

# JARGONBUSTER

Issue No.1

Jar·gon N.

~~Nonsensical, incoherent, or meaningless talk.~~

The specialised or technical language of a trade, profession, or similar group.

~~Speech or writing having  
unusual or pretentious  
vocabulary, convoluted  
phrasing, and vague  
meaning~~

Simplifying the language of planning, project management  
and performance improvement to increase understanding

The content of Jargonbuster has been drafted by Kevin Ashby, and by Colin Nee (Charities Evaluation Services), with input from a steering group containing representatives from:



Robert Blow advised on the use of Plain English.

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Credits/Contents	2
Introduction	3
This guide	4
Alphabetical Summary	5-6
The CES Planning Triangle	7
What you want to achieve	8
What you do and what happens when you do it	9
How you know how well you are doing	10
What you need to do your work	11
More Detail and Examples	12-23

## A problem with language

Funders and support agencies use concepts and terms from the language of planning, project management and performance improvement in different ways. This lack of agreed definitions has led to widespread confusion about what particular terms mean and how to use them most appropriately.

## The Jargonbuster Group

In response to this problem and calls to simplify the language and increase understanding, the Community Fund set up an advisory group on jargonbusting in 2003. Following the merger of the Community Fund with the New Opportunities Fund in 2004, the Association of Charitable Foundations agreed to co-ordinate the work of the group.

The Jargonbuster Group aims to help UK funders, the Charity Commission and voluntary and community organisations be more consistent in the way they use technical terms in voluntary sector management and procurement. We also aim to increase awareness of the ideas behind these technical terms. This will help organisations to understand, plan, review and develop their projects in a systematic way and become more effective. It will help funders understand the work of the projects and organisations they want to fund more thoroughly and sympathetically.

The Jargonbuster Group is an informal partnership of funders, government departments, regulatory bodies and voluntary sector organisations. Together, we work to:

- *Reach agreement about the use of terms in voluntary sector management and procurement.*
- *Produce and promote a glossary of key terms.*
- *Publish it in a range of easily usable formats.*

*The Jargonbuster Group intends to review and update this resource regularly.*

# This guide

4

## **This is the first edition of the Jargonbusters guide. It has three aims.**

First, it will define some of the different terms charities and community groups, evaluators and funders use, tell you when you might hear them, and what they mean in different situations.

Secondly, it will bring out some of the ideas behind the jargon.

Thirdly, it will help funders be clearer about the words they use and use them more consistently.

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### **Using the guide**

You can use this guide in two ways.

You can look up terms in the alphabetical summary opposite.

You can look up the terms you might use when talking about particular themes:

- What you want to achieve (page 8)
- What you do and what happens when you do it (page 9)
- How you know how well you are doing (page 10)
- What you need to do your work (page 11)

There is a short explanation of each term, and a more detailed discussion which includes examples of how it is used.

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### **Examples**

We have added examples for each term to give you an idea of how to use it. We will add to these as this guide develops.

