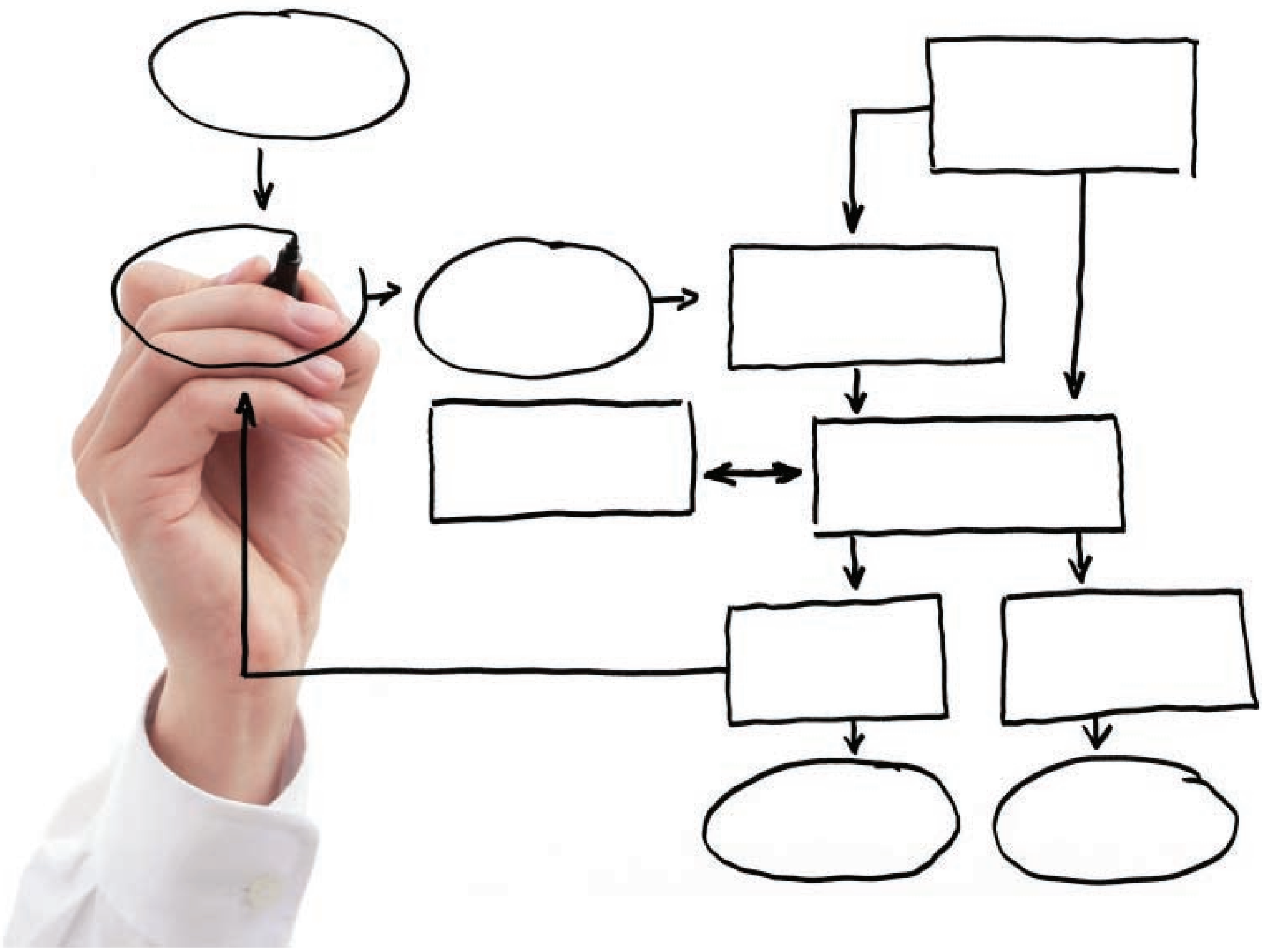
Your Guide to

Project Planning in the Voluntary & Community Sector



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Introduction

"How do you know when you are there, if you don't know where 'there' is?"

