OUR BRIGHT FUTURE
Evaluating Impacts of Our Bright Future Projects:
How do I know my project has worked?

What is an impact?

Impacts can be thought of as the ultimate results of an activity or action. Impacts may be direct or indirect as well as being intended or unintended. In evaluation impacts are considered as the final element of a logic model. A logic model is classically presented as a series of steps in which each is assumed to contribute to, or result in the next, from inputs, to activities, to outputs and so on:

INPUTS	>	ACTIVITIES	>	OUTPUTS	>	OUTCOMES	>	IMPACTS

A theory of change or logic model therefore explains how an intervention (in the case of Our Bright Future this would be the *programme* overall or a specific *project*) is understood to lead to the intended (and unintended) impacts.

For Our Bright Future, the programme evaluation theory of change considers outcomes and impacts separately, although some evaluations will consider these two together. In the context of Our Bright Future projects it may be useful to think of the difference between outputs, outcomes and impacts in terms of what is being affected (young people, communities, the environment etc.).

Table 1 suggests how you may think about outputs, outcomes and impacts using the example of a project that aims to engage young people in the natural environment as a means of gaining an accreditation in habitat management, with the goal of enabling young people to find employment. In practice different projects will focus on different outcomes and impacts depending on their objectives and target beneficiaries.

Table 1: How to think about 'outputs', 'outcomes' and 'impacts'

Outputs	What the project will do / concrete, tangible products of the project e.g.: • Young people involved in the project participate in one or more specific activities organised by the project which are designed to provide them with a structured environment in which to participate in supervised activities that build towards gaining accreditation.
Outcomes	Changed conditions for those involved in the project, e.g.: • Young people involved in the project complete their participation, having successfully gained the intended accreditation.
Impacts	Changes in young people, communities, the environment, organisations, the wider world resulting from the project, e.g.: • The young people find employment in the environment sector.

In thinking about outputs, outcomes and impacts it may also be useful to consider time frames. E.g. outputs are generally the immediate result of an activity or process; outcomes are the short-term changes for people (or things) that are the target of the processes / activities; and impacts are longer-term changes for people (or things) as a result of their involvement. Impacts may also include broader changes to e.g. the environment, behaviours, practices etc. In the case of Our Bright Future it is possible that some impacts will occur after the project has closed. However expected impacts can be identified, and post-project monitoring procedures put in place, and for projects with specific cohorts (e.g. annually) or other short-term or one-off engagement, impacts may already be identifiable and measurable.

Why is it important to consider and evaluate impacts?

Although it is useful to know how effectively an intervention (project, programme) is meeting expectations in relation to activities, outputs and outcomes, the ultimate measure of how valuable and successful an intervention has been is through its impacts. Understanding the impacts of an intervention is also a key way in which an organisation can learn about how successful or otherwise its interventions have been, and how they may need to be changed in future.

Using the example in Table 1, if a project is engaging its target number of young people in activities that are designed and implemented as planned and a high proportion are successfully gaining accreditation, the project may be considered a success. However, if none of the young people continue to engage with activities in the environment or seek employment in environmental management (and these were goals of the project), the project may need to consider if the types of activity it is running or accreditation it is working towards are the correct ones to deliver the intended impact. This finding may also prompt reflection on what other factors may be influencing the impact, and if these need to be considered in planning future activities (e.g. self-confidence of young people, communication skills etc.).

What impacts should projects be expecting and seeking to evaluate?

The exact nature of impacts expected will depend on the focus and objectives of each project, for example a project focussing on encouraging young people to become entrepreneurs in the environment sector would have very different impacts to a project working with young people to establish or improve community gardens and food growing.

In thinking about the theory of change or intervention logic for your project it is important to consider what, ultimately, you are seeking to achieve with the proposed interventions. This is probably embedded already in your project vision and objectives, however for the purposes of evaluation it is useful to describe specific impacts expected rather than broader and less defined visions or objectives (e.g. an objective may be 'to enhance the employment prospects of young people in the environment sector', while a related impact may be 'more than 50% of young people who have participated in the project have taken up employment in jobs related to the environment sector').

Table 2 (overleaf) presents some illustrative examples of the sort of impacts that may be expected from Our Bright Future projects.

However, it is important to recognise that multiple other factors, external to your project and Our Bright Future, may have contributed partially, or entirely to the observed outcome or impact. For this reason, it is important to consider the extent to which impacts can be **attributed** to your project. For example, when asking young people about how your project has influenced them, be mindful to ask if any other factors, projects, experiences or individuals have also played a role.

Table 2: Examples of types of impact that may be expected

Impact area	Illustrative examples of impacts
Young people	• Young people who are participating or have participated in the project use new skills or qualifications earned to gain employment. (A specific number or percentage of participants could be a related target) • Through their participation in the project, young people become engaged in environmental volunteering and continue to remain active volunteers after their involvement in the project. • Young people express feelings of improved self-confidence and wellbeing, and longitudinal surveying (e.g. 1 year after engagement in Our Bright Future) shows these feelings have continued.
Environment	• An urban orchard created and planted through Our Bright Future project activities has become established, is maintained and continues to produce fruit and provide a place of amenity for local people. • An area of habitat improved or created through Our Bright Future project activities remains healthy (of good quality) and evidence of target species establishing viable populations is able to be gathered.
Community	• Members of a local community (this may be a place or a community group) in which project participants were encouraged by an Our Bright Future project to engage in the improvement of a local park continue to use the space as individuals or for community events. • A local community in which young people were supported by an Our Bright Future project to become environmental leaders has higher levels of environmental action (e.g. recycling rates) than comparable areas.
Policy and practice	• As a result of campaigning or other activities undertaken as part of an Our Bright Future project a local council has changed local planning or policy, e.g. to protect one or more areas of green space, or to encourage local schools to include outdoor learning in their teaching programmes. • Due to the successful inclusion of young people in coordination or management meetings of an Our Bright Future project, one or more organisations involved decide to include young people on regular management groups / boards and in decision making.

