with your reporting needs and the type of things you want to generate from your data. It’s all too easy to rush into designing a spreadsheet that seems simple, until it comes to the data analysis stage and you realise that is a better or more efficient way of approaching. Spending some time analysis your organisation’s needs, and also learning about the capacity and function of the software you are using, can spare you lots of time and energy in the future.

Gantt charts

Some organisations use Gantt Charts to manage projects.⁵ These are a low cost, accessible and adaptable approach, especially useful for organisations with limited resources. In its basic form it is developed using a spreadsheet or a calendar and it shows a list of activities and outputs against a timeline, marking when they need to be delivered in the programme.

Further amendments could include:

- Colour coding the chart using a traffic light system. Red for activity not started yet, orange for begun but not yet complete or green for completed.
- Notes or comments added to the cells to explain further relevant details.
- Linking the chart to an additional budget or resource management excel page, which outlines financial, physical and human resources.

Questionnaires

Arguably the most widely used quantitative data collection tool is a questionnaire. They are accessible and adaptable and have the capacity to reach a wide representation of a population. There are many advantages to using a questionnaire, but also things to consider.

Advantages

- Relatively simple and accessible to develop and use.
- They allow a high level of data standardisation, meaning more control over the type of data you collect and therefore making it easier to manage at the analysis stage.
- They can collect large amounts of data at a low cost within a short period of time.
- They can be anonymous. This can encourage more honest feedback.
- They can be conducted in a number of ways, face-to-face, self-completed, telephone/skype interviews, online.

Considerations

- Although they look simple, there is a huge amount of thought and consideration needed when you are designing them.
- They have limitations – they might not always be the best option when a richer depth of data is required.
- If you collect large amounts of data, you need to work out how you're going to process it. Do you have the capacity, what will the system you use look like, how much time will it take and who will be responsible.
- Each way of conducting a questionnaire has challenges and benefits. It's important to think about accessibility for each one e.g. if you're expecting written answers, will the people you're asking to complete have high enough levels of literacy? Or, will a face-to-face approach mean people find it harder to be honest.

⁵ <https://www.gantt.com/>

Categorical Questions: Different types of word-based questions to use in questionnaires

The following examples were developed using Survey Monkey, but are easily to replicate using other models or a paper-based survey which can be designed using Microsoft Word or Excel.

1. Rank: where options need to be ranked in order of value / importance/ unimportance etc. **E.g.:**

1. What would be the most beneficial ways for your Job Coach to support you? (please rank in order of importance, with 1 being the most important)

1	Job Search
2	CV Writing Support
3	Completing job applications
4	Interview skills

2. Multiple Choice: where an option or multiple options are selected from a larger list of options. **E.g.:**

2. How often would you like to meet with your Job Coach?

- Once a week
- Once a fortnight
- Once a month

3. Rating: give a rating score based on a scale where one end represents the lower denominator and the other end the highest. Scales can vary, but best practice is to use the Likert Scale of 5. It has a middle number and it is also a small enough number to capture useful comparative data. E.g. if you use a scale of '10' and got responses from 10 people who all rated a different number – we wouldn't be able to identify trends. **E.g.:**

3. How would you rate the trainers delivery of the course?



Or this:

4. How satisfied were you with the course materials?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

4. Dichotomous Questions: where there are a choice of two answers i.e. yes/no or true/ false. **E.g.:**

5. Would you recommend this programme to a friend?

- Yes
- No

Numerical questions to use in questionnaires

Numerical questions are generally easier to include a questionnaire, they can either take the form of asking someone to explicitly input a number.

Please provide your age in the box

On multiple choice

Please circle the number of dependents you have

1 2 3 4 5 6 7+

Tips for developing effective questionnaires⁶

- Keep the language simple without being condescending and avoid jargon.
- Keep questions short.
- Avoid double-barrelled questions, as in questions which ask two questions at once.
- Avoid negatively framed questions, because they are difficult to understand, especially when you are asked to agree or disagree e.g. Marijuana use should not be decriminalised: agree/ disagree.
- Ask questions only where respondents are likely to have the knowledge needed to answer.
- Try to ensure that the questions mean the same thing to all respondents i.e. meanings and terms used may vary between different groups.
- Avoid creating opinions i.e. respondents may not necessarily hold an opinion on a topic, therefore allow a 'no opinion' alternative.
- Avoid unnecessary detail i.e. it is unlikely that you will want precise income or age and this may generate too much data, instead use groupings.