# Alphabetical Summary

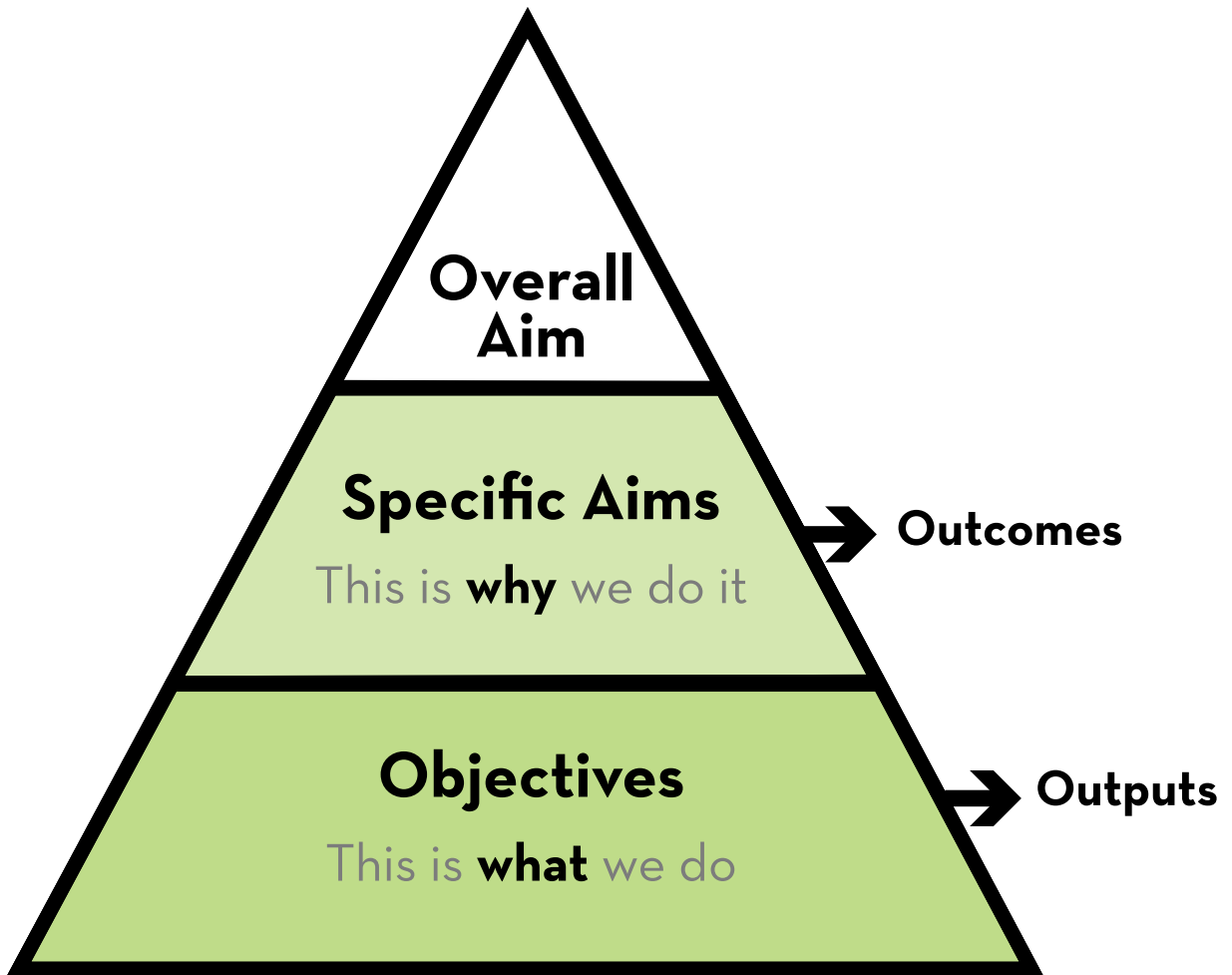
Term	Meaning
<b>Activities</b>	The actions, tasks and work a project or organisation carries out to create its outputs and outcomes, and achieve its aims. (page 14)
<b>Aim (Overall)</b>	Same as mission. (page 13)
<b>Aims (Specific)</b>	Particular changes or differences the project or organisation plans to bring about for its users. (page 13)
<b>Baseline</b>	Information about the situation that a group is trying to change, showing what it is like before they intervene. (page 19)
<b>Benchmark</b>	A standard of achievement that an organisation or project (or others like it) has already achieved, which they can compare current achievement to or use to set a target. (page 23)
<b>Evaluation</b>	Using information from monitoring and elsewhere to judge the performance of an organisation or project. (page 23)
<b>Hard outcomes</b>	Outcomes that are clear and obvious, or which involve an external change in people's behaviour or circumstances. (page 18)
<b>Impact</b>	Broader or longer-term effects of a project's or organisation's outputs, outcomes and activities. (page 18)
<b>Indicator</b>	Well defined information which shows whether something is happening. (page 22)
<b>Input</b>	All the resources a group needs to carry out its activities.
<b>Interim outcomes</b>	Smaller changes that happen as steps on the way to the main outcome. (page 17)
<b>Intermediate outcomes</b>	Same as interim outcomes. (page 17)
<b>Milestone</b>	A well defined and significant step towards achieving a target, output, outcome or impact, allowing a group to track progress. (page 20)
<b>Monitoring</b>	Collecting and recording information in a routine and systematic way to check progress against plans and enable evaluation.
<b>Mission</b>	Why an organisation or project exists and the broad effect that it wants to have. A summary of the overall difference it wants to make. (page 13)
<b>Objectives</b>	The areas of activity or practical steps a project or organisation plans to accomplish its aims. (page 14)

