What is this guide?

This guide is intended to provide you with a ‘starter-for-ten’ to establish an evaluative monitoring approach within a science/research project or programme.

It assumes you are familiar with some key impact related tools that are routinely used, including the Beyond Results **programme logic**, the **impact planning tool**, and other related resources (see [www.beyondresults.co.nz](http://www.beyondresults.co.nz) for more), as well as the content covered in iPEN’s workshop modules (especially the Tracking Your Impact module).

This guide has been written in response to an acknowledgement that setting up a full monitoring and evaluation framework and plan for a research project may be unrealistic.

It is intended to be used alongside standard project management systems, which provide much of the foundation information that ‘evaluative monitoring’ activities can then leverage off.

It is structured around systematically capturing two forms of evidence:

1. Reflections from the team on progress and achievements
2. Feedback and reflections from stakeholders

This information, when combined with key data being reported in project management systems provides a ‘good enough’ evaluative monitoring system.

When should this be used?

This guide should ideally be reviewed by the team firstly at the start of the project during inception/kick-off. The guide can even be used to capture initial expectations and the ‘current state’ at the start of the project. This can act as a benchmark to reflect/compare against in future.

**As a team you will need to then agree on a schedule of when this will be completed.**

How often should this happen?

Like most impact related activities, there is no fixed answer, as it depends at least in part, on the context of your research. However **as a general rule of thumb these questions should be asked and answered every 6 or 12 months**.

Any longer than 12 months is usually insufficient to capture the learning and reflection that are occurring. You can also strike a balance by completing the internal reflection piece every six months, and then the stakeholder feedback every 12 months.

Capturing and managing the data

You can use this document as a template, or create a separate document or file to track this (this could also include creating an online form, or setting up an excel file). **The main goal is to capture this information systematically and routinely.**

Section One: Team Reflections

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| Inputs, activities, and outputs  Do we have what we need, and are we on track with what we planned? | *Review the data that is collected in the regular project management system(s). As a group ask yourselves, do you still have the inputs you require, are the activities and outputs happening as expected (tailor this question accordingly, for the stage of the project).*  *Then as a team ask yourselves, overall, do you believe you’re on track (or not).* Write this down and note down WHY *(this doesn’t need to be an essay, but it’s important to note) e.g., we have everything we need, nothing unexpected cropping up so far.*  *Do forget to note/update anything in the assumptions or other learnings areas if there has been anything unexpected crop up that fits in these areas.*  *USE YOUR PROGRAMME LOGIC AS A PROMPT FOR THIS DISCUSSION.* |
| Outcomes  What difference are we making so far, how important is this, and how do we know? | *As a group ask yourselves whether or not your project is achieving its intended outcomes, or on track to achieving your outcomes. Consider why you believe that? Is this expectation hinging on any key assumptions? If you are achieving or feel you’re on track, are their ways you can see that would help accelerate or widen your impact? Do you need to be engaging with other stakeholders or engaging with your current ones in different ways?*  *USE YOUR PROGRAMME LOGIC AS A PROMPT FOR THIS DISCUSSION.* |
| Assumptions  What are we relying on happening that’s outside of our control, in order to delivery our project and its outcomes as planned. | *Review your assumptions section. Are there new assumptions you should add? You may find the discussion on the progress you’ve made to-date and how happy (or not) you are may have prompted some thinking in this area.*  *If you haven’t identified any, as a team briefly discuss if there are any expectations that sit behind your inputs, activities and outputs as a start. Are there any changes in what you’re expecting associated with your inputs, activities, support you need/are expecting, what the wider operating context is expected to be. For example has a key member of staff just left? Has there been a policy change in the government? These kinds of uncontrollable factors can influence the progress you achieve.*  *Don’t update for the sake of it, but also don’t skip over this section too quickly. Remember assumptions are often the first place to go looking when things don’t to plan/as expected.* |
| Other learnings  Are there any learnings that are worth documenting here that might inform our decisions going-forward or might be useful to share with others? | *Are there any areas that your project/programme might be focusing on in particular that you might need to add some specific questions here to make sure you capture these routinely that is beyond the core focus of the research itself? Examples might include working differently (with different stakeholders/partners or with colleagues from other disciplines), learnings associated with working with a new partner/stakeholder, how you’ve managed in the face of a significant change (such as team members, pivoting the direction of the research, or in the face of a major external ‘shock’ such as COVID).* |

Section Two: Seeking stakeholder feedback

Seeking feedback from stakeholders at regular points through the process is an important way to validate (or correct) your assessments of how things are progressing. They can also shed new light on areas you may be less aware off. *Don’t forget stakeholders may be internal or external*.

Who to approach? At each review point as a group consider where you are at, and who you would be best to approach for a brief discussion (in the form of a semi-structure interview/conversation – don’t forget to get their consent to make notes or record the discussion). Use your impact planning tool to help.

How many? Even one or two is better than none, but as a rule of thumb aim for three or more for reasonable triangulation. Anything over 10 would start being overkill unless you’re moving into a more formal evaluation approach (which would need its own plan and more targeted set of questions).

What do you ask them? Use the framework and questions below to get their feedback in the same structured way as the teams reflections. Some slightly different questions have been included, and take some time as a team to consider if there are any areas you’d like to get specific feedback on, and then **add these in**. You don’t have to ask the questions in a formulaic way, you can have a ‘chat’, but just make sure you cover these questions when you do.

**And don’t forget about obtaining their consent to capture their feedback!**

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| Inputs, activities, and outputs | Overall how do they think the project is tracking. Any areas they are concerned or unhappy about?  *If yes, why are they concerned? What would they like to see change?* |
| Outcomes | Is this project making a difference yet? If yes, what kind of a difference, to whom, how has/is it making a difference?  Are their opportunities you can think of for us to accelerate or widen this?  OR Are you confident that we will make the difference we are hoping (use your programme logic as a bit of a prompt)?  Probe for why they’ve given their answer. THEN, is follow up with the acceleration question. |
| Assumptions | Is there anything going on (with other stakeholders, your context etc) that might have an influence on what we’ve planned that we should be aware of?  *If yes, what is it and why do they think it’s important/may have an influence.* |
| Other learnings | Note any other learnings that crop up – and don’t forget to check if there are areas you’re specifically tracking (see section one). |

REMINDER

As you move through your project, you’ll need to think about an evolving set of questions that reflect where you are at in that process. Here is a helpful diagram that is presented in our Tracking your impact workshop.

