Maudsley Charity

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Learning and evaluation guidance

Learning and evaluation guidance

Maudsley Charity aims to take a proportionate approach to monitoring and reporting. We are a flexible funder, but as a charity ourselves we want to measure the impact of our grant-making by capturing the outputs and outcomes from the projects that we fund. We do this through discussion with grant holders and by reviewing progress reports that have been completed at specific touchpoints in a project's journey.

Learning and evaluation should be of mutual benefit to us and our grant holders. It enables us to understand, test and improve approaches, make evidence informed decisions, and deliver impactful activities.

The four steps below provide some guidance for defining why projects are needed, planning project evaluations, and capturing and sharing learnings.

Steps for learning and evaluating a project:

Step 1: Define why the project is needed

To help articulate what the project is aiming to achieve and the activities that will be delivered in order to achieve the outcomes, a theory of change could be produced.

What is a theory of change?

A technique to map out how activities lead to project goals and long-term changes.

Advantages of producing a theory of change

- Helps to build common understanding, clarity and focus.
- Helps to identify: What needs to change, who needs to think or do what differently for that change to come about, and what barriers need to be overcome.
- Helps to explore the assumptions behind how this change happens.
- Helps to provide focus on the direction of travel, so successes can be replicated and learnings can be generated from things that haven't gone so well.

How to develop a theory of change

The core components are the aim, outcomes, activities and assumptions.

- Aim – the overarching goal/sustained change/impact that the project is striving for. It should be aspirational and likely will fall beyond the project's line of accountability, i.e. something it contributes to, but may not be fully attributable to the project.
- Outcomes – the knowledge, skills and assets that the project develops amongst the people and/or communities it supports that in turn enable them to achieve impact. They are the long-term, intermediate and immediate changes that occur as a result of an action in order for impact to occur.

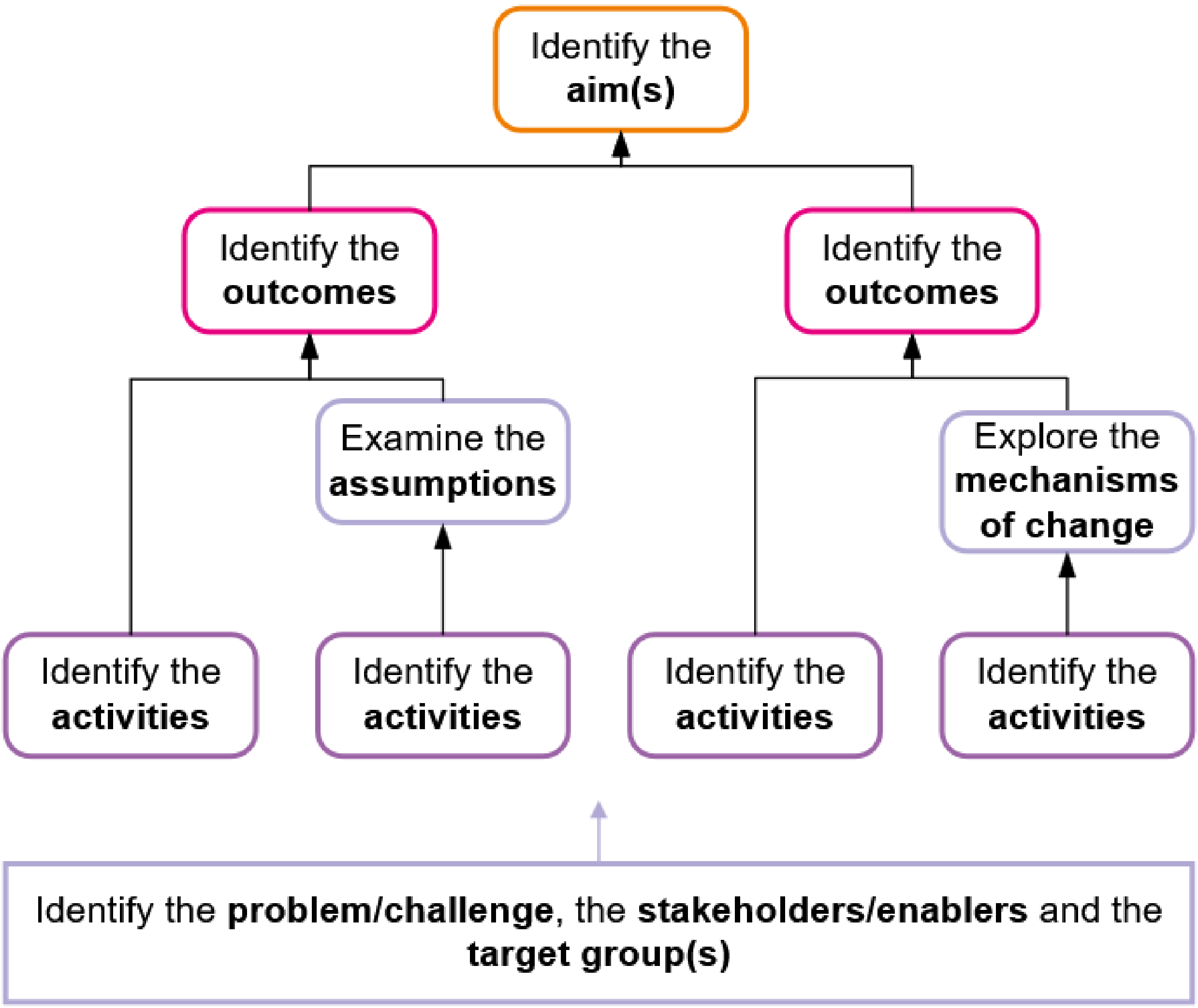
> Note the difference between outputs and outcomes:
> Outputs are what you expect to produce, e.g. number of workshops delivered or number of people who attend a workshop.
> Outcomes are the change you will have caused, e.g. increased knowledge from attending the workshop. Only focus on outcomes for the theory of change.

