

Impact Measurement: Moving the Sector Forward

Presentation Notes

Slide 4:

Many verbs are used to describe impact measurement. Impact measurement explores what your organization provides, what its intended impacts are and whether or not it achieves them. It does not prove that the changes that take place are a result of your activities.

You are not meant to be an expert in evaluation or research methodology. But you do need to know some basics to conduct impact measurement.

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Effective impact measurement does more than collect, analyze, and provide data. It makes it possible for you to gather and use information to learn continually about and improve your organization. Impact measurement is a learning and management tool that can be used throughout an organization's life. Impact measurement results in effective programming and offers greater learning opportunities, better documentation of outcomes, and shared knowledge about what works and why. The logic model is a beneficial tool that facilitates effective organizational planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Basically, a logic model is a systematic and visual way to present and share your understanding of the relationships among the resources you have to operate your organization, the activities you plan, and the changes or results you hope to achieve. The most basic logic model is a picture of how you believe your organization works. It uses words and/or pictures to describe the sequence of activities thought to bring about change and how these activities are linked to the results you expect to achieve.

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The basic components of a logic model are shown here. These components illustrate the connection between your planned work and your intended results.

Your planned work describes what resources you think you need to implement your activities and what you intend to do.

Resources, also called **inputs**, are the resources and contributions that you and others make to the effort. They include the human, financial, organizational, and community resources that are available to direct toward doing the work. Examples of inputs are people (i.e., staff and volunteers), money, materials, equipment, partnerships, and technology.

Activities are what your organization does with its resources. Activities are the processes, tools, events, technology, and actions that are an intentional part of your daily process. The activities are what are used to bring about the intended changes or results.

Your intended results include all of your organization's desired results (outputs, outcomes, and impact).

Outputs are the direct products of organizational activities and may include types, levels, and targets of the activities to be conducted by the organization. Outputs are data about the size and scope of your activities, the audience/participants, and the products that are delivered or produced.

Outcomes are the specific changes in participants' behavior, knowledge, skills, status and level of functioning. Outcomes can be intended or unintended, positive or negative. Outcomes do not occur all at one time or

immediately. The more immediate the outcome, the more influence, in general, your organization has over its achievement.

Short-term outcomes are the specific changes in attitudes, knowledge, skills, motivation, or awareness expected to result from your organizational activities. Short-term outcomes can occur as soon as immediately or they may take up to a year to occur.

Medium-term outcomes build on the progress achieved by short-term outcomes. **Medium-term outcomes** are the expected changes in behaviors, practices, policies, or procedures. Medium-term outcomes typically occur one to three years after the activity.

In turn, long-term outcomes build on the progress achieved by medium-term outcomes. **Long-term outcomes** are expected changes in environment, social, economic, or political conditions. Long-term outcomes typically occur four to six years after the activity.

Impact is the fundamental intended or unintended change occurring in organizations, communities, or systems as a result of your organization's activities. Impact might include improved conditions, increased capacity, and or changes in the policy arena. Impact is typically achieved seven to ten years after an activity.

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Impact measurement is about moving beyond just looking at outputs. The power of accomplishing significant outcomes is not about what we do; it is about why we do what we do. Outcomes are the difference your organization will make in someone's life or life in your community. Outcomes are the future you want your organization to create for the people who walk through your door and everyone in your community.

Now let's test your knowledge. (See **Outcome or Output Handout**.)

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Now let's walk through the process for creating a logic model using this template. This process may take anywhere from an hour to several hours or even days, depending on the complexity of your organization. It's not necessary to create your logic model all in one sitting. It will almost certainly be useful to talk to other stakeholders and get their input along the way. You can work through the process, as we will do, starting with your organizational goal and ending with your intended outcomes. Or, if it's easier for you, you can work in reverse, starting with outcomes and working your way backwards.

First, think about the overall purpose of your organization. What are you trying to accomplish? The answer to this question will serve as your goal. Goals serve as a frame for all elements of the logic model that follow. They reflect organizational priorities and help you steer a clear direction for future action. Goals should include the intended results—in general terms—of your organization and specify the target population you intend to serve. Many of your organizations may already have articulated your organizational goal in the form of a mission statement. Insert your goal statement(s) into the Organizational Goal(s) box in your logic model template.