Analysing quantitative data

Quantitative data analysis can be as easy as logging into an online survey site and asking it to summarise the findings of the questionnaire you posted a week ago. Sites like Survey Monkey make it super easy for us. However, beware of the biggest downfall of using an online survey tool - but the response rate is usually fair to poor on most campaigns, even when the target audience is professional peers. When your target group is a transient population with complex needs and socio-economic and literacy barriers to engaging with technology, then the success rate is of course even lower.

This doesn't mean to say that you can't use them as a tool, they can still be a highly effective. An efficient way of gathering data from harder to reach groups is through training staff and peer-researchers to input the data on behalf of the participant rather than a self-completion format.

Even if you don't use an online questionnaire tool, quantitative data analysis is going to need computer software, such as MS Excel. This Toolkit does not provide step by step instructions on how to use these software packages to analyse quantitative data, instead we encourage you to use the plentiful YouTube videos available online to support you with developing your data analysis skills on MS Excel and things like SPSS Statistics.

When you've selected your software package you're going to need to:

- Design the format of the systems. Choose which columns you are going to use and how that will impact on your data entry and analysis.
- Input the data, either manually or imported from your online survey tool.
- Clean the data. Check the data to check that the numbers have all been inputted correctly.

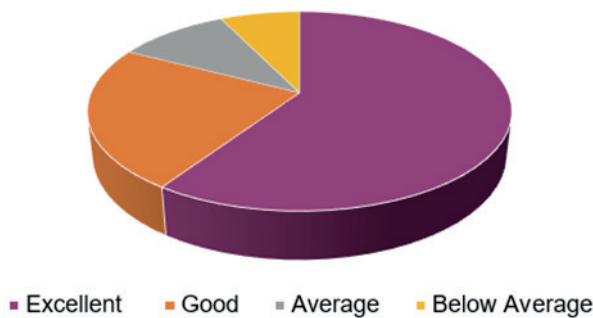
Approaches to analysing quantitative data

Descriptive statistics

1. Pie charts

Pie Charts are used when it is relevant to illustrate how the whole group is split on a certain topic.

How Participants Rated the Course Content



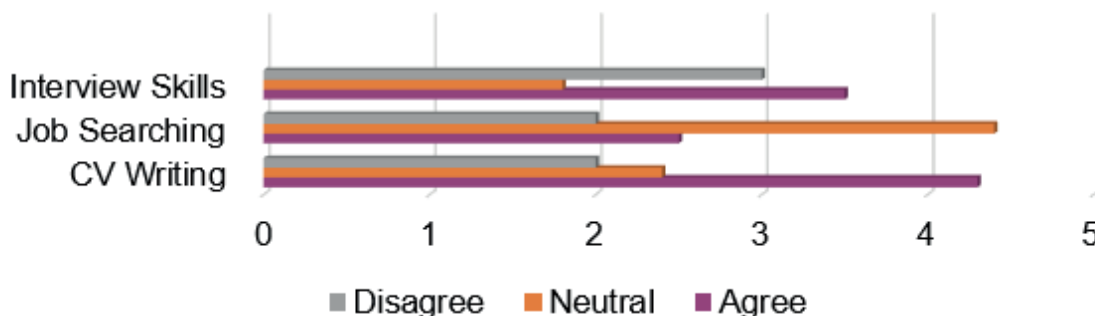
For example:

- A training group is split on how they felt about the programme.
- The population of clients is split based on age range, ethnicity or any other relevant demographic.
- How a projects funds or resources have been allocated or spent.

