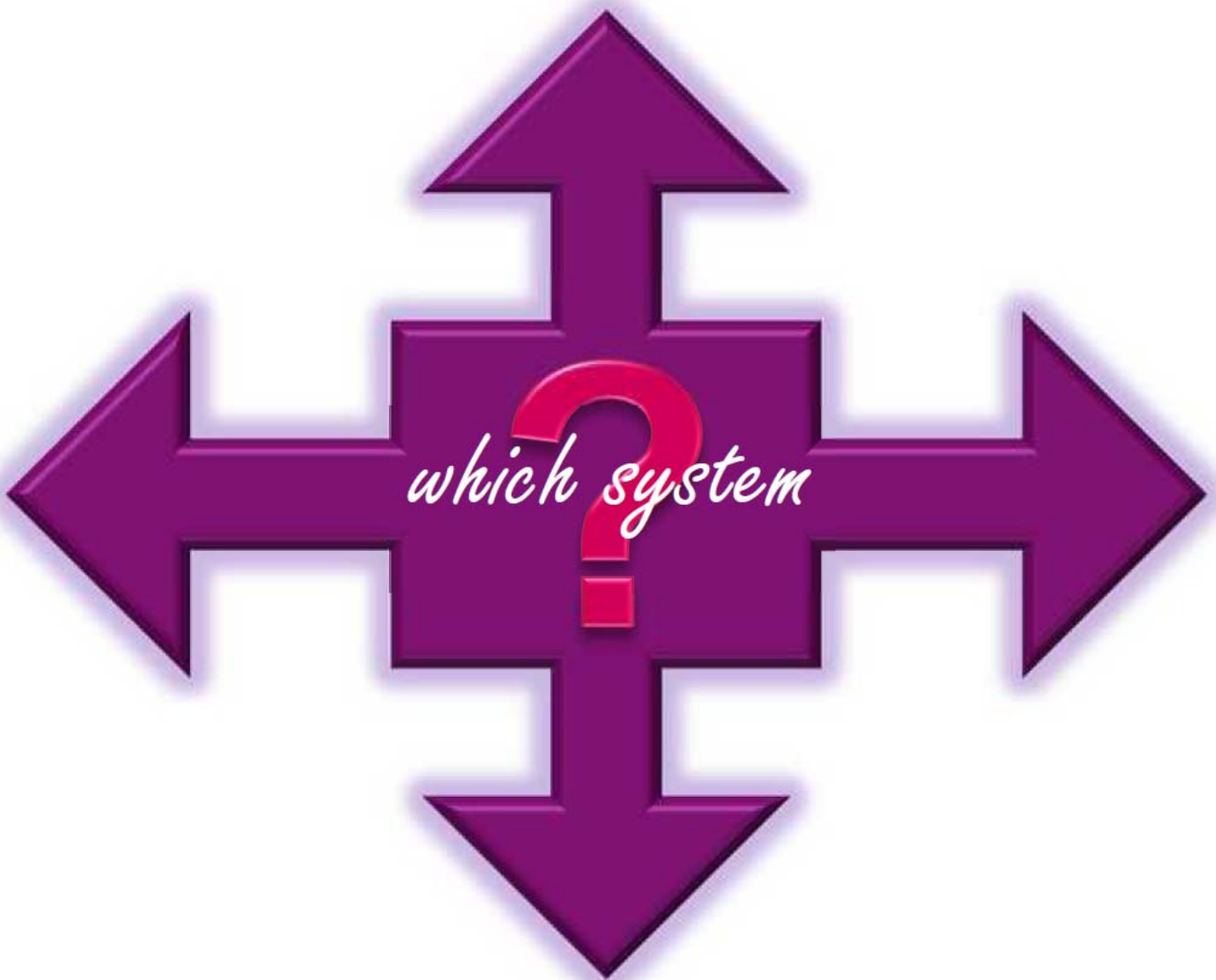


## IT for Outcomes

Selecting a database for monitoring

By Shafiq Meghani

March 2011



## Background to this guide

This guide was written by Shafiq Meghani for Charities Evaluation Services' National Performance Programme. It was based on a previous guide published by the Performance Hub in 2008, *Using ICT to Improve your Monitoring and Evaluation*, with new research of providers undertaken in 2010 by Dr Simon Davey, Diana Parkinson and Avan Wadia.

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## Terms and acronyms used in this guide

**Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)** – The process of collecting and recording information in a routine and systematic way to check progress against plans and then using that information to assess the performance of an organisation or project.

**Outcomes** – The actual changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of services and activities provided by an organisation or project.

**Information and communications technology (ICT)** - Using computer hardware, software and communications to manage and process information.

**ICT infrastructure** – Everything that supports your computer system (in other words, your computer equipment and how it connects up, as well as the programmes and services it is based on).

**Customisation** – Tailoring such as adding additional fields to capture the information that you need or specific reports.

