

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning in the Humanitarian Innovation Fund

October 2014

1. Introduction

This document is intended to provide guidance for people applying to and receiving funding through the large grants funding facility of the HIF.

The paper aims to:

- i. Outline what 'performance' means in the context of a HIF grant
- ii. Provide a set of suggested questions that will help grantees to develop their monitoring, evaluation and learning plans
- iii. Set out some general principles to consider while collecting and analysing information to assess the performance of an innovation

This document is not a technical 'how to' guide for evaluating innovation: it does not specify tools or required processes for applicants. If guidelines for a step-by-step monitoring and evaluation process are needed, *Action Against Hunger* (ACF International) have written a guide (ACF 2011) which is accessible [here](#). ALNAP have also written the *Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Pilot Guide* (ALNAP 2013) available [here](#). Finally, the IFRC have published a *Project/programme monitoring and evaluation (M&E) Guide* (IFRC 2013), available [here](#).

2. What is Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning?

The three guides listed above have contributed to the definitions in Box 1.

Box 1: Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning: A summary

Monitoring is the routine collection and analysis of information to track progress against planned targets and milestones. Monitoring is critical to a project's success. If monitoring data is analysed periodically and used effectively to inform decisions, it can mean the difference between a well-managed and a poorly managed project. With good monitoring, issues can be corrected before they become problems and opportunities can be maximised during the life of the project. When the project has been completed, performance cannot be proven without a final analysis that is based on information gained through monitoring processes.

Evaluations are assessments, as systematic and objective as possible, of a project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. Evaluations are essential for accountability and learning purposes. Evaluations for accountability show the extent to which objectives have been met, results have been achieved and performance has been positive. Evaluations for learning identify how and why different aspects of a project have or have not worked, and what others could learn from this. Evaluations also commonly assess effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability; assess impact; recommend improvements and facilitate better decision making; and support advocacy to stakeholders, beneficiaries and donors.

Learning is the process through which experience and reflection lead to changes in behaviour or the acquisition of new abilities. ALNAP also defines three types of learning: *Single loop learning* leads to changes that correct mismatches and errors based on existing practices, policies and norms; *Double loop learning* changes practices, policies and norms; and *Triple loop learning* changes organisational rationale, strategy and context.

3. Evidence and Performance with the HIF

Key for the HIF is the ability of every project to build evidence that demonstrates the performance of their innovation. There must be evidence of the success or failure (or the partial successes and failures) of the innovation for the HIF project to be completed. This evidence will most often be based on data and information that are collected, analysed and assessed as part of the project's monitoring and evaluation plan.

It is important to monitor, evaluate and report on performance for a several reasons.

- There is a requirement to report on the HIF grant;
- The requirement to collect and analyse information helps project teams to pay attention to what is happening as the project progresses, and this in turn makes the innovation more likely to succeed;
- A good evidence base helps build a case for the innovation, and supports the successful diffusion of innovations;
- Finally, where innovations fail, the information collected can help explain what did and didn't work and allow future initiatives to build on success while avoiding the pitfalls.

We expect that different projects will require different approaches to monitoring and evaluating the performance of their innovation. Some of the information that projects will be expected to collect will be set out as part of the standard reporting required by the grant: these requirements will be found in the project contract. In addition, projects might use existing organisational guidelines for monitoring and evaluation; the most common tool in humanitarian use is the logframe (logical framework), which is often supported by a Theory of Change (ToC) diagram and a workplan. Others might develop new approaches based on established monitoring and evaluation practice, and others may favour research methodologies resulting in peer-reviewed publications.

No matter how it is done, the MEL plan for each project must consider how best to produce evidence of the performance of the innovation. This may mean that, for example, it is important to include targets and outcomes related to performance in the project's M&E plan; second, it is necessary to adopt tools that support the collection and analysis of performance related information; and finally, that evaluation methods used must provide clear evidence of performance.

In order to undertake a comprehensive evaluation, additional research or data gathered and analysed by other stakeholders may be used by the project team; data collected before the project begins may be adopted as a baseline – this may include government information and statistics; and during the course of the project, different data and knowledge may be found that can be utilised dynamically by an evaluation at the end. This may occur when, for example, an understanding of the humanitarian context of the project is a key cause of success or failure, and the context is changing constantly; or when a project team seeks to understand how their innovation may impact the humanitarian system as a whole.