# Alphabetical Summary (cont)

6

Term	Meaning
<b>Outcomes</b>	The changes, benefits, learning or other effects that result from what the project or organisation makes, offers or provides. (page 16)
<b>Outputs</b>	Products, services or facilities that result from an organisation's or project's activities. (page 15)
<b>Qualitative information</b>	Information about what you do, achieve or provide that tells you the nature of the thing you are doing, providing or achieving. (page 22)
<b>Quantitative information</b>	Information about what you do, achieve or provide that tells you how many, how long or how often you have done it, achieved it or provided it. (page 22)
<b>Resources</b>	Everything a project or organisation draws on to carry out its activities. These will include the people, equipment, money and services you need. They may also be intangible, such as time, morale and knowledge.
<b>Soft outcomes</b>	Outcomes that are less easy to observe or measure, or which involve some form of change inside people, such as a change in attitude or a change in the way they see themselves. (page 17)
<b>Target</b>	A defined level of achievement which a project or organisation sets itself to achieve in a specific period of time. (page 21)
<b>Vision</b>	The ideal state a project or organisation wants the world to be in. What the world will look like if the project or organisation is successful in achieving its mission. (page 12)

# The CES Planning Triangle



# What you want to achieve:

## Visions, missions, overall and specific aims

8

### The terms

These terms help to answer questions like “What do I want to achieve?” or “Why does my project or organisation exist?” In everyday English, we use them interchangeably. In planning and evaluation, however, each word tends to mean something slightly different.

**Vision:** The ideal state a project or organisation wants the world to be in. What the world will look like if the project or organisation is successful in achieving its mission. (page 12)

**Mission or Overall Aim:** Why an organisation or project exists and the broad effect that it wants to have. A summary of the overall difference it wants to make. (page 13)

**Aims:** Particular changes or differences the project or organisation plans to bring about for its users. (page 13)

**Note one:** Charity law uses the word “purposes” to describe why a charity exists, so you may also hear this word.

**Note two:** In everyday English you may also hear the words “objectives” and “goals” used to describe what an organisation or person wants to achieve. In evaluation, the word “objective” means something different from this. We define it in the section called: “What you do and what happens when you do it”.

**Note three:** Planning, evaluation and performance management also use the word “target”. This word describes a particular level of achievement that a project or organisation wants to achieve in a set time, or has been asked to achieve. We discuss this word in more detail in the section called “How you know how well you are doing”.

**Note four:** Planning and evaluation usually use the words mission and vision only for the work of whole organisations.

# What you do and what happens when you do it: Objectives, outputs and activities; outcomes and impact

## The terms

“Activities”, “outputs”, and “objectives” are what you talk about when you answer questions like “What do you do?” and “What does our project provide?”

“Outcomes” and “impact” are what you talk about when you answer questions like “What are the results of what you do?” and “What difference are we making?”

**Objectives:** The areas of activity or overall practical steps a project or organisation plans to accomplish its aims. (page 14)

**Outputs:** Products, services or facilities that result from an organisation’s or project’s activities. (page 15)

**Activities:** The actions, tasks and work a project or organisation carries out to create its outputs and outcomes, and achieve its aims. (page 14)

**Outcomes:** The changes, benefits, learning or other effects that result from what the project or organisation makes, offers or provides. (page 16)

**Impact:** Broader or longer-term effects of a project’s or organisation’s outputs, outcomes and activities. (page 18)

## Outcomes vs outputs

Many people (including some European funders) confuse the terms “outcome” and “output”. They mean different things however.

Outcomes are changes, benefits, learning or other effects that happen as a result of the outputs you put in place. The outputs are services or products, such as publications or training courses.

So there is a crucial distinction: what you achieve for your users (the outcomes): and the services or other interventions intended to bring about those achievements (outputs).

## Example

If your aim is to increase the number of young children in your borough that can swim, an output might be a regular swimming class, and an outcome might be an increased number of children able to swim.