## Introduction

Monitoring and evaluation involves gathering and assessing a great deal of information – collation, storage and manipulation of data can be a challenge. ICT can help, however it is vital that your organisation is able to select the right system to meet your needs.

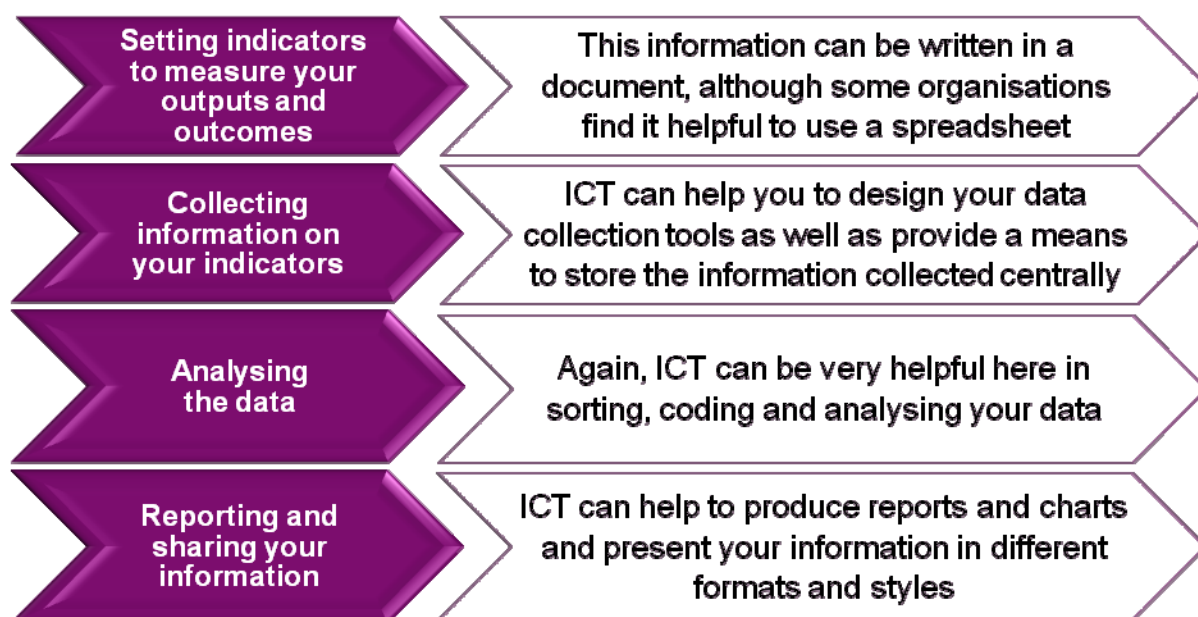
This guide is aimed at organisations that have already developed their monitoring framework, assessed their needs and are considering purchasing an ‘off-the-shelf’ system. It contains an introduction to some of the things to consider as well as information on systems used in the sector. This will give your organisation a head-start in identifying the most suitable system.

For more information please visit [www.ces-vol.org.uk/mande](http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/mande)

## The benefits

ICT enables different people to access different information and use it in different ways. It can enable you to cross-reference and link pieces of information which makes it easier to understand patterns and trends and then produce reports.

ICT can be used to support the different processes involved in monitoring and evaluation:



But understanding your organisational needs can be difficult. Knowing how to convert those needs into a solution can be equally, if not more, demanding.

## The Challenge

When developing an ICT solution for your organisation, aside from understanding the resources required, there are a number of additional questions that need to be taken into consideration:

<b>Strategy</b>	How does this fit with the organisations' vision and direction? What do you hope to achieve from this work?
<b>IT Infrastructure</b>	What computer hardware do you need to run your system? What level of connectivity do you need?
<b>Support</b>	What happens in your organisation when something goes wrong? Where can you go for independent advice?
<b>Skills</b>	Who will know how to manage the system within the organisation? Who will know how to input, secure and use the data?
<b>Time</b>	Have you factored in planning and building time? What about operating, reporting and maintaining time?

Once you've established that your organisation is ready to move forward with developing an ICT based solution, you need to think about what type of ICT will best meet your needs.

## The options

There are a number of potential ICT solutions to help your organisation support its monitoring and evaluation. The following matrix, comparing 14 systems capable of monitoring outcomes, provides a simple way to help shortlist the best solution for your organisation.

The data has been compiled from individual interviews with each system provider, together with a test of the system where available. In each case, a series of questions were posed, looking at various aspects of each system. The data was then collated and used to benchmark against other systems. The following categories have been used in the system selector:

Category	Description
Typical Cost	Including customisation, data migration, licensing, software, annual fees, set up, support, updates
Flexibility	Including customisation, user modification, user security levels, user access, remote access, data input, data migration
Outcomes management	Including recording qualitative and quantitative outcomes data, scaled outcomes, outcomes over time, pre-defined outcome menus, outcome analysis, standard and user defined reporting, charts, individual outcomes management
Data security	Including data encryption, security levels, password protection, data backup, access control
System support	Including third party access to data, method of support, type of support, standard and bespoke training

### Don't forget the four C's

- Clarity** Are you clear about the outcomes you want to monitor?
- Culture** Is your organisation ready for change?
- Capacity** Does your organisation have the time, skills and resources?
- Commitment** Is there a real commitment to see this work through?

