

How can we monitor and evaluate policy influence?

Toolkit N°1

Why should we monitor and evaluate policy influence?

This toolkit is part of a series addressing the various steps to be followed in the process of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of policy influence.

Defining key concepts

Monitoring is the revision of a project's progress. It consists of a **permanent measurement** of the degree of compliance regarding the execution of planned activities (efficacy) and of available resources with regards to the assigned budget (efficiency).

It involves identification of what is being done in order to influence, and a comparison with what has been programmed. It is a tool which **provides** highly useful **information** about the project's advance, with regards to operational decision-making.

Evaluation is a management instrument put into practice to respond to certain questions and provide **orientation** for those in charge of **making decisions**. It also serves to obtain information to determine whether the theories and hypotheses on which the project is based are valid, which aspects were effective, and why.

Generally, its objective is to determine **the relevance, efficiency, efficacy, effect and sustainability** of the evaluated level (be it the organization as a whole, a program and/or a project).

Rethinking our beliefs on success and failure

Many organizations acknowledge that –sooner or later– they will need to deepen the manner in which they measure their policy influence, beyond the already discussed limitations and obstacles of this type of effort (Jones, 2011). The reason to undertake this path will significantly influence the specific manner of evaluating their work and of utilizing that knowledge to transform itself.

What are our first ideas when thinking of being successful or failing?

A good exercise to begin an evaluation is to revise what we think about our successes and failures. For that purpose, we could question ourselves on these two concepts and what they represent on an institutional as well as a personal level.

Often, the words evaluation and monitoring make us feel pressure almost automatically, believe that a fault or an error is being sought and, therefore, they can generate negative attitudes, fears and resistance.

The manner in which M&E is interpreted significantly affects the results of the effort and the way this are utilized in the future.

Of course, any organization or individual wishes to be seen as successful. The desire to provide good news is intrinsic to our working environment. This can lead us to fall into the “success myth” instead of creating learning opportunities. If we can incorporate a new concept of success and failure, we will achieve a more authentic M&E regarding our influence, and one which generates an institutional process of learning and improvement as well.

Now then, what will be the focus of M&E?

Any M&E exercise implies much energy, time and resources; therefore, the clearer our reasons are to do it better the more fruitful the organizational and personal investment will be.

Alain de Botton



In only a few minutes, Alain de Botton, invites us to rethink what we understand as SUCCESS and FAILURE.

http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/alain_de_botton_a_kinder_gentler_philosophy_of_success.html

According to Lindsay Rose Mayka (Open Society Institute, 2008) there are five classic reasons for which an organization resolves to evaluate its work:

- **Accountability:** provide key donors and decision-makers with a measure of the progress made, in comparison with the projected impact. It can also be utilized as a cost-benefit tool to make decisions regarding financing, among others..

Do we strive to better inform our key donors and external players about what influence we exert?

- **Operational management support:** generate feedback to improve implementation of the strategic plan of an organization or a program. If we count on an M&E system, we can capture those elements not useful in the action and detect new opportunities on the basis of unanticipated effects or actions requiring revision to improve the operational management of the organization and/or program.

Do we wish to strengthen and improve the manner in which we implement policy influence projects?

- **Strategic management support:** provide information about potential opportunities for the future and about strategies to be adjusted. An M&E system can shed light on aspects we need to improve when thinking strategically (for example, strengthen our capacity to forge alliances).

Do we aim towards evaluating our actions to make better decisions on the strategic path of the organization and/or its programs?

- **Knowledge creation:** expand organization's knowledge about strategies which generally work under different contexts, in order to develop more efficacious strategies in the future.
- **Empowerment:** increase strategic planning skills of the members of the organization or program, and of other interested parties. The evaluation process increases the acceptance of, and commitment to, shared objectives, and creates an environment which improves the probability of future activities to cause a positive impact (Woodhill, 2007).

Do we wish for more and better knowledge for our team to improve its influence?

Do we aim to boost our members through wider consensus and commitment with our objectives?

The importance of consensus

We would probably like to attain all of these ends when undertaking a new M&E process. However, prioritizing is important to ensure alignment of the new M&E system with what most of the members expect from it. Moreover, each organization will find some of these options more applicable to its reality according to its idiosyncrasy, track record or evolution in terms of influence, for example. The key is to be clear about the priority purpose/s of the evaluation, in order to focus strategies and work methodology, according to what should be changed. For example, it is not the same to conduct an evaluation exercise to produce a public report of the organization's annual work, than it is to initiate a process to detect those key lessons on influence which should be internally socialized among the members of an institution.

In addition, this is an opportunity to think, rethink or formalize current M&E influence (implicit or explicit) practices. It is probable that your organization already engages in media follow-up or prepares various reports for donors. M&E should not be conceived as a luxury: It is not a practice exclusive to large budget organizations, or for those with specific support from a donor to carry it out. Each organization may set its own path. Monitoring and evaluation means making an intelligent and promising investment which will undoubtedly bear fruit.

Participation and consensus

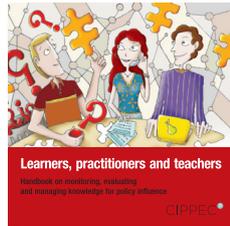
If an organization's team feels it is being included in the M&E process, and that this can contribute in an obvious and direct manner to its work, it will participate with enthusiasm. To achieve this, we recommend taking a moment for internal debate where the following issues are dealt with:

- What is understood by monitoring and evaluation?
- What is the purpose of the evaluation?
- Is there an interest in carrying it out? In what manner?
- Which are the expectations?
- Which are the main challenges?
- Who is interested in participating in the process?
- What is the usefulness of an M&E system?

I need help!

Recommendations for reading or consultations by CIPPEC's Civil Society Directorate for the M&E of policy influence.

- *Learners, practitioners and teachers. Handbook on monitoring, evaluating and managing knowledge for policy influence, CIPPEC 2010.*
Available at www.vippal.cippec.org.



- *A guide to monitoring and evaluating policy influence, Harry Jones, (Overseas Development Institute, 2011, páginas 3-4).*
Available at www.odi.org.uk.

In Spanish:

- *Marcos Alternativos de Evaluación: Desarrollo de una Filosofía de la Evaluación para OSI-LAP (Open Society Foundations), 2008.*

Next Toolkit:

Step One:
Where we are and
where do we want to go

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