

The impact mapping exercise

The stages that make up an impact mapping exercise are reproduced in the rest of this section. These *Five Steps* are meant as prompts for someone who is leading a discussion whether on a one-to-one mentoring basis with an individual, or with a larger group of people.

To be truly effective the *Five Steps* should be undertaken in the spirit of a participative and transparent process (such as a workshop, or seminar) that is delivered with sufficient time and space to involve representatives from all potential groups of stakeholders. Choosing who should take part in the 'conversation' means undertaking a thorough and comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise that identifies the people who will affect and who are affected by the activities of the organisation.

Once you have gathered the participants together, take them through the *Five Steps* of an impact mapping exercise as follows:

- Step One: Questions for the conversation
- Step Two: Building a Storyboard
- Step Three: Impact mapping – a defining moment
- Step Four: Ways of knowing – identifying indicators
- Step Five: Deciding what happens next?

Step One: Questions for the conversation

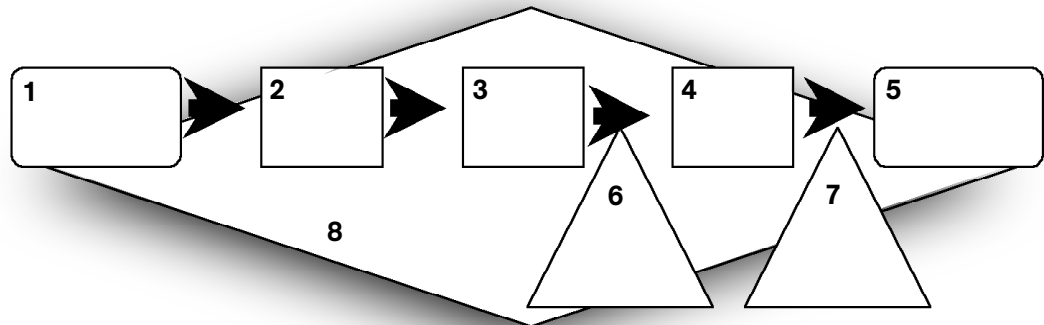
Read through the following questions and think about the answers you would give for each one.

1. Describe the world in which you are working in terms of the local or wider need that your project is addressing.
2. What are you planning to do as part of this project?
3. What effects do you expect to see straight away?
4. What effects and changes do you expect to see in the future?
5. Where possible, describe the long-term changes for people, the environment or the economy that:
 - a. Your project will contribute to.
 - b. Your project will be wholly responsible for.
6. For every immediate effect you identified in 3 above, ask 'So what?' or 'Why is that important?' (Try and describe precisely how each of the immediate effects will lead to the changes in the future.)
7. For every effect and change you identified in 4 above, ask 'So what?' or 'Why is that important?' (Try and describe how the changes will lead to the long-term changes for people, the environment or the economy.)
8. What barriers do you foresee that could prevent any of this happening?

III. Mapping
impact and
choosing
indicators

Step Two: Building a Storyboard

Prepare a large sheet of paper (A3 or larger depending on how many people are taking part in the conversation) by reproducing the blank flow chart diagram as in the picture below.



Once you have discussed each question in detail, summarise the answers that you come up with in each of the corresponding numbered boxes on the flow chart. You can do them in any order (start with the easy ones). Feel free to add extra comments to boxes as and when ideas occur to you during the conversation.

Step Three: Impact mapping – a defining moment

Now have a look at what you have written in each box, and think about each comment in terms of whether you would describe it as an Input, an Activity, an Output, an Outcome or an Impact.

The working definitions in Table 17 may help you decide which is which.