**Note one:** The word impact does not yet have an agreed meaning even among specialists. We use it here to mean “wider and broader effects”, but some people use it simply to mean “outcome”.

# How you know how well you are doing: Indicators, benchmarks, milestones, baselines and targets

## The terms

All these words are technical terms in planning, evaluation and performance management. We use these terms when answering questions like: “How close am I to achieving my aims?”, or “How do you know you have made a difference”?

Many people use these terms loosely, unaware of their distinct, technical meanings.

**Baseline:** Information about the situation that a group is trying to change, showing what it is like before they intervene. (page 19)

**Milestone:** A well defined and significant step towards achieving a target, output, outcome or impact, allowing a group to track progress. (page 20)

**Target:** A defined level of achievement which a project or organisation sets itself to achieve in a specific period of time. (page 21)

**Indicator:** Well defined information which shows whether something is happening. (page 22)

**Benchmark:** A standard of achievement that an organisation or project (or others like it) has already achieved, which they can compare current achievement to or use to set a target. (page 23)

**Monitoring:** Collecting and recording information in a routine and systematic way to check progress against plans and enable evaluation.

**Evaluation:** Using information from monitoring and elsewhere to judge the performance of an organisation or project. (page 23)

# What you need to do your work

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## The terms

“Inputs” and “resources” are words we use to answer questions like: “What do you need me to give you to carry out your project?”

**Inputs:** All the resources a group needs to carry out its activities.

**Resources:** Everything a project or organisation draws on to carry out its activities. These will include the people, equipment, money and services you need. They may also be intangible, such as time, morale and knowledge.

People sometimes confuse inputs and outputs.

# More Detail and Examples

## What you want to achieve

Term	Meaning
<b>Vision</b>	<p><b>The ideal state a project or organisation wants the world to be in. What the world will look like if the project or organisation is successful in achieving its mission.</b></p> <p>A vision statement is usually just one or two sentences. It describes the situation that would exist if everything the project or organisation is working for happened. In other words, it says what would count as complete success for that project or organisation.</p> <p>The vision is not what a project or organisation thinks it will achieve this year or next year, but what things would look like eventually, if it achieves all its aims.</p> <p>A vision can either be something specific, or something general, depending on the project or organisation. It is often something that needs the work of many other organisations and projects in order to happen.</p>
<b>Examples</b>	<p>A world in which everyone can read.</p> <p>In 100 years, East Fensham village is still a functioning community surrounded by countryside, with its architectural heritage intact and no new development out of character with its present form.</p> <p>People understand the causes of global warming and how it will affect them. People understand the technologies and personal actions they can take to tackle those causes. People take those actions, e.g. reduce their use of energy and other resources and recycle their waste products better.</p> <p>People with degenerative brain conditions are treated with dignity and have the help they need to live independently for as long as their condition allows it.</p>

Term	Meaning
<b>Mission; (Overall) Aim</b>	<p data-bbox="563 448 1431 577"><b>Why an organisation or project exists and the broad effect that it wants to have. A summary of the overall difference it wants to make.</b></p> <p data-bbox="563 600 1431 678">The mission statement or overall aim is also usually just one or two sentences.</p> <p data-bbox="563 723 1431 846">It describes the people, situation or problem a project or organisation want to make a difference to. It also describes the particular difference the project or organisation wants to make.</p> <p data-bbox="563 891 1431 1014">As with a vision, the aim may take a long time, be very general or very specific. It is not what a group will achieve specifically this year, or next year, but the thing they ultimately want to achieve.</p>
<b>Examples:</b>	<p data-bbox="563 1037 911 1070">To enable people to read.</p> <p data-bbox="563 1104 1394 1182">To meet the needs of disadvantaged people and improve their quality of life.</p> <p data-bbox="563 1216 1321 1249">To preserve the character of the village of East Fensham.</p> <p data-bbox="563 1283 1409 1361">To increase people’s understanding of global warming and what they can do about it.</p> <p data-bbox="563 1395 1353 1473">To enable people with degenerative brain conditions to live independently.</p>
Term	Meaning
<b>Aims; Specific Aims</b>	<p data-bbox="563 1556 1409 1630"><b>Particular changes or differences the project or organisation plans to bring about for its users.</b></p> <p data-bbox="563 1641 1326 1720">Mission and aims are sometimes called “Overall Aim” and “Specific Aims”.</p> <p data-bbox="563 1753 1425 1877">Specific aims break down the overall aim into a series of particular changes or differences that, if they all happen, achieve the overall aim.</p> <p data-bbox="563 1910 1425 2078">Specific aims can still require a long time to bring about, and be quite general. They may also change over time, as the context in which a project or organisation is trying to achieve its overall aim changes.</p>