4. Performance criteria for innovations

All projects should be able to ultimately demonstrate how they will contribute to improving the effectiveness of humanitarian aid, and have clear and practical ways to measure this. As part of the grant selection process, the HIF Grant's panel will pay particular attention to the approach that a project takes to monitor and evaluate performance. The first step of any MEL approach is to identify key aims, which may be defined by a project team variously through targets (and target milestones), outcomes or objectives. We will refer generically to *targets* in this document. We will also use the

term *criteria* to mean the aspects of the project which are important to measure with specific targets.

In particular, the HIF considers the following criteria as central to measuring performance:¹

- **Effectiveness** is concerned with the degree to which the project achieves its stated targets on time.
- **Efficiency** is a measure of the quality and/or number of outputs compared to the inputs (often money or time) required. The more efficient the project, the more and/or better the outputs created with the same amount of inputs, or the fewer inputs used (OECD 2011).
- **Coverage** measures the degree to which the project reaches the highest proportion of those who need it, and ensures that priority of access based on needs (so that particular groups are not excluded)
- **Relevance and appropriateness** are concerned with assessing whether an intervention is in line with the needs and priorities of the intended end-users/beneficiaries.

Impact may also be included in these criteria for some projects. It looks at the wider effects of the project – social, economic, technical, environmental – on individuals, gender- and age-groups, communities and institutions. Impacts can be intended and unintended, positive and negative, macro (sector) and micro (household)' (ALNAP: 2006, p.56). Measurements of impact look at whether the project outcomes led to overall goals being achieved, but also look at the effects of the project beyond those that were originally planned for. For more information on defining and measuring impact, please refer to the *HIF Impact Guidelines*, available on the HIF website [here](#).

These criteria are considered the most relevant to demonstrating the performance of innovations, however, other criteria such as **connectedness** (the link between the short-term emergency and the longer-term context) or **coordination** may be relevant depending on the innovation. Not all criteria will be suitable in all cases – grantees should choose the most suitable criteria for their innovation.

Annexe 1 suggests a series of questions that might help applicants develop their strategies and targets in order to monitor, evaluate and produce evidence of the performance of their innovation according to each of the five criteria above. These questions can help to decide: what exactly the project hopes to achieve and what kind of targets need to be set; what kind of monitoring and evaluation system needs to be designed in order appropriately evaluate the innovation and report on evidence; and what other agencies will need to know in order to learn from this project.

5. Principles for Evidence, Evaluation and Learning in the HIF

Whichever approach and tools are used, certain principles should be recognised in relation to demonstrating the performance of the innovation. The principles have been drawn from different streams of literature and action-oriented research on evaluation and analysis of innovation in different sectors; we do not expect projects to invent new project monitoring tools for the sake of it.

a) Evidence is crucial to successful innovation

No one method or approach will be suitable for all projects, but evidence is nonetheless fundamental to the ability to draw valid conclusions about the performance of an innovation. All projects should seek to find appropriate, feasible and robust ways to generate evidence that is both valid and

¹ These criteria are taken from established measures for the evaluation of humanitarian action. Full descriptions and explanations can be found in the ALNAP Guide to Evaluating Humanitarian Action using the OECD-DAC criteria (Beck: 2008). The guide outlines seven criteria, of which the HIF prioritises five.

reliable. ***Evidence should be integral to the project design*** and the rationale for choosing particular methods should be clearly articulated.

As has already been emphasised, while developing proposals, grantees should consider a range of methods and find those most appropriate for testing their innovation. The primary consideration should be to produce evidence to inform decision making and ongoing project adjustment, and to draw conclusions around the innovation. Beyond this, the challenges and the feasibility of different approaches, the resources available and the time scale of the project should all be considered.

b) Demonstrating success is about making relevant comparisons

One challenge facing innovation in humanitarian settings, particularly radical or transformational innovations, is the lack of comparability with existing approaches. However, the impetus is on innovators to show how their innovation improves on existing practice; being able to demonstrate the degree to which a given innovation advances effectiveness in comparison to alternatives is fundamental to demonstrating its success.

