A GUIDE TO INDICATORS

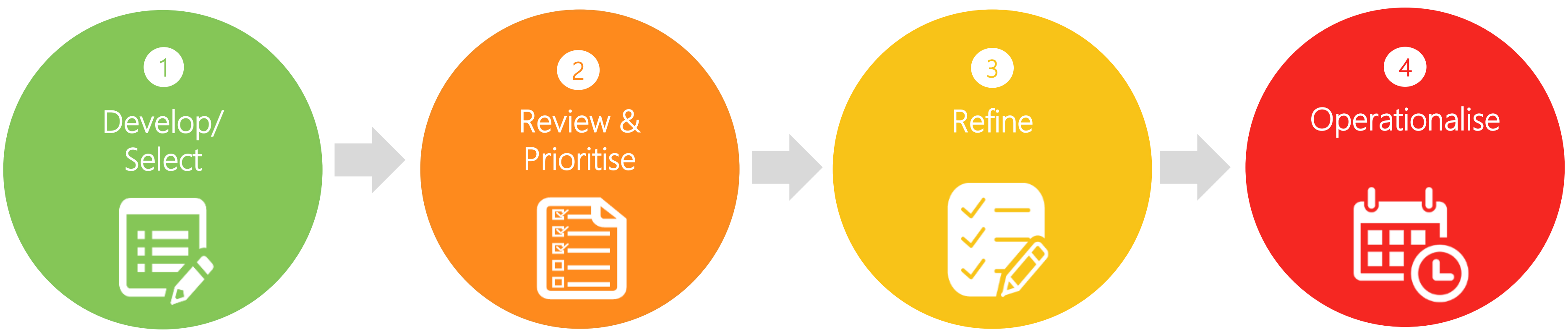
Indicators are specific pieces of information that show the state, level or extent of something. In relation to the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of programmes working towards social change, indicators can be used in a number of ways, for example, to understand whether population who are in most need are those being reached/served, or, if activities are running as planned and whether changes are taking place as a result (and to what extent). At inFocus, we consolidate indicators into an Indicator Framework, an Excel workbook that helps to provide guidance and clarity for staff as to what is being collected and why, avoids duplication, aids communication to external stakeholders, improves perception from funders and enables comparison across the sector (if using existing sector-wide indicators).

> "M&E professionals have access to a wide range of tools… Indicators are one of the more valuable and versatile, but if indicators are not used carefully they can consume extensive resources and generate data with little or no value."
>
> An Introduction to Indicators, USAID Monitoring and Evaluation Fundementals

Further Reading

Find out more about indicator types (outcome, output, qualitative, quantitative, proxy, KPIs) in our additional 1-page guide here.

Organisations are often left with too many indicators to measure, indicators that aren't relevant to their programmes or indicators that are stored across multiple documents. This guide can help you to avoid these scenarios through the four stages below and is intended to be used alongside the *How to develop indicators* inFocus training course, where we work through different examples for each stage.



SELECTING INDICATORS

1 WHO TO INVOLVE

Firstly, we advise thinking about how you will create your indicators and who to involve in this process. For example, involving staff/volunteers in developing indicators within a workshop setting can be a rewarding and empowering process.

2 PREPARE YOUR INDICATOR FRAMEWORK

We also recommend that you have your indicator framework set up and ready so that you can enter in indicators as you go. You can find the inFocus Excel indicator template here.

3 THINK ABOUT THE BASIS FOR YOUR INDICATORS

If you have a theory of change, indicators could be drafted for the *problem* you are addressing, the *population* you are targeting, your *activities*, your *outcomes*. or your *assumptions*. At inFocus we also use *learning (or evaluation) questions* as a basis for our indicators to dig deeper into elements of a theory of change. These could also be used independently if you don't have a theory of change. It's important to bear in mind that you might need more than one indicator for a particular area (such as an outcome or learning question).

5 SELECTING INDICATORS

Before embarking on developing indicators we recommend checking if there are indicators that you are required to use (for example, to report back to a particular funder)~~,~~ Then, begin by looking for indicators already in use in the your sector. Before you do this it is important to think about the advantages and disadvantages of using pre-existing indicators.

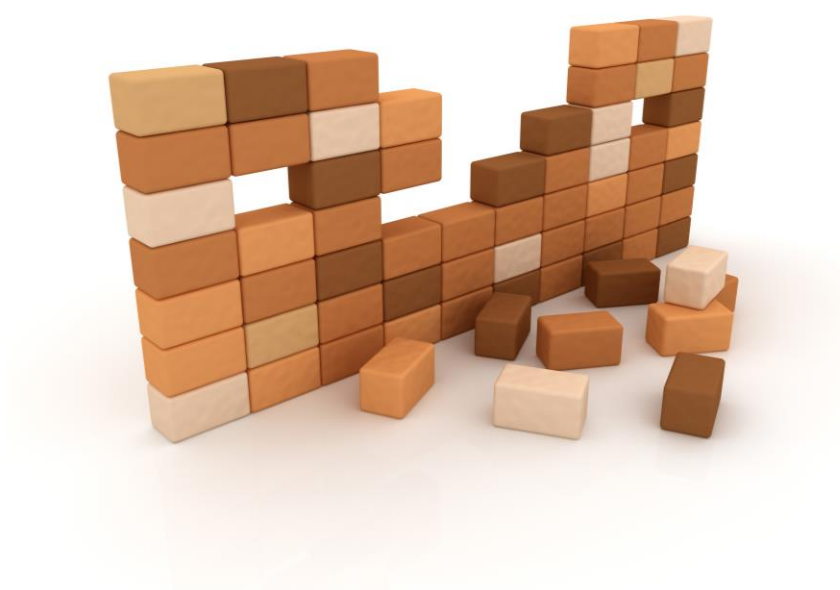
Advantages	Disadvantages
▸ Are often developed by experts and tested and are better quality ▸ Save time in training staff in creating indicators and consultation. ▸ May be used to compare with others in the sector	▸ May be at the wrong level to be useful for your programme (e.g. at a national population level) ▸ The indicators may not be relevant for your local context ▸ Existing indicators can be hard to find

Further Reading

You can find different sources for indicators which are already in use in the development sector in [our guide here](#).

FILLING THE GAPS: DEVELOPING YOUR OWN INDICATORS

Unfortunately, it is unlikely that you will find all the indicators you need from pre-existing indicators. As such, there may be gaps in your indicator framework that require you to develop your own bespoke indicators. The advantage of developing your own indicators is that you can make sure they are tailored towards your own specific situation. However, it's important to make sure you follow quality guidelines when creating indicators. We have included some advice to the right of the page.



1 USE NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

It is important to express the indicators using the right language to avoid confusion. Indicators are not tools for assessment and don't express change. The wording of indicators should reflect this, for example, *number of participants who are attending school* would be a neutral indicator, whereas an *increase in school attendance* would not.

Top Tip

Useful terms for creating the indicator include: the level of…, the extent to which…, the type of…, the number of…, the ability of…,the ratio of…, the rate of…,the % of…

2 INCLUDE QUALITATIVE INDICATORS

It can be tempting to always use quantitative indicators and start each one with 'number of' and '% of', however, using qualitative indicators can be particularly valuable for digging deeper into a particular topic and can add value by supplementing quantitative indicators. Some useful starting phrase for writing qualitative indicators can be 'the extent to which' or 'the level of'.

3 BE CLEAR AND SPECIFIC

Vague or overly-broad indicators will yield inconclusive evidence/ data. Beware of the following types of wording: "completed successfully", "implemented effectively", "population "at risk" etc.

4 ONLY MEASURE ONE THING

Indicators should not include more than one measurement, unit or focus.

5 DO NOT INCLUDE TARGET/BASELINE/TIMING (AT THIS STAGE)

The wording of indicator itself should not include the target, baseline or timescale (although these are included in the indicator framework itself).

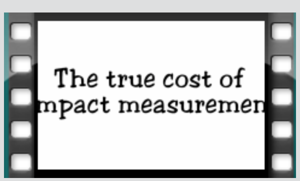
REVIEWING AND PRIORITISING INDICATORS

What ever the size of your organisation and your M&E team you are unlikely to have the capacity to measure everything that you want to. It is therefore important to prioritise and decide what to measure. It's also important to look back at your indicators and consider whether they are appropriate/the best fit for what you are trying to measure.

