



outcome mapping

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This highlight brief is intended to provide individuals, groups or organizations a summary of some of the most common questions asked about outcome mapping. The questions are intended to guide the reader in determining the usefulness of outcome mapping for their particular context.

FAQ #1: What is outcome mapping?

Outcome mapping (OM) is a methodology for planning and assessing development programming that is oriented towards change and social transformation. OM provides a set of tools to design and gather information on the outcomes, defined as behavioural changes, of the change process. OM helps a project or program learn about its influence on the progression of change in their direct partners, and therefore helps those in the assessment process think more systematically and pragmatically about what they are doing and to adaptively manage variations in strategies to bring about desired outcomes. OM puts people and learning at the centre of development and accepts unanticipated changes as potential for innovation.

FAQ #2: How do I know if OM is an appropriate approach for me to use?

OM can provide a set of tools that can be used stand-alone or in combination with other planning, monitoring and evaluation systems, if you want to:

- Identify individuals, groups or organizations with whom you will work directly to influence behavioural change.
- Plan and monitor behavioural change and the strategies to support those changes.
- Monitor internal practices of the project or program to remain effective.
- Create an evaluation framework to examine more precisely a particular issue.

OM is a robust methodology that can be adapted to a wide range contexts. Potential users of OM should be aware that the methodology requires skilled facilitation as well as dedicated budget and time, which could mean support from higher levels within an organization. OM also often requires a “mind shift” of personal and organizational paradigms or theories of social change.





FAQ #3: Who should participate in the outcome mapping process?

By involving boundary partners (the project or program's direct partners whose behaviours are to change), many projects have found that planning, monitoring and evaluating with OM becomes more realistic and useful for collective learning, increased ownership of interventions, and engaging mutual support for changing behaviours.

OM should be tailored to suit participation needs in planning, monitoring and evaluation; different boundary partners, strategic partners or the project team may participate at different steps of the methodology. However, being strategic about enabling participation is necessary as it can support or hinder the change process you are trying to contribute to (for example, in projects or programs operating in conflict contexts or where the boundary partners are hostile to the project / organization).

FAQ #4: Do I have to use all of the steps outlined in OM? Do I have to use OM exclusively as my M&E methodology?

No. OM is flexible in that it can be used in its totality or in parts, or it can be used in combination with other methodologies. For example, some projects have used OM to define their boundary partners, in combination with a stakeholder analysis. Other tools that have been used to complement OM include: Force Field Analysis, Most Significant Change, Transformation Attitude Interview, and different facilitation and 'discussion-creating' techniques such as Action Learning Days and advocacy initiatives.

FAQ #5: Can I use OM with a Logical Framework Analysis (LFA)?

Yes, but, there are political, methodological, and workload challenges. If the LFA is mandated by your donor agency then you most likely are contractually obligated to report against it. Experience tells us that many bilateral donors have been unwilling/unable to allow projects to completely replace the use of the LFA with the use of OM (although some have). This leaves you the choice of either: 1) using OM as your learning system and the LFA as your accountability tool; or, 2) using elements of OM to help with your data collection for your LFA (e.g., developing progress markers and using them to feed your LFA indicators).

FAQ #6: When is the best time to do OM?

There is no one best time to use OM. OM can be used prospectively, or retrospectively. It can be used as a planning or re-planning tool, at the beginning or mid-project. It can be used as a monitoring approach throughout a project or program, or as a framework for an evaluation, regardless if the project or program previously used OM or not.

FAQ #7: Why is there so much jargon in outcome mapping?

OM is full of new terminology, which may appear more outlandish when translated into other languages. Nonetheless, these terms convey the underlying concepts and theory that reflect the paradigm from which OM approaches development, social change and the role of planning, monitoring and evaluation in these processes. Understanding the fundamental concepts of OM and its particular tools first, will then allow you to use any terms that will work in your context.



For some people, OM is intuitive and simply gives a systematic process and terminology to their existing way of working. For some others, OM requires a paradigm shift in their thinking about social change and their role in it. Either way, working through the terminology, will bring meaning to the words, and more likeliness of the concepts being applied to improve the effectiveness of an intervention.

FAQ #8: Aren't Progress Markers just indicators by another name?

No. While indicators can be about behaviour changes, progress markers describe observable changes in behaviours, actions and relationships of a single boundary partner and demonstrate a progressively deepening transformation of that behavioural change. The strength of progress markers is that they are taken as a set; they tell the complex story of change, and are not simply one-off snapshots of change. Development interventions intend to support those progress markers and hope to contribute to behavioural change, but the change ultimately rests within the power and control of the boundary partner.

FAQ #9: What kind of workload should I expect if I decide to use OM?

For planning as a team, going through the first seven steps of OM usually takes three days. For monitoring, you should consider both the time to plan and to implement the monitoring system. If your monitoring is highly participatory, the amount of time it takes to create your monitoring system in a workshop is about 2-3 days. To implement the system will depend on how much you want to focus on documentation. The more focus on documentation and shared learning through participatory processes, the more time you can invest. The time put into an evaluation will depend on whether it is a self-assessment or an external evaluation.

Garnering support for OM, clarifying accountability and learning needs and therefore prioritizing the data to be collected, identifying and using already existing spaces to conduct planning, monitoring and evaluation work, clarifying who your boundary partners are, and using skilled facilitation for the OM process, will make OM work more streamlined.

FAQ #10: How much budget do I need to use OM?

The resources needed to use OM differ based on size of project, type of intervention, level of participation, monitoring and evaluation capacity of implementers, monitoring and evaluation system, and the type of data required, the level of analysis, and the uses. OM provides the tools to help plan what data gathering, analysis and use will look like, and therefore what resources will be needed.

Approximately 3% of the total project/program budget is standard to estimate an amount for monitoring and evaluation budget.

FAQ #11: Can I use OM in development work or only development research?

OM has been successfully used in both development initiatives and in development research. It has even been used as an approach for action research. It has been used in developing and developed countries around the world.



FAQ #12: How do I pitch outcome mapping to my organization and gain their support?

Some ideas for building the case for OM (be it your organization or to a donor) include:

- Show where OM can respond to information needs.
- Explain how OM data will be used for decision-making and improved program management.
- List the complementary methodologies and tools to OM that will be used.
- Demonstrate how OM can be integrated into the logical framework.
- Garner commitment from one or more people who will be responsible for championing OM.
- Identify the support mechanisms and resources necessary for using OM.
- Advocate for a focus on contribution rather than attribution.
- Help promote an environment that is receptive to honest dialogue.
- Develop a list of benefits and limitations of OM, and propose responses to limitations.

FAQ #13: Do I have to be trained in OM before I can use it?

No. Some people prefer to be trained, others have used OM after only reading the materials available or consulting with the OM virtual learning community, while others have hired an experienced OM facilitator to guide their work. There is no right or wrong way to use OM and the methodology is constantly being adapted to be useful in particular contexts.

FAQ #14: How can I learn more about OM? How can I get trained in OM?

- IDRC's Evaluation Unit: www.idrc.ca/evaluation
- Outcome Mapping Virtual Learning Community: www.outcomemapping.ca
- Through the learning community, you can find a number of regional facilitators and trainers in OM. To find them, write up the TORs for a consultancy and post it on the virtual learning community.

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