

MANAGING TO OUTCOMES
A Guide to Developing an Outcomes Focus



PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

‘Outcomes’ are the things that change for people because of an activity or action. When we measure outcomes rather than outputs, we are able to see the real and tangible difference that we are making to people’s lives.

This guide can help you shift your focus to outcomes so that you can tell the story of the real difference your activities are making to the lives of the people you work with, and what the lasting impact will be. Having clarity around the outcomes you are trying to achieve, and then measuring whether or not you are achieving those outcomes, will help you prove that what you are doing works, and help you test, learn and iterate to make sure services are effective.

Adopting an outcomes-focused approach can engage and refocus an agency or NGO - it can be energising to see that the work you are doing is creating meaningful impact for people in need.

This guide is designed to support organisations to adopt an outcomes-focused approach. The guide has four main sections that will help you to build your capacity regardless of what stage your organisation is at:



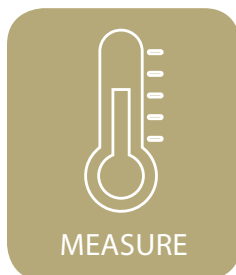
1. Understand what an outcomes-focused approach is

- An introduction to an outcomes-focused approach
- Why to focus on outcomes and how an outcomes-focused approach works in practice



2. Define the outcomes your organisation is seeking to achieve

- How to develop your own logic model to deliver outcomes
- The practical difference between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes



3. Measure whether or not you are achieving outcomes

- Identifying what you can measure to tell you about change
- Collecting data and generating evidence to measure the impact you are having



4. Use the information you collect to prove and improve what you do

- Using data and evidence to embed continuous improvement
- Identifying when to revisit and adjust your logic model and activities

KEY TERMS

Term	Descriptions
Activity	The actions you take to respond to an identified social issue. Activities might include delivery of one or more programs or services or funding others to deliver programs or services.
Data	Information that has been gathered about indicators that, when analysed, shows whether progress is being made on a certain condition or circumstance.
Evidence	Information (including analysed data) that helps to prove a fact and inform decision-making.
Impact	The longer term social, economic, cultural and/or environmental outcomes (effects or consequences) of an activity.
Indicators	Measurable markers that show whether progress is being made on a certain condition or circumstance. Different indicators are needed to determine how much progress has been made toward a particular output, outcome or impact.
Inputs	Resources that are used by an activity. Examples are money, staff, time, facilities, equipment, etc.
Logic model	<p>A visual representation of the logic of how an activity will work to effect change. The model identifies the intended causal links between activities, short-term outcomes, intermediate outcomes and long-term outcomes. Outcomes may be positive, negative or neutral; intended or unintended. There is no one way to represent a logic model – the test is whether it is a logical representation of the activity's causal links.</p> <p>This is also referred to as: program logic, program theory, theory of change, causal model, outcomes hierarchy, results chain, and intervention logic.</p>
Outcomes	<p>The changes that occur for individuals, groups, families, organisations, systems, or communities during or after an activity. Changes can include attitudes, values, behaviours or conditions.</p> <p>Changes can be short-term, medium or long-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term outcomes – the most direct result of an activity, typically not ends in themselves, but necessary steps toward desired ends (medium or long-term outcomes) • Medium-term outcomes – link an activity's short-term outcomes to long-term outcomes; they necessarily precede other outcomes • Long-term outcomes (sometimes called ultimate outcomes or impact) – result from achieving short-term and medium-term outcomes, often beyond the timeframe of an activity.
Outcomes-focused approach	The broad process of developing a theory of how change happens because of activities and gathering data to prove or disprove the theory of change and learn what works to inform better decision making. This is also referred to as: outcomes management or managing to outcomes.
Outcomes-focused performance management	An approach to performance management that emphasises the use of outcomes data to inform strategic planning and decision making.
Outcomes measurement	The process of measuring if, and how much, activities lead to certain outcomes
Outputs	The direct deliverables of your activities such as the number of people served, or the number of activities/services carried out.

Some of these terms may have an alternative meaning across government agencies and NGOs for different purposes. This document uses commonly used terms and common definitions for those terms.

1. UNDERSTAND THE BASICS



1.1 What are outcomes?

In human services, outcomes are the positive changes that happen as a consequence of the program, service or activity being delivered. These changes occur for individuals, groups, families, organisations, systems, or communities during or after an activity. Changes can include attitudes, values, behaviours or conditions.

Outcomes can be short, medium or long-term:

- short-term outcomes are the most direct result of an intervention
- medium-term outcomes link an intervention’s short-term outcomes to long-term outcomes
- long-term outcomes are the result of achieving the short and medium-term outcomes, they usually occur beyond the timeframe of the activity.

Outcomes are different from outputs. Outputs are the things that happen due to a program or activity (for example, a child gets a pair of glasses), and outcomes tell us about how things changed for the person (for example, the child has improved vision, the child becomes more engaged at school, the child’s self-confidence increases).

Some simple examples of relationships are depicted overpage.



Stock photo.

From a frontline worker:

“I have been working with kids for 20 years. I watch them grow and change every day because of what we do here and I intuitively know what works best for them. Talking about outcomes means my workmates and the government now want to hear about the real work I’m doing – not just the numbers of kids that come through the door”

1. UNDERSTAND THE BASICS CONTINUED

Relationship between activities and outcomes



1. UNDERSTAND THE BASICS CONTINUED



1.2 Why focus on outcomes?

Government agencies and NGOs are adopting an outcomes-focused approach for a number of reasons:

- **It leads to greater impact** – an outcomes-focused approach encourages agencies and NGOs to be clear about the impact they want to have, and then test, learn and iterate to make sure services are effective. This test, learn and iterate process can improve service design and delivery, foster collaboration to achieve shared goals, and drive innovation, that ultimately leads to better outcomes.
- **It is good for the people we serve** – an outcomes-focused approach puts people’s needs at the centre of design and delivery. When the focus is on the individual, service providers can work with individuals to empower them to be agents of change for themselves, their families and their communities.
- **It supports innovation** – by building evidence about what works and why, agencies and NGOs can find new ways of addressing challenging problems. Designing programs that can be tailored to the individual that also leverage the other services that the individual is accessing, to address their unique range of needs and aspirations, based on evidence of what works, can lead to new approaches.
- **It engages and refocuses the agency or NGO** - it can be energising to see that the work you are doing is creating meaningful impact for people in need. Having greater clarity of the change that your work leads to can inspire everyone in an agency or NGO, and even the beneficiaries themselves, to engage in the work and try, test and iterate to find the best ways to create that meaningful impact.
- **It provides greater transparency for funders** - government commissioning agencies and other philanthropic funders prefer to fund programs that can demonstrate what they are doing works and is creating meaningful and lasting impact. An outcomes-focused approach provides better information to all parties, so funders can also work with NGOs to make programs more effective. NGOs that are better able to demonstrate their value can unlock new funding opportunities.
- **It supports collaboration** - individual needs often span many social issues. Agencies and NGOs can achieve better outcomes if they are aware of all of the outcomes an individual wants to achieve and then designing services to address all the needs of an individual, or by partnering with agencies and/or organisations to deliver holistic solutions.



April working at [Marnin Studio](#), an arts and therapeutic studio for Indigenous women operating in Fitzroy Crossing, WA that works to empower Indigenous women to become leaders and change agents in their community.

1. UNDERSTAND THE BASICS CONTINUED



1.3 What does it mean to have an outcomes-focused approach?

Having an outcomes-focused approach means orienting your agency or NGO to achieve outcomes. The first step is understanding what outcomes your agency or organisation is trying to achieve – to answer “Why are we doing this?”.

Secondly, you need to focus on the people you deliver services to, and the changes you want to effect for those people – not just the programs you deliver or the terms of your contracts. This means developing and delivering activities in line with the outcomes your agency or NGO wants for people.

To achieve those outcomes, you must draw on the existing evidence of which outcomes have helped address the same issues you are trying to address elsewhere or at a different time. You then rigorously measure your performance against those outcomes, and manage your agency or NGO aligned to those outcomes and measures.

Agencies and NGOs that adopt an outcomes-focused approach will have the right information about what is working, and will use this information to improve program design and delivery.

Practical information on how to adopt an outcomes-focused approach is provided in [section 4](#).



Stock photo.

Example scenario:

Anita is managing a women’s refuge. Her team speaks to the women who use the refuge and decide that the outcome they should be trying to achieve is that more women permanently leave situations where they are victims of violence.

Taking an outcomes-focused approach, the refuge chooses to not put all of its efforts into providing temporary refuge but instead puts some resources into operating a txt support service that supports women as they permanently leave situations of violence.

The women’s refuge’s txt support service allows Anita to stay in touch with women beyond the date when they leave the refuge. They are able to gather data to see whether or not their service has helped women to permanently leave situations where they are victims of violence.

1. UNDERSTAND THE BASICS CONTINUED



1.4 The challenges to adopting an outcomes-focused approach

1.4.1 Challenges around understanding its value

For many agencies or NGOs, adopting an outcomes-focused approach means a real shift in focus. Some are concerned that it means committing to solving the whole problem for a person, that it will cost significant money to implement and that the information gathered will be used against them to adjust funding. Some believe an outcomes-focused approach is not core business, it is just a “nice to have”, or that the level of interest will fade.

Governments see value in the approach as a way to more effectively and efficiently deliver social change and are encouraging agencies and NGOs to support this effort. The definition and measurement of outcomes is being embedded in many aspects of government policy and in procurement, many agencies and NGOs have seen or even tendered for human services that have required the identification and measurement of outcomes. Social impact bonds are an example of this.

The following table compares what an outcomes-focused approach is, and what it isn't.

What it is	What it isn't
An opportunity to make sure that the work you do is effectively contributing to long-term change for the people agencies and NGOs work with.	Signing up for more work by having to solve the whole problem. Your program might only contribute to one part of the change journey for an individual. An outcomes-focused approach lets you see how your work contributes to that long-term change, and whether it is doing it effectively.
An approach that means agencies and NGOs have the right information to make better decisions to improve program delivery in a timely manner.	An obligation to collect information for the purposes of reporting.
An opportunity for government and philanthropic funders to support innovation, growth and development within agencies and NGOs.	An opportunity for government and philanthropic funders to cut funding to ineffective agencies and NGOs.
An invitation to engage stakeholders and gather evidence to understand the changes that individuals want, and the changes that are likely to lead to impact for individuals.	An alternative to measuring activities and outputs. Measurement of these things should continue
A shift that will require a reallocation of resources and an investment in capacity building.	A shift that needs to be expensive. The shift is a re-positioning, rather than something that requires additional resources or people.

1. UNDERSTAND THE BASICS CONTINUED



1.4.2 Challenges around realising that value

A focus on outcomes can lead to meaningful positive change for individuals. This guide is intended to support agencies and NGOs to focus on outcomes, however it is worth noting:

- To achieve maximum impact, it is not enough to just identify the immediate outcomes your activities currently achieve. You should identify all the outcomes that need to be achieved for an individual to experience the long-term impact that they want. This may include outcomes that you did not previously consider to be within your area of responsibility. While it can be difficult to conceptualise how the activities of an agency or NGO contribute to broader changes, this exercise is important because:
 - it can help an agency or NGO to design services that reflect the reality that the individual is operating in (i.e. their broader ecosystem), and the long-term needs and aspirations of that individual to make sure those services achieve better impact; and
 - it enables an agency or NGO to leverage other services to help individuals achieve the outcomes they want.
- Agencies and NGOs need to be careful that their orientation towards outcomes does not result in finding ways of achieving outcomes that are not in the best interest of individuals. These are called 'perverse outcomes' and might include, for example, only working with individuals who are likely to demonstrate change quickly.

Where are you up to?

Now you should have a basic understanding of what outcomes are. You can use the next sections of this guide to better understand the process involved in defining how your activities will lead to outcomes, and how you can collect data and use that data to learn, and improve what you do.



The Young Doctor project in action, run by [Malpa](#), an Aboriginal controlled organisation that promotes health and well-being among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people and communities.

2. DEFINE HOW YOU ARE CREATING CHANGE



Kids learning bike maintenance through BikeRescue, an outreach program run by Dismantle, an organisation that uses hands-on learning to facilitate engagement, mentoring and transitions to further education and employment.

Your agency or organisation needs to be clear about what it is trying to achieve. Specifically, what are the changes, (i.e. the outcomes) that you want for the people you work with, and how will your activities lead to that change?

A logic model is one tool that can help to clearly tell the story of how your activity works. Described most simply, the logic model is a statement of intended consequence (i.e. if we do these things, then we will achieve these things). For example, if we provide services to older people in their homes, then we will prevent premature or unnecessary residential care. If we provide housing services to homeless people, then we will reduce homelessness.

Other tools you can use include Results Based Accountability, Outcome Funding Framework, Targeting Outcomes of Programs, Balanced Scorecard, Scales and Ladders, Results Mapping, Program Results Story. References to resources that can help you understand more about these tools are included in [Section 7](#). For the purposes of this guide we will focus on logic models because they help you identify the outcomes that can be achieved as a result of the activities you do.