2. Bar graphs

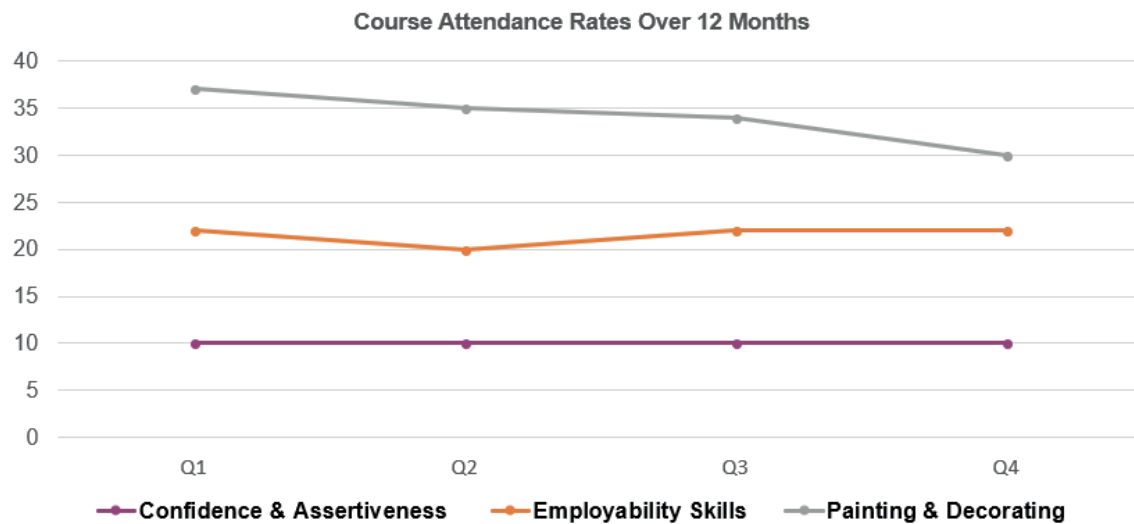
Bar Graphs are used to compare numbers which are independent of each other and when there is a need to cross analyse two or more variables. In the example below, we want to illustrate how much participants agreed that the topic area had been covered well for each topic area and how those topic areas performed against each other based on that participant opinion.

No. of Participants Who Felt that the Topic Area was Covered Well in the Course



3. Line graphs

Line graphs help us to illustrate how numbers behave over time and to cross-analyse how sets of numbers behave over time comparatively. The example below shows course attendance rates of three different courses over a three month period.



4. Tables

Tables are useful for summarising multiple sets of data and comparing a more diverse set of variables than a bar chart allows.

Support Needs of Service-Users

Age bracket	Service-users		Support needs	
	No.	% of total	Mental health % of total	Substance misuse % of total
16-24	12	24%	20%	18%
25-34	20	40%	24%	34%
35-49	5	10%	25%	50%
50-64	7	14%	33%	33%
> 65	6	12%	100%	0%
Total	50			

5. Numbers and infographics

Sometimes numbers are most appropriately presented as standalone figures, such as when presenting average, median or mode.

Infographics are an increasingly popular way of visualising quantitative data and can be created relatively easy using software such as MS PowerPoint or low cost online software such as Canva.com (which offer special deductions to charitable organisations).

If you're feeling creative, you can create your own bespoke infographics using things like Lego blocks, modelling clay or brightly coloured pictures to create the descriptive statistic and take a photograph. There's some great examples of how people do this online just using Google images.

Telling a story with numbers

We also need to support the descriptive statistics we choose to use using a narrative i.e. ensure you explain to the reader what these graphs tell us. Do they show an increase in uptake of a service over time or a higher percentage of a demographic group using a service? The information we gain from quantitative stats will often naturally beg the addition of qualitative data to delve deeper into the reasoning behind the data.

Section 6: Qualitative data: Working with words

About

This section covers:

- Qualitative research tools
 - Interviews
 - Focus Groups
- Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data

Qualitative data helps us to explore an issue with depth; however, never underestimate the time, skill and resources that go into working with qualitative data.

Save yourself the unnecessary hard work and spend time planning:

- What do you really need to find out? (and what is unnecessary)
- What questions will generate that kind of data?
- Which tool is best to use? (think dynamics as well as questions)
- What support is needed for this process?