Next, identify the available resources for your organization. This helps you determine the extent to which you will be able to implement your activities and achieve your intended goals and outcomes. List the resources that you currently have to support your organization. Common types of resources include human resources (e.g., full- and part-time staff, consultants, pro bono staff services, and volunteers), financial resources (e.g., restricted grants, operating budget, and other monetary resources), space (e.g., office and other facilities), technology (e.g., computer hardware and software and communications infrastructure), other equipment (e.g., office machinery such as printers and copiers and equipment specific to the program) and other materials (e.g., office

supplies, program/training materials, insurance, etc.). Identify the major resource categories for your program. Be specific about these resources, but do not spend a lot of time developing a detailed list of all actual or anticipated program expenditures. List your resource statement(s) in the Resources box in your logic model template.

Activities are the actions that your organization does —what you will do with resources in order to achieve your outcomes and, ultimately, your goal(s). It is often helpful to group related activities together. The number of activity groups depends on your organization’s size. For a large organization, there might be numerous activity groups; smaller organizations may consist of just one or two. Each activity group will have more specific activities under it—but remember, this isn’t a to-do list. Getting too specific can overwhelm your audience. List all of your organizational activities, grouping related activities together. Record each activity group in a separate box in the Activities column of your logic model template.

Outputs are the measurable, tangible, and direct products or results of your organizational activities. They lead to the desired outcomes—benefits for participants, communities, or organizations—but are not themselves the changes you expect your activities will produce. They do help you assess how well you are implementing your activities. Whenever possible, express outputs in terms of the size and/or scope of services and products delivered or produced. Outputs are frequently expressed as quantities (e.g., number of audience members/visitors; number of workshops held; number of performances/ exhibits). Outputs don’t reveal anything about **quality**. Make sure your outputs have activities and resources associated with them. This is one way a logic model is useful—to check whether an organization has planned how it will create a product or deliver a service. List all the outputs you expect your organization’s activities will produce. Place these outputs in the boxes in the Outputs column of your logic model template adjacent to their corresponding activities.

Outcomes express the results that your organization intends to achieve if your activities are implemented as planned. Outcomes are the changes that occur or the difference that is made for individuals, groups, families, organizations, systems, or communities during or after your activities. Outcomes answer the questions: “What difference does the organization make?” and “What does success look like?” They reflect the core achievements you hope for your organization. Outcomes should represent the results or impacts that occur because of your organizational activities; be within the scope of your control or sphere of reasonable influence, as well as within a reasonable timeframe; and be measurable (it may take work to translate your outcomes into outcome measures). Organizations with diverse missions and services share common categories of outcomes, because outcomes are about change: changes in learning, changes in action, or changes in condition. Changes in learning include new knowledge; increased skills; changed attitudes, opinions, or values; and changed motivation or aspirations. Changes in action include modified behavior or practice; changed decisions; and changed policies. Changes in condition include human, economic, civic, and environmental. Be sure to clarify who or what will experience the intended changes.

Not all outcomes can occur at the same time. Some outcomes must occur before others become possible. This is referred to as the “chain of outcomes.” Short-term outcomes are the changes you expect to occur either immediately or in the near future. Short-term outcomes are those that are the most direct result of your activities and outputs. They are typically not ends in themselves, but are necessary steps toward desired ends (intermediate or long-term outcomes or goals). Intermediate outcomes are the changes you want to occur after that. Intermediate outcomes are those outcomes that link an organization’s outcomes to long-term outcomes. Long-term outcomes are the changes you hope will occur over time. Long-term outcomes are those that result from the achievement of your short- and intermediate-term outcomes. They are also generally outcomes over which your organization has a less direct influence. Often long-term outcomes will occur beyond the timeframe for which you have the capacity to measure. Identify the changes that will occur as a result of your activities. Place these in the Outcomes boxes of the logic model template adjacent to the corresponding activities/outputs.

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A series of “if-then” relationships should connect the components of the logic model: **if** resources are available to the organization, **then** the activities can be implemented; **if** the activities are implemented successfully, **then** certain outputs and outcomes can be expected. As you draft each component of the logic model, consider the if-then relationship between the components. If you cannot make a connection between each component of the logic model, you should identify the gaps and adjust your work. This may mean revising some of your activities to ensure that you are able to achieve your outcomes or revising intended outcomes to be feasible with available resources.

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Once your logic model is complete, take time to revisit and review your work. Consider the following questions:

- Does your organization have adequate resources to implement the activities and achieve the desired outcomes? If you need further resources, is that reflected in your activities?
- Have you included all of your major activities needed to achieve your expected outcomes? Would the activities list enable someone who is unfamiliar with your organization to understand its scope?
- Do your activities, outputs, and short- and long-term outcomes relate to each other logically (i.e., the “if-then” relationship)?
- Does your logic model clearly identify the scope of your organization’s influence?
- Have you considered a variety of perspectives? It’s a good idea to get feedback from colleagues and stakeholders.

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When beginning impact measurement for the first time, it is wise to begin with an assessment of existing attitudes toward behaviors related to impact measurement.

Here are some behaviors to watch for:

The **naysayers** seem to be negative about most everything. Whenever an idea comes up that involves changes, their instant reaction is: “Won’t work here.”

The **complacent** belong to the “Things are okay as is” crowd. If it’s not broken, why fix it? And from their perspective, nothing involving them is ever broken. They’ve constructed their own comfortable worlds built on untested assumptions and unexamined beliefs. Impact measurement is a threat to such people. Reality testing will only upset things. They ask “Why bother?”

The **compliant** experience impact measurement only as something mandated by funders; so they’ve developed a compliance mentality. The compliant-oriented say: “Just tell us what we have to do and we’ll do it.” They don’t want to think about it or engage with it, they just want to meet the mandate. They know that money comes with strings attached. They don’t like it, but they accept it.

The **cynics** are the “Been there, done that” folks. They have horror stories to share. “Waste of time and money.” “Academic.” “Esoteric.” “Irrelevant.” “Useless.”

The **frightened and anxious** tend to be the ones who confuse impact measurement with personnel evaluation and are worried that THEY are being evaluated. They also know some of the organization’s weaknesses but hope such blemishes will stay hidden from outside eyes. Now they fear exposure and imagine ruin.

The **enthusiastic** are the people who hunger for learning. They want to improve. They may even be data junkies – can't get enough of it. They can be allies, but some haven't thought through the possibility that the findings may show a need for change.

The **sophisticates** value data, are open to learning and feedback, understand that data must be interpreted to take action, and are prepared to engage in the process from design to interpretation and use. Sophisticates can be strong allies, but they can also create conflict by insisting on their way of doing things and acting with disdain toward those who are less sophisticated.

The **offended** are sincere, committed, hard-working and dedicated true-believers who are doing everything they know how to do. They usually work long hours with limited resources and then someone comes along and asks "How do you know that you are doing good?" And they are offended by the question. They are even more offended that resources are being spent on answering the questions instead of going into programs.

Finally, the **politicos** are the folks whose attention is riveted on which way the political winds are blowing. They view data like they view everything else – ammunition for political combat. They are attuned to the political power of a program's constituencies. If powerful constituencies want the program, or if more is to be gained politically by support rather than opposition to the program, then the program is judged to be worthwhile. No other evidence is needed, though data may be sought to support this predetermined political judgment.

Of course, these are all caricatures and stereotypes and don't do justice to the great diversity and individuality that truly exists. The point is to pay attention to the characteristics of the people who will be involved in impact measurement for your organization. Most organizations consist of a mix of types of people. Taking time to understand and assess your organizational culture is the beginning of impact measurement.

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The phrase "reality testing" implies that being "in touch with reality" cannot simply be assumed. When individuals lose touch with reality, they become dysfunctional and, if the distortions of reality are severe, they may be referred for psychotherapy. Organizations can also lose touch with reality in the sense that the people in those organizations are operating on myths and behaving in ways that are dysfunctional to goal attainment and ineffective for accomplishing desired outcomes. Impact measurement provides a mechanism for finding out whether what's hoped for is, in fact, taking place. It is a form of reality testing.

Research on readiness for impact measurement has shown that "valuing impact measurement" is a necessary condition for impact measurement use. Commitment to impact measurement is typically fragile, often whimsical, and must be cultivated like a hybrid plant that has the potential for enormous yields, but only if properly cared for, nourished, and appropriately managed.

Now, let's walk through an assessment of your organizational readiness for impact measurement. (See **Organizational Readiness Assessment Handout.**)