**'It was really difficult to commit time and resources to make this happen. Something always seems like a bigger priority (especially client work!) but delays are counterproductive in the long run. You need to make it happen and accept that this sometimes involves sacrifices in the short term.'**

### Using the matrix

Once you have your list of priority considerations for your organisation, use the grid below to help you to shortlist systems that might meet your needs and then click on the name of the system to link to further information including contact details, system description and a case study.

System	Typical cost	Basic contract length	Set up time	No. of users	Flexibility	Outcomes management	Data security	System support	Specific Use					General ease of use
	Based on 10 users for 1 year	Months	From install to basic training (days)	Reported by system provider at time of research	Customisation and data integration/export	Data input, analysis, charting and reporting	Data back-up and protection	Training and technical support	Advice	Housing/homelessness	Young people	Substance misuse	Generic	Access, navigate, data entry & search without training. Useful features
<a href="#"><u>AdvicePro</u></a>	Medium	12	7	150	Low	Medium	High	Medium	✓					Reasonably straightforward, data entry not so intuitive. Hover over field help information useful
<a href="#"><u>Apricot</u></a>	Medium	12	60-90	70	Medium	High	High	Medium					✓	Intuitive, data entry simple and generally user-friendly
<a href="#"><u>Caseworker Connect</u></a>	High	60	28-110	35	Medium	High	High	High					✓	User-friendly and simple. Missing information prompts and 'workboard' with summary information useful
<a href="#"><u>Charitylog</u></a>	Medium	12	14-21	75	Medium	High	High	Medium					✓	Clear menu, a little more complex in options available. Missing information prompt useful
<a href="#"><u>ContactLINK</u></a>	Low	12	1-14	30	Low	Medium	Low	Medium					✓	User-friendly and simple to use, limited features

System	Typical cost	Basic Contract length	Set up time	No. of users	Flexibility	Outcomes management	Data security	System support	Specific Use					General ease of use
	Based on 10 users for 1 year	Months	From install to basic training (days)	Reported by system provider at time of research	Customisation and data integration/export	Data input, analysis, charting and reporting	Data back-up and protection	Training and technical support	Advice	Housing/homelessness	Young people	Substance misuse	Generic	Access, navigate, data entry & search without training. Useful features
<a href="#"><u>In-form</u></a>	High	12	60-90	11	High	High	High	Medium		✓				Easy to use, a little more complex in options available. Missing information prompt and 'dashboard' information useful
<a href="#"><u>Lamplight</u></a>	Low	3	7-60	42	Medium	High	High	High					✓	Clean menu structure and simple navigation. Outstanding tasks and case relationship features useful
<a href="#"><u>Online Data Manager</u></a>	High	24	14-60	12* *multiple agencies	Medium	High	High	Medium					✓	System not tested
<a href="#"><u>Performance Management System</u></a>	Medium	12	1	51	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium					✓	Straightforward to use and simple add projects function
<a href="#"><u>Social Impact Tracker</u></a>	Low	12	1	80	Medium	High	High	High					✓	Simple to follow with drop down menus that can be customised

System	Typical cost	Basic Contract length	Set up time	No. of users	Flexibility	Outcomes management	Data security	System support	Specific Use					General ease of use
	Based on 10 users for 1 year	Months	From install to basic training (days)	Reported by system provider at time of research	Customisation and data integration/export	Data input, analysis, charting and reporting	Data back-up and protection	Training and technical support	Advice	Housing/homelessness	Young people	Substance misuse	Generic	Access, navigate, data entry & search without training. Useful features
<a href="#"><u>Spa</u></a>	High	6	7	8	High	High	High	Medium					✓	Straightforward and detailed information capture, a little complex in data entry volume
<a href="#"><u>Star Online</u></a>	Medium	12	1	0* *recently launched	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium		✓	✓	✓	Other	Easy to add and search data
<a href="#"><u>VC Connect</u></a>	Medium	12	90	20	Medium	Low	High	High					✓	Straightforward with reasonable use of prompts. Able to accommodate support providers or infrastructure organisations
<a href="#"><u>Views</u></a>	Medium	1	14	350* *Transferring from SPRS	High	High	High	Medium					✓	Intuitive with good media support and connectivity. A little complex when adding communication with a client

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**national  
performance  
programme**

Charities Evaluation Services  
4 Coldbath Square  
London EC1R 5HL  
020 7713 5722

[www.ces-vol.org.uk](http://www.ces-vol.org.uk)