

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning in the Humanitarian Innovation Fund

1. Introduction

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

The paper aims to:

1. Outline what 'performance' means in the context of a HIF grant
2. Provide a set of suggested questions that will help grantees to develop their monitoring, evaluation and learning plans
3. 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. We expect that different projects will require different approaches to collecting and analysing information about 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, some projects might use existing organisational guidelines for monitoring and evaluation, others might develop new approaches based on established monitoring and evaluation practice, and others may favour research methodologies resulting in peer-reviewed publications.

The HIF expects each project to be able to collect and present evidence that can demonstrate the performance of their innovation in relation to existing practice. It is important to collect information on performance for a several reasons.

- First, there is a requirement to report on the grant.
- Second, the requirement to collect information helps us to pay attention to what is happening as the project progresses, and this in turn makes the innovation more likely to succeed.
- Third, 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.

So, however it is achieved, it is essential is that all projects have from the outset a strategy in place to build the strongest possible evidence base around the performance of an innovation.

2. Performance criteria for innovations

All projects should be able to clearly demonstrate how they will contribute to improving the performance 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 collecting and analysing information on performance.

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

- **Effectiveness** is concerned with the degree to which the project achieves its stated objectives in a timely manner. It is generally a measure of outcomes.
- **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** '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.

Being able to measure an innovation's impact is at the heart of demonstrating advances in humanitarian practice – however, impact is hard to measure (Proudlock et al, 2008). HIF funded projects should be realistic about what they can achieve, and be conscious of the need to promote future uptake of their innovation to secure greatest impact. In particular, projects should be clear about the anticipated impact of their innovations, even while recognising the challenges of measurement.

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) 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.

3. Example questions for examining innovations

Below are a series of suggested questions that might help applicants develop their strategies to document and demonstrate the performance of their innovation according to each of the five criteria above. 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?

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.



- 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?
- Where 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.

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

As discussed above, there is no single correct approach for collecting information to answer these questions. It may be possible to collect data to answer these questions through established project planning and monitoring tools such as a project log-frame, or by applying relevant models such as the Theory of Change model. The HIF expects projects to select and use the most appropriate monitoring tools for the particular needs of their project.

Whichever approach and tools you use, it will help to bear certain principles in mind in relation to demonstrating the performance of your 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.

1. Evidence is crucial to successful innovation

No research method or approach will be suitable for all projects, but research and evidence are 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 reliable. **Research and evidence should be integral to the project design** and the rationale for choosing particular methods should be clearly articulated.

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 refinement, 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.

2. 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. 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 practice in comparison to alternatives is fundamental to demonstrating its success.

Projects funded by the HIF should seek to quantify and monitor relevant output and outcome variables, and clearly demonstrate the anticipated and actual differences between the innovation and standard practice. For many innovations there will be a range of 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 available, reference should be made to how the project team has built on current practice, and sought to draw on previous experience and knowledge, as opposed to attempting to develop techniques in isolation.

3. 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 an idea (Perrin: 2001, p16). Therefore, the HIF has a high tolerance for failure in relation to innovations. However, failure is only productive if lessons are learnt and influence future practice, which requires a willingness to accept and discuss failures large and small.

Learning about the reasons for underperformance can help in the design of more successful interventions in the future by providing the impetus for variation. At the very least, an understanding of an innovation's failure 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.

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

4. 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, 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).

5. ‘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.

5. 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 the HIF Team at info@humanitarianinnovation.org.

5. References

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6. 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

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- 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>].

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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].

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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>].

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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>].

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WFP - World Food Programme (2002a), 'How to plan and undertake a Self-evaluation', *Monitoring & Evaluation Guidelines* (Rome WFP - OEDE, Office of Evaluation) [available at:

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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:

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