Table 17: Elements of the impact map

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
<p>The resources that you need to manage the project.</p> <p>For example, time, money, staff, other assets (such as a building), a clear vision and shared direction etc.</p>	<p>The things that you do to effect some sort of change in people, the community, or the environment.</p> <p>For example, providing a service, a programme, or a good to people.</p>	<p>The direct results and beneficiaries. Usually outputs show that certain people receive something, learn something, or take part in something as a result of what you do or how you do it.</p> <p>For example, easily countable things, like the number of people involved, or the number of hours of training delivered etc.</p>	<p>Longer-term change. Describe why that output is important, in terms of the implications for, and the effect it has on, a local area or a group of people.</p> <p>This is the theory that you will be testing – the link between what you do and the things you care passionately about.</p>	<p>When thinking about your vision, impacts are the big-picture change you are trying to create or the changes in the wider world that the work you are doing is contributing to.</p> <p>For example, this could be in terms of your vision for change in people's lives, a community, the environment or the local economy.</p> <p>Otherwise a more precise definition of impacts is "the outcomes less what would have happened anyway".</p> <p>For example, if you got ten people a job, how many would have got one anyway?</p>

Clarify which is which by listing each of the comments under one of the five headings. (We recommend that you draw up a blank version of the table onto a flipchart sheet and fill it in, column by column.)

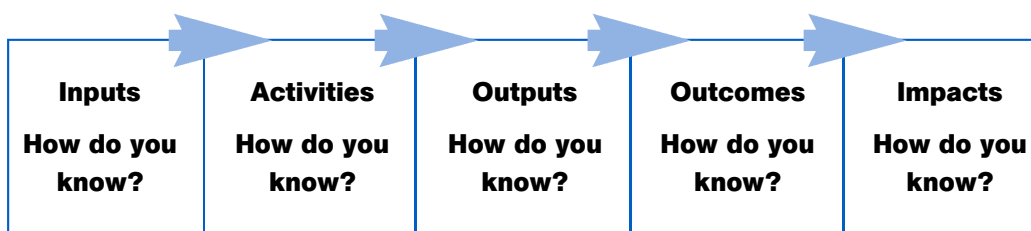
The impacts section can be used in two ways. If you are using the impact map to look forward and create a vision, use the impact column for thinking about your big-picture vision. Otherwise, use it to account more precisely for what you have achieved by taking away from your impacts what would have happened anyway. For more details on this, see the Notes and Queries at the end of this section.

For the comments in each column, decide roughly when they will happen (or when they need to have happened for the project to be a success) and label them 'now, soon and later' in order to do this.

III. Mapping impact and choosing indicators

Step Four: Ways of knowing – identifying indicators

You should now have at least two large sheets of paper on display. One is showing the completed Storyboard, and the other with five columns listing Inputs, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts.



As a first step to choosing and developing indicators (literally: ways of knowing that something has happened or changed) ask yourself how you will know that a particular Input has been delivered, how you will know that an activity has successfully produced a particular Output, and how you will know that, that Output has successfully brought about an Outcome and an Impact. Do this for each of the items you have listed in each of the columns.

On a third sheet of flipchart paper, make a long list of these 'ways of knowing'. This will be the basis for a master list of the things you need to measure in order to be able to tell your story.

An example

Here's a possible 'story'. For a training session (Activity) to have been a success it needs to have been delivered (Output) with a certain number of people attending (Output) who gain a new skill (Output). They then may successfully apply for a job using their new skill (Outcome), or they may find that they are enjoying their current job more (Outcome).

This means that they stay in a particular job for longer (Outcome), and are able to take on more roles and responsibilities as their confidence grows (Outcome). In the long run if this happens for enough people in a neighbourhood there will be a higher proportion of people in employment able to achieve a better quality of life for themselves and their families (Impact).

So if we were to make a rough list of the ways we will know that the training has been a success, it might include:

- Training session delivered.
- Participants complete the training and gain a qualification.
- Participants successfully apply for a job.
- Participants happier in their current job.
- Participants still enjoying that job in 12 months' time.
- Participants talking on new roles and responsibilities in their jobs.
- Participants saying that their life is better.
- Participants' families saying that they have a better life.

Some will be easy to count, others will be extremely difficult, or impossible to measure or collect information on. At this stage, when compiling this long list, don't feel constrained by what you think you can measure. For many of them, you will find that you are collecting information on them already, but realistically you can't cover everything. When finalising your indicators you'll need to decide what you can feasibly do with the time and resources you have available.