## More Detail and Examples (cont)

### What you do and what happens when you do it

Term	Meaning
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>The areas of activity or practical steps a project or organisation plans to accomplish its aims.</b>
	People often express this as a short list of what they will do.
<b>Example</b>	<p>To help our clients to read, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide one-to-one literacy support.</li> <li>• Work with prisons to identify people with reading difficulties.</li> <li>• Lobby schools, the Learning and Skills Council, Government and other bodies to move literacy up the policy agenda.</li> </ul>
	Sometimes, you will also hear the word “objectives” used simply to mean “goals” in a loose sense not connected to making a difference. This is not the technical meaning we discuss here.
Term	Meaning
<b>Activities</b>	<b>The actions, tasks and work a project or organisation carries out to create its outputs and outcomes, and achieve its aims.</b>
	Activities include all the things you do to put on a service, run facilities or create products. It is not just what you do when you are actually providing the service, product or facility.
<b>Example</b>	<p>To help people with poor literacy to read we provide one-to-one reading courses.</p> <p>The courses are our product (or service or output).</p> <p>Our activities are everything we have to do to put on the courses, including consulting service users, planning the courses, raising funds for them and marketing them.</p>

Term	Meaning
<b>Outputs</b>	<p><b>Products, services or facilities that result from an organisation’s or project’s activities.</b></p> <p>Outputs can include services you offer, products you sell or give away (for example, booklets), and facilities you provide. They are what you “put out” as a result of your activity. The people you help use these outputs to achieve changes they want to achieve for themselves.</p> <p>Outputs are not the benefits or changes you achieve for your users, they are the interventions you make to bring about those achievements.</p>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reading courses we offer.</li> <li>• A session in a reading course that we offer.</li> </ul>
	<p>Outputs relate to objectives. Objectives are the planned areas of activity through which you intend to achieve your aims. Outputs are specific services and products you offer to carry out those objectives.</p>
<b>Example</b>	<p><b>Objective:</b> to provide one-to-one reading support.</p> <p><b>Outputs:</b> 30 one-to-one reading courses of 10 sessions each.</p>
	<p>We can describe outputs in detail as well as provide figures for them.</p>
<b>Example</b>	<p>Each reading course consists of a series of reading tasks of progressively greater difficulty, length or complication. A qualified teacher tutors each class and tests that clients successfully complete each task.</p>

## More Detail and Examples (cont)

Term	Meaning
<b>Outcomes</b>	<p><b>The changes, benefits, learning or other effects that result from what the project or organisation makes, offers or provides.</b></p>
	<p>When people use a project or organisation, they expect it will make some kind of difference to them. For example, if they have a problem with reading they hope the reading classes will teach them to read better. This difference “comes out” of the things the project or organisation “puts out”. (This is why it is an “out - come”.)</p> <p>Outcomes are all the things that happen because of the project’s or organisation’s services, facilities or products. This includes the bad and not so good, as well as the good; the unexpected as well as the expected.</p> <p>Outcomes can be for individuals, families, or whole communities. We can also talk about outcomes in organisations, or in other fields such as policy, law or the natural environment.</p>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals with poor literacy are able to read better.</li> <li>• An individual gets a job (as a result of training or help with interviews and jobsearch activity).</li> <li>• There is less fear of crime in an area (for example, as a result of better policing or work among young people to give them things to do).</li> <li>• Organisations raise more money (as a result of fundraising training).</li> </ul>
	<p>Outcomes relate to aims. Aims describe the changes or benefits you intend to achieve within your target group. Outcomes are all the changes that actually occur when you carry out activities to achieve the aims. They may not be the same as the outcomes you planned.</p>
<b>Example</b>	<p><b>Aim:</b> To help people with poor literacy to read.</p> <p><b>Outcomes:</b> People who attend our reading courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are more confident reading.</li> <li>• Read better.</li> <li>• Read outside our classes well enough to have independent lives.</li> <li>• Have improved self-confidence all round.</li> </ul>

