Telling tales
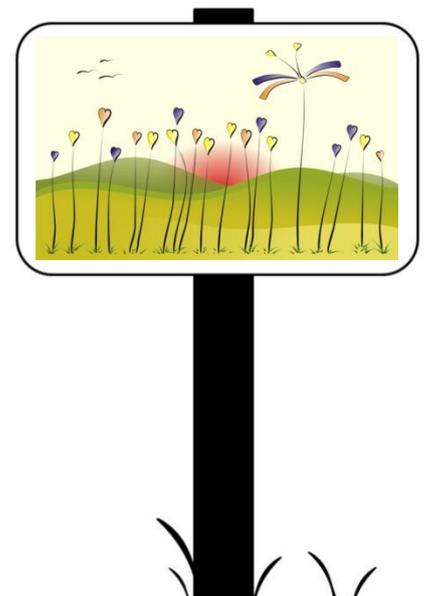
A practical toolkit on measuring
and communicating your impact

brap

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Contents

Why read this guide?

brap have been committed to supporting the growth and development of the civil society for the last decade.

Our experiences show that very few of us have sufficient evidence to prove the impact of our work. This isn't necessarily the same thing as not making an impact. Instead it relates to our ability to monitor, analyse and communicate our impact to others.

This guide is aimed at organisations that want to get on top of impact measurement rather than let it get on top of them. In this guide we show how to make impact measurement part of the everyday; a useful process to undergo every step of the way, rather than just in terms of the end goal.

It's been developed with organisations who have previously struggled to implement the thinking and practice behind measuring impact, who none the less run effective and impactful organisations and services.

With diminishing resources, increased competition for available funding and increased social deprivation, the time has never been more right for the sector to understand where it makes the most impact. Not only as a way of securing resources and support from donors, funders and commissioners, but more importantly as a way of continually improving the way in which we develop and deliver the services that address social inequality.

How to use this guide

This guide will take you through the five stages of measuring your impact:

1. being clear about your story
2. getting a structure for what you want to say
3. getting evidence to back up your story
4. taking account of other influences
5. communicating your story

This guide is designed to be practical, so at each stage of the process you'll find useful exercises for you to do. We'll think you'll get most the most of the tips and hints provided if you take the time to engage with the practical examples.

Health warning!

In this guide we try to avoid jargon and instead use plain English. For example, instead of saying 'impact measurement' we say 'measuring change' because we think it's easier to understand.

Unfortunately, though, there is inevitably a whole other language associated with measuring social impact that can at times be off-putting, especially if you haven't heard the terms before. The short glossary of key terms on the opposite page should be helpful – keep referring back to these terms as you work through the guide.

When the terms are used in the text they're in colour and in bold.

Glossary of key terms

	Term	Definition
1.	Activity	It's what you do, it's the intervention, the bread and butter
2.	Audience	The people who have an interest in the change you are creating
3.	Evidence	Collation of data (quantitative and qualitative) that enables you to prove change has happened
4.	Impact assessment	A way of objectively assessing the impact of what your work achieves
5.	Input (contribution / investment)	The contributions made by each stakeholder that are necessary for the activity to happen
6.	Outcome	Another word for the effects, benefits, or things that change in your community as a result of your work These can be good and bad, expected and unexpected
7.	Outcome indicator	A well considered measure or measures of an outcome
8.	Output (the initial result of doing something)	Slightly different to outcomes in that they refer to the things you directly do as part of your work (e.g. providing 40 hour-long career advice clinics to 240 people).
9.	Performance improvement	An approach to improving the performance of an organisation by using techniques like monitoring, impact assessment, developing new strategies and evaluating progress.
10.	Qualitative data	Data that provides a more in-depth understanding of something
11.	Quantitative data	Data that is numerical and statistical in nature
12.	Scope	The parameters of your endeavours to understand change e.g. the activities and stakeholders that will be included, as well as the timescales.
13.	Stakeholder	The range of people and organisations that experience change (good or bad)

Words which are **highlighted** in the text are explained in this glossary.

Telling a tale

Being clear about your story

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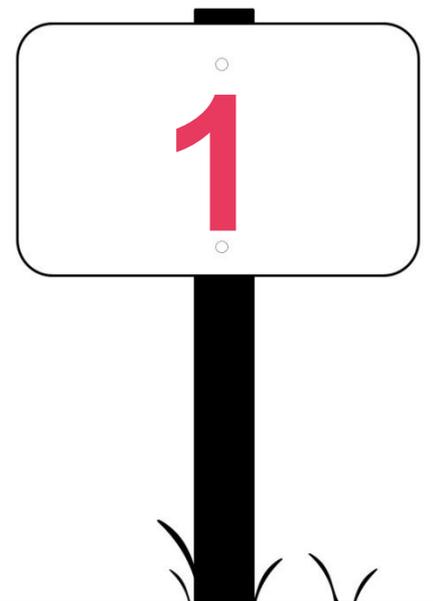
What's the point?

Before we do anything it's important to connect with the true story, to connect with the *why we do what we do*, the passion. If we do this before we get started with the process of measuring change, we always have this story to come back to.

There's some technical processes we have to go through – like measuring our **output**, **activity**, and **outcomes** – but if go straight to those we can often become bogged down and stand to miss out on the real story.

Getting started

You can do this as a project team, a management team, a board of trustees, or as part of an away day for the entire organisation.

The idea is that you get everyone telling stories, and sharing ideas.

It's story telling with no rules, but it helps to give people a start point, something like:

> *Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there was an organisation called* [your name] *that changed the world. Here is the story of how they did it...*

Once you have a collection of stories, you have all the material you need to move onto the next stage 'Understanding Story'.

Making everything count

Why not record your story telling session and launch it on your website via a podcast. If it's a bit ropey then you can always find a media student who is happy to edit it. But you aren't aiming for something slick; you're aiming for something that wins hearts and minds.

You can refer potential funders to the podcast as a way of getting a real flavour for who you are and what motivates your staff.

Things to consider

It's important to decide who you will involve at this stage – and it may include beneficiaries – and how you can bring people together without a huge knock-on effect on staff workload or the delivery of services.

You could time it with a staff away day – and simultaneously motivate staff, find out what makes them tick and kick start the process of measuring change!

Either way, it's likely you need someone to coordinate this part of the process.

You'll need a room (preferably one that inspires people) refreshments and a way of capturing people's stories.

Understanding story

Getting a structure for what you want to say

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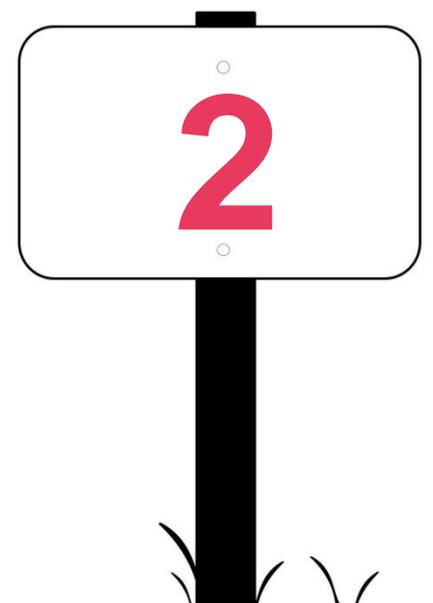
What's the point?

To understand change and how it relates to the stories we hold inside us we have to understand the story. To understand any story we have to get to grips with *narrative*.

All stories have a narrative, although not all storytellers stick to the same rules, and some will play with the 'traditional' narrative sequence. However, for the purposes of measuring and understanding change we will stick to traditional narrative form (although we may choose to play around with it at the end of the process).

All stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and this forms the story's narrative. If we think of the fairy tales we were told as children, we can identify these moments in the story, before we ever really understood that we understood narrative.

'Narrative' is how we make sense of the world and the information we receive. We're always looking for a beginning, a middle and an end, and if we don't know one element of this we begin to question logic.

