

Setting outcomes

Setting your project's **outcomes** is the first thing you need to do in order to evaluate your project.



What are outcomes?

Outcomes are the **changes** or **differences** you expect your project to make.

Having **clear, focused** outcomes will help:

- you work out what to measure in order to find out whether your project is making a difference, and to what extent
- people know what they can expect to gain if they use your services
- funders know the impact their money will have.

Don't be tempted to set too many outcomes for your project. Usually **3-5 outcomes** are enough for one project.

Outcomes should:	Example:		
relate directly to the identified need for your project i.e. the <u>reason</u> your project exists	<u>need</u> ↑↓ <u>outcome</u>	<i>Young people's life chances are limited by low literacy levels.</i> <i>Young people improve their literacy skills.</i>	
reflect the logical result of what your project does i.e. they should describe the <u>difference</u> your project will make, <u>not</u> its activities or services (what it does)	<u>activity</u> <u>outcome</u>	<i>We run a range of literacy classes...</i> ...as a result of which... <i>...young people improve their literacy skills.</i>	
answer the "So What?" question It's easy to get outcomes and activities confused. To be sure, check whether what you've written answers the <i>"So what?"</i> question.	is it an <u>outcome</u> or an <u>activity</u> ?	does it answer the <i>"So what?"</i> question?	therefore it's...
	<i>We run a range of literacy classes.</i>	no... I don't know what will change	...an activity
	<i>Young people improve their literacy skills.</i>	yes... this tells me what will change	...an outcome

Outcomes should:	Example:	
be realistic achievable in a few years	<u>unrealistic outcome</u>	<i>All school pupils throughout the city achieve graduate level literacy skills.</i>
be in your power to achieve	<u>outcome you can't influence</u>	<i>All our learners get permanent jobs within a year.</i>
be simple if you see the word "and" in an outcome, check whether it should actually be two separate outcomes	<p><i>Learners are more able to move into mainstream classes and employment.</i></p> <p>What will happen if it turns out that learners are more able to move into mainstream classes, but <u>not</u> into employment (or vice versa)?</p> <p>It makes it easier to measure and report if this becomes 2 outcomes instead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Learners are more able to move into mainstream classes.</i> - <i>Learners are more able to move into employment.</i> 	

How to word outcomes

1. Outcomes need to include **change words** such as **improve, increase, decrease**, or **reduce**.

Sustain can also be a "change" word – for example if the situation would have got worse without your project's intervention, e.g. *People at risk of homelessness can sustain their tenancies.*

[By contrast, activities need words that describe what you do such as *support, engage, help, encourage, offer, enable.*]

2. When writing outcomes, make sure you include the **Who? What? and How?** of change. NB: "How?" refers to the direction of the change – e.g. increasing, getting smaller, etc. (not to how you are going to make the change happen, i.e. your activities).

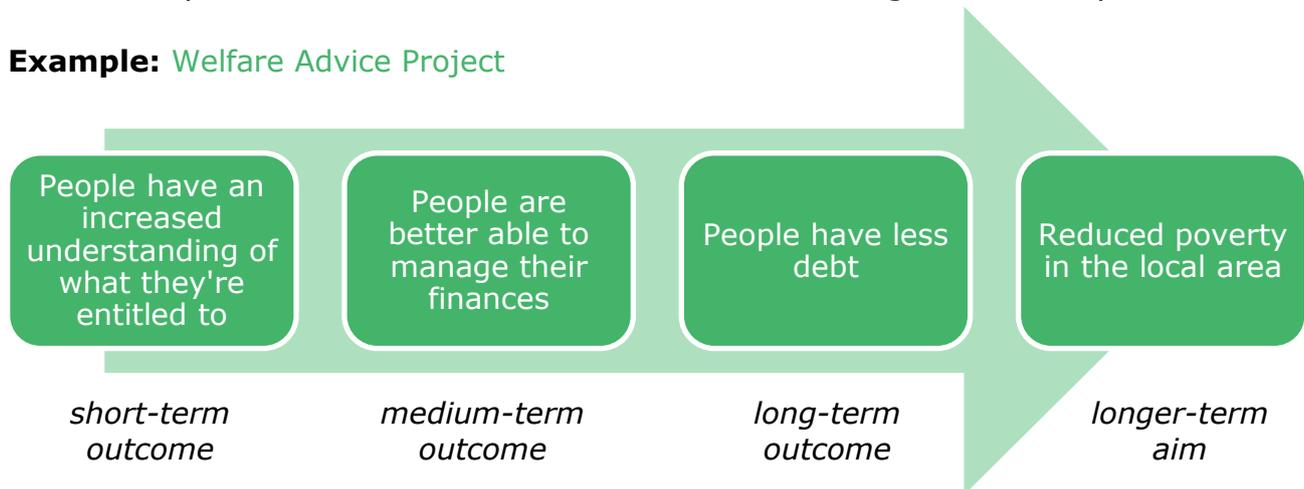
example outcome:	<i>Learners are more able to move into mainstream classes.</i>
Who is changing?	learners
What is changing?	their ability to move into mainstream classes
How (in what direction) is change happening?	their ability is increasing, learners are "more able"

Short, medium and long term outcomes

It is important to think about **when** you can expect the different outcomes of your project to become relevant.

In the example below, there would be no point in trying to measure a reduction in how much debt someone has before they have firstly understood what support and benefits they are entitled to and then learned how to manage their money better.

Example: Welfare Advice Project

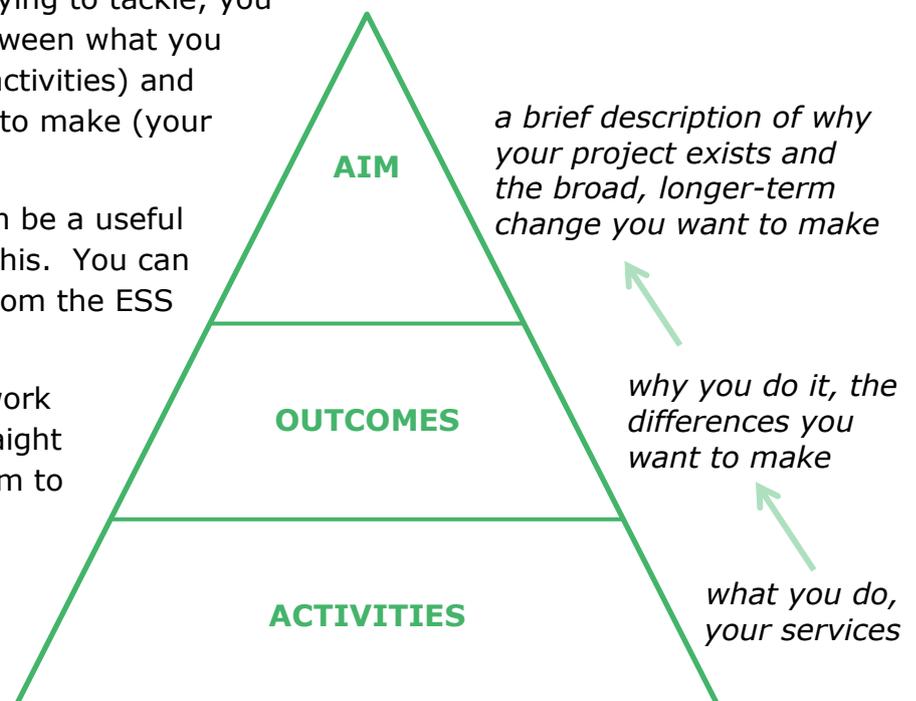


The link between activities and outcomes

Whatever problem you are trying to tackle, you need a logical connection between what you plan to do (your services or activities) and the difference you are trying to make (your aim and outcomes).

The Weaver's Triangle¹ can be a useful tool to help you think about this. You can download a [blank template](#) from the ESS website:

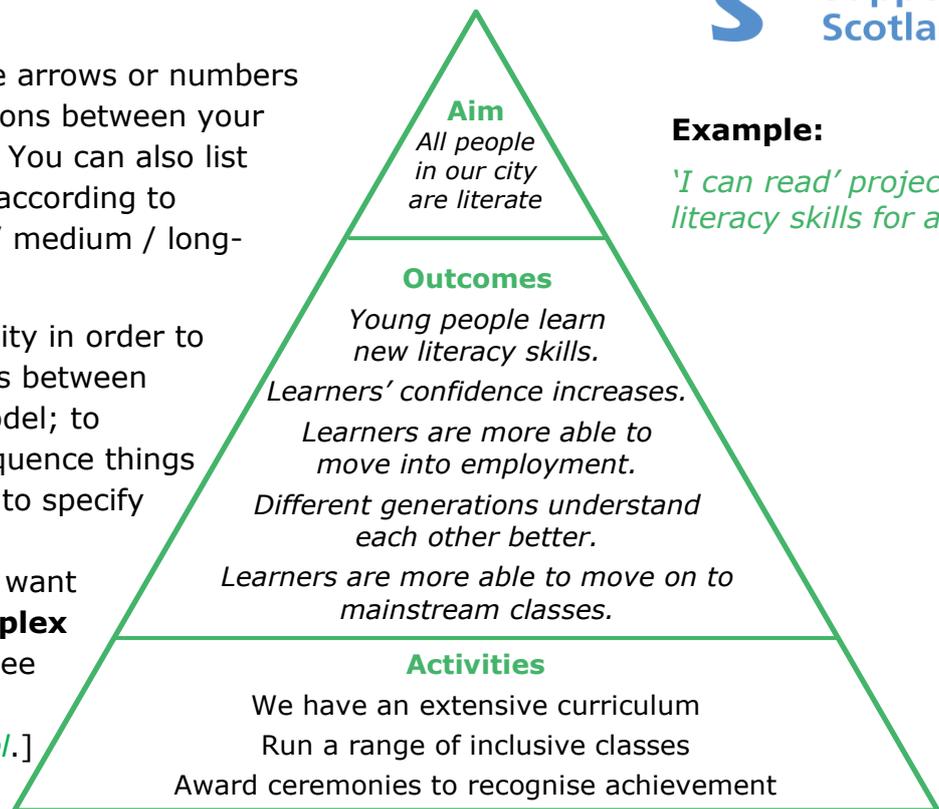
The Weaver's Triangle may work particularly well for more straight forward projects, helping them to clarify their logic and identify what to evaluate.



¹ Weaver's Triangle is adapted from the Charities Evaluation Services [CES] Planning Triangle (see www.ces-vol.org.uk for more information). Jayne Weaver worked for CES and developed the Triangle for the BBC Children in Need Appeal.

If you want, you can use arrows or numbers to illustrate the connections between your activities and outcomes. You can also list your outcomes in order according to whether they are short / medium / long-term.

If you need more flexibility in order to illustrate the connections between different parts of the model; to demonstrate in what sequence things happen; or to allow you to specify some of the underlying assumptions, you might want to develop a **more complex logic model** instead. [See *ESS support guide: Developing a logic model.*]



Example:

'I can read' project: literacy skills for all

More help

There are some **definitions** of evaluation terms on p31 of the [Harmonising Reporting working group's report to the Scottish Funders Forum](#), which you can download from ESS' website.

Our training workshop **Getting started: Outcomes and Indicators** will help you at this stage. To book a place visit the [workshops](#) page of our website.

What next?

What do you need to measure in order to find out whether or not your outcomes have been achieved? See our [Working out what to measure \(setting indicators for your outcomes\)](#) support guide.



You can download all our **Evaluation Support Guides** free from our website.

For evaluation help and advice, or if you need a copy of this guide in another format, please get in touch.

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