- Activities – what will be delivered to achieve the outcomes.
- Assumptions – the challenges or weaknesses in the model that need to be addressed in order to move forward.

Other elements that could be factored in:

- Problem/challenge – what the project is seeking to address.
- Target group(s) – the people that will be directly supported or reached by the activities.
- Stakeholders/enablers – the people, groups or organisations that can influence the problem positively or negatively.
- Mechanisms of change – what people experience in the moment they receive an activity or service and are the key elements that lead to the intermediate outcomes. Identify what people involved in the activities need to think, feel or do in order for the project to achieve positive change.

The result of the theory of change exercise should be a fairly straightforward flowchart with a narrative that sits behind it (not everything has to be squeezed into the model itself).



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Theory of change checklist

1. Does the model describe the project accurately so that a member of the public would understand the theory?
2. Is it clear who the target population is for each outcome and activity?
3. Are the activities likely to contribute to the desired outcomes and impact?
4. Do all of the causal links make sense when you say “so that” when travelling along the pathways from activities to outcomes to aim, i.e. ‘deliver this, so that, this occurs’?
5. Are some of the outcomes connected to each other by causal links? (i.e. not all of the outcomes lead directly to the aim).
6. Is every pathway eventually connected to the aim?
7. Is it realistic? Does it take into account the delivery team’s capacity?
8. What if the assumptions don’t hold true?
9. Are the outcomes measurable? What indicators can be used to measure them?
10. What's within control of the project? Where does the project’s line of accountability lie?

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Step 2: Plan how the project will be evaluated

Evaluation planning

Once the theory of change has been developed, the outcomes can be input into an evaluation plan in order to identify how each one will be measured. At this point, outputs that are expected to be produced during the project can be included too.

