

## Understanding the 'results chain' in the context of *Training and Work Pathways Program* projects

Anyone who seeks to achieve long-term, sustainable change in people's lives regularly use the terms 'activities', 'outputs', 'outcomes' and 'impact' to describe their work. Yet, while in common use, the use and interpretation of these words are often inconsistent. The purpose of this document is to assist applicants and project owners understand what we mean by these concepts.

Most organisations intuitively understand the key difference between the things they **do** (activities) and the **changes** they wish to help **bring about** (impact). However, in order to achieve enduring change, there are many steps between activities and any eventual impact (positive *or* negative).

Good project planning and management should involve deep consideration on these steps. One way to do this is by mapping out a 'results chain' (see page 3), which is an attempt to categorise these steps by breaking them down into manageable stages. We have structured the Program to best support people to do this.

The Program supports applicants to quantify what a project aims to achieve, with specific questions on project **outputs** and **outcomes**. The Project and Risk Management Plan template will help identify activity, which along with a detailed budget will form the basis of any Approved Purpose of a Grant Deed and its reporting requirements.

### Activities

There is often confusion between the concepts of 'activities' and 'outputs'. Some activities are obviously not outputs. Examples of this might include reading research reports, the act of consulting community members to determine barriers, negotiating with potential suppliers of training and so on.

However, it is easier to see how there might be confusion when we get to the level of 'the delivery of training'. The act of 'delivering training' is clearly an *activity*, while the 'number of people completing training' is an *output*. This confusion is common, and many projects fail to maximise their assessment score, as their outputs (or output indicators) are too weighted on activities alone.

### Outputs

By definition, an output is the physical result of your work. It is the number of meetings you hold, the number of participants inducted into a training program, the number of work placements hosted, the number of certificates issued on successful completion. It is not the role of outputs to measure the change in behaviour or knowledge because of a grant's activities.

Outputs can be referred to as 'deliverables'. As in the example of completing a qualification demonstrates, a deliverable may be composed of multiple smaller deliverables.

When you are completing the output section of your application, outputs should be clear, precise and measurable. These are your 'deliverables', and should be precise and realistic to your targeted cohort or area. Use minimum whole numbers and avoid percentages or ranges. Ultimately, they will serve as the project's 'KPIs' and will be reported against if you are successful in securing a Deed.

### Outcomes

In contrast to outputs, outcomes record the changes that occur because of your program. They are achieved because of a project's outputs. Target outcomes should have a measurable benefit, and gauge the success of the project. At project conclusion, these measures will help answer questions like 'what have we achieved?' and 'how do we know?' Your outcomes link to activities and outputs. Vague outcomes, those not linked to outputs or are difficult to measure, are likely to score less highly in the assessment process.

## Impact

More often than not, it is very difficult to ascertain the exclusive impact of a single project given the complex interplay of the service system, individual and community changes and other activities also taking place. An example of an impact goal might be “improved quality of life for participants”. While we can with some certainty measure *activities* (supported delivery of a training program), *outputs* (a participant successfully engaging in a training program) and *outcomes* (a participant securing employment), isolating overall impact is hard.

This should not prevent project owners from identifying the impact they wish to achieve through their projects, nor stop you from trying to measure it. Understanding impact, whether positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by an intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended is critical to good project management.

However, impacts are hard to measure since they may or may not happen. They are what we hope our efforts will accomplish. For instance, successfully completing a training program may eventually lead to a better quality of life for participants, but the fuller sense of that impact will likely take a long time to emerge.

This should not dissuade project owners from having major goals. Nevertheless, impacts are often uncertain and unpredictable. Perhaps the best way to describe it is, “impacts are what we hope for, but outcomes are what we work for.”

## Examples of the Results Chain