We're going to look at the use of interviews and focus groups as qualitative research tools.

Interviews

There are three main types of interview.

Structured interviews

Pre-determined questions with a structured wording, asked in a consistent order.

Semi-structured interviews

These have predetermined questions but the order that can be modified depending on how the interview feels to be appropriate. This allows an organic flow; and, also for important information to be captured that may have been missed is not predicted in the design of a structured approach. However, beware of digressing off-point and of possible data-overload.

Unstructured interviews

This approach is the most informal and organic. The interviewer can approach the interview with only a general area that they want to explore rather than a complete script. However, although this approach can be tempting in terms of being able to explore areas in an organic way, this is also the most labour-intensive approach to interviewing. It usually generates reams of qualitative data that can require a lot of work in the analysis stage; something that smaller organisations with limited research capacity should be conscious of.

Types of Interview Questions

Interviews include three main types of questions:

Question type	Description	Example
Closed	Require interviewees to choose from two or more options.	Which training course did you enjoy more, C.V writing or Interview Skills?
Open	Don't restrict the answer, they only offer the subject area.	How did you enjoy the training courses?
Scale	Are similar to closed questions but they also require the interviewee to express the degree to which they hold an opinion.	Tell me how much you agree with this statement 'I enjoyed the CV Writing training course'. strongly agree/ agree/ disagree/ strongly disagree

Steps in facilitating a focus group

Step one: introduction

- The facilitator should introduce themselves and their role.
- The purpose of the focus group should be clearly defined, and the facilitator should also explain exactly how the data will be recorded and used.
- Using a flip chart at the front of the room encourage participants to suggest ground rules for the session, the facilitator should also make necessary additions, e.g.
 - Turn mobile devices off
 - Only one person at a time should talk (props such as introducing a talking stick ⁷ can help with this)
 - No side discussions during the focus group
 - Respect each other's opinions
 - Let's try and enjoy the opportunity to voice our opinion (adding light-hearted ground rules helps participants to relax about the process)
- At this stage the participants should be gently encouraged to ask any questions or voice any concerns they may have about the process.
- Safeguarding considerations should be considered in the design phase and addressed in the introduction, for example if a focus group is going to explore potentially sensitive issues then this should be flagged with the participants and the facilitator should have the capacity to sign-post or refer the participants to extra support.
- Explain that as there is a lot to cover, you (facilitator) will be monitoring time and steering the group along.

Step two: warm-up

- Build rapport and trust with the group by using a couple of non-threatening discussion points to ease the group into the process.

⁷ http://www.global-change-seminar.org/exercises/talking_stick.html

Step three: main body of the focus group

- The more experience you gain with facilitating focus groups the more confident and adept you will become with it. The real skill in facilitating focus groups comes with your ability to read group behaviour and subtly encourage the free-flow of idea/opinion sharing. There are many different personality types which will impact on the groups dynamics and your role as facilitator is to manage this.

For example, there is often an individual who will dominate discussion. This may not necessarily be a negative trait they just may feel very passionate about the topic. As the facilitator you will need to encourage less confident/ forthcoming members of the group to share and manage the input from more confident members without making them feel unheard or unappreciated.

Think about how you use your body language, facial expressions as well as the language and tone you use. Also make use of props such as the Talking Stick (mentioned above) or by using a flip chart to 'park' ideas or digressions until the end of the group discussion to be addressed if time allows.

- Capturing data during a focus group can be tricky as you need to capture both what is said and who says it. Conversation can be fast paced, and dialogue can go back and forth across different members of the group. It is advisable that you have both a facilitator and someone to transcribe in the room so that each can focus on their roles. Even with someone to transcribe, the facilitator should be encouraged to also take notes as it helps to cross-check after the group. Video and audio recording are also options although consideration needs to be given to the impact of this on group dynamics and also safeguarding issues.

Step four: cool-off

- Its good practice to include some gentle questions at the end of the session to wind down and ensure the mood is positive.