Step Five: What happens next?

You have now completed a comprehensive impact mapping process, and you are now ready to plan the detail of how you will observe, capture and report the changes that you are hoping to see happen as a result of what your project or organisation is doing. You will now have a better sense of:

- A shared understanding of the hypothesis of how your organisation/initiative brings benefits to people, communities, the environment or the local economy.
- The important issues that need to be measured to demonstrate it.
- Ideas for specific indicators to be collected in order to prove it.

The other sections of this Toolkit provide overviews and signposting for a comprehensive range of ways to find out about, demonstrate, and measure impact. Some you can pick up and use for yourself, others will require some more research, training and support to deliver them. Completing this impact mapping exercise will enable you to more effectively use the **Comparing Proving & Improving Approaches** chart as well as the Ten Key Elements in the **Knowledge** book, giving you a better sense of the next steps you can take to prove and improve your organisation's quality and impact.

Frequently asked questions

How many people should take part in this exercise?

This depends on who you feel needs to be involved in order to get the most comprehensive picture of how the project will work. This impact mapping exercise is most useful if it is conducted in the spirit of a conversation, where ideas can be challenged in an open, friendly and constructive manner. This 'conversation' could be undertaken on a one-to-one basis, say between a business advisor and a project manager as a way of talking through the project. Alternatively if the time and resources are available it could be delivered as a participative workshop with a wider group of the people who are involved or affected by what the project is doing.

By involving more people, the exercise provides the opportunity to gain a wider range of ideas and insights, as well as a way to challenge some of the assumptions that may have been made about how the project, intervention or organisation will actually make a difference. At the same time, the process can be a way of involving existing and potential stakeholders (literally, the people who affect or are affected by the work of the project) so that they feel more a part of what's going on.

If choosing to involve more people then you will have to plan carefully how they can be all involved. One way is to reproduce the blank Storyboard on a large poster or series of flipchart sheets, and then give participants the opportunity to write their own comments directly onto the Storyboard or onto Post-it notes that they can attach themselves. This opportunity for interaction will help people feel that the process belongs to them, and that it is being 'done by' them and not 'done to' them.

How much detail should we go into?

Often the story of how a project, intervention or way of doing business brings about a change can be extremely complex, with many different causes bringing about or contributing to several diverse (yet related) effects. Rather than trying to cover every aspect of an intervention, you could begin by going through the eight questions focusing on just one particular element.

Take the example of a project or organisation that is concerned with delivering training for young people. When building up the Storyboard you could focus on one

particular aspect of how the training course is delivered, such as the additional support that occurs outside of the classroom. You could then use the eight questions to explore what it is about this specific aspect of how the training is delivered that makes the difference for the youngsters taking part.

How should we define 'impact'?

We've mentioned that impact mapping can be a tool for planning an evaluation as well as a business planning exercise at the start-up stage of a project or organisation's development. In Step 3 ('The defining moment') the final column in the table (Impacts) should be used differently depending on what you are using the exercise for.

Being clear on the vision is important for both business planning and evaluation. So if you are undertaking this impact mapping as a business planning exercise at 'start-up', the Impacts column is where you would describe the long-term **vision** that the initiative or organisation is striving for.

However, if you are using impact mapping to establish the scope of a project for a detailed measurement process then you will need to be more precise about what you call **impacts** and, indeed, **outcomes**.

Here you would define your impact as the outcomes that would not have happened anyway. (This is sometimes known as 'dead weight'.) So for example, if you described as a positive **outcome** of your project's training activity that 50 per cent of the 'trained' young men aged between 16 and 24 remained in employment a year later, you would need to find out the percentage of 'non-trained' 16 – 24-year-olds who remain in employment after a year. (Sometimes a control group can be set up to do this, or reference made to some national or local statistics.) You would then need to subtract the 'non-trained' figure from the 'trained' in order to put a more precise figure on the impact that can be specifically attributed to your intervention.