As an example, let's take the story of Little Red Riding Hood...

- Beginning – the wolf eats grandmother and takes her place, lacy bonnet and all

- Middle – Little Red Riding Hood visits her grandmother, and quickly grows suspicious of her grandmother. Eventually the wolf leaps up and tries to eat Little Red Riding Hood too

- End – Little Red Riding Hood escapes and goes to tell the woodcutter, who kills the wolf and frees grandmother from its belly

If the story had no beginning would the middle have the same impact? What does the beginning do – does it create tension...anticipation...fear? If there was no end, how differently would we feel about the story?

In this same way, when people read your story, they will expect a story that has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and they will expect there to be some casual link between each stage.

So what would happen if we put the beginning of Little Red Riding Hood, the middle of the Three Little Pigs and the end of Hansel and Gretel together?

Getting started

The aim of the task is to plot your story, but only in relation to **input**, **activity**, output and outcome. There are rules this time, but what you do at this stage should be informed by 'Telling Tales'.

INPUT The beginning	These are the contributions made by each stakeholder that are necessary for an activity (the middle) to happen. For example: o volunteers o public and private sector investment o a building or venue o sports equipment
ACTIVITY... The middle ↓	This is about what takes place between the beginning and the end. It's about valuing what you do on a day-to-day basis. More often than not this is the bit that we greatly undervalue and subsequently under sell. Remember, there is always more to tell. Think about everything you do, not just the things that more obviously constitute an activity. This is where it can be helpful to think about one client in particular, and think about all the different ways that you provide them with services and support.
...and **OUTPUT**	This is the result of each activity – normally expressed as a quantitative summary of activity.
OUTCOME The end	This is where you state what you would expect to change as a result of input + activity + output. It will most likely be expressed in relation to the impact your efforts will or have had (input + activity) on the people and organisations you work with – for example, young people acquire more focus, confidence and direction.

Making everything count

It's always useful to have a clear overview of how your organisation operates. By detailing your services, how you approach your work, and the added value you deliver, you can often respond more quickly to business opportunities and funding opportunities, and with more success.

Keep the information saved at this stage with your bid/tender resources. Next time you're asked how you would go about delivering a piece of work, you'll have it written down already.

Things to consider

There are several ways to go about this part of the process and it will depend entirely on why you want to measure change. For instance:

- you may want to prove impact in relation to a particular funding stream
- you may want to demonstrate impact in relation to a particular client group (young NEETs)
- you may want to show the impact of a particular **activity** that you believe to be particularly innovative and investment worthy

Whatever the case you will need to ensure that you involve the right people at this stage. Don't automatically assume it will be (just) the project manager – you're looking for people who have insight and knowledge. Often a team administrator will have a unique insight into a project, and can fill gaps in knowledge. You may also want to involve beneficiaries, who may be able to prompt you to remember all the amazing things you did, but have forgotten.

'Change reactions' (only for the brave amongst us!)

Here's an example technique you might want to use. With this process you have a go at tracking an outcome's 'change reaction' – one outcome leading to another outcome.

For example:

Young people are more focused, confident, and driven [*primary outcome, although could lead to*] establishing stronger peer relationships and stronger intergenerational relationships [*leading to*] apprenticeship [*leading to*] greater autonomy and financial independence.

Obviously, if you want to understand the 'change reaction' you have to commit to more long term evaluation.

Making change credible

Getting evidence to back up your story

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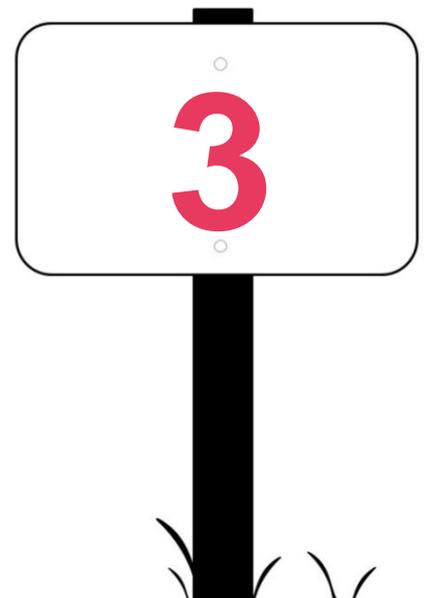
What's the point?