Step five: closure

- Sometimes participants share more information once the process is officially closed. The facilitator may choose to log this or not but if you do decide to log it then also include notes explaining the circumstances.
- Thank the focus group participants and invite questions.
- Reiterate how their information will be used and what feedback will be offered i.e. how the findings will be shared with the group themselves.
- Safeguarding and sign posting.

Group interviews and focus groups

The primary difference between a group interview and focus group is the role of the interviewer. In a group interview the interviewer holds a predominant position akin to that of the one to one interview; questions are asked and answered by members of the group. A group interview can follow the same guidance as the semi or unstructured interviews; but using a group interview approach can be beneficial in terms of:

- Reaching a larger population within the time and resource limitations of the research.
- Sometimes participants feel safer sharing their views in a group setting for a variety of different reasons.

Focus groups are a way of observing how a group discusses a topic, both the content of what is said and the dynamics of the group itself. The interviewer takes a far more backseat role in a focus group in terms of driving the conversation, but it can be demanding in terms of capturing the complex range of information and observations.

For example, let's take Outcome 2b from our Paint Project case study.

“Outcome 2b: Participants demonstrate employability skills and increased confidence.”

If we were using a group interview to collect data on this then we may choose to interview a group of three participants using a semi-structured interview asking them to provide feedback on how their confidence has grown or how beneficial they found the training on employability skills. You would note down answers, noting useful information and who said what, and keep facilitating the interview forward onto the next question.

Comparatively, with a focus group, you would have a number of topics for discussion for the group to explore together. The interviewer would then capture what was actually being said and also the dynamics in the room. For example, in this case, with a focus on confidence the interviewer may make notes on body language, who's engaging in the focus group and who's sitting back and being quieter etc. The level and areas that you observed would of course depend on what you are researching.

Steps in facilitating a focus group

Step one

Introduction

- The facilitator should introduce themselves and their role.
- The purpose of the focus group should be clearly defined, and the facilitator should also explain exactly how the data will be recorded and used.
- Using a flip chart at the front of the room encourage participants to suggest ground rules for the session, the facilitator should also make necessary additions, e.g.
 - Only one person at a time should talk (props such as introducing a talking stick⁸ can help with this)
 - No side discussions during the focus group
 - Respect each other's opinions
 - Let's try and enjoy the opportunity to voice our opinion (adding light-hearted ground rules helps participants to relax about the process).
- At this stage the participants should be gently encouraged to ask any questions or voice any concerns they may have about the process.
- Safeguarding considerations should be considered in the design phase and addressed in the introduction, for example if a focus group is going to explore potentially sensitive issues then this should be flagged with the participants and the facilitator should have the capacity to sign-post or refer the participants to extra support.
- Explain that as there is a lot to cover, you (facilitator) will be monitoring time and steering the group along.

Step two

Warm-up

- Build rapport and trust with the group by using a couple of non-threatening discussion points to ease the group into the process.

8 http://www.global-change-seminar.org/exercises/talking_stick.htm

Step three

Main body of the focus group

- The more experience you gain with facilitating focus groups the more confident and adept you will become with it. The real skill in facilitating focus groups comes with your ability to read group behaviour and subtly encourage the free-flow of idea/opinion sharing. There are many different personality types which will impact on the groups dynamics and your role as facilitator is to manage this.

For example, there is often an individual who will dominate discussion. This may not necessarily be a negative trait, they just may feel very passionate about the topic. As the facilitator you will need to encourage less confident/ forthcoming members of the group to share and manage the input from more confident members without making them feel unheard or unappreciated.

- Think about how you use your body language, facial expressions as well as the language and tone you use. Also make use of props such as the Talking Stick or by using a flip chart to 'park' ideas or digressions until the end of the group discussion to be addressed if time allows.
- Capturing data during a focus group can be tricky as you need to capture both what is said and who says it. Conversation can be fast paced, and dialogue can go back and forth across different members of the group. It is advisable that you have both a facilitator and a transcriber in the room so that each can focus on their roles. Even with a transcriber on board, the facilitator should be encouraged to also take notes as it helps to cross-check after the group. Video and audio recording are also options although consideration needs to be given to the impact of this on group dynamics and also safeguarding issues.

