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Measuring what matters

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This guide offers a set of principles for measuring what matters, setting out a simple framework within which to be clear about the change that you are looking for, and how you will know it has been achieved

Measuring what matters

It is important to measure what matters rather than what has always been measured or what is easy to measure.

The New Economics Foundation (NEF) offers a set of seven principles for measuring what matters across public services:

1. **Measure for social, economic and environmental outcome**

   Measures should provide information that improves our understanding of the relationship between specific interventions and the well-being of individuals, communities and the environment. Measures should be focused on outcomes: the positive and negative change in people's lives, communities or the environment as a result of policy.

2. **Measure with people**

   The people who are closest to or most affected by an activity are uniquely positioned to identify its effects, whether positive or negative. They should therefore be involved as deeply as possible when creating and revising indicators. Without this input, measurement is unlikely to capture what really matters to people.

3. **Value the things that matter most**

   Financial considerations have a tendency to drive policy-making. It is only by making social and environmental outcomes visible and assessing them on the same terms as traditional costs and benefits that we can ensure that they are not squeezed out. Finding ways to quantify, value and account for negative outcomes is equally important, not just to get a fuller picture of the returns on investment but also to incentivise organisations to minimise them.

4. **Be responsive**

Effective measures will provide evidence that can be used to inform future implementation and decision-making – but what is also required is that government is able and willing to learn from what the evidence says, and from past experience.

5. **Avoid over-claiming**

Measures should identify the difference that particular policies have actually made, and how much of a policy's impact can be attributed to specific interventions. This helps to avoid double-counting of policy impacts and allows decision makers to pinpoint those policies that actually do bring about desired outcomes.

6. **Transparency and accountability should inform everything**

Decisions makers should be able to justify why they have chosen the measures used. This involves making explicit the basis on which they have prioritised what to measure.

7. **Measure strengths as well as risks and deficits**

Measuring people's strengths and abilities allows policy makers to focus on how best to enable people to succeed, rather than focusing solely – as many policies do – on what people lack and why they fail.

Measurement in practice

Measurement, and the selection of indicators, can often feel daunting. It shouldn't be. If you have a clear idea of

- what you are doing in your particular work area, and why, and
- what you expect to change as a result of your activity and for whom,
- what you should measure will follow naturally from this

This can then be set out as part of a logical chain / theory of change to allow you to demonstrate expected improvements in outcomes for local communities, and be confident that what you are measuring 1) matters, and will help you track if your actions have been successful.

References

New Economics Foundation (2009) Seven Principles for Measuring What Matters

http://neweconomics.org/2009/01/seven-principles-measuring-matters/