A warning – this is where the hard work starts.

We can all tell a good story, but the story that we are trying to develop needs to stand up to scrutiny. It must be underpinned and framed by **evidence**, in a way that makes sense to people.

The main aim of this stage is to work out how you can best measure outcomes or, put another way, how you can best collate evidence that shows that change has happened.

So the first stage is to develop outcome indicators. These indicators detail the type of evidence you would expect to generate if your story really does end where you think it does.

And by coming up with a handful of indicators, we can focus our evaluative energies on capturing useful information that we know will illustrate change, rather than information that has no relationship to our story, and therefore no role in demonstrating change.

Indicators decided? Now you need to decide on the best ways to capture the evidence you need, or whether you already have this data, and just need to collate and analyse it. You may find yourself somewhere between these two positions.

Getting started

Deciding on your indicators

Let's think about this in relation to outcomes that relate to people. This might be your beneficiaries and/or wider **stakeholders**.

Take an outcome and answer the following:
- what is life like for this person now?
- what do they do or what do they feel that they didn't before?
- what does that look like on a day to day basis?
- what does it look like in relation to their social or economic situation?

Asking your clients can be the best – and most ethical way – of deciding this. Just ask them, "What does change look like and feel like for you?"

Alternatively, you may decide to review secondary evidence / existing reports that have already looked at the impact of certain activities and base your indicators on these?

Collecting evidence

First, you need to decide which of the below describes the state of your evidence:

- you have comprehensive evidence available to you that gives your story credibility
- you have some evidence but it's patchy
- you have very little or no evidence to prove your indicators

Once you know where you are it's easy to plan – answer the following:

- who do you need to involve?
- what do you need to ask them?
- how will you go about doing it?
- how long do you think it will take?
- what type of sample do you need?
- what's it going to cost you?

Making everything count

Evaluation is important whether you intent to write a report or not. This stage of the process will help you to develop robust evaluation processes, and is a process that you can adopt when planning projects.

If you choose to involve clients to understand more about what change looks like for them, you also stand to build much stronger relationships with clients. It may also help clients to focus on what it is that they want to get out of the service, things they hadn't considered before.

Things to consider

Things to establish about **outcomes**:

- How long do outcomes last?
- What do they depend on?
- Do you need to measure them later on – is a long
- Valuing outcomes – do you go this far? Do you assign a monetary value? Are commissioners up on this? Value is really subjective and far less powerful than well thought through and presented evidence of change

Parallel stories

Taking account of other influences

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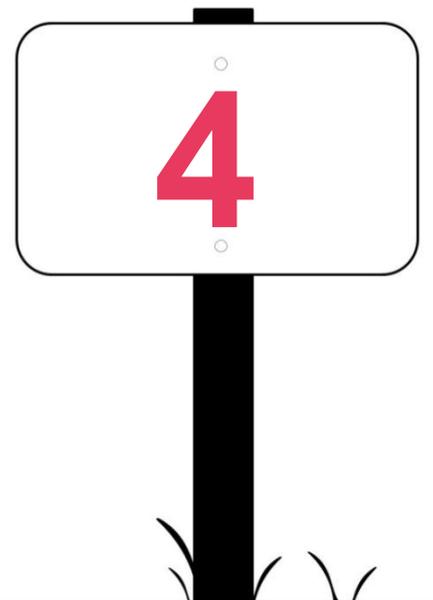
What's the point?

Now for a reality check. This is the first time you will look outside of your own story (unless you are very proactive and have incorporated questions in your evaluation on parallel stories) to assess the extent to which your story of change is the only one that matters.

In Social Return on Investment (SROI) this process takes on a more significant role in determining what you can and cannot claim, by virtue of the fact that you are making a claim to a 'cost saving' financial impact.