Projects funded by the HIF should seek to measure and monitor relevant outputs and targets, and clearly demonstrate the anticipated and actual differences between the innovation and standard practice. For many innovations there will be a range of different measures (for instance derived from the criteria above) which can be used to make comparisons with existing practice, and which could individually or collectively inform conclusions about an innovation.²

In other cases, where such direct comparisons may not be possible, reference should be made to how the project team has built on current practice and current standards, and sought to draw on previous experience and knowledge, as opposed to attempting to develop techniques in isolation.

c) Innovators must embrace, analyse and learn from failure

Failure is an inevitable part of the innovation cycle – without it, innovation would be impossible. Moreover, successful innovations often occur after a series of failures have allowed the innovator to adapt and improve an idea (Perrin: 2001, p16). Therefore, the HIF has a high tolerance for failure in relation to innovations. However, failures large and small are only productive if the evidence of failure is clear and comprehensive, and if the project can capture, discuss and diffuse ‘lessons learnt’ in order to influence future practice.,

Therefore, monitoring systems should be designed with the possibility of failure in mind. At the very least, good monitoring data can provide an understanding of an innovation’s failure which will increase the knowledge base around a particular area of practice. Evaluations should help analyse and identify the causes of failure, and contribute to documenting and sharing experience. For innovators, the only unacceptable failure is the failure to learn from mistakes.

d) Projects should be ready for the unexpected

In an innovation process, learning often comes from the unexpected, and unanticipated results may function as a spring board for further innovation. A well-functioning project monitoring system, which goes beyond simply recording predetermined outputs, is thus essential.

HIF projects should look to identify and document the entire range of emerging results triggered by their innovation, irrespective of whether these results are in line with original intentions. Exceptions,

² A real-world example is the comparisons of Community Therapeutic Care to in-patient care for treating Severe Acute Malnutrition in emergencies.

discontinuities, unexpected results and side effects are valuable sources of information on innovation, and should be used to develop and refine thinking during the project. They can provide useful clues; for example regarding relevant internal/external changes and newly emerging challenges, which can help to improve ongoing implementation (Williams and Imam: 2006, p168).

e) 'Open' innovation will be key to achieving scale-up

The HIF aims to encourage collaboration and effective partnerships for innovation. This emphasis stems from open innovation approaches that recognise that collaboration often underpins successful innovation and knowledge creation. The relationships that exist around an innovation – within and between agencies, with local and national actors, and significantly with recipients and other users – are fundamental to a project's success or otherwise. Projects should seek to develop appropriate collaborations in order to increase an innovation's responsiveness and relevance, and to improve the chances of successful implementation. Particularly important are efforts to engage with stakeholders who have been unable to contribute to project design.

In addition to a commitment to collaboration and openness within projects, the HIF also aims to promote knowledge sharing across the humanitarian system, in order to facilitate ongoing development of innovations beyond the grant period. Innovation rarely occurs in isolation. We hope that the HIF will contribute to creating a more favourable environment and culture for innovation within the wider humanitarian system; by documenting and sharing project information and results, and making data sets and evidence open and accessible, HIF projects can directly contribute to this change. Such an approach is important in securing the maximum impact for innovations beyond the scope of HIF grant.

6. Further Support

Given the central importance of research and evidence to testing and demonstrating innovation, the HIF team is available to work with grantees and provide projects with support at different stages; for example once a project contract has been signed projects will receive additional support to review and refine their monitoring and evaluation plans and ensure they have appropriate mechanisms in place to document performance at project outset. They will also be available for advice and support throughout the lifespan of a project.

The HIF team will revisit and update this guidance note periodically on the basis of experiences, learning and best practice that emerges from the HIF grants. For comments please contact Kim Scriven (k.scriven@savethechildren.org.uk).

Annexe 1

These questions are a 'starting point'; they will not be relevant in all settings and should be adapted to the specific innovation. Each project should be designed to ensure that information collected over the life of the project will ultimately provide an answer to these or similar questions.

Effectiveness:

- To what extent did the project achieve its stated objectives?
- What contributed to or hindered the achievement of these objectives, and how did the project team react to this?
- What assumptions were made around the achievement of objectives? Were these assumptions correct?
- Were the project objectives achieved in a timely fashion?
- Did the project succeed in demonstrating the innovation's potential for improving the effectiveness of humanitarian action in similar contexts?