Term	Meaning
<b>Interim or intermediate outcomes</b>	<p><b>Smaller changes that happen as steps on the way to the main outcome.</b></p> <p>Most of the aims organisations and projects want to achieve do not happen in one go. They happen as a result of many smaller changes that eventually add up to the desired change. The smaller changes need to happen before the user can reach the final, desired outcome.</p> <p>People call these smaller changes “intermediate” or “interim outcomes”, or “outcomes on the way”.</p> <p>When you want to achieve a complex outcome, or one that takes a long time to reach (possibly longer than the term of any grant support for it), you can show that your project or organisation is effective by demonstrating intermediate outcomes.</p>
<b>Example</b>	<p>To improve their reading skills, our clients first need to believe that they have the ability to learn and be motivated to learn. Thus, a change in self-belief and motivation can be an intermediate outcome of our project.</p>
Term	Meaning
<b>Soft Outcomes</b>	<p><b>Outcomes that are less easy to observe or measure, or which involve some form of change inside people, such as a change in attitude or a change in the way they see themselves.</b></p> <p>Although not the easiest to measure, soft outcomes can be an important part of an organisation’s or project’s achievements. Often they are the most appropriate change to focus on, or are what you aim to change (for example, if you want to change public attitudes toward people with mental health difficulties).</p> <p>Soft outcomes may, coincidentally, also often be intermediate outcomes. But the two should not be confused.</p>
<b>Example</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with poor literacy improve their self-confidence as they learn to read.</li> </ul>
	<p>It is possible to measure soft outcomes. We do so by asking people to judge for themselves what is changing inside them as they use our services.</p>

## More Detail and Examples (cont)

Term	Meaning
<b>Hard Outcomes</b>	<b>Outcomes that are clear and obvious, or which involve an external change in people’s behaviour or circumstances.</b>
	Hard outcomes are not better than soft outcomes, simply different. We can often report them easily in numbers.
<b>Example</b>	A user of our reading classes becomes literate.
	Hard outcomes can often take a long time to achieve, especially when working with people who have many problems in their lives. For example, it may take years for each user of a homelessness project to obtain and keep their own housing.
Term	Meaning
<b>Impact</b>	<b>Broader or longer-term effects of a project’s or organisation’s outputs, outcomes and activities.</b>
	The word impact has a number of different uses in project work. The two most often encountered are as follows.  Many people use it simply to mean “outcome”.  The meaning we use here is “the broader or longer-term effects of a project’s or organisation’s outputs and activities”. Often, these are effects on people other than the direct users of a project, or on a broader field such as government policy.
<b>Example</b>	Training providers in Newcastle help the workforce achieve a high level of skills. This encourages more companies to invest in Newcastle.
	Impacts can be negative for some people as well as positive.
<b>Example</b>	Installing CCTV cameras reduces the level of drug crime and street prostitution in the Borough of Lowdown. Unfortunately, levels of drug crime and street prostitution increase in neighbouring boroughs that do not have CCTV.

## More Detail and Examples (cont)

### How you know how well you are doing

19

Term	Meaning
<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Information about the situation that a group is trying to change, showing what it is like before they intervene.</b>
	<p>Projects and organisations need to collect baseline information to see what progress they are making. If you cannot describe the initial situation, or your clients' starting point, you cannot know whether you have made a difference.</p> <p>Baseline information can be about individual clients, or about a whole situation the project or organisation wants to affect.</p> <p>To be useful, it must be information about elements of a situation that the project or organisation can affect. It must also be information that allows you to compare directly the state of things before and after you intervene.</p>
<b>Example</b>	The reading age of our clients before they take our reading classes.