Aim of the Guide to Project Planning

Many groups think that you can play it by ear… stick to doing what comes naturally and it will all work out in the end, somehow. Planning is seen as too much work, too much like a text book and boring! Common comments are, "who has the time, when there is so much that needs to get done now!?" and, "we don't want to get locked into a plan; we need to be flexible to meet the needs of the people".

Effective organisations understand that they need to take a good hard look at themselves, at where they want to go, how they plan to get there and how they will know if they have been successful.

The aim of this Guide is to give you a step-by-step guide to project planning – an essential process to ensure success for your group. This pack sets out how to design, plan, and monitor your project.

This guide is a beginners guide and is useful for new and small volu ntary and community groups that are just starting out. It is also useful for groups that need good practice guidance on planning.

What is a project?

A project is a series of activities that takes place over a pre-arranged period of time to achieve a specified aim. It differs from an organisation or group, which is a collection of individuals working together indefinitely for a particular purpose. Organisations often run more than one project simultaneously, but is essential that these projects are well planned if they are to achieve their aims.

What is planning?

There are many different forms of plans e.g. business plans, strategic plans, project plans, etc. Each have one element in common: they are on-going processes to bring about change through having desirable future activities by taking action at the present. This Guide relates to project planning. Annex 1 sets out an overview of the different kinds of plans.

Why is good planning important?

- Impresses funders, showing that you know where you are going and how you will get there
- Enables you to do more focused Marketing and get support from the public including volunteer involvement and donations
- Sets a guideline for actions to be taken in your group
- Helps you to get the most out of resources available – enables you to spend money and deliver activities within particular timeframes
- Helps you to understand if you are reaching your goals.

Outcomes focussed project planning

This guide takes a detailed look at outcomes focused project planning. This is important as voluntary and community groups exist to bring about changes or benefits to the community. These are called outcomes.

An outcomes focus involves the following steps:

1. Identifying the changes that you want to achieve
2. Monitoring the changes that will happen over time
3. Using outcomes information to find out what works and what does not work

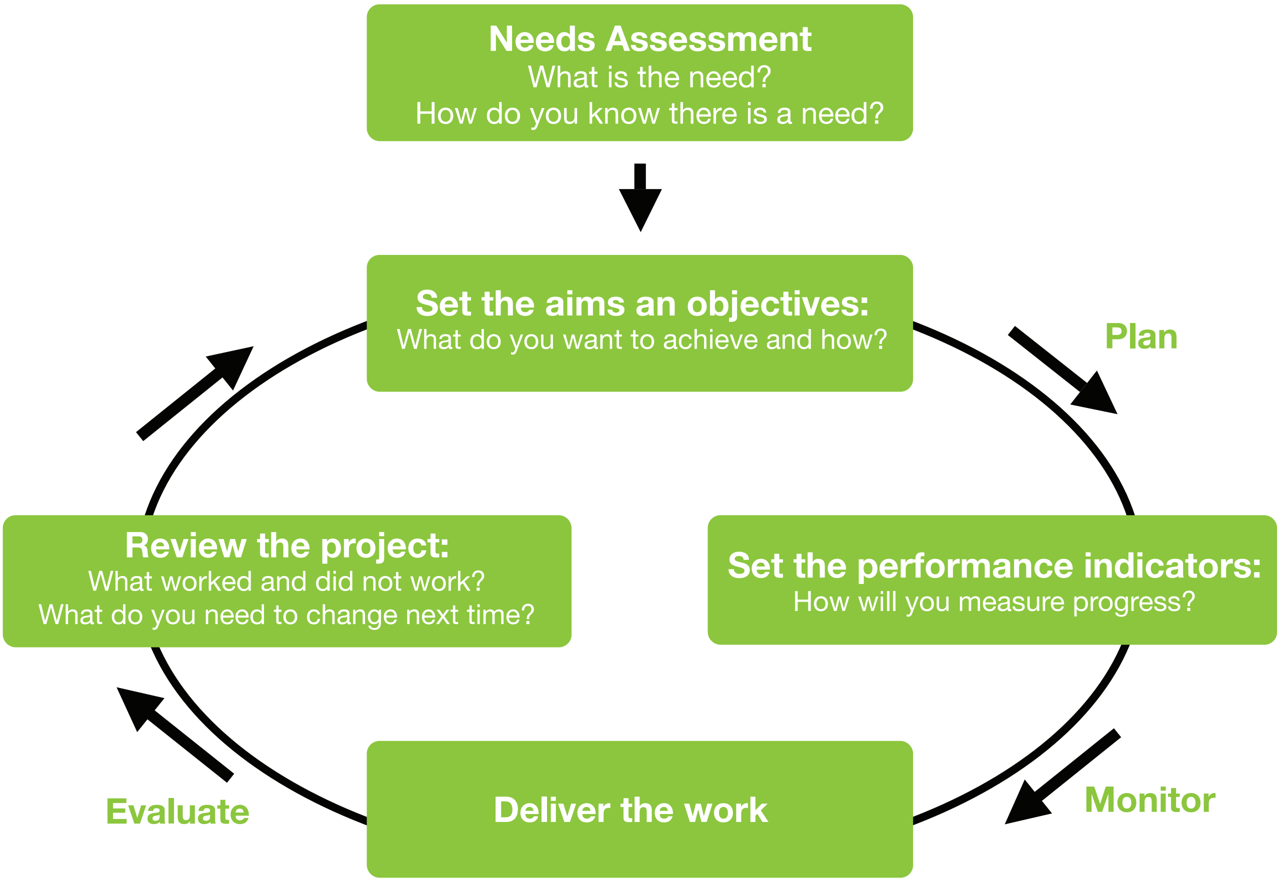
So as to:

1. Decide which projects to run
2. Make positive changes for the people you work with

Project planning

Good project plans follow a continuous process, called a project cycle:

The Project Cycle[1]



1 Diagram Adapted from First Steps in Monitoring and Evaluation (2002, Charities Evaluation Service)

Doing a needs assessment[2]

You will need to decide on what outcomes you want to achieve. These need to be based on the aims of your group and will explain the change that you want to bring about. Key questions to ask are:

1. What is the need in the community?
2. How do you know that there is a need?
3. Can you prove that there is a need for your project?

Gathering information or evidence about the community needs is essential and is the first step in designing a project. Importantly, many funding applications ask for information about the needs and who you have consulted when designing the project.

The information or evidence you will consider in planning your project and in explaining it to potential funders can come from a number of sources;

I. Your own research
II. Experience and knowledge of people in your group
III. Relevant recent research
IV. Statistics

I. Your own research

Questionnaires/ surveys

- Help you to interpret the answers from people using a standard format
- Questions should be short and to the point and are designed to help focus and structure the interview or discussion
- Can be sent out in the post, given out in a session or form part of a face-to-face interview
- Keep a record of how many questionnaires were sent out and how many you got back – this is called the response rate.
- Cheap to administer

Focus group discussions

- Bring together groups of people to discuss issues in more detail
- Meet after initial research has been done to check findings and look at specific issues that have arisen
- Lead by a facilitator who asks questions and records the main points of the discussion and who came to the discussion

2 Adapted from Big Lottery Fund Guidance (2006), Investigating and Writing about Need

Complaints policy / suggestions box

- A system that encourages people to let you know what they think.
- Receiving complaints from members can help you to reflect on and improve your service provision.
- Positive feedback either informally or through formal systems such as a suggestions box
- Provides comment sheets, and records any informal feedback you receive.
- Use the information as a report to the management committee which will help develop plans and spot any trends, or weaker areas within the service

Evaluation forms

- Provide an opportunity for people to feedback about a specific event or piece of work
- Usually completed by participants immediately after an event, but can also be completed at a later date to give people an opportunity to reflect before giving their feedback.
- You may get a more honest evaluation if you allow people to complete forms anonymously

II. The experience and knowledge of people in your group

If volunteers, staff or service users have experience of the need in the group applying for the grant, this can provide useful evidence. Such evidence can demonstrate the strength of your commitment. A well-chosen individual example can also help to illustrate the problem (but you must seek the permission of the individual/s concerned).

III. Recent relevant research

You may decide to back up your own evidence with results from other research, particularly if you are planning a larger project. Many local, regional and national organisations and groups have done research to substantiate need or decide on the direction of their work. For national organisations and many local ones, you can go to their website and see if they have relevant research publications.

Organisations that carry out or sponsor social research include:

- Government departments (and specialist units within a department)
- Regional Government Offices
- Social Exclusion Unit (SEU)
- Local Authorities and Local NHS Trusts
- Specialist voluntary organisations
- Local community groups
- Charitable foundations and trusts
- University departments with specialist research centres

- Discuss your research with other people you know who work in the same area, as they may know of relevant research.

IV. Statistics

It may be important to include some key statistics about the general population in your area or the particular group of people you want to benefit.

Useful sources include:

- 2001 Census (including statistics for local areas) at www.statistcs.gov.uk or www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk
- Other Government statistical publications on specialist topics e.g. The Index of Multiple Deprivation is available at www.communities.gov.uk or from the Department of Health – www.dh.gov.uk - which also has a statistics section
- Projects developed by Local Authorities such as Leicestershire Statistics and Research Online at www.lsr-online.org
- Local and regional strategy documents such as those from Local Strategic Partnerships – for Leicester the Leicester Partnership at http://www.oneleicester.com/leicester-partnership and for Leicestershire, Leicestershire Together at http://www.leicestershiretogether.org/
- plus Health Authorities such as NHS Leicester City - http://www.leicestercitypct.nhs.uk/and NHS Leicestershire County and Rutland - http://www.leicestercitypct.nhs.uk/

Preparing a Project Plan

Once the need has been identified you will need to prepare a project plan. This sets out the following:

1. Aims
2. Objectives
3. Outcomes
4. Outputs
5. Inputs
6. Monitoring and evaluation framework

1. What are the Aims of the Project?

The aims are the effects or changes that you are trying to achieve.

It is helpful to break aims down into 2 parts. The overall aim describes the broad, general changes that you want to see. It is sometimes called the mission statement and is usually set out in your constitution. The specific aims are more precise about the overall aim.

Example: A Family Learning Centre

Overall aim:
To improve the lives of children that use the centre.
Specific aims:
- To improve the parenting skills of parents that use the centre.
- To improve children's self esteem.
- Parents give each other practical support.

The following verbs are usually used to describe the aims:

- Enable…
- Improve…
- Increase…
- Reduce…
- Maintain…

2. What are the Objectives of the Project?

The objectives are the practical activities that you carry out to bring about changes in the community.

Ask yourself the following question: 'What do we need to practically do as a group to achieve the aims and outcomes?'

Example:

- Provide workshops, information and advice on parenting.
- Run a drop in centre with a play area.
- Provide opportunities for high quality play, dance and drama.
- Organise outings for parents.

The following verbs are used to describe objectives:

- Provide …
- Offer …
- Support …
- Run …
- Set up …

There is a direct link between the aims and objectives. To achieve some aims it might be necessary to carry out several different activities. Therefore, each aim might have more than one objective and some objectives may relate to more than one aim.

3. What are the Outcomes?

The outcomes are the changes or benefits that happen as a result of your activities. Outcomes indicate whether you achieve your aims. They can be short or long term.

Example:

Aim: To improve children's self esteem.

Outcomes: Children are more able to make their own choices.
Children are more confident.
Children are more independent.

Outcomes can occur at many levels:

Level	**Example**
Individual	Improved attendance at school
Family	Reduced debt
Community	Reduced fear of crime
Organisation	More funding stability
Environment	Increased use of park by locals
Policy	Improved partnerships

Outcomes in people usually describe a change in one of the following: Health, behaviour, attitude and self-perception, knowledge or skills, circumstance.

Outcomes Summary: Developing an outcomes based project plan

It is useful to summarise the project plan in a table (sometimes called an outcomes framework, or a logical framework). This helps to show how the different parts of the project relate to each other, in a logical way. The table below sets out an example, drawing on the examples from above.

OVERALL AIM: TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF CHILDREN THAT USE THE CENTRE				
Needs	**Aims**	**Outcomes**	**Objectives**	**Outputs**
• Leicester Children's Plan: Need to improve children's confidence	• To improve children's self esteem	• Children are more able to make their own choices • Children are more confident • Children are more independent	• Provide opportunities for high quality play, dance & drama • Run a drop in centre with a play area	• Weekly dance and drama classes • 1,000 leaflets • Daily drop in centre
• User survey identified that teenage and young mums need support and guidance	• Improve the parenting skills of parents using the centre	• Increased knowledge about child development, and managing children's behaviour	• Provide workshops, information & advice on parenting	• Workshops on self-esteem • Workshops on managing children's behaviour • Leaflets • Telephone & in person advice sessions

4. What are the outputs?

The outputs describe the more detailed activities and products.

Outputs can include; training courses, publications, campaigning materials.

Example:

Objective (activity):	Provide workshops, information and advice on parenting.
Outputs:	Workshops on managing children's behavior, leaflets, telephone advice and drop in.

5. Who are your key beneficiaries

This refers to the main group(s) you are working with and the people your project is intended to benefit. Things to think about are:

- Age group e.g. children, young people, elderly.
- Type e.g. ethnicity, disability.
- Geographic location.
- Quantity – approximately how many people will use your service?

It is important to consider the needs of your target group as their needs will affect how, when and where you deliver your activities.

6. What are the Inputs?

Inputs mean everything that you will need for the project, including the budget. Make a list of all of the things that you will need to run your project, and then attach a cost to them. Be really specific about costs, even to the last penny.

This process of 'recovering' all your costs is known as '**Full Cost Recovery**'. Full Cost recovery means including the direct costs of projects and all your overheads. The 'Directs Costs' are costs incurred as a direct result of running a project or service. The 'Indirect Costs' (or Overheads) are costs incurred by an organisation in order to support the projects it runs.

The budget is an important aspect of project planning and can be a key factor in whether you are able to secure funding or not. If your budget is accurate and includes all of the costs of the project, you will also find that running the project becomes much easier once you have secured the funding.

For more information on writing a budget, please see our Guide to Funding, which can be found here.

7. Monitoring and evaluating the project

How will you prove that your project has been successful and that you have achieved the outcomes?

- Monitoring explains what is happening during the project.
- Evaluations attempt to explain why, and to learn and share important lessons.

Monitoring your project

Monitoring involves regularly and systematically collecting information about what is happening and checking on the progress of the project. The information collected might be about activities, or services, users, or outside factors affecting your group. However to do this you will need to firstly identify what things to look out for – performance indicators.

Performance indicators

Performance indicators help you to see the progress and success of the project. They are the things that you can assess and monitor to show whether or not you are achieving your objectives (activities) and outcomes (the anticipated changes). They are clues that show what has happened. Setting the indicators for your project at the beginning helps you to see what information you need to collect as part of your monitoring system. There are 2 types of indicators; output and outcomes.

(i) Monitoring Outcomes through setting Outcome Indicators

These are things that you can assess or monitor to show whether you are achieving the changes as a result of your project. They show progress towards meeting your aims, and are clues that show what has happened.

Aim	Outcome	Indicator
• Increase children's self-esteem	• Children are able to make choices on their own • Children are more confident • Children are more comfortable about doing things independently	• How often children initiate play with other children and adults • Levels of interaction with other children • How often children choose to do things without their parents

For each specific aim ask yourself, **'What changes (outcomes) do we want to see in our users, and what signs (outcome indicators) will show us that the change we hoped has happened?'**

(ii) Monitoring Outputs through setting Output Indicators

These help you to assess the work of the project and show progress towards meeting your objectives. They usually set out the quantity (the number of services run or products delivered), take-up (the number of people who use your service or product), and access (type of people using your service).

Objective	Output	Indicator
• To provide workshops, information and advice about parenting skills	• Workshops • Information and advice sessions • Information leaflets	• The number of workshops and advice sessions in a year and the number of information leaflets (quantity) • The number of people coming (take-up) • The profile of people attending (access)

TIP: You can't cover everything. When finalising your indicators you'll need to decide what you can realistically do with the time and resources you have available.

8. Data Collection

After you have set out what the performance indicators are, you will need to check on progress by collecting data. Data collection methods are the different ways that you will get the information and data to prove that you have achieved your outcomes and outputs.

Examples of data to be collected:

- Questionnaires
- Evaluation forms, self-assessment forms
- Observation
- Support staff observing changes in clients
- Interviews
- Focus groups, case reviews
- Case records
- Attendance registers, case notes

Example:

Objective = Workshops and advice sessions
Data collection method:

- Register taken at the beginning of each session.
- A diary to record how often and how many workshops and advice sessions were run over the year.
- The home address of participants collected and entered
- on a database.

It is slightly more difficult to collect information about outcomes as it could involve collecting information about people's behavior and attitude.

Example:

Outcome = Children are more confident
Data collection method:

- Observe children and record in a log book when the children initiated play with adults and other children.
- Observe and note in a log book the levels of interaction with adults and other children.

Ask the parents to fill in a questionnaire about whether they thought their children chose to do more things without them over time.

To assess changes over time – the outcomes – you need to collect information on the indicators at different points of time and compare the results.

At the very least you will need to collect:

- **1st set of data and information:** at the beginning of the project so that you can compare the result. Sometimes this is called baseline data or survey.
- **2nd set of data and information:** at the end of the project.

Collecting data and information at regular intervals with similar people or groups helps you to track your performance over time.

Tips for collecting information

- Only collect the information that you need.
- For each piece of information ask why you are collecting it.
- Use existing systems to collect information and feedback.

People and Data

- Consider whether there are data protection or confidentiality issues relating to personal data
- Collect information when appropriate and in ways people feel comfortable with
- Clarify who collects the data, when and why
- Feedback results and changes as a result of monitoring to the people involved
- Explain to people why you are collecting the data

Example:

Source: http://www.proveandimprove.org

For a training session (Activity) to have been a success it needs to have been delivered (Output) with a certain number of people attending (Output) who gain a new skill (Output). They then may successfully apply for a job using their new skill (Outcome), or they may find that they are enjoying their current job more (Outcome).

This means that they stay in a particular job for longer (Outcome), and are able to take on more roles and responsibilities as their confidence grows (Outcome). In the long run if this happens for enough people in a neighbourhood there will be a higher proportion of people in employment able to achieve a better quality of life for themselves and their families (Impact).

So if we were to make a rough list of the ways we will know that the training has been a success, it might include:

- Training session delivered
- Participants complete the training and gain a qualification
- Participants successfully apply for a job
- Participants happier in their current job
- Participants still enjoying that job in 12 months' time
- Participants talking on new roles and responsibilities in their jobs
- Participants saying that their life is better
- Participants' families saying that they have a better life.

Analysing the information

After thinking through what information it is important to know, and how to find it, comes the task of analysing the results of your research or consultations. This can be done through inputting data into a spreadsheet or a table. You can then start to look at the data in more detail and draw out conclusions. You may then learn that some aspects of your work are more successful than others, and be able to tailor your future work accordingly.

In summary: Monitoring steps to take

1. Decide which information you need to collect and then routinely and systematically collect this information
2. Ensure that all of the information you collect is accurately recorded – in paper records or on a computerised database
3. Answer the following questions: How well are you doing? Are you doing what you said that you would do? What difference are you making?
4. Use the monitoring information to tell funders more about the project and what you did with their money

II. Evaluating your project

Evaluations involve making sense of the information that you have collected from the monitoring activities and making a judgment about the value, success and lessons learnt of your project. It is normally carried out at the end of the project. A self-evaluation is a good internal learning process that involves your own reflections about the project and the value of the work undertaken. You could do a self-evaluation yourself or have someone external to the project evaluate you. Sometimes a combination of a self-evaluation and an external evaluation can be useful.

Questions to ask are as follows:

1. What has happened and why?
2. Did the project achieve the aims, if not why not?
3. Did the project bring about the changes that you had hoped for, if not why not?
4. Did the project achieve the objectives, if not why not?
5. Did the activities run as planned, if not why not?
6. What worked well and what did not work and why?
7. How could we do things differently?

The results of the evaluation can be used to improve what you do and redesign projects/ services.

Reporting progress

Project plans and monitoring information/ progress needs to be reported and communicated to funders, users, the management committee, staff and volunteers before, during and after the project has finished. Think about who would be interested in the results and how the information should be reported. Examples of ways to report information are as follows: Annual reports, training events, conferences, management committee meetings, newspaper articles, radio, website, newsletters.

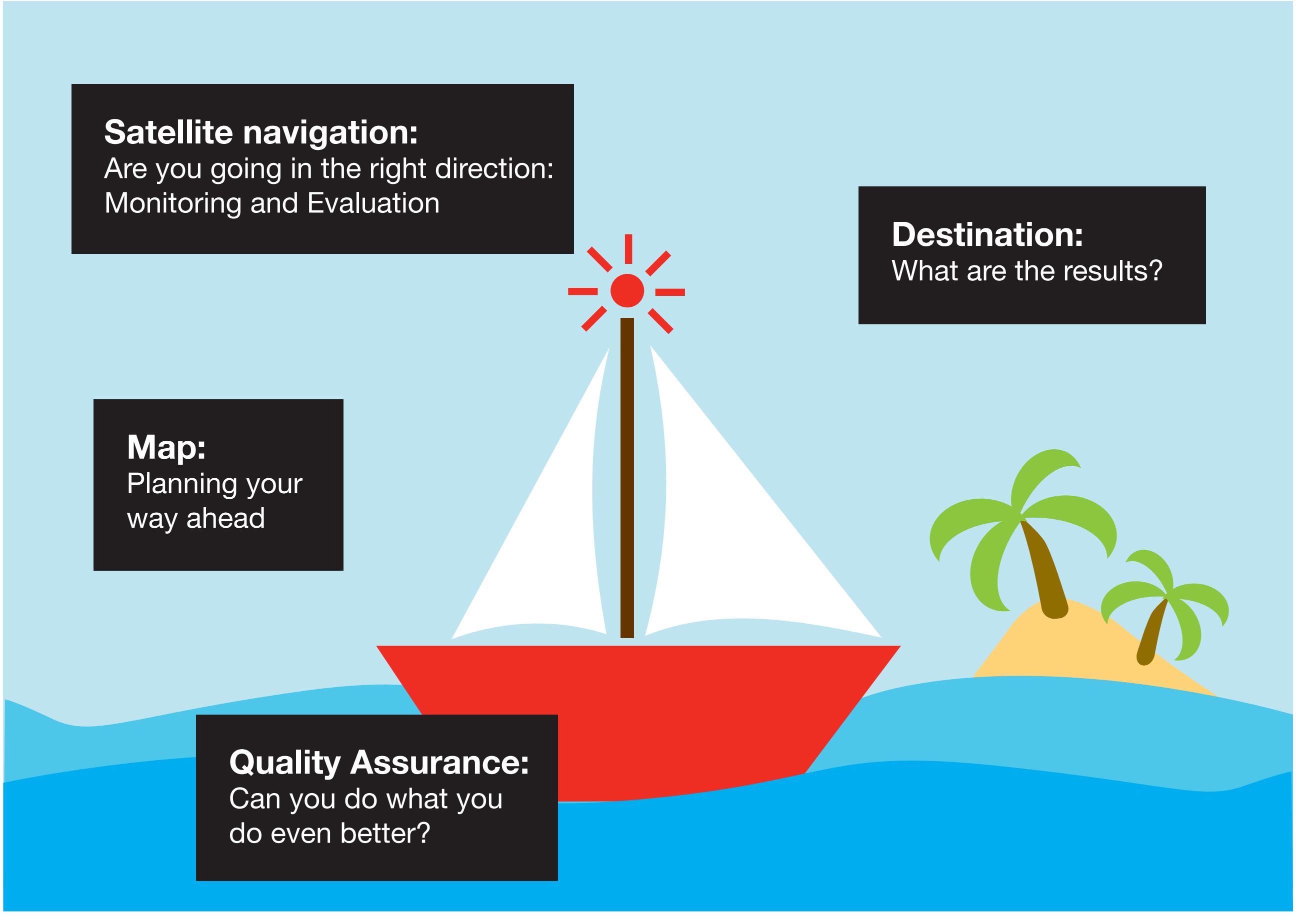
Summary: Developing an integrated Monitoring and Planning system

As before, it is useful to summarise the complete project plan in a table so that you can see how the different parts of the project clearly relate to each other, in a logical way as in the example below.

Aim	**Outcomes**	**Outcome indicator**	**Data collection method**	**Who reports progress, when, and where to**
• To improve children's self esteem	• Children are more able to make their own choices • Children are more confident • Children are more independent	• How often children initiate play with other children and adults • Levels of interaction with other children • How often children choose to do things without their parents	• Observations in a log book • Project report • Observations in a log book • Project report • Parents questionnaire • Project report	• Sessional worker monthly at supervision to the Project Manager • Project Manager quarterly to the Management Committee
Objectives	**Outputs**	**Output indicators**	**Data collection method**	**Who reports progress, when, and where to**
• Provide workshops, information and advice about parenting skills	• Workshops • Information and advice sessions • Information leaflets	• Number of workshops & advice sessions and number of information leaflets (quantity) • Number of people coming (take-up) • Profile of people attending (access)	• Register • Diary • Database	• Sessional worker monthly at supervision to the Project Manager • Project Manager quarterly to the Management Committee

An integrated approach

The diagram below shows how planning, monitoring and evaluation, and quality relate to each other and what the purpose of each process is 3.



3 Taken from Implementing PQASSO training (2007), Charities Evaluation Services.

Project Plan

From doing your needs assessment (more information on page 7), you are now ready to complete a project plan.

Referring to the information on 'Preparing a Project Plan' on page 10, use the information to complete this project plan, these are the questions funders ask in a funding application forms.

1. What are the aims of the project?
2. What are the objectives?
3. What are the outcomes?
4. What are the outputs?
5. Who is the target group / beneficiaries?
6. What are the Inputs? (Everything you need in order to start the project) e.g equipment / resources / policies / budget
7. How will you know that you have achieved the outcomes? Monitoring & Evaluating the project
8. Date Collection Methods

Additional information

Who will run the project and what skills / experience do you have to run this project?

1. What are the aims of the project?

2. What are the objectives?

3. What are the outcomes?

Common terms in Project Planning

Aims	The changes or benefits that you are trying to achieve
Outcomes	Outcomes are the changes, benefits or other effects that happen as a result of your activities
Objectives	The practical activities that you carry out to bring about changes in the community
Outputs	The more detailed activities and products
Target group/ beneficiaries	The people that will benefit from your project, or the users
Inputs	Everything needed for the project, including the budget
Monitoring	The information collected to find out more about the progress of the project
Performance indicators	The things that you can assess and monitor to show whether or not you are successful. They are clues that show what has happened
Data collection methods	The different ways to get information and data to demonstrate that you have been successful
Evaluation	Making a judgment about the success and lessons learnt of your project. It is normally carried out at the end of the project
Performance	The success in achieving the desired results
Quality assurance	Systematically learning what you are doing well and what needs to improve, and using this information to do it better

Main types of plans

A Project Plan enables you to plan activities and services over a relatively short period of time - often projects run for a few months, a year or more. The overall direction of your organisation should be determined by longer term strategic planning, however, and the table below sets out the different types of plans organisations use and what they are used for. Most organisations will use more than one type of plan and it is essential that these plans fit together and complement each other.

Type of plan	Purpose	Frequency
Business Plan	• Sets out the method for running an organisation over a specific future period. • Reviews the organisation and sets out a strategy for the next 3-5 years with detailed operational and financial plans. • Covers all areas of a business and generally focuses on management, services/ products, marketing and sales.	Every 3-5 years with annual reviews.
Strategic Plan	• Sets out the mission, long-term objectives and to achieve them. • Concerned with the long-term direction of the organisation. • Provides the framework for decisions. • Usually covers vision and mission, long-term objectives, key strategies and programs, budget and risk areas.	Every 3 years
Annual Plan	• Describes the projects and allocates resources (money and people) to achieve the objectives of the strategic plan. • Usually includes trends, learning from monitoring processes, description of proposed project plans, comments on how activities contribute to the strategic plan, and describes resources required.	Annually
Project Plan	• Sets out short-term, small activities aimed at specific objectives with earmarked budgets and limited time frames. • Targeted on a specific geographic area or at a particular group of people.	As required

Other Online Resource Centre Guides

For further guides for Voluntary Organisations please see our Online Resource Centre www.valonline.org.uk/orc.

- Your Guide to Funding in the VCS
- Your Guide to Business Planning
- Your Guide to Project Planning
- Your Guide to Setting up a Voluntary and Community Group
- Your Guide to VCS Legal Structures
- Your Guide to Employing Staff
- Good Practice Guide to Involving Volunteers

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