Implementation Tips *for* USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

Monitoring and Evaluation 2 | 2018

Definitions

Indicator—A particular characteristic or dimension that will be used to measure change. Height is an example of an indicator.

Data—The actual measurement or factual information collected about an indicator. A measurement of someone's height as 5' 7" is an example of a piece of data.

Baseline—Data collected about specific indicators before an intervention begins that will serve as the starting points against which to measure change.

Target—A specific, planned level of result for an indicator you expect to achieve within a defined period of time.

Monitoring—Periodic tracking (for example, daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually) of your project's progress by systematically gathering and analyzing data and information about what you are doing, whom you are reaching and whether your activities are being implemented as planned.

Evaluation—The comparison of actual project impact against agreed-on plans. Evaluation looks at what you set out to do, what you have accomplished and how you accomplished it.

Workplan—A detailed narrative that lays out your planned activities, the resources required to implement them and the targets you intend to reach.

Performance Management Plan (PMP)—A reference document that contains your targets, a detailed definition of each indicator, the methods and frequency of data collection for each of those indicators and who will be responsible for collecting the data.

Key Features of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Q. Why invest in an M&E system?

A. An M&E system guides the process of collecting, analyzing and using data for the purpose of measuring whether a project has been implemented according to plan (monitoring) and is having the desired result (evaluation). An M&E system is critical to carrying out a project effectively and efficiently and boosting accountability to beneficiaries, donors and other stakeholders. In particular, an M&E system helps you:

- determine whether your project is on track, on time and on target;
- ensure that funds were used as intended and the project was implemented as planned;
- learn whether the project/intervention made a difference.

Setting up an M&E system is more than just building a spreadsheet or database. The following describes the components of an M&E system and provides you with a starting point for creating your own.

Monitoring or Evaluation?

Monitoring and evaluation are often mentioned as if they are one single activity. In truth, monitoring and evaluation are separate activities that have different purposes. What they have in common is that they seek to capture information about what you are doing and how you are doing it.

Monitoring is the collection of routine data to measure the progress of a project or activity. It can serve as a kind of early warning system that lets you know whether activities are being carried out as originally planned. If not, you can take measures to correct problems and adjust activities or the workplan as needed to be more effective. Monitoring provides the basic information and building blocks for evaluation.

Evaluation is a more in-depth assessment of performance and activities than monitoring. Evaluation enables you to assess the progress, quality and impact of your work against your program strategy, your targets and your workplan.

References

Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkits

Preparing a Performance Management Plan (PMP)

Baselines and Targets

Data Quality Standards

Data Quality Assessments

Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

Planning for M&E

Incorporate M&E into your project design early on—that is, when you are developing your project strategy and activities. Although data are needed for evaluation at the mid-term and end of a project, you should collect baseline data before the intervention starts. In addition, think about how information from your M&E system will be used internally to make decisions for your program, and externally to meet donor and government requirements. Ensure that appropriate information will be available for:

- annual project work planning and budgeting,
- mid-term and final evaluations,
- program reports,
- feedback to beneficiaries and key stakeholders, and
- other purposes such as marketing and proposal development.

Components of an M&E System

An M&E system comprises interrelated components, as described below.

Resources and Capacity Building – These are the resources you need to have to develop and maintain your M&E system. Ask yourself:

- What kinds of human resources are required for my M&E system?
- What kinds of activities/processes would require funding within the M&E system? *(Examples: evaluations, travel funds for monitoring trips, photocopying data collection sheets, training of staff in M&E)*
- What kind of training/capacity building is required for staff? Which staff? How often?

Plans, Guidelines and Operational Documents – These are the plans and other documents that guide staff in using your M&E system.

A well-designed M&E system should have an M&E Plan that describes in detail the methodology or processes for collecting and using data, including purposes/uses of the data collected; types of data to be collected (both qualitative and quantitative) and frequency of data collection. The M&E Plan should also specify the following:

- indicators to be tracked,
- meaning of key words,
- targets (mid-term and final),
- what tools will be used to collect data,

Six Tips for Managing Your M&E System

1. Make realistic M&E plans.
2. Provide sufficient management support.
3. Ensure your staff understand and value M&E tasks.
4. Set aside enough time for M&E activities, including organizing and processing data.
5. Build M&E into planning cycles.
6. Present M&E data in time for them to be used in reports and for decision making.