Efficiency:

- How did the project plan ensure that the project outputs were delivered to the highest quality at the lowest cost?
- To what degree was this achieved, and what factors contributed to this?
- Were the approaches used in the project more efficient than existing practice? How was this measured?
- How might the efficiency of the innovation be affected if taking the approach to scale?

Coverage:

- How did the project identify the number, location and 'profile' of target recipients?
- What measures did the project put in place to ensure that particularly vulnerable or hard to reach groups were not excluded, and were these successful?
- To what degree was the project successful in reaching the planned number and type of recipient/user?
- What evidence is there that, if more widely applied, the innovation would help the humanitarian community meet the needs of more people, or more effectively target humanitarian services on the basis of need?

Relevance and appropriateness:

- How did the project take account of and respond to the needs of recipients, both at the design stage and during implementation?
- How successful was the project in taking these needs into account?
- In what ways, if taken to scale, might the innovation improve the relevance of humanitarian work for the affected population?
- Will the innovation be relevant in other humanitarian contexts? What adjustments will need to be made?

Impact:

- What have been the wider effects, positive or negative, of the project in the area(s) of operation? How have these been measured?
- To what extent do the observed impacts of the project match those expected in project plans? If they differ, what explanation might there be for this?

- What can the evidence collected through the project tell us about the potential impact of the innovation on wider humanitarian performance?
- Were the project outcomes dependent on the context, and how might this effect the replication of impact in other situations?

References

Action Against Hunger (ACF), 2011, *Food Security and Livelihoods Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines: A Practical Guide for Field Workers* [at <http://www.actionagainsthunger.org/publication/food-security-and-livelihoods-monitoring-and-evaluation-guidelines>]

ALNAP, 2013, *Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Pilot Guide* [at <http://www.alnap.org/eha#>]

Beck, Tony (2008) Evaluating humanitarian action using the OECD-DAC criteria - An ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies (London: ALNAP at ODI) [available at: www.alnap.org/pool/files/eha_2006.pdf].

International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC), 2013, *Project/programme monitoring and evaluation (M&E) Guide* [at <http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/monitoring/IFRC-ME-Guide-8-2011.pdf>]

Perrin, Burt (2001) “How to – and How Not to – Evaluate Innovation” in *Evaluation*, Vol. 8 (1), p.16.

Proudlock, Karen, and Ben Ramalingam with Peta Sandison (2008) Improving humanitarian impact assessment: bridging theory and practice, in *ALNAP's 8th Review of Humanitarian Action* (London: ALNAP at ODI) [available at: <http://www.alnap.org/resource/5663.aspx>].

OECD, (2011) ‘Value for money and international development: Deconstructing some myths to promote more constructive discussion’, OECD Consultation Draft [available at: <http://www.alnap.org/pool/forum/vfm-paper.pdf>]

Williams, Bob, and Iraj Imam (eds.) (2006), *Systems Concepts in Evaluation - An Expert Anthology*, ed. AEA - American Evaluation Association (Point Reyes, CA: EdgePress) p. 168.

Further Reading

In addition to the references above, this further reading section is aimed at helping grantees and potential grantees to explore the areas covered above in more detail, and in particular to identify and develop approaches to monitoring, evaluation and the collection of appropriate evidence for their own innovations. It will continue to be refined and expanded based on the experience of grantees.

Introduction to Evaluation and approaches to Monitoring & Evaluation

Bamberger, Michael, Rugh, Jim, Mabry, Linda (2006) *Real World Evaluation - Working Under Budget, Time, Data, and Political Constraints* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications).

Birckmayer, Johanna and Carol Weiss (2000) “Theory-Based Evaluation in Practice: What Do We Learn?” in *Evaluation Review*, Vol. 24(4).

Catley, Andrew, John Burns, Davit Abebe, and Omeno Suji (2008) *Participatory Impact Assessment-- a Guide for Practitioners* (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University) available at: <https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/display/FIC/Participatory+Impact+Assessment>

Estrella, Marisol (2000), 'Learning from Change: Issues and Experiences in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation - An Introduction', in Estrella, Marisol et. al. (eds.), *Learning from Change: Issues and Experiences in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications).

Fitzpatrick, Jody, James Sanders, and Blaine Worthen (2004) *Program Evaluation: Alternative Approaches and Practical Guidelines* (New York: Pearson Education Inc.)