In this process, it is less significant but is still a piece of the puzzle that needs answering, and may require you to think of some additional evaluation/monitoring questions.

The main aim of this part of the process is to understand, recognise, and acknowledge who else, or what else might be supporting you to achieve your **outcomes**, whether it's:

- another organisation
- a supportive parent
- a statutory programme
- a local school

You also need some way of making sense of this in terms of how you articulate impact / change.

If all your clients also receive mentoring through a statutory service and these clients talk positively about their experiences then you will want to refer to this in your impact report.

This rarely has the effect of watering down your efforts, but will rather impress on funders the extent to which you know and understand your clients.

In this stage you'll also be considering other external factors (normally outside of your control) that have an impact on impact. We'll take about this more in the next bit...

Getting started

Do you know your deadweight from your drop off? We've borrowed these terms from SROI – which should make for an easy transition if you opt for SROI at some point.

In considering parallel stories and putting some of your thinking and assumptions through a reality check you will want to consider the following:

- would some of your outcomes have happened anyway?
- have achieving your outcomes had a negative knock on effect for anyone else?
- are there other organisations involved in creating your outcomes?
- what happens in the long term? is the outcome eternally sustainable?

Making everything count

Understanding your competitors is something that is important for all businesses. However, research into the third sector shows that our awareness of competitors (and potential partners) is weak.

Use this exercise to gauge how much you know about what's happening out there. If you struggle, it might be time to do some research.

Things to consider

You'll want to be able to articulate parallel stories in a way that is concise and useful – which is why you may want to consider some of the following:

- Do you need to include additional questions in your evaluation methodology to understand more about who else is having an impact on your client?

- Do you need to 'commission' a short piece of research into competitors, so that you understand what they do and how it compares to what you do?

- Do you need to review the social, political or economic context to understand whether some of your outcome is down to national/regional trends?

Are you sitting comfortably?

Communicating your story

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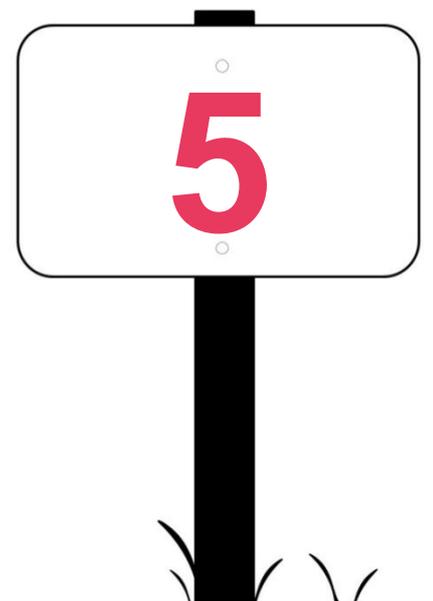
What's the point?

This is where you can put the final version of your story together with an **audience** or audiences in mind.

Everything stacks up and you can now tell your story confidently. There are so many ways of telling stories of change, and it's about picking the right one for your organisation, or the intended organisation:

- a more traditional report – with a structure that loosely reflects the process that you have gone through to understand change
- a case study on a particular client that focuses on the story of one individual but would include information that described the bigger picture
- a video
- a story or story board
- a comic strip
- a flow chart or spreadsheet
- an event
- a play

Getting started

You may opt to present your impact in a number of different ways – there is nothing wrong with this: if anything it makes you more flexible.

Having a report to hand is likely to be the most useful of all of the methods, especially if you incorporate some of the other methods within this.

Take a look at what other organisations have done: not just at impact reports, but at reports and communication materials more generally – you'll get some great ideas and also work out what you think works and doesn't work.

Plot your report in draft – much like your original tale, you'll have a beginning, a middle, and an end – and think about including some of the original story, so that your voice and passion stands out.

Something to do as a team...

Come up with ideas for the chapters of your impact report. Once you have agreed on the chapters, you can spend time coming up with creative titles.