A logic model is a common way of defining, and visually representing, the outcomes that will happen as a consequence of your activities. The model identifies the intended causal links between the activities and the short, medium and long-term outcomes. The various elements, and the causal links shown between them, articulate your theory of how change will happen. You should gather evidence by measuring and analysing data to test that your theory works in practice, and what, if anything, needs to change to achieve the desired impact.

A logic model can support evidence-based decision-making about the best way to address an issue. It can be used to describe the theory of how change will happen for one program, a group of programs, or an entire agency or NGO. Logic models can also be used to represent your theory of how to respond to a particular issue, or how to support a particular cohort.

There is no 'one way' to represent a logic model – the test is whether it is a logical representation of the program's causal links.



Each of the steps of the logic model chain are introduced below. We will use the example of a parenting program to demonstrate how each step could be applied to a program.

You can use these headings to build a logic model for your own programs.

2. DEFINE HOW YOU ARE CREATING CHANGE CONTINUED



What is the social issue you are responding to?
e.g. X% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in NSW are not school-ready at age 5

2.1 Define the issue

What is the social issue you are responding to?

It is important to clearly define the issue you are trying to address even if you have been working on the issue for many years.

You should research the issue:

- how it has been dealt with successfully elsewhere, including the use of published, peer reviewed literature
- how your agency or organisation's activities have operated in the past, and what changes have been happening as a consequence
- understand the people your activities serve and what their goals and aspirations are that your activities may be able to support them with.

If your activities are designed to achieve the outcomes people really want, then those people will be more invested in making change happen.

A valuable source of information about what the issue is, and how that issue effects people's lives, are the people who are experiencing the issue. Stakeholder consultation is important to gain valuable insights into what the real problem is that you are trying to solve. For example, interviewing a person who is homeless might reveal that the real issue for that person is not a lack of finances, but rather mental health issues.

Below are four activities that can help you gather information about the issue you are trying to address.

NGOs, check your constitution

Most NGOs will have identified the stakeholder group and the broad issue the organisation is trying to solve in the objects section of its constitution. Reviewing the objects can be a useful starting point before engaging in stakeholder consultation. If the objects do not enable the organisation to address the real issue, in the best way possible, the organisation should consider amending its constitution.



BackTrack provides disadvantaged youth in regional communities the support, life skills and experience to pursue positive life pathways.

2. DEFINE HOW YOU ARE CREATING CHANGE CONTINUED



Activity	How to do it
Research what has worked in other places to address the issue	Most issues that human services seek to address, have been addressed in the past by your agency or NGO or elsewhere. Gathering evidence of what has worked and, importantly, what has not worked, can help to refine your thinking about how change is likely to happen as a consequence of a program.
Research outcomes used by similar programs	The outcomes-focused approach is being adopted throughout Australia and overseas. Many governments and NGOs are sharing their approaches online and there are a wide range of resources available that can link you to these case studies. You might find other programs that are similar to yours that have identified outcomes that can inform your decision-making.
Talk to your program staff	Your program staff may have been observing the issue your program addresses, and the changes for many years. They will likely have views on what clients want and need, and valuable insights about how they believe change happens for clients in the program.
Hold a group meeting or workshop with current and former clients, or people who have the need that the program is trying to address	<p>The best source of information about the issue you are addressing, and the changes you should be trying to achieve for people are the people themselves. You should try to understand from stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more about the issue and how it affects them and the people close to them • what their needs and aspirations are • how change has happened for them in the past (which might indicate how change will happen in the future). <p>Focus groups could be informal two-hour meetings with fewer than 15 participants. Participants could be asked questions such as “what has changed in your life because of the program?”, “what did you like or not like about the program?”</p>



A school visit as part of the [SVA Bright Spots Schools Connection](#), a network of high-performing school leaders working in low socio-economic areas, convened by SVA to connect, support and advance the work of these schools to improve educational outcomes for their students.

Action: To understand your issue better, speak to stakeholders and program staff.

You can begin to build your logic model by writing a concise (fewer than three sentences) description of the issue your program is trying to achieve.

2. DEFINE HOW YOU ARE CREATING CHANGE CONTINUED



2.2 Define the participants

Who are the people upon whom you want to have an effect?

You should be able to clearly identify who your participants are. This includes all those who will benefit from any strategies or activities, including people with a need or aspiration, their family members or carers, government or other organisations you may work with to address the issue.

You might ask the question, where do we draw the line? Your program arguably touches so many people's lives; you should only include stakeholders who will be effected by the program in a material way.

Who are the people upon whom you want to have an effect? Other stakeholders?

e.g. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds aged under 5 in NSW

Action: List all the material stakeholder groups. Be specific and include the number of participants and the geographical area that those participants are in.



2.3 Gather evidence

What does the evidence say is the best way to respond to the social issue?

You can use evidence gathered about the issue and about what others have found to work when addressing your issue. This evidence can help to inform initial program design or refinement of an approach. It can be used in consultation with participants and inform co-design activities. Evidence can include published research or systematic reviews of available literature.

You can also gather evidence to better understand the broader issue. For example, evidence can help you to understand the many interconnected factors that lead to a child being school-ready.

Do not get stuck at this point if you cannot find very strong evidence – the best available evidence is still useful and later on, it will be supported by evidence you create through measuring your own activities.

What does the evidence say is the best way to respond to the social issue?

e.g.

- Evidence about childhood development goals
- Evidence about attachment theory

Action: Record the evidence you are relying on. Which evidence suggests that your activity is a useful response to the issue? Is there any evidence that suggests otherwise? Include specific sources.

2. DEFINE HOW YOU ARE CREATING CHANGE CONTINUED



2.4 Describe the activities

What will you do with the participants?
 What activities or services will you provide?

Activities are the actions you take to respond to the identified social issue. For example, activities might include running an early child care centre, providing housing assistance or offering counselling for victims of crime.

A logic model can articulate the change that you want to see for just one activity or for a grouping of activities. You can choose how broad or narrow you want to go depending on the level at which you want to be able to observe change. For example, running a school is an overarching activity that consists of many smaller activities, and a reading recovery program is a narrower activity.

Alternatively, you can use a logic model to represent your theory of how change can occur for a particular issue. In that case, you could include all the activities that a range of agencies and NGOs are delivering to address that issue. For example, if you used a logic model to represent how change can occur when addressing the issue of childhood obesity, you might include as activities:

- child education and exercise
- diagnosis, meal planning, surgery
- parenting programs.

At this point, it is also important to record the inputs you will use to deliver the activity. Inputs are defined as resources that are used by an activity such as money, staff, time, facilities and equipment.

What activities/services will you provide?
 e.g. Parenting course teaching parents how to discipline and encourage children, understand the needs of their children, and be educators

Action: List all the activities, and the relevant inputs, you want in your logic model.



STREAT is a social enterprise helping homeless youth have a stable self, stable job and stable home through training and work experience.

2. DEFINE HOW YOU ARE CREATING CHANGE CONTINUED



2.5 Identify the outputs

What will happen to people who do those activities?

Outputs are the things that happen when you run an activity, but not necessarily changes for people. For example, 20,000 children attended four or more after-school care sessions, 38,000 arthroplasty of knee procedures were performed, 10,000 offenders attended facilitated offender behaviour change programs.

When describing outputs, you do not need to describe the change you hope to see as a consequence of the activity. Those changes are the outcomes.

What will happen to the participants through doing those activities?

e.g. 100 parents attend 10 sessions of the parenting course over a three month period

Action: List all of the outputs that will happen because of the activity within a prescribed timeframe (usually a year).



The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) works for an Australia where Indigenous children finish high school at the same rate as all Australian students.

2. DEFINE HOW YOU ARE CREATING CHANGE CONTINUED



What will be the short-term changes in the participants' lives?

e.g.

- Parents feel more confident in their parenting skills
- Parents report greater involvement in their child's development

What will be the medium-term changes in the participants' lives?

e.g.

- More children attend early childhood education
- More children achieve development goals
- Family relationships are strengthened

What will be the long-term changes in the participants' lives?

e.g.

- More children are school ready
- Children have a stronger support network
- Children are more resilient

2.6 Identify the outcomes

The hard work begins when it comes to articulating the consequences of what you do - the changes that happen for people. Remember that the changes that happen because of your activities are the outcomes. They are the short, medium and long-term changes in the people's lives.

There are four general principles to bear in mind when identifying outcomes:

1. **Engage your staff and beneficiaries** either in the initial identification of outcomes, or while testing or refining them.
2. **Consequences don't happen all at once.** The immediate consequences may be termed the 'outputs' or 'direct deliverables' of the program; these are generally what workers are directly involved in securing. The short, medium and longer-term consequences can be termed 'outcomes'.
3. **Consequences can be positive or negative, or both.** For example, an unemployed young person supported to attend work-readiness training might experience greater levels of stress or anxiety. Being open to identifying both positive and negative consequences is crucial to ensuring the integrity of the resulting program logic statement.
4. **Be exhaustive.** It is important to identify as many consequences that arise from the program as possible, including those which are indirect or seemingly tangential. This is because the logic model is distilled from this 'universe' of consequences, so taking a comprehensive approach is most likely to yield a sound logic statement that does not overlook anything. An exhaustive list of outcomes will contemplate outcomes for all stakeholders. Once you have created an exhaustive list, you can identify the core outcomes, without which your participants will not achieve long-term impact. Those core outcomes are your priority outcomes.

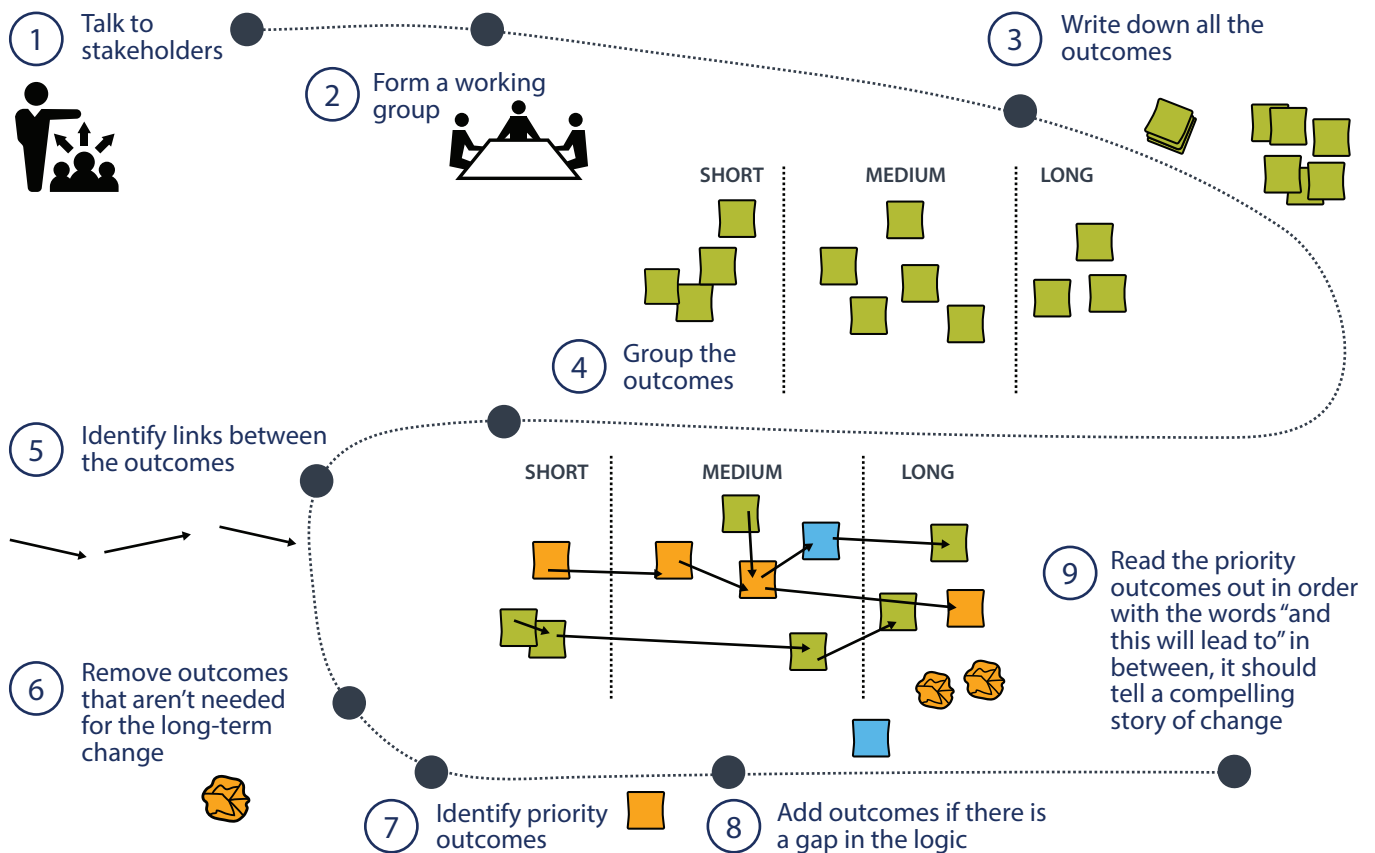
Identifying the outcomes for a program is one of the most important, and in some ways, one of the most challenging parts of adopting an outcomes-focused approach. Remember:

- while challenging, identifying your outcomes is also rewarding. It can energize and engage employees once they can see that the work they are doing is leading to tangible change for the people they are working for
- you don't have to get it right the first time. Understanding change is an iterative process and as you gather information about what works, you can evolve your outcomes.

Action: With these four principles in mind, we suggest holding a logic model workshop to identify, group and order your outcomes. See the page below for a simple logic model workshop guide.

2. DEFINE HOW YOU ARE CREATING CHANGE CONTINUED

Simple Logic Model workshop guide:



Step One

Talk to stakeholders and program staff to understand the issue and what changes for people because of your activities (i.e. what your outcomes are)

Step Two

Form a working group with the people who have spoken to stakeholders

Step Three

Write down all the outcomes that might happen because of your activity. Draw on what staff or stakeholders told you and evidence from activities run elsewhere. Include the long-term changes you hope to see for people as a consequence of your work. The outcomes should be as specific as possible as they will form the basis of what you will measure. Outcomes might start with words like improve, decrease, develop, expand or increase

Step Four

Arrange all the post-it notes on a big table or wall in the order that they happen for people. Try to identify which of the outcomes are short-term outcomes, which are medium-term outcomes, and which are long-term outcomes. You can move the post-it notes so that they are grouped into short, medium and long-term clusters

Step Five

Try to draw links between the changes, indicating when one change leads to another. Use a pen, draw arrows, challenge the logic – this stage of the process does not have to be orderly or pretty

Step Six

You can remove the outcomes that are not leading to any longer-term change for individuals

Step Seven

Take a step back and observe the story as a whole. See if you can identify the really vital outcomes, without which participants in the program will not be able to achieve meaningful change. These are your priority outcomes - they are the ones you should measure

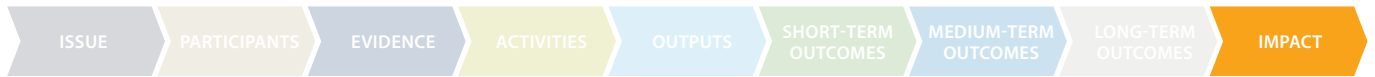
Step Eight

If there is a gap in the logic between the changes that will happen as a consequence of your program, and one or more of the long-term outcomes you hope to see for people, you can add outcomes to describe the changes that you think are needed to get someone to bridge that gap. Other services might achieve those outcomes

Step Nine

Finally, if you read the priority outcomes out in order with the words "and this will lead to" in between, it should tell a compelling story of change

2. DEFINE HOW YOU ARE CREATING CHANGE CONTINUED



2.7 Define the impact

What will it look like when the social issue has been addressed?

What is the long-term change you want to see happen for people? The impact is often the inverse of the issue you are trying to address, but might be informed by the type of change that stakeholders say they want to achieve.

What will it look like when the social issue has been addressed?

- e.g.
- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have greater ability to learn, contribute and achieve

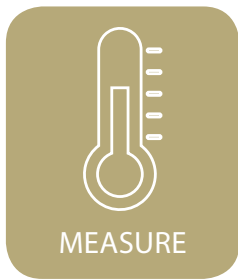
Activity: Write down the impact your program hopes to achieve.

Challenge: Now that you have defined your impact, review your logic model. Write down all of the components of the logic model in one place, under the headings shown in the logic model template below. Work backwards from your impact and challenge yourselves by considering whether you could deliver your activities differently, or deliver different activities, to achieve your impact more effectively.

Below is a logic model template including an example scenario for a parenting program targeting disadvantaged families:

"CONSEQUENCES"								
ISSUE	PARTICIPANTS	EVIDENCE	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES	IMPACT
What is the social issue you are responding to?	Who are the people upon whom you want to have an effect? Other stakeholders?	What does the evidence say is the best way to respond to the social issue?	What will you do with the participants? – What activities/ services will you provide?	What will happen to the participants through doing those activities?	What will be the short-term changes in the participants' lives?	What will be the medium-term changes in the participants' lives?	What will be the long-term changes in the participants' lives?	What will it look like when the social issue has been addressed?
Example								
X% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in NSW are not school-ready at age 5	Children from disadvantaged backgrounds aged under 5 in NSW	Evidence about childhood development goals Evidence about attachment theory	Parenting course teaching parents how to discipline and encourage children, understand the needs of their children, and be educators	100 Parents attend 10 sessions of the parenting course over a three month period	Parents feel more confident in their parenting skills Parents report greater involvement in their child's development	More children attend early childhood education More children achieve development goals Family relationships are strengthened	More children are school ready Children have a stronger support network Children are more resilient	Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have greater ability to learn, contribute and achieve

3. MEASURE OUTCOMES



This section covers how to collect data to test whether your activities are creating the change you outlined in your logic model.

3.1 Deciding what data to collect

The next step is to agree how progress towards each outcome will be assessed. The priority outcomes from the logic model need to be translated into measurable elements that can be monitored. You can do this by identifying a set of indicators that will provide data about progress towards the outcome. The selected indicators should have a clear linkage to the desired outcomes, be validated and practical. This data should guide decision-making and inform service delivery (and if it isn't, you can review the indicators and collect different information).

3.1.1 What are indicators?

The outcomes are the changes your program hopes to achieve. To observe whether or not those changes have happened, you need to use indicators. Indicators are the clues that suggest something has, or is going to happen. Think of the petrol gauge on a car. If the petrol gauge is on full, it is a strong suggestion that the petrol tank is full. We use the indicator (gauge), without having to look inside the petrol tank.

When we talk about indicators, we include things that are highly suggestive that a change has happened or will happen (e.g. an indicator that a person is satisfied with a service is that they say they would recommend the service to a friend) and facts that demonstrate that a change has happened (e.g. an indicator that a person is job-ready is that they have been employed for three months). When developing indicators for a program, the indicators should almost always begin with “words such as “The number of . . .” or “The percentage of . . .”

One or more useful indicators need to be identified for each of the priority outcomes in a logic model. The data collected on those indicators will help show whether change has happened.

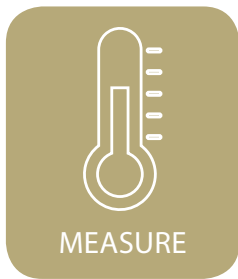
Various governments, peak bodies and research institutes have developed libraries of indicators that include example indicators to draw on. A particularly relevant library is the NSW Department of Finance, Services and Innovation's publicly available Library of Primary Indicators. The indicators in the Library:

- satisfy the best-practice criteria for what makes a good indicator
- are common in human services, so data gathered against those indicators can be compared
- are evidence-based, drawing on international indicator banks.

The library maps to the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework and includes the following types of indicators:

- Lead indicators, which are indicators of early-stage outcomes suggesting that a program is on track to achieve its impact;
- Lag indicators, which are indicators of late-stage outcomes suggesting that a program is closer to achieving its impact; and
- Shadow indicators, which are indicators that an outcome is being achieved in a domain in which you do not normally operate (perhaps as a consequence of a different provider or program delivering services in that domain), but which contributes to the longer-term impact your program hopes to achieve.

3. MEASURE OUTCOMES CONTINUED



3.1.2 Considerations when identifying indicators

When identifying indicators, there are a few considerations you should keep in mind:

- The primary focus of any measurement should be learning for the sake of improving. Keeping this in mind can help you to measure the right things so that you can learn what works and improve the effectiveness of your program
- Be practical, there is no need to do everything. To make the job easier, you can:
 - start with just one program or geography
 - begin by measuring the priority outcomes
 - draw on data you are already collecting
 - use the Library of Primary Indicators to find relevant indicators
 - utilise the extensive online resources on measuring outcomes
- Keep in mind the data you already collect, the data collection methods that are available to you (see [Section 3.2](#) below) and any budget or time constraints you might have
- Select indicators that are accurate, rigorous and practical. Think about validity, reliability, timing, resourcing, credibility and whether it will be observable.

Criteria	Things to think about
Validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the indicator enable one to know about the outcome? • Does it specifically relate to the expected result or condition?
Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the indicator defined in the same way over time? • Will it reliably return the same result if measured in the same way?
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What measurement timing is required for intended uses? • Will data be available?
Resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is data on the indicator currently being collected? • How can it be collected at minimal cost?
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the indicator meet the information needs of intended users or stakeholders?
Observable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is quantification possible, where required by intended users?

Source: Horsch, 2005, cited in Quillam & Wilson (2011); Olmos-Gallo & DeRoche, 2010; Muir & Bennet, 2014; Campbell, 2002; DHHS, 2016

3.2 Data collection tools

Once outcomes and indicators have been defined, the methods for collecting data need to be developed. Outcomes data can be collected through many different methods (e.g. surveys and questionnaires, structured and semi-structured interviews, and tailored client assessment tools).

The best way to develop a complete assessment of outcomes is to use a mix of approaches to draw on multiple sources of data. The table below can be used to think about which measurement tools might suit a particular program.

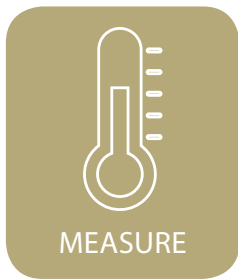
Technology solutions can assist in the timely collection and analysis of data.

3. MEASURE OUTCOMES CONTINUED

Method	Overview	Key considerations
Surveys & questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tools for eliciting empirical and perception-based data from clients, their families, service providers or other stakeholders Completed by the respondent themselves through a series of closed questions such as changes in their health or wellbeing Surveys and questionnaires can be online, paper-based or on a tablet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys and questionnaires enable the standardised collection of data from large samples, in order to build a quantitative view Risks include creating a data collection burden on respondents, or negatively impacting client-worker relationships, both of which can undermine outcomes
Structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structured interviews collect perception-based data that are administered by service provider staff, such as a case manager or practitioner – the staff member reads out the questions in a consistent way and records responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administering structured interviews can make it difficult for staff to build the rapport and trust with respondents that is essential to delivering quality services and achieving outcomes. This is a particular risk if interviews are long, or involve collecting sensitive information Structured interviews are less effective than semi-structured interviews (see below) for capturing qualitative data that can help give a fuller picture of the respondent’s situation and what is changing in their life
Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Semi-structured interviews are designed around key themes or areas of inquiry, with suggested lists of targeted and follow-up questions, that staff can use to collect priority outcomes data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The qualitative data that can be collected through semi-structured interviews can provide richer detail about what outcomes have been achieved, and deeper understanding about how and why outcomes have or have not been achieved Semi-structured interviews require specific skills to effectively probe, clarify answers and guide the respondent, while maintaining a conversational flow and building rapport Data from semi-structured interviews can be harder to access, share, compare and report on than structured survey or interview data; it can also be more expensive
Client assessment tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Client assessment tools capture staff’s professional perspective and assessment of outcomes (see the example in Box 2). They also draw on data collected through structured or semi-structured interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrates data collection with service delivery functions, which can reduce the burden of data collection However, client assessment tools emphasise the professional perspective of staff – triangulating with surveys or interviews that capture the respondent’s perspective on what is changing for them may be important

Source: Tilbury, 2006 & 2007; ARACY, 2009; Gyateng et al, 2013; NHS, 2017b.

3. MEASURE OUTCOMES CONTINUED



3.3 Collating the data

It is important to record how data will be collected and stored. Data should then be compiled in one central repository so that it can be analysed and used. Below is a simple table that can help with this record-keeping.

Priority outcome	Indicator	Questions to ask to get information about the indicator	Person you can ask the question of	Data source	Comparable data source (useful for later comparison against)	Frequency with which you will gather the data	How data will be stored
Include examples							

All new data collection systems should be pilot tested. Treat any data collected in the first round of data collection with caution while you iron out any glitches with your collection methods. Remember also that the process is iterative and your agency and NGO will learn what works best for data collection and which things they want to measure most.

Example outcomes, indicators and data sources

Example: Out of home care

Outcome	Indicator	Data source
Child Safety		
Children have improved physical wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and percent of children with serious health problems at follow-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency records, trained observer ratings
Children do not experience abuse and neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and percent of children and young people in OOHC reported at risk of significant harm (ROSH) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency records, trained observer ratings, client survey
Children are safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and percent of children and young people in OOHC reported at ROSH Number and percent of children and young people re-reported at ROSH within a 12 month period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency records, trained observer ratings, client survey
Child development		
Children develop physically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and percent of children who met development milestones, normal growth curves and height/weight expectations at time of follow-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency records, trained observer ratings
Children develop socially	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and percent of children who displayed “age-appropriate social skills” at time of follow-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trained observer ratings, client survey
Children develop academically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and percent of school-age children who were progressing satisfactorily in school at time of follow-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency records, client survey

Adapted from *The Urban Institute: Key Steps in Outcome Management*

4. LEARN SO YOU CAN IMPROVE WHAT YOU DO



This section covers how you can:

- use the data to prove or disprove your theory of how change happens (logic model) and improve your activities based on what you learn
- adopt a learning culture
- adopt an outcomes-focused approach so that your agency or NGO is focused on achieving better outcomes.

Measuring the things that matter most is only part of the story; real change comes through building a culture that understands how to use the data to manage to outcomes.