Step four

Cool-off

- Its good practice to include some gentle questions at the end of the session to wind down and ensure the mood is positive.

Step five

Closure

- Sometimes participants share more information once the process is officially closed. The facilitator may choose to log this or not but if you do decide to log it then also include notes explaining the circumstances.
- Thank the focus group participants and invite questions.
- Reiterate how their information will be used and what feedback will be offered i.e. how the findings will be shared with the group themselves.
- Safeguarding and sign-posting.

Tips on planning for interviews and focus groups

The following are things to think about when planning interviews and focus groups.

Be clear about your objectives

Outline the information you want to find out from the interviews, this should align with your Theory of Change and monitoring and evaluating framework.

Develop your research tools

Choose the approach you wish to use i.e. structured/ unstructured interviews, and draft questions. You may wish to pilot your tools and interview questions on an individual or small group and then review them before carrying out the rest of the interviews.

Getting the right people in the room

- Be clear about what you want to know and who may be able to offer insight i.e. clients who have taken part in a programme/ service.
- Ensure proportional representation of the wider population by thinking about demographics (e.g. gender, age etc.) when selecting who to talk to (see Section on Getting Started with Data).
- Think about the dynamics involved in interviewing participants i.e. whether individuals would feel more relaxed in a group or one to one setting. In group settings, think about the possible dynamics between different participants.

Plan how to capture the data from respondents

The first thing to consider is the level of data you need to capture. It is unlikely that you will need to capture data in a verbatim (word for word) way required in academic research. It will probably be sufficient to capture the gist of what is said along with verbatim quotes on key issues. You need to consider the best approach for doing this. For example,

- Taking notes during the interview or bringing in support to transcribe
- Video or audio record the session (think about the impact on dynamics)
- Using a flip chart board to capture data in a more participatory format, or
- A combination of all the above

Consider managing the dynamics within the room

- Find out as much about the group as you can before the session, i.e. what personalities will you have in the room and what behaviour may you expect?
- Pre-determine possible dynamics which could arise from certain topics and how you may deal with them.
- Identify any strategies you can employ to manage group dynamics, including how you set the room up and how you allocate seating.
- Consider any safeguarding issues, such as possible issues that the process may bring up for participants and follow-up support they may be offered or sign-posted to.

Analysing Qualitative Data

There is qualitative data analysis software available such as NVivo. However unlike with quantitative data analysis, it is not necessary to employ a software package to analyse qualitative data; especially as a small to medium sized organisation carrying out evaluations and impact assessment.

Basically, qualitative data analysis at this level of research is about looking for common themes in the responses you get from participants. At a simple level this maybe selecting a sample of direct quotations from qualitative data to support an observation or trend identified in quantitative data.

For example: Three core themes emerged during the focus group discussion when the participants were asked to discuss how the wellbeing training programme had impacted on them; they were, 'confidence', 'optimism about the future' and 'an increase in self-efficacy to take care of their physical health'.

When discussing how the course had impacted on their confidence, all 5 of the women reported feeling more positive about themselves and able to interact better in group activities in the hostel.

“I feel much better about joining in with group discussions since the training. It helped me to realise that what I think is just as important as what everyone else thinks and that most people have negative feelings about themselves at times and battle with their confidence. That feeling that we are all in a similar boat, really helps me”. (Female client aged 29)

How you provide details on the source/ who said the quote will depend firstly on how appropriate it is to share in terms of safe-guarding the client; and, also what relevance the information has in terms of the data i.e. it may be valuable to share gender and age for instance.

‘Coding’⁹ is the most popular approach to analysing qualitative data; it’s a way of dividing and subdividing qualitative data into themes to identify commonalities, trends and comparisons. As the diagram below models, a top-level theme is first identified and then sub-themes where necessary; these are supported by direct quotes.