Making everything count

This is what you've been working towards, and if you make it this far and have a report (that is still timely) then you've made every stage count.

Things to consider

Don't hang about. Evaluation might be a long-term activity but once you have **evidence** you can't afford to wait till it's out of date to do anything about it. The process of understanding and communicating change should be a well-planned activity, and part of this planning should involve keeping to deadlines that mean you strike while the iron is hot.

How we can help

With a 13-year track record of supporting voluntary and community organisations (VCOs), our SFEDI accredited business team have worked with more than thousands of organisations across the UK and have helped organisations start-up, grow and diversify income generation streams. We also offer staff and volunteer training, all intended to make organisations ready for business.

Crystal ball gazing

How well do you know your markets – and your future markets? Do you know who your service users will be in three years' time? With ever changing commissioning priorities, social businesses need to be agile, forward thinking and responsive. We'll provide you with your own personal guide and recommendations to help you stay ahead of the game.

Business plan writing

What are your strengths and weakness? Can you see the challenges ahead – and the opportunities? We can design business and strategic plans bespoke for your organisation, including market research and key issues relating to your unique selling point.

Developing your income generation plans

If you always do what you've always done, then you'll always get what you've always got! We work with organisations to review their track record and develop new income generation strategies. This service provides a complete analysis of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities and recommends a course of future development and action.

Don't get caught on the back foot

The development of effective and efficient monitoring systems is at the heart of good evaluation and impact assessment, yet monitoring is a task that not many people really enjoy. brap will analyse project requirements and provide support in developing systems which allow organisations to get on with delivering their project and report with less effort!

Swoop

Managing grants and contracts can mean organisations have to be meticulous in collecting monitoring data, but what happens if a project manager leaves, or the rules around evidence change? brap can swoop in and either strengthen or maintain existing systems.

Project evaluation

It's important to be able to demonstrate the success and learning from projects, yet good evaluation can be a project in itself. With our team of expert researchers, brap offer an objective, insightful and thorough evaluation service.

Bid review service

Even the most experienced bid writers benefit from an objective review of their draft bids. With brap's experience of income generation and fundraising, we can provide a non-biased view of applications, suggest improvements and even proofread your documents, increasing your chances of being successful. Bids can be reviewed over email in a matter of days, so there's no need to wait for an appointment.

Board; not bored

Whether it be visioning or strategic planning, an external facilitator can support you to make the most of the time available, ensure that the meeting goes to plan and you leave with the outcomes intended.

Impact measurement

Justifying the need for a service, making improvements and ensuring beneficiaries are getting what they need is paramount to delivering effective and efficient services. Many impact measurement methods are complex and confusing – brap takes the pain out of impact measurement and monitoring, giving organisations the evidence they need to widely market their service and help to secure the next round of funding.

Equalities training

Voluntary and community organisations delivering public services have to meet requirements under the Equality Act 2010. Evidencing your equalities credentials can make or break your bid, so make sure you're up to date with the Act. From training to creating equalities policies, this service will help you deliver fairer outcomes for everyone.

Changing the world from within

This service is a bespoke package of staff and organisational development to support you in meeting the needs of your communities in an ever changing social, political and economic environment.

Business in a box

This is a comprehensive VCO start-up package which includes all the policies, templates and guidance you need to set up your organisation. Great value for money for those just starting out.

Interested? Feel free to give us a call on 0121 456 7400 or email us at brap@brap.org.uk. You might also want to take a look at our website, www.brap.org.uk.

About brap

brap is a think fair tank, inspiring and leading change to make public, private and voluntary sector organisations fit for the needs of a more diverse society.

brap offers tailored, progressive and common sense approaches to equalities training, consultancy and community engagement issues.

In the last 13 years we have worked with thousands of voluntary and community organisations from marginalised communities to provide them cutting-edge business support. For more information view our website, www.brap.org.uk

About this guide

This guide is written for voluntary and community organisations looking for advice on measuring and communicating their impact. It has been produced as part of the LIFT infrastructure support programme, which is funded by the Big Lottery.