How can your project identify and evaluate impacts?

It is likely that in thinking about and describing the vision and objectives of your project you will already have considered what impacts the project is intended to have. Impacts are the ultimate results of the outputs and outcomes of interventions delivered through an Our Bright Future project.

Impacts are generally longer-term than outputs and outcomes, which are the immediate result of project activities. For example, an activity may be to engage young people in an intervention to plant tree saplings, the output is that saplings are planted by the young people, the outcome is that the young people gain new skills, learn about trees, and that together the saplings represent a new natural space. The impact in turn is that the saplings become established and grow into trees providing a habitat for species and a place for local people to relax and the young people use the skills learned and continue to volunteer or participate in environmental activities in other ways.

Impacts may also be indirect or wider effects of a project, for example a project that encourages young people to become involved in cleaning local beaches and understanding the nature of the coast may have wider impacts through, for example a local community appreciating the cleaner beach environment and deciding to set up a regular beach-clean or put up new signage to encourage people to take their litter home. Such impacts may not have been anticipated or considered in the original project objectives, but should still be considered as impacts of the project.

To help think about impacts it is useful to use the logic model approach discussed above, which encourages you to think logically about what the results of the inputs and activities of your project may be, by considering specific outputs and outcomes first and from these what the impacts may be. If you do not feel that impacts are adequately described already in your project logic model or monitoring, to help identify impacts it may be helpful to consider what would success look like in relation to types of activity and/or participants in your project? How would you describe this success (i.e. what changes, in what way)? However, be careful to differentiate between the completion of 'activities' (e.g. 100 young people participating in a workshop) and the anticipated outcomes (e.g. some proportion of these young people learning through their participation) and impacts (e.g. applying this learning to gain employment or move into further education).

Once the expected impacts of your project have been identified these can form part of the evaluation framework for your project. For separate guidance on evaluation frameworks and reporting, search 'evaluation' in the Green Room Knowledge Bank and open *EVALUATION GUIDANCE FOR OUR BRIGHT FUTURE PROJECTS* *excel file or* EVALUATION FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT.

When might impacts be seen?

It may be useful to think about impacts in terms of timeframes over which impacts are expected to be seen, i.e. short-term (e.g. within a few weeks or months of an intervention); medium-term (e.g. more than a few months but less than a year); longer-term (more than one year).

In multi-annual projects, especially with shorter term engagement or annual or sub-annual cohorts of participants it is hoped that impacts will be measurable for some participants and types of activity / intervention.

If impacts are not expected to be seen until the longer-term, it would be beneficial to establish a monitoring plan through which procedures can be put in place to measure impacts over time. This may be for example an annual review of the state of a green space improved by the project, or a regular or one-off survey of all or a sample of participants one or more years after participation to collect information on what they have done differently as a result of their engagement in Our Bright Future. This may be particularly relevant for projects delivered by lead organisations who will continue similar activities or may wish to seek future funding for similar types of project.

A logic model can be particularly valuable where impacts of your project are longer-term and for which there may not yet be clear evidence. In these cases evidence of outcomes can be used as an indication of success even where impacts are not yet measurable. Where this is the case in reporting on impacts it will be important to describe clearly how, and why, measured outcomes are expected to lead to impacts and what factors will contribute to this, including where appropriate any continuing intervention or support provided by the project.

What works for who and why?

Once you have considered overall impacts, it may be possible to consider, for example, whether certain types of people appear to particularly benefit from participation, or certain impacts are more evident in some areas than others. In order to understand your project's impacts better and inform the ongoing delivery of your project it would be useful to provide some context to the impacts that you identify and seek to measure, e.g.:

- Have you observed any differences in those participants noting the widest or most significant outcomes and impacts? (E.g. in age, gender, pre-existing interest, duration/type of involvement i.e. voluntary/compulsory)
- What particular activities have contributed to the changes they have experienced? (e.g. outdoor practical activities, youth led activities, group or individual work)

Example methods of data collection for measuring impacts

A variety of methods can be used to collect evidence that can help to measure impacts and demonstrate that they have been achieved. The table below provides an overview of some of the main methods that could be used and what type of impacts these may be relevant to. The table is not intended to be exhaustive and you may know of or already be using other methods.

Impact related to…	Suggested evidence collection approaches			
	Surveys	Interviews or focus groups	Networks (e.g. alumni), participant progress checking	Observation and physical inspection (e.g. noting changes observed, taking before/after photos)
Young people (participants)	✔	✔	✔	
Community	✔	✔		✔
Environment				✔
Policy and practice	✔	✔		✔

Sources of further information and guidance

The Magenta Book: The UK Government (HM Treasury) guidance on what to consider when designing an evaluation: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book

Heritage Lottery Fund Evaluation Guidance (note this is specifically in context of Heritage projects, but has wider relevance): https://www.hlf.org.uk/evaluation-guidance

Better Evaluation website: https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/themes/impact_evaluation