Term	Meaning
<b>Milestone</b>	<p><b>A well defined and significant step towards achieving a target, output, outcome or impact, allowing a group to track progress.</b></p> <p>A milestone is a key step, not just any step. It is a step which is essential for the project or organisation to achieve the target, output, outcome or impact it plans to achieve.</p>
<b>Examples</b>	<p>To provide one-to-one reading courses (the output), one milestone is to recruit enough volunteers or paid staff to teach the courses.</p> <p>For the reading courses to help anyone read better, one milestone is that people who have difficulty reading attend the courses.</p>
	<p>If the milestones are about changes happening for the group's clients, they will be the same as "intermediate outcomes". Some people use the term milestone to mean "intermediate outcome".</p>

Term	Meaning
<b>Target</b>	<b>A defined level of achievement which a project or organisation sets itself to achieve in a specific period of time.</b>
	<p>A target should be “SMART”. That is, it should be specific, something you can measure or observe and achieve, something that is realistic, and have a time limit.</p> <p>You can set a target for an input, output, milestone, objective, outcome or impact.</p>
<b>Examples</b>	<p>A project to help people with poor literacy might have the following targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To recruit five volunteers by the end of April (input target).</li> <li>• To provide reading classes for 50 clients this year (output target).</li> <li>• To recruit 50 clients to our reading classes (milestone target).</li> <li>• 30 clients attending our reading classes will leave them with a reading age of 16 or greater (outcome target).</li> </ul> <p>An example of an impact target is to halve child poverty by 2010.</p>

## More Detail and Examples (cont)

Term	Meaning
<b>Indicator</b>	<p><b>Well defined information which shows whether something is happening.</b></p> <p>You use indicators to see if you are reaching your targets or milestones, creating your outputs and objectives or achieving your outcomes, aims and impacts. An indicator is something you can observe or measure, and which is a sign that any of these things has happened.</p> <p>To be useful, an indicator must really be a test of what you want to find out about. It must also be something you can collect information about consistently.</p>
<b>Example</b>	<p>A client completing the reading course is an indicator that we have delivered a service, but not of whether the client has reached the literacy level we want them to.</p> <p>Particularly when talking about outcomes, people often confuse the indicator with the change itself.</p>
<b>Example</b>	<p><b>Outcome:</b> People achieve a level of literacy that allows them to function independently.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Reading age indicates the level of literacy; a reading age of 16 indicates that they are literate enough to lead independent lives.</p>
Term	Meaning
<b>Quantitative information</b>	<b>Information about what you do, achieve or provide that tells you how many, how long or how often you have done it, achieved it or provided it.</b>
<b>Example</b>	We provided 30 reading courses, consisting of five weeks of two-hour sessions each week.
Term	Meaning
<b>Qualitative information</b>	<b>Information about what you do, achieve or provide that tells you the nature of the thing you are doing, providing or achieving.</b>
	When we use qualitative information as part of an indicator, the information should tell us about the worth or quality of the thing being measured.

Term	Meaning
<b>Example</b>	In their exit interviews, every student said they had enjoyed the course and had got a lot out of it.
<b>Benchmark</b>	<p><b>A standard of achievement that an organisation or project (or others like it) has already achieved, which they can compare current achievement to or use to set a target.</b></p> <p>A benchmark is a level of achievement that your own project or organisation has already achieved, or that similar organisations or project have achieved. You compare your current achievement to this standard.</p> <p>The benchmark may be about the quality of your services, how people view the service, or the levels of success it is achieving. It is usually a statistical measure, though sometimes benchmarks can be in the form of milestones against which to measure progress.</p>
<b>Examples</b>	<p>On average, 60 per cent of clients completing reading classes in Reading improve their reading age by five years or more and 90 per cent say they are satisfied with the service the classes provide.</p> <p>When we have run this service in other boroughs, we have filled our classes within two weeks of advertising them. We have set this as a milestone for our new project.</p>
Term	Meaning
<b>Evaluation</b>	<p><b>Using information from monitoring and elsewhere to judge the performance of an organisation or project.</b></p> <p>There are a number of different kinds of evaluation.</p> <p>“Self-evaluation” is when an organisation uses its own expertise and resources to judge its own performance.</p> <p>“External evaluation” is when you hire a consultant or other organisation to make these judgements.</p> <p>“Formative” evaluation is when you use evaluation while you are still carrying out your work to improve it while it is still happening.</p>