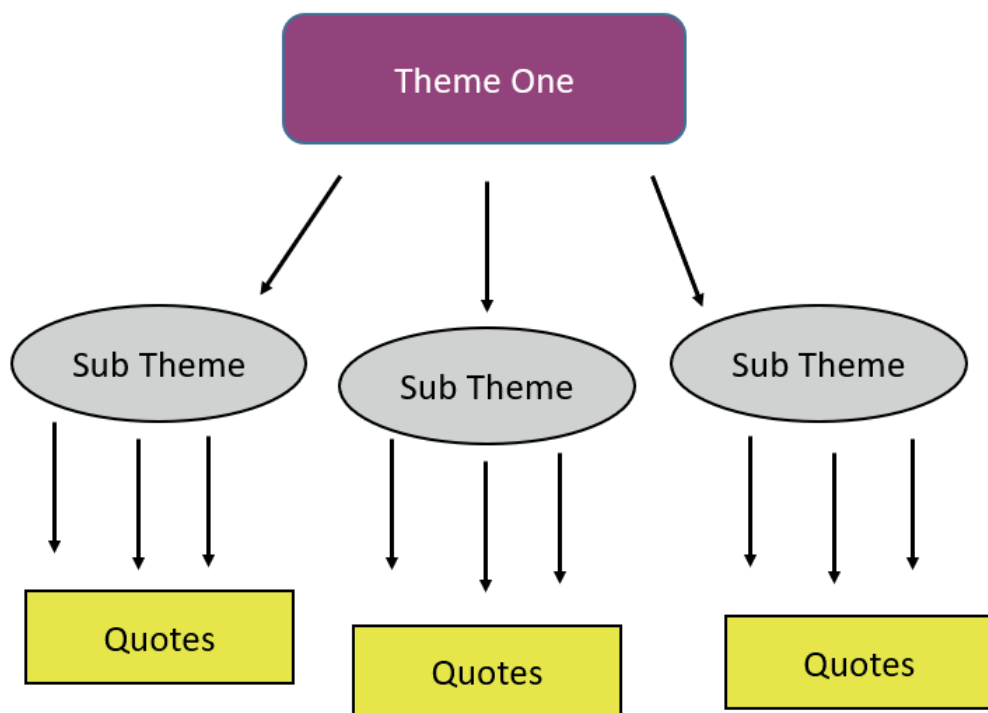


Figure 8. Coding qualitative data

There are software packages for carrying out this kind of analysis, but you can just as effectively do so manually:

- Simply go through an interview transcript with a selection of highlighting pens, giving each theme that arises a colour. Then every sentence that relates to a theme, highlight in the respective colour; another way is to.
- Open several Word documents a give each one the title of a theme, then read through the transcript, copying and pasting sentences onto the respectively themed Word documents they relate to.

9 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iL7Ww5kpnIM>

Section 7: Participatory methods

About

In the following section we will define participatory methods, summarise a selection of participatory approaches and provide links to further information available online.

This section covers:

- Participatory methods defined
- Outcomes Star
- Video stories
- Photo voice
- Participatory mapping
- Pocket voting
- Analysing and using data

Defining participatory methods

Participatory methods of data collection are where participants take a more proactive role in the data collection process. They range in methodology, for example, interactive distance travelled tools; tangible ranking and sorting activities, creative arts-based approaches and utilising technology such as video and photography.

There are plenty of existing tools and approaches available to inspire you and you can create your own. However, when creating your own, be aware of the capacities and constraints of your tool for achieving a research objective; and, be transparent and explicit about the approach used. In the following section we summarise a selection of participatory approaches and provide links to further information available online.

The Outcomes Star¹⁰

The Outcomes Star approach is a family of tools all based on a similar format that measures journeys of change when working with individuals. There are different stars to choose from and all have been developed through a rigorous process of co-creation and testing with clients and front-line staff.

If you are unfamiliar with the Outcomes Star then we recommend you take a look at the website referenced below to understand it more fully in terms of format, objectives and approach.

The tool is widely used as a front-line tool to enable key-workers and clients to monitor the change journey. In terms of using it as an evaluation tool, summaries can be generated to provide averages and trends of clients scoring under each of the criteria on the star. These summaries can be taken as baseline data reading at the beginning of a programme, then periodically. Further cross-analysis can be done through generating summaries based on demographically defined sub-groups of the population, such as age, gender, ethnicity etc.

