



INSPIRING IMPACT

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Blueprint for shared measurement

Developing, designing and implementing shared approaches to impact measurement.

Shared measurement involves charities and social enterprises working on similar issues, and towards similar goals, reaching a common understanding of what to measure, and developing the tools to do so.

Shared measurement is a process—understanding a sector’s shared outcomes and mapping out its theory of change—and a product—any tool used by more than one organisation to measure impact. This report defines what we understand shared measurement to be and identifies the benefits and challenges associated with it. Through analysis of twenty approaches, we examine how it is developed and draw lessons for future initiatives.

Key features of shared measurement

Shared outcomes: organisations have a consensus on the shared outcomes that their sector achieves.

Consistent methodologies: organisations use the same tools and methods when measuring.

Focus on measuring impact: organisations focus on the difference an activity or organisation makes.

Agreement around what is measured: outcomes and indicators used in a shared approach are relevant and meaningful to all those using it.

Clarity around a sector’s impact: organisations understand how a sector works together to solve a particular social problem—through mapping a sector’s theory of change or impact network.

Ability to compare: organisations are able to compare their results to those of similar organisations.

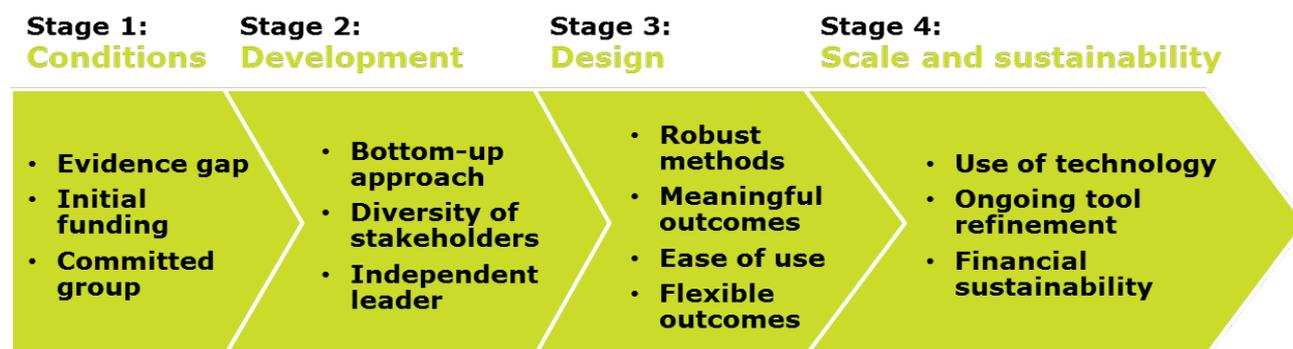
What are the benefits of shared measurement?

Shared measurement can improve standards of impact measurement, allowing for greater consistency and comparability, and help charities to understand what works and improve their practices. Shared measurement can:

- **save time and resources**
- **reduce duplication in reporting to funders**
- **allow beneficiaries to be tracked through many different services and interventions**
- **improve standards of impact measurement**
- **validate impact data that is collected**
- **help organisations think about how their sector works together to achieve change**
- **help us understand what works best for different social issues**

It is important to acknowledge the challenges of developing shared measurement approaches. Some charities we spoke to fear that shared measurement may force them to measure outcomes that are not relevant to their work, and others worry that it may lead to benchmarking and competition on the basis of results. Ensuring approaches are nuanced, and do not oversimplify charities’ often complex work, is important. We address a number of these challenges in our report.

What makes a successful shared measurement approach?



Stage 1: Conditions

Our research identified a number of conditions that need to be in place before development begins:

- An **evidence gap** in the sector. This could be to connect activities to long-term outcomes, or a lack of sensitive measurement tools.
- **Initial funding**, committed for a number of years to develop and pilot tools.
- A **committed group** of engaged individuals or organisations.

Stage 2: Development

A number of factors are key to the successful development of an approach:

- A **bottom-up approach**, ensuring design and development is led by those working in a sector—for example, front-line practitioners.
- **Diverse stakeholders** included in development to ensure the approach reflects the sector.
- An **independent leader** to drive the process forward, and successfully balance the demands of charities and funders.

Stage 3: Design

Several themes are key to successful design:

- **Robust methods** and tools which stand up to external scrutiny.
- **Meaningful outcomes**, with the majority relevant to all stakeholders in the approach.
- A simple, **easy-to-use** tool—complex enough to be meaningful to a range of organisations, but straightforward to administer.
- A degree of **flexibility in outcomes**, striking a balance between flexibility and standardisation.

Stage 4: Scale and sustainability

Several themes are important to think about when scaling up and making approaches sustainable:

- Use of **technology** to make tools easy to use and accessible, and allow easy comparison of results.
- **Ongoing refinement** of tools to continually improve and respond to user feedback.
- **Financial sustainability**, through committed funding or a practