
THE DIGITAL INCLUSION
EVALUATION TOOLKIT:

GUIDE TO STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



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This guide should be read alongside the [Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit: A Step-by-Step Guide to Demonstrating the Social Impact of Digital Inclusion Projects](#).

Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit has been developed for those working on digital inclusion projects. It aims to provide a consistent evaluation approach, which will support the development of a strong evidence base for effective intervention in this field. For an overview of the whole process please see the [Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit: An Overview](#).

This sub-guide focuses on Stakeholder Engagement, which is part of Stage 1: Planning your evaluation.

We have avoided using jargon terms wherever possible. However, where we feel it is useful to include them we have highlighted the word or phrase and included it in a glossary of terms at the end of this document.

PURPOSE OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

When planning an evaluation, you need to decide what information to collect. Our evaluation process focuses on outcomes. These are the changes or effects your services have, such as increased IT skills, improved quality of life, and so on. See the full Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit guide for more details on how to identify what an outcome is or see Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit Bank of Indicators, Outcomes and Survey Questions for some examples.

Stakeholder engagement will help you identify what these outcomes are. You can then develop ways of measuring these outcomes in the next stage of the process.

This guide takes you through the following process:

- A. IDENTIFY ALL YOUR STAKEHOLDERS**
- B. SELECT YOUR KEY STAKEHOLDERS**
- C. DECIDE HOW MANY KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO INCLUDE**
- D. DECIDE WHAT QUESTIONS TO ASK**
- E. DECIDE WHEN AND HOW TO ASK THE QUESTIONS**
- F. CREATE A STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN**
- G. WRITE UP THE FINDINGS**

A. IDENTIFY ALL YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

Firstly, you need to decide who all the stakeholders are for your project. These include any group or individual that is likely to benefit from your project, or is crucial to its delivery. The main stakeholders are usually the direct beneficiaries of a project or service. Other stakeholders might include the local community, family members of beneficiaries, or even the State (if a project leads to changes in the use of public services).

Start by making a list of all those that might be directly affected by the service or activity you are evaluating. You can then move on to anyone that it might have an indirect effect on, such as family members of your beneficiaries or the local community. Next you will want to think about any stakeholders that are crucial to project delivery, such as staff. Finally, you might want to consider whether there is anyone else that might bring a valuable perspective on the change you create, but is neither a beneficiary nor involved in delivery. This might be other local agencies or organisations that work with your beneficiaries.

You can use the following table as template to record this list.

Box 1: List of stakeholders

MY PROJECT...		
Makes a difference to...	Depends on...	Is observed by...
e.g. families	e.g. staff	e.g. Job Centre staff

B. SELECT YOUR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The list of stakeholders may be quite long. You now need to narrow the list down so that it is manageable. You only need to include your key stakeholders in the evaluation. These are the stakeholders which are likely to receive significant benefit from your project, or are crucial to delivery.

You might find that some of those on your list only obtain a very small benefit and it may not be worth including them in your evaluation study. Try not to spread your resources too thinly by attempting to measure all things for all people. This is particularly important where benefits are expected to be small or very intangible. You can always widen your net at a later stage.

For example, you might find that there is an indirect impact on your post office. A small number of participants on your IT training course now use online billing instead of going to the Post Office to pay bills. However, this will not have a significant impact on the post office in the context of its day-to-day operations. The amount of impact it is likely to have does not justify the effort it would take to measure it.

This process is sometimes called a materiality test. In other words, you are deciding what is ‘material’ (or important) to the evaluation.

For each stakeholder ask yourself the following: If I excluded them would this affect...

- the overall findings of the evaluation?
- decisions about how to run the project in the future?

If the answer is ‘No’ to both questions, you can exclude the stakeholder from the evaluation.

Keep a record of any stakeholders that you’ve decided to exclude. You should record this step in your evaluation report.

C. DECIDE HOW MANY KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO INCLUDE

The process of stakeholder engagement does not need to be very long or very onerous. You may already have a clear idea about the changes your project is bringing about. In which case, you can use this to simply ‘reality check’ your understanding. So you will not need a very large sample from each of your key stakeholder groups.

The best guide is a principle called saturation. You should keep engaging stakeholders until you stop hearing anything new as this is likely to mean you will have covered the most significant outcomes. If you have a diverse stakeholder group, make sure that you have spoken to individuals from a range of backgrounds. For example, you might find that participants in your IT training course have different experiences depending on factors such as whether they are male or female, young or old, and living alone or with others.

The principle of saturation means there is no ‘magic’ number for how many participants to engage. However, you will often find that if you have a group of participants that have fairly similar backgrounds then 5 to 7 will usually be sufficient.

D. DECIDE WHAT QUESTIONS TO ASK

The purpose of this stage is to develop a rich understanding of how your project creates change. This might include several stages of cause and effect. For example, attending an IT skills training course might lead to the following chain of outcomes.

OUTPUT	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES:	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES:	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES:
IT skills training course	IT skills increased Motivation to go online increased	Increased internet use New friendships formed. Closer links to family and friends online	Reduced isolation Improved quality of life

We call this a Theory of Change. It describes the way in which your project creates change for a group of stakeholders. You will probably need to develop a separate Theory of Change for each type of key stakeholder you are including in your evaluation.

To develop this theory of change, ask each group of stakeholders about how the activities have created change in their lives. Where stakeholders are not directly experiencing change – for example, project staff – ask for their perspective on how change is created for others.

If you have never developed a Theory of Change before this can seem like a daunting prospect. However, it can be a very simple table or diagram. See the Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit Overview for a very simple version covering general digital inclusion projects. You can always adapt this for your project, based on your findings from stakeholder engagement.

See Box 2 for some questions you might want to ask your stakeholders. Start with some general information about their involvement of the project, before moving on to questions about change. Then move on to their thoughts on the project more generally. Adapt these as needed for your project.

Please note that these questions are designed to be used with participants that have previously used the service or activity being evaluated. The assumption is that the service or activity is ongoing and that there is a sample of people that have already completed the intervention that you could talk to before you begin the evaluation. You are using these previous participants to help shape the evaluation that will take place with another set of participants.

If the service or activity you are evaluating is only being run for a short time, there may not be any previous participants that would be relevant or appropriate to speak to. In this case, you will need to ask different questions that focus on their hopes and expectations for the project and what changes they hope it will bring. In this situation, you may need to rely more on the standard examples given in our template bank of outcomes and indicators Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit bank of indicators, outcomes and survey questions. You could choose the ones you feel are most relevant, perhaps discuss these with some of your stakeholders to 'sense check' them and then base your evaluation on these.

Evaluation is not a one-off process but something that should be repeated over time. You can improve on the process each time. So even if you do not currently have previous participants to include in the stakeholder engagement you may do so next time, and the evaluation is likely to be better as a result.

Box 2: Sample questions for stakeholder engagement

- When did you first start with the project?
- What activities did you participate in (e.g. course, drop in, mentoring)?
- How did you first hear about the project?
- Why did you decided to become involved?
- What is the biggest change that has occurred for you as a result of being involved in the project?
- What are some other changes you have noticed? [you may want to provide prompts]
- What has been the best thing about being involved in the project?
- Have there been any downsides to participating in the project?
- What did you like about the project?

- Is there anything that you didn't like?
- If the project hadn't existed do you think you could have achieved these changes without it/where else would you have gone for help?
- Now that the project has finished, do you think you'll be able to maintain the positive changes on your own?
- Is there any ways the project could be more helpful to people like you?
- Are there other people or groups of people that have experienced changes that you are aware of?
- Is there anything else you would like to add – positive or negative – about the project?

E. DECIDE WHEN AND HOW TO ASK THE QUESTIONS

Usually the best way to gather this information is through conversation. This will help you to develop a rich picture of the way your project creates change, and of the strengths and weaknesses of your project. If you ask these questions as part of a conversation you can explore interesting or unexpected answers in more depth – or ask people to explain their answers to avoid any ambiguity.

There are two main ways of doing this:

- A one-to-one interview
- A focus group: where you bring people together to answer questions in a group setting.

Each of these has their advantages and disadvantages, and which method you choose will depend partly on your stakeholders (see Box 4). For example, if you are dealing with a sensitive issue – such mental health problems – it will be more appropriate to use one-to-one interviews where individuals can speak more freely about personal matters than in a group setting.

Sometimes it is not possible to speak to people in person. In this instance, you can interview people over the phone or Internet. With some stakeholder groups, it is also appropriate to engage people via email or by asking them to fill in questionnaires. When choosing a method think about:

- The time and cost involved,
- How appropriate it is for the stakeholder group and the topics being covered,
- How you can maximise the quality of the information that you are likely to receive

You might choose to do a combination of interviews, focus groups and other methods to take advantage of the benefits of each method.

Box 3: Interviews vs. Focus Groups

Interviews

- Confidential
- Useful for sensitive information
- People may feel they can speak more freely because they are not in front of their peers
- Can give shy people the chance to speak – don't just hear from the loudest voices in the room
- Can be more in-depth
- No opportunity to debate, or discuss opinions

Focus group

- Discussion as a group gives the opportunity to build up a story through debate and discussion
- Can highlight contrasting experiences
- Needs to be carefully facilitated to give everyone the opportunity to speak
- Can be more efficient than interviewing participants separately

Whichever method you choose, you should ensure the information your participants provide is treated confidentially. If you are holding a focus group, start the group by stating that any information shared in the group, must not be shared beyond the group. Wherever possible, you should also offer participants anonymity – that is, that they will not be identified in the report and that any identifying characteristics will be removed from case studies.

Consider asking someone who is not involved in the project to conduct the interviews and focus groups. This can make stakeholders feel more comfortable to speak honestly about the project.

Finally, if you choose to use focus groups, you may want to use a structured facilitation technique to guide your group. You might find the Storyboard Exercise available as part of the Prove It! toolkit particularly useful ('Project Storyboard and Impact Mapping Exercise Step 1' available for download at <http://www.proveit.org.uk/downloads.html>). This is a focus group technique specifically designed for building up a theory of change.

F. CREATE A STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Use Box 4 below to record your plan for stakeholder engagement. You can include this in your evaluation report.

Box 1: List of stakeholders

STAKEHOLDER	HOW MANY TO ENGAGE?	METHOD?	WHEN?
e.g. Course participants	2 x elderly 3 x job seekers 2 x job seekers with children	Interviews	2-9 September
e.g. Project staff	3	Focus group	2-9 September

G: WRITE UP THE FINDINGS

Finally, use the results to help you plan the rest of your evaluation by developing a Theory of Change for each key stakeholder group.

You may also find it helpful to write up a few case studies if there are some powerful or interesting stories coming out of this part of the research. If you do so, be careful to remove any information which could identify individuals.

Also make sure you keep track of any recommendations for change or improvements to the service. You should reflect on these when you are interpreting the findings of the main evaluation and deciding on your final recommendations.

GLOSSARY

Outcomes: The changes that occur for beneficiaries as a result of an activity. Outcomes for participants on an internet training course, for example, could include increased confidence, or improved IT skills.

Materiality test: A process by which you decide whether something is significant or important ('material') to your evaluation

Saturation: In this context, it means the point at which you have included enough people from a group of stakeholders. You reach this point when you are no longer gathering new information (and are just hearing what previous interviewees or focus group participants have said).

Stakeholders: All those who are involved in, or affected by, your project, such as beneficiaries, staff, volunteers, and so on.

Structured facilitation technique: A specific method or process by which you facilitate a discussion.

Theory of change: This is a visual representation of how the activities you deliver lead to the outcomes you have identified. It is usually presented in the form of a table or flow chart

OTHER RESOURCES IN THIS SERIES:

Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit: A Step-by-Step Guide To Demonstrating Social Impact of Digital Inclusion Projects



Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit: An Overview



The Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit Survey Template



The Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit Report Template



The Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit Bank of Outcomes, Indicators and Survey Questions