4.1 Getting the most out of your outcomes-focused approach

How do you get the most out of your outcomes-focused approach to learn and improve?

It is vital to review the results of your outcomes measurement regularly to see whether things are working as you thought they would. This will help you ensure you achieve your intended impact.

Is the data confirming that you are achieving your intended outcomes, or is it perhaps showing that you are having mixed results in achieving your outcomes? Is the data showing that you are realising outcomes that you did not expect? Activities often don't happen the way you expect them to.

A useful way to review the data is to review in line with the logic model, from left (issue) to right (impact) as demonstrated in [Section 2](#). Some helpful questions to ask are:

Issue: have you understood the issue appropriately?

- Is the issue you identified impacting on individuals in the way you thought it would?
- Are there other issues individuals are struggling with that need to be addressed first? Are those issues something you can address or work with a partner to address?

Stakeholders: are you reaching the appropriate people?

- Are you reaching as many people as you expected? Is there something you can do to get the word out more or to increase referrals?
- Are you reaching the types of people you expected? Is there something you can do to better reach your target group?

Activities: are you delivering activities appropriately?

- Are you delivering your activities in a way that resonates? Is the format appropriate? Is the location appropriate?
- Are you doing the right mix of activities? Are there certain activities that are more popular or impactful than others? Are there others you might want to stop doing?

Outcomes: are you achieving the outcomes you intended?

- Are you achieving the outcomes you intended? If you are having mixed results with outcomes, look for the cohorts, geographies, or activities where you are doing well. What is it that is resulting in better outcomes? Are there particular characteristics or conditions that lend themselves more readily to better outcomes? Is it something about the way you are delivering activities in that geography, and is that something that you could replicate in areas where you might not be doing as well? Equally, it can be helpful to ask questions about the areas where you are not doing well. What is it about those areas that are not working well?
- Are you also hearing that you are achieving outcomes that aren't in your logic model, whether positive or negative? If so, integrate these outcomes into your logic model and data collection to start tracking them. What can you do to encourage more of the positive outcomes and prevent the negative outcomes?

Try modifying your activities based on these questions and see if your outcomes improve. To determine how best to modify your activities, you might also want to speak with your stakeholders and/or review the evidence.

If your modifications result in better outcomes, continue that new way of doing things. If not, ask these questions again and see what else might work. By regularly reviewing the data and making modifications to your activities, logic model, and data collection, you can iterate your way into a 'proven' logic model and service delivery model that achieves your intended impact.

4. LEARN SO YOU CAN IMPROVE WHAT YOU DO CONTINUED



4.2 How do you build a learning culture?

Just identifying what to collect, does not mean that staff will collect and use that information effectively. Agencies and NGOs should strive to develop a culture of disciplined tracking of performance against outcomes, appropriate evaluation and informed decision-making across the agency or NGO. An agency or NGO with a learning culture focuses on doing what it does as well as it can and continually seeks to do even better.

A learning culture values honest appraisal, open dissent and constructive feedback. It promotes intelligent risk-taking in pursuit of both insight and impact. It considers the relevant context of an assessment and makes difficult decisions based on evidence—even if that means ending a program.

A learning culture requires:

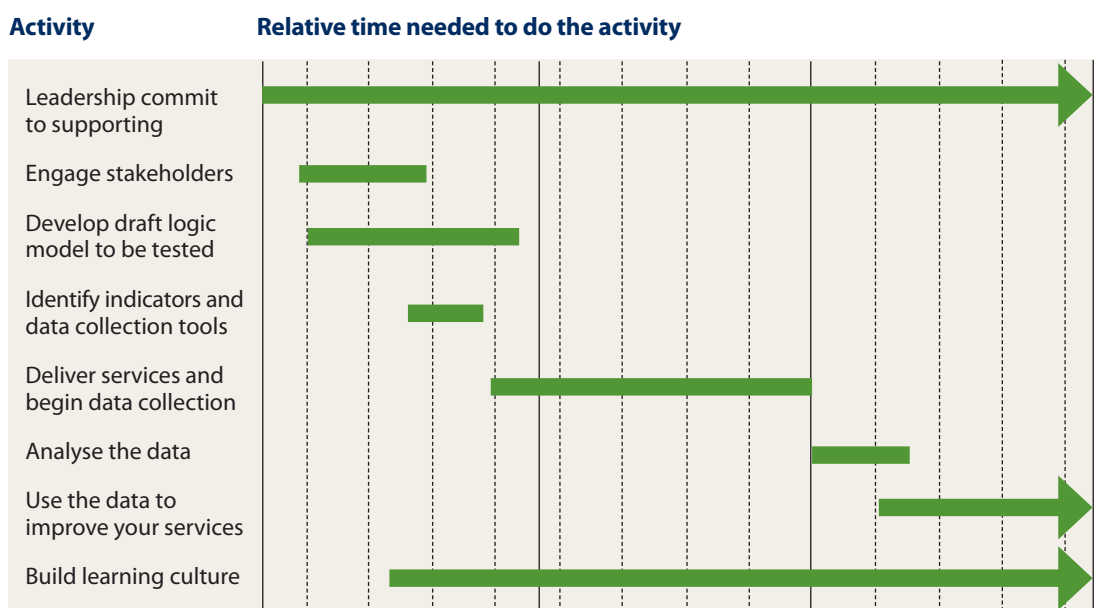
- appropriate support. The agency or NGO needs to have engaged leadership who are committed to achieving outcomes and support a learning and outcomes-focused culture. Leadership must develop a deep understanding of the agency or NGO, who or what the agency or NGO supports and the outcomes it aims to achieve. The leadership should also keep the management accountable to delivering on these outcomes
- the management and staff to believe in the value of data and have skills to use it to improve results. This kind of performance culture requires an ongoing investment into the learning and development of staff.

There are various ways to support a learning culture, such as starting small, clearly communicating the outcomes you are seeking to achieve and then promoting and rewarding the use of data. It requires investment into infrastructure and people. Data collection, storage and reporting capabilities are essential, as is ongoing training of staff. However, the ultimate success is dependent on the leaders and the staff of the agency or NGO bringing data to life, as part of their ambition to drive continuous improvement.

4.3 What takes the most time?

Changing your management approach to focus on the outcomes that will lead to meaningful change takes time. When the right systems are in place, and the necessary people are supportive, an outcomes-focused approach can result in disciplined tracking, rigorous evaluation, informed decision-making and material, measurable and sustainable benefit for people in New South Wales.

The following chart shows the approximate relative time needed to do each activity required in an outcomes-focused approach.