- the personnel who will gather, record and analyze the data (for example, beneficiaries and other stakeholders), and
- the types of reports that will be prepared, including for whom, why, and how often.

Data Collection and Management – Data collection is the key to good M&E. Collection methods should match the indicators developed for the project, be appropriate for the context and be easy to use. Consider methods that allow for community-level participation and ensure that all analysis is shared with staff and beneficiaries both to improve decision making and to engender support for M&E tasks.

There are many different ways to collect data for M&E purposes, including questionnaires, client interviews, observation by experts and focus group discussions. Before introducing new data-collection methods or tools, assess what data can be gathered from sources already in place. For example, can you adapt existing registers or attendance lists to get the data you need? If you develop new tools, for example, questionnaires or field worker reports, focus on making them user-friendly and ensure staff and stakeholders are trained to use them. Always keep in mind who your users are as you develop your tools. How literate are the data collectors? Do the tools need to be in local languages? How much time will a collector have to gather information?

Ensure that your data are accurate and truly reflect your outputs and outcomes by regularly undertaking data quality assessments of the data you collect. *(For more on data quality, see 4 and 5 noted in the reference box.)*

Finally, make sure that you have a secure place to store your data, and that it is clear to the team who is responsible for saving and maintaining project data.

Data Verification – Data verification includes going to the field and tracing your data from the original data collection sheet all the way through your reports to your donors, to make sure you are reporting accurately. It helps you identify potential gaps in your data collection and management, so that you can improve overall data quality.

Data Quality Systems – These are the quality controls you need to have in place to make sure you are using and reporting the best quality data possible within your projects. Ask yourself:

- How will we make sure we are not duplicating data?
- How will we make sure that data collection tools are filled in properly?
- How will we make sure that donor and government reports are submitted on time?

For More Information

For this or other issues of *Implementation Tips*, please visit **www.NGOConnect.net.** The Web site is a dynamic and interactive portal dedicated to connecting and strengthening CSOs, networks and CSO support organizations worldwide.

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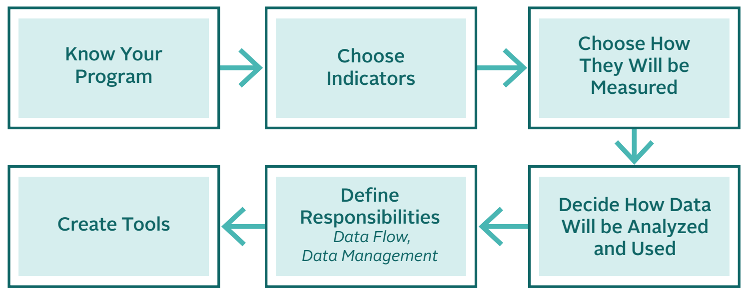
How to Create an M&E System



Data Analysis and Use – This is often viewed as the step when you pull together your results and report them to your donors. However, the real fun—and perhaps most important purpose of this step—is to learn from your data and feed lessons back into your projects. On a regular basis, analyze the data you have collected by structuring and organizing it to get a sense of the trends and patterns emerging from the implementation of your project. This information will help managers determine whether the project is on track to achieve its objectives and inform changes if it is not.

Build in clear mechanisms for using the information from your M&E endeavors. For example, you may want to set up formal meetings to review monitoring data monthly, quarterly or annually to check progress toward meeting your targets and objectives. This will allow you to modify your activities if necessary or have discussions with your donor if you have to change your targets.

USAID M&E Requirements

USAID recipients are usually required to document their M&E system in a Performance Management Plan (PMP). The PMP is a tool designed to help you set up and manage the process of monitoring, analyzing, evaluating and reporting progress toward achieving your objectives. It serves as a reference document that contains your targets, a detailed definition of each project indicator, the methods and frequency of data collection for each indicator and who will be responsible for collecting the data. Your PMP will also provide details about how data will be analyzed and any evaluations that may be required to complement monitoring data.