Whether you are assessing your indicators alone, or with a group of staff and/or volunteers, we recommend reviewing and prioritising your indicators by using the two different tasks shown to the right. Guidance follows on the next page as to what to look for when reviewing/prioritising.

Further Reading (or watching...)

When reviewing your indicators consider that even a basic questionnaire can take considerable time to implement and use.



Click on the short video above and to the right to learn more about the length of time that it can take to implement a typical questionnaire.

1

REVIEWING YOUR INDICATORS AS A GROUP

We recommend first going through each *group* of indicators (for example all of the indicators related to a particular outcome) and identifying if any can be removed or altered, and whether new indicators need to be added. This stage is about looking at how the indicators fit within their group. Imagine you are reviewing soldiers on parade - you want to look at each individual solider but also how they fit with the overall regiment.

2

REVIEWING INDICATORS 1-BY-1

The next step is to review each individual indicator against the criteria on the next page and consider which are most important and whether they need to be refined further. This might involve making a decision between indicators. In this scenario, it can help to rate the indicators by giving each one a score of between 1-3 (with 3 as the highest score). We have built the option into our Indicator Framework in Excel.

CRITERIA FOR REVIEWING AND PRIORITISING INDICATORS

HOW *RELEVANT IS IT?*

- Will the indicator give us the data we need? E.g. to report against an outcome or answer our learning question
- Do we need new indicators that would be more relevant? Would adding an additional indicator add more relevance?
- Do we need to rephrase the indicator to make it more relevant?

Top Tip

It can be easy to get stuck on the wording of a particular indicator. However, it's important to keep moving through the indicators during this process. We recommend making a note of where additional indicators are needed, or where indicators need to be rephrased etc. and coming back to this when refining indicators (see next page).

HOW *REALISTIC* IS IT IS IT?

- Are the indicators at the appropriate level of detail for the reality of our organisation and context of the programme/ activities.
- Do we have the capacity to collect data against the indicator. Would it require specific expertise for data collection and/or analysis?
- Would we expect data quality/reliability issues if we tried to collect data against this indicator?

HOW *USEFUL* IS IT?

- Think about how you will use each of your indicators. For example, is the indicator important for *learning about whether a programme is working,* for *fundraising* (do you need the indicator to report back to a particular funder) or *communication*.
- Is the indicator going to increase/create the potential for participation and empowerment of participants or stakeholders?

HOW *SENSITIVE* IS IT?

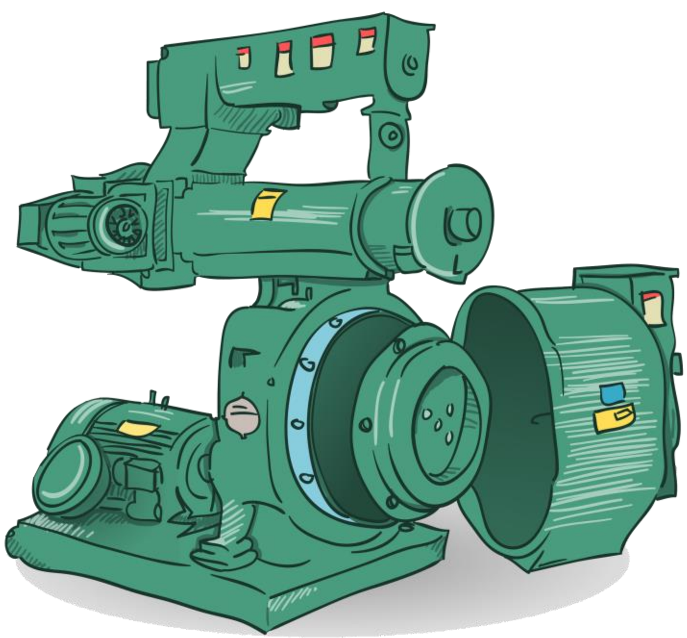
- Is there an ethical cost to using the indicator, and if so does this outweigh the benefits of the particular indicator? For example, would the indicator embarrass or create unnecessary 'fatigue' among the people we will be collecting information from?
- Is there any socio-cultural or political issue involved? For example, we may be impeded to measure an indicator due to sensitivity at political level).