5. ASSESS YOUR READINESS TO ADOPT AN OUTCOMES-FOCUSED APPROACH

The Readiness Checklist includes key questions to confirm you are ready to adopt an outcomes-focused approach:

Readiness Checklist	Yes / No
Our mindset is to “do what we do as well as we possibly can and continually seek to do even better”	
We have the support of the leadership team – who understand the change that may be required	
We are clear on our purpose and what we are trying to achieve as an organisation; and we are able to articulate the outcomes that we aspire to achieve for the people we support	
We have the capacity in our team to commit to developing and embedding an outcomes-focused approach in our organisation	
We have the capability to measure and evaluate what we do or we have developed a strategy for building capability	
We understand that there may be different outcomes at an organisation wide level and at a program specific level and are clear about which level we are focusing on	
We have socialised the idea of adopting an outcomes-focused approach to the way we do things across our organisation	
We have identified who needs to be involved – including program staff, representatives from management, our clients, operational support e.g. finance (measurement) and IT	
We know where can go to for additional information, reference materials or support	



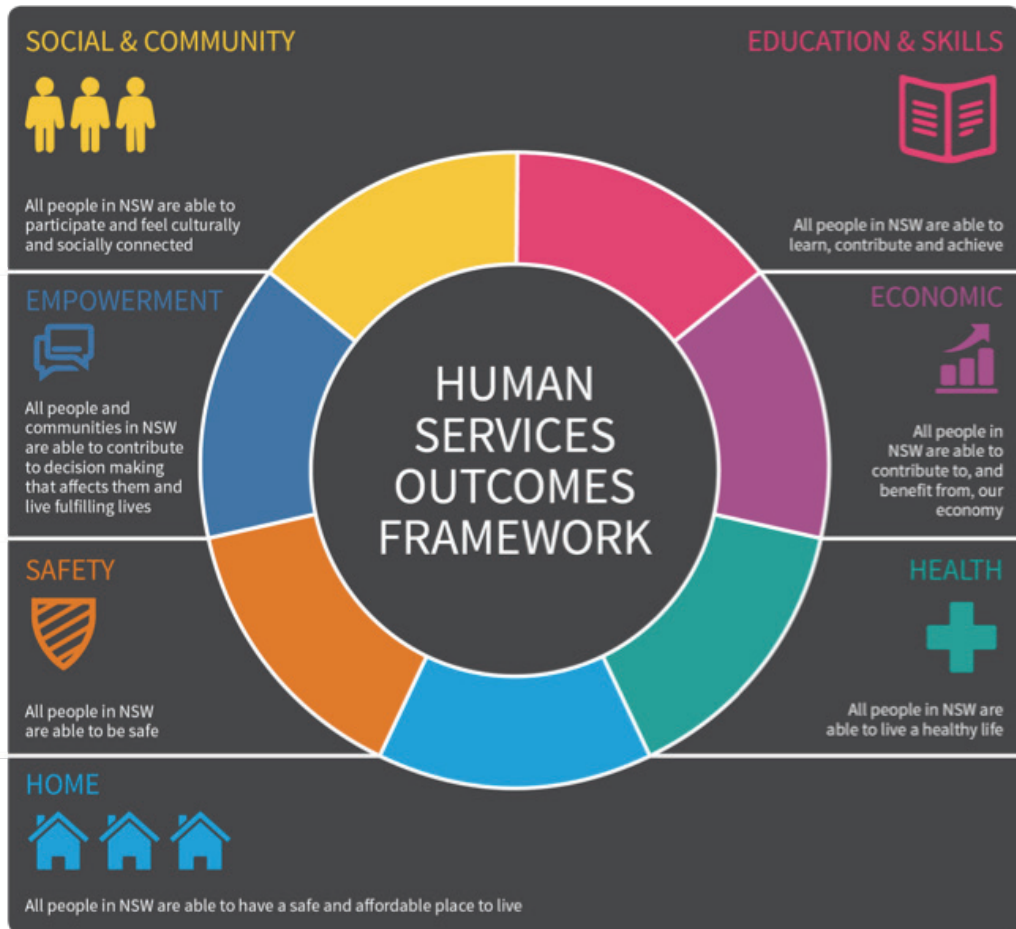
CareerSeekers is a program that aims to provide internships that help humanitarian arrivals gain relevant, professional work experience as they look to re-establish their careers in Australia.

6. THE NSW HUMAN SERVICES OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

6.1 The Human Services Outcomes Framework

The NSW Human Services Framework (Framework) is supporting agencies and NGOs to adopt an outcomes-focused approach by setting out the human services outcomes that NSW government is working towards. Agencies and NGOs are encouraged to use the Framework to help identify the long-term outcomes that the agency or NGO is looking to achieve. The Framework is designed to help agencies and NGOs to work towards a more collaborative approach to commissioning, service design, and service delivery.

The domains of the Framework are shown in the following diagram:



The Framework will be useful in providing:

- greater clarity around what the NSW Government’s target outcomes are and a way to demonstrate how NGOs are contributing towards those outcomes
- context for how programs or services will fit to these long-term human services outcomes
- a way to increase awareness of possible impact linkages within and across domains.

Agencies and NGOs should use the Framework to identify which Outcome Domains in the Framework their activities will contribute towards. Those outcomes should then be the goal:

- of all the human services they deliver or fund
- when determining how to respond to a specific issue (e.g. drug and alcohol use or youth unemployment) or cohort of people (e.g. children-in-out-of-home care or people who are homeless).

The Framework also includes a Library of Primary Indicators that can be used to measure progress towards these outcomes. The indicators help agencies and NGOs to determine whether the activities they are funding or delivering are contributing to change in one or more of the Outcome Domains.

The Framework and the Library of Primary Indicators can be accessed on the NSW Social Innovation Council website.

7. WHERE DO I FIND MORE INFORMATION

7.1 Other information sources

The Urban Institute: <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/key-steps-outcome-management>

Centre for Social Impact: [The Compass](#)

Mario Morino: [Leap of Reason](#)

Social Ventures Australia:

[Managing to Outcomes: what, why and how?](#)

[Finding the Golden Thread - A New Approach to Articulating Program Logic](#)

[How culture grows effective outcomes](#)

[Look before you leap into buying outcomes management software](#)

Harvard Family Research Project Evaluation Exchange: [Evaluation Methodology: Eight](#)

Outcome Models

ARACY (2009) *Measuring the Outcomes of Community Organisations*. ARACY

Carnochan, S et al (2013) 'Performance measurement challenges in non-profit human service organisations'. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol.43(6);

NCVO (2013) *The Code of Good Impact Practice*. Inspiring Impact;

Flatau, P, Zaretsky, K, Adams, S, Horton, A & Smith, J (2015) *Measuring Outcomes for Impact in the Community Sector in Western Australia*. Social Impact Series Issue #1. Bankwest Foundation

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