¹⁰ www.outcomestar.org.uk

For example: At the beginning of the programme the average response of females when asked to rate their ability to 'look after themselves' was 2. This increased to a 3 by the first quarter and remained so at the half-term review. However, by the end of project evaluation, this had increased to a 4. We explored the reasons behind this with participants and discovered that a big influence had been the workshops delivered over the final two months of the programme.

"I learnt about the importance of creating a routine for myself and some tools and techniques for helping with this." (Female client, aged 18)

"For me it was taking the time to understand my own needs and then make a plan that I could stick too, the course taught me how to do this." (Female client, aged 20)

Video Stories

With mobile phones and tablets making video recorders easily accessible these days and easy to use online editing software, video stories are easier to create and a powerful tool for demonstrating impact.

The trick is to keep it simple when interviewing a client about the impact your programme or service has had on them, focus on the following questions:

- What was your situation before?
- What happened during the project?
- Where are you now?
- How do you feel about the future?

Video stories can be a powerful and engaging way of collecting and presenting data, however careful consideration needs to be given to safeguard clients when using this medium and helping them to understand the longevity of video clips and their online accessibility.

Photo Voice

Photo Voice is an approach which focuses on empowering the individual to be the person behind the camera and to take photographs that they feel represent an issue.

For example: taking photos of the areas in which an individual defines as their local 'community'. Or things that represent their journey through a project.

A Canadian Women's Organisation has developed a free online resource¹¹ which provides comprehensive guidance on using this approach. And the organisation Photo Voice¹² offer training and online resources to using this approach for social change.

¹¹ http://www.pwhce.ca/photovoice/pdf/Photovoice_Manual.pdf

¹² <https://photovoice.org/>

Participatory Mapping

This is a flexible approach that can be adapted to suit different objectives. Basically, the objective is for participants to develop a map together. This can be done using a large piece of paper and pens or using a range of craft objects e.g. sticks, craft dough, leaves etc.

The focus of the map depends on the research, one approach is to get participants to map their local area and then mark what they see to be hazards on the map. This can be insightful in different ways, e.g.:

- What individuals include on the map in the first place, i.e. things that are important to individual tend to be represented larger than scale or more centralised than they are in reality. Things that are not deemed important will be represented smaller or sometimes be omitted completely.
- The nature of what individuals believe to be a 'hazard', may challenge preconceptions.
- Comparing maps can offer interesting insights, e.g. how groups of men and women create different maps or how a groups approach to mapping changes from the baseline reading to a post project activity.
- Observations can also be made about how individuals participate in the exercise and group dynamics.

Pocket Voting

Pocket Voting is effective when gathering sensitive data in a participatory setting. A board is set up with a number of polythene pockets attached to one side of it. Each of these pockets represents a choice, for example different types of illegal substances, these can be indicated using photographs/ pictures or words. The board should be placed in a position where only one person at a time is able to see the pockets. Each participant is handed a selection of counters and given some time to place their counters in the pockets relevant to them. In this example we want to know how many people have used the substances on the board. However, you can adapt the approach to include coloured counters which allow participants to rank the importance of their choices also.

Analysing and using the Data

Dependent on the type of participatory tools you have used you can apply qualitative or sometimes quantitative approaches to data analysis (please see respective sections of this toolkit). However, some of these tools will support other data collection mechanisms i.e. a video story will provide a richer picture to an evaluation report but will need to be accompanied by quantitative and qualitative data that will offer a more proportional representation of clients journeys.

Participatory methods can be an engaging and creative way of collecting and presenting data. However, akin to the guidance given on qualitative and quantitative data collection tools, consideration needs to be given to the research objectives, tool design and facilitation aspects such as logging data and managing participant dynamics; for this there are a number of great resources available online.¹³

¹³ http://www.participatorymethods.org/sites/participatorymethods.org/files/VSO_Facilitator_Guide_to_Participatory_Approaches_Principles.pdf
<http://www.wcia.org.uk/images/user/Hub%20Participatory%20Approaches%20to%20Development%20Training%20Resources%20v10.pdf>



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