

Evidencing Need and Defining Outcomes

‘Evidencing need’ basically means being able to show or prove that what you do is needed. Inadequate evidencing of need is one of the main reasons that funding applications fail. Most funders will expect you to address the question of how you know there is a need or demand for your services. Big Lottery Fund defines need as “the term we use to describe a problem, or a situation where something needs to change to make things better.”

‘Outcomes’ are simply the things that will happen or change as a result of your work or your project. Big Lottery defines outcomes as “the changes that your project can make over time to address the need(s) you have identified.”

Evidencing Need: How do you prove demand?

It is becoming increasingly important to be able to prove that what you are doing or what you want to do is *needed*. Funders want to see their money put to good use and that generally means they want to see positive results happen as a result of their grants or funding. Being able to prove that there is a demand for your work or project is therefore vitally important.

Before you start, ask yourself:

- What are the difficulties for the people in my community?
- Why do people face these difficulties?
- What is the impact of these difficulties?

These are the things that should be emphasised to the funder. The need for your project should relate to the needs of people or communities as opposed to why you want to run the service.

Explain what you already know:

It could be that you are trying to get long-term support for an existing project or that you already have experience of work or projects within your field. Do you have waiting lists? What does your monitoring and evaluation tell you? Use this information to evidence your need.

Anecdotal evidence and letters of support:

You could provide case studies of service users you have helped. You could also include letters of support from service users and other agencies you work with who can support your application.

Consultations:

Carry out door-to-door surveys or online questionnaires, interviews or focus groups and tweak your project based on the results. This is almost like carrying out market research to prove that a need exists for the service or project you want to provide.

Community statistics and area profile:

Unemployment, health, crime and deprivation data helps. Use the internet, census data and national statistics to help find some useful facts and figures. North Tyneside Council’s datastore provides access to data and maps that the Council and other public sector organisations hold.

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Research:

As well as carrying out your own research, it could be that research already exists to prove the need for your service or project. You should reference any documents you refer to (name, date, weblink) so the grant officer can look them up for further information.

Refer to specialist strategies:

For example health, housing, crime prevention, community safety - there may be local or even national plans and strategies for these and other areas of work that can back up your evidence of need. How does your project fit into these strategies and will it help to meet any of the priorities identified?

The reasons people are in need can be because of:

- Where they live, for example living in an economically disadvantaged area
- The problems they have, for example mental or physical disabilities; being a carer, being an addict; being discriminated against; socially isolated; experiencing a difficult life at home
- The barriers they experience, for example people who become 'hard to reach' or isolated from their community because they lack self-confidence or have an illness or disability

It is up to you to convince the funders that there is a need for your work or project. Don't assume they know about your locality or a particular specialised service area. Provide evidence that is specific to the project and not to the organisation as a whole. Don't gloss over the problems - you may deal with them every day but that doesn't mean it's the norm. Spell it out, assuming they know nothing.

What the grant officer is looking for

Below is a summary of what grant officers will be looking for when they assess your application:

- Is the need for your project supported by good evidence or research?
- Have you consulted with relevant stakeholders (i.e. anyone connected to your project, whether they are beneficiaries or other service providers)? Do these stakeholders know about your project and are they supportive of it?
- Does the consultation support the need?
- Do you have a good understanding of similar work already taking place?
- Can you explain how your project relates to regional and/or national plans, and strategies, if relevant?

If you can answer 'yes' to these questions, you have a good chance of 'proving your need.'

Defining Project Aims and Outcomes

When dealing with funders, it is important that you can clearly state the overall aim of your project and identify a set of outcomes that relate to it. This way the impact of your project can be measured.

Your overall aim should, in one or two sentences, communicate the main purpose of your project and sum up the change you will make. Make it simple and straightforward and make sure it's achievable over the course of the project.

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Examples of aims:

- To deliver a range of services which will improve the quality of life of older isolated people in Killingworth
- To provide a modern community facility that will offer activities, services and community space to engage local residents in active citizenship
- To improve the financial health and wellbeing of people on low incomes by providing access to money management, advice, training, and good quality welfare rights-based advice.

Your intended **outcomes** are the specific things you want to achieve and the differences you want to make for your beneficiaries by the time the project comes to an end.

How you tackle this will depend on the funder you are applying to, but it's always useful to identify a few outcomes because these give you something to measure your project against. Also once you start to monitor these outcomes you will then be able to report your progress to trustees and other funders.

Again depending on the funder, an outcome could consist of a number of component parts, for example:

- A number (such as 10; 100; 1000): whatever it is make sure its accurate and achievable, don't pick random numbers out of the air
- A beneficiary: the description of a person or place that will be helped or provided with the service
- A benefit/change: Improved skills, increased confidence, improved physical wellbeing
- An activity: Workshop, training, social activity
- A timescale: For example, In six months, in the first year, by the end of the project

So examples of outcomes using the above guide might look like this:

25 elderly people will improve their physical and mental health by taking part in a series of intergenerational activities over a six month period

200 residents feel less isolated and report an improved sense of wellbeing through engagement in new community activities by the end of the project

Tips on writing outcomes

- It's important when defining your outcomes to make sure the numbers and timescales are realistic.
- As a measure, divide the total people by the number of weeks the project will last. This will give you an indication of the number of people per week you will need to reach.
- Use words such as 'improved', 'decreased', 'reduced,' 'better', 'healthier' and 'enhanced' to describe the change or difference the project will make.
- Don't be too concerned about creating lots of outcomes, sometimes one or two can be enough (for example, Big Lottery ask for up to four).

For further advice contact VODA's Development Team on 0191 643 2636 or email development@voda.org.uk

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