Morra Imas, Linda G. and Ray C. Rist (2009), *The Road to Results: Designing and Conducting Effective Development Evaluations* (Washington: World Bank - IEG Independent Evaluation Group) available at: <http://issuu.com/world.bank.publications/docs/9780821378915>

Patton, Michael Quinn (1996) *Utilization-Focused Evaluation: The New Century Text*, 3rd Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications).

Patton, Micheal Quinn (2011) *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press).

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning guidelines and methods

Cosgrave, John, Ben Ramalingam, and Tony Beck (2009) *Real-Time Evaluations of Humanitarian Action - An ALNAP Guide Pilot Version* (London: ALNAP at ODI) available at: <http://www.alnap.org/resources/guides/evaluation/rte.aspx>

Jones, Harry, and Simon Hearn (2009) *Outcome Mapping: a realistic alternative for planning, monitoring and evaluation* (London: Overseas Development Institute) available at: <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/5058.pdf>

Keystone (2008) Learning with constituents, *IPAL Guide - Impact Planning, Assessment and Learning Guide no.3* available at: http://www.world-federation.org/NR/rdonlyres/6624B203-521A-475E-9E67-299E664FBA00/0/NGO_8p3_KALearningwithcontitents.pdf

Kusters, Cecile, et al. (2011) *Making Evaluations Matter: A Practical Guide for Evaluators*, (Wageningen, The Netherlands: Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen University & Research centre) available at: http://www.cdi.wur.nl/NR/rdonlyres/66764817-54E3-4DCB-BD4F-806B403F892C/139231/2011_guide_MEMguide2.pdf

McDavid, James and Laura Hawthorn (2006), 'Key Concepts and Issues in Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement', in McDavid, James, and Laura Hawthorn (eds.), *Program Evaluation & Performance Measurement: An Introduction to Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage).

Mendizabal, Enrique. *The Alignment, Interest and Influence Matrix (AIIM) - Guidance Note* (London: Overseas Development Institute) available at: <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/6509.pdf>

Patton, Micheal Quinn (2002), *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications).

Royal Tropical Institute - The Netherlands (2011) *KIT Dossier Monitoring & evaluation for learning in rural innovation systems* (Royal Tropical Institute - The Netherlands: Amsterdam) available at: <http://www.kit.nl/-/INS/62595>

Taylor-Powell, Ellen (2011). The What and How of Outcome Measurement (Atlanta, GE, AEA - CDC Summer Institute) available at: <http://comm.eval.org/viewdocument/?DocumentKey=ab4d984f-940d-4a44-bc14-9988496bba7c>

UNEG - United Nations Evaluation Group (2007), 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation' (Washington and Geneva: UNEG) available at: <http://www.uneval.org/search/index.jsp?q=ethical+guidelines>

WFP - World Food Programme (2002a), 'How to plan and undertake a Self-evaluation', Monitoring & Evaluation Guidelines (Rome WFP - OEDE, Office of Evaluation) available at: http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ko/mekb_module_12.pdf

WFP - World Food Programme (2002b), 'How to Plan an Evaluation', Monitoring & Evaluation Guidelines (Rome WFP - OEDE, Office of Evaluation) available at: http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ko/mekb_module_11.pdf

Logic Models (including Theories of Change)

Earle, Lucy (2003) *Lost in the Matrix: The Logframe and the Local Picture*, in INTRAC's 5th Evaluation Conference: Measurement, Management and Accountability? (INTRAC: The Netherlands) available at: <http://ngolearning.org/evanspmclass/Shared%20Documents/LogFrameCritique.pdf>

Flores, Julia (2004), 'The Logical Framework', *Evaluation Series No.1* (Edinburgh and Sheffield: Performance Assessment Resource Center -PARC) available at: http://pdf2.hegoa.efaber.net/entry/content/883/evaluation_series_n_1_LF_PARC.pdf

Kellogg Foundation (2001) Logic Model Development Guide. Battle Creek, MI) available at: <http://www.exinfm.com/training/pdfiles/logicModel.pdf>

Keystone (2009) Developing a Theory of Change, *IPAL Guide - Impact Planning, Assessment and Learning no. 2* available at: http://www.inprogressweb.com/files/cms/resource/2_Developing_a_theory_of_change-1.pdf