HOW *EFFICIENT* IS IT

- Can the indicator be used more than once, for example, could it be used for more than one outcome or learning question?
- Could any indicators be combined together to increase efficiency?

REFINING INDICATORS

At this stage you have created and/or selected a set of indicators in accordance with the quality guide-lines and have reviewed and cut-down/edited the list. If so you should only have the most important and valuable indicators in your indicator framework. In the course of reviewing and prioritising your indicators, you have likely discovered that additional indicators are required, or that indicators need to be rephrased or combined. At this stage we are, effectively, fine-tuning our indicator 'machine' to make sure that all parts are working as effectively as possible.



AMEND INDICATORS

You may find that you need to amend some of your indicators to improve the wording.   We recommend going back to the guidelines for writing indicators on page 2 when rephrasing the wording of your indicators. .

CREATE NEW INDICATORS

It is possible that you discovered that you need~~ed~~ to create new indicators. We recommend, in this case, that you also follow the guide-lines on page 2, but then review any new indicators against the review/prioritisation guide-lines on the previous page.

COMBINE / MERGE

You may also have identified that indicators could be combined together to make a more specific/relevant indicator.

Top Tip

We recommend that at this stage you make sure your indicators are all written up and included in your indicator framework in Excel ready for the final step

OPERATIONALISING INDICATORS

Our final stage is to populate/customise the Indicator Framework. This will enable you to fully utilise the indicator. It's important to note that we complete sections 3 and 4 during step 3 and 4 of the *7 Steps to measuring social change*, *in* the overall inFocus curriculum for monitoring and evaluation.

1 DESCRIBING THE INDICATOR

These first columns describe the indicator and where it was sourced

3 HOW DATA WILL BE COLLECTED

We then describe which general data collection methods and specific tools and questions will be used to collect data against the indicator

Indicator How can we show status or change?	Indicator description Additional description of the indicator (if needed)	Indicator Source Where does the indicator come from?	Target Population Who does the indicator relate to?	Frequency of use How often will you use the indicator?	Data collection method What general data collection method will you use against the indicator?	Data Collection Tool What is the name of the specific tool you will use to collect the data	Item/Question Which question does the indicator relate to?	How indicator is calculated how will data be used to report against the indicator	Baseline The most recent data against the indicator	Target The change that you want to see from the baseline	Threshold The minimum change that would mean that the outcome has been achieved
% of GFTF participants accessing jobs	*% Participants who gain formal employment within the subsequent 12 month period after leaving the programme*	*bespoke*	*GFtF participants (Alumni)*	*Twice per year*	*Survey*	*GfTF Quarterly Alumni Questionnaire*	*Are you currently formally employed (either in a full time or part time capacity?)*	*Number of respondents who respond 'yes' /Total number of respondents*	*56% participants entered into employment following the programme*	*70% of participants enter into employment following the programme*	*65% of participants enter into the employment following the programme*
Extent to which participant attributed getting the job to GFTF	*% of participants who believe that GFtF significantly contributed to their ability to obtain employment*	*bespoke*	*GFtF participants (Alumni)*	*Twice per year*	*Survey*	*GfTF Bi-annual Alumni Questionnaire*	*To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Participating in GFtF significantly increased my ability to gain*	*Number of respondents who selected 'strongly agree' or 'agree' / Total number of respondents*	*80% participants believed that GFtF significantly contributed*	*90% participants believed that GFtF significantly contributed*	*85% participants believed that GFtF significantly contributed*

2 WHO AND WHEN…

Next, we describe the target population for the indicator and how often the data from the indicator will be used

4 BASELINES, TARGETS AND THRESHOLDS

Finally, we include details about how we will calculate the indicator and, once we have a baseline, what our target and threshold would be. The threshold is the minimum level of change required for the outcome to be achieved.

LEARN MORE ABOUT INDICATORS

This guide accompanies our online 2-hour *How to develop indicators* course that includes exercises on each of the steps within this guide and an opportunity to interact with other organisations and ask questions of inFocus trainers. For more information about the training please contact info@impactinfocus.com.