What?	Outcome – the change that occurs as a result of an activity. Output – the result or deliverable that occurs as a result of an activity.
What?	Indicator – way of measuring if that change has happened and by how much (distance travelled). Indicators are pieces of information that can be measured to show whether outcomes/outputs have been achieved. Quantitative indicators count numbers of things that happen. Qualitative indicators assess people's perceptions and experiences.
How?	Data source and how the data will be collected.
When?	When it will be collected.
Who?	Who will collect it.
How many?	The proportion of people the data will be gathered from, how they will be selected and what the expected response rate is.

It's important that outputs, outcomes and indicators are appropriate and realistic for the project. Careful consideration should be given to the capacity, time, budget and resources required to effectively gather and analyse the data. Think about the level of data and evidence that is necessary and proportionate to collect.

Some useful resources to help put things into perspective:
https://www.thinknpc.org/blog/5-types-of-data-for-assessing-your-work-an-explainer/
https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/standards_of_evidence.pdf

Equitable evaluation

It's also important to think about equitable evaluation – who is making decisions about evaluation, whose knowledge and voice is valued in the process, and what purpose does the evaluation serve. Generating evidence can cause harm if research is done 'on' or 'to' people rather than 'with' or 'by' them. Equitable evaluation should value the needs and perspectives of the communities that the project is designed to support.

1. Consider methods that give participants a voice in the design, delivery and analysis process, e.g. participatory approaches, genuine co-production.
2. Ensure that learning activities and products are inclusive, accessible and culturally appropriate, e.g. led by/for the communities they serve, and understand the role of culture and trauma.
3. Consider if and how evaluation and learning may perpetuate racism and inequalities, e.g. by reinforcing power structures and biases.
4. Make sure that everyone who has contributed information or insights is given access to the findings and told what has happened as a result.

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Step 3: Capture learning

We want to hear about what is working and, just as importantly, what is not working, so the charity and grant holders can learn and use that knowledge to adapt and potentially be more effective. We understand that original project plans sometimes don't work out as expected. If this is the case, it is important for us to understand why and see how delivery is adapting to this. We are open to approaches changing where this is clearly based on learning and will better help deliver the change that the project is working towards.

The following guide, lessons log template and process evaluation template may be useful tools to capture learning from the project.

Lesson logging guide

1. Log lessons learnt during project catch ups and meetings.
   - Revisit the objectives and deliverables of the project. Ask "what did it set out to do?" and "what did it achieve?"
   - Go through the project step-by-step. Revisit the plan and identify any deviation from it. Where were the delays and what went ahead of schedule? What changed and why?
   - Ask "what were the successful steps towards achieving the objective?" and "what went really well?"
   - Ask "why?" several times. This is what will get you to the root of the reason. Don't take the initial response at face value as at first people often don't realise what the underlying reason behind a success or failure is.
   - Find out why these aspects went well and express the learning as advice or guidelines for the future. Try to avoid expressing lessons learnt in a passive, past tense, such as: "X task completed ahead of schedule because the team remained in-tact throughout the design and execution stages". The lesson will be far more accessible to others if it is expressed as: "On time-critical projects, ensure that the project team remains consistent throughout the design and execution stages of the project. This will eliminate any learning-curve issues due to the take-on of new staff".

- Ask "what repeatable, successful processes were used?" and "how could we ensure future activities go just as well, or even better?"
- Ask "what were the aspects that stopped even more being delivered?"
- Identify the stumbling blocks and pitfalls, so they can be avoided in future by asking "what would your advice be to future teams based on your experiences here?"
- Ask for "marks out of ten" and "what would make it a ten for you?" to access residual issues.
- Focus on behaviours or tactics that were successful or problematic, rather than people who were successful or problematic, e.g. "staffing issues led to lack of resources towards the end of the project", rather than "Bob resigned so left us short staffed".

2. Once lessons have been captured, make sure they are easily referenced by others, so keep notes detailed but succinct.
3. Look for trends and share these with colleagues and Maudsley Charity.
4. Review lessons learnt prior to starting another similar project.
5. Track improved effectiveness and efficiencies on projects based on applying the lessons learnt from past projects. In this way, the lessons learnt help to increase the success of future projects.

In summary, think about:

- What went well?
- What didn't go well or had unintended consequences?
- If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently?
- What recommendations would you make to others doing similar projects?

Use Appreciative Inquiry as much as possible:
The key feature of this approach is that it uses existing strengths, achievements and successes – the aspects of people's work that they are proud of, that motivate them, and that are getting good results – as a foundation for a credible vision of the future. It does not ignore past failures, but helps people to collectively get into a more positive and therefore more creative frame of mind to come up with ideas for improvement.

Lessons log template

You can download a version of the Lessons Log template (XSLX, 21KB).

Date identified	Identified by	Subject/theme/topic (Brief descriptor of the lesson learnt)	Situation (Description of the situation learnt from)	Lessons learnt and recommendations (Detailed but succinct)	Follow-up needed?

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Process evaluation template

Complete this at a learning session or closing meeting at the end of a project or phase of work with all key players.

You can download a version of the Process Evaluation template (XSLX, 21KB).

	What went well? Why?	What didn't go well? Why?	What could have been improved? How?	How can this learning be applied?
Purpose, rationale and scope Were the outcomes well defined? Was the scope clearly defined?				
Gathering insight Did we gather the insight required to successfully design and deliver the phase/programme?				
Planning and design Did we select the right approach? Was enough time and resource dedicated to planning?				
Delivery Did implementation go to plan? What challenges were encountered?				

	What went well? Why?	What didn't go well? Why?	What could have been improved? How?	How can this learning be applied?
Outcomes Did we achieve the intended outcomes? What challenges were encountered?				
Measurement and evaluation Was the M&E approach fit for purpose? Did the data collection methods produce the data required?				
Communication Was communication between stakeholders effective?				

Running a learning session

To run an effective learning session or other meeting/event, it may be helpful to think about the following:

- Who would it be beneficial to invite? E.g. delivery team members, project participants, family members, carers, decision-makers, senior leadership, researchers, potential funders etc.
- If guests can't attend the whole session, which items of the agenda are most important for each stakeholder to input into and/or gain something from?
- How can the session be delivered in the most equitable and inclusive way?
- Ensure content produced for the session and learning outputs produced after are relevant, accessible and appropriate for all audiences.
- What facilitation techniques are most engaging for each part of the agenda?
- Check tech beforehand. Can the venue meet your tech requirements? Are there any restrictions in place when using your organisation's tech elsewhere?
- What other equipment/resources would be useful to deliver the session and capture learnings? E.g. flipchart, pens, Post-it notes, a note-taker etc.
- What kind of refreshments are appropriate to provide?
- What other ways can you thank people who contribute to the session and/or project?

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ORTUS room hire

As part of the wider support and benefits available to our grant holders with grants over £25k or Community Partners, Maudsley Charity offers to fund the use of a room at the ORTUS, Maudsley Charity's purpose-built conferencing and events venue in the heart of Denmark Hill. We know that face-to-face collaboration is important to projects, so we will fund two half day bookings on Mondays or Fridays or 1 full day (any day) booking for you at the ORTUS.

If you would like to make use of this opportunity, please contact us at grants@maudsleycharity.org. We will then connect you with the events team at ORTUS who will help you with the logistics of your booking. They require at least 8 weeks' notice to book an event but advise confirming your date as early as possible.

We would really like to get to know our projects and their delivery teams, and for you to get to know us more too. When you have finalised a date for your event, please share details such as the agenda and attendee list with grants@maudsleycharity.org. We can then check availability of any relevant Maudsley Charity staff and arrange their attendance if appropriate.

Step 4: Share project data and learnings

Identify who would be interested in receiving learning from the project.

- Who are the key stakeholders?
- What kind of learning do these stakeholders need?
- What kind of format would they find most beneficial and accessible?

If a Maudsley Charity progress report has been assigned to your project, it's worth reviewing the questions in advance of the due date, so expectations from our end are clear.

Contact grants@maudsleycharity.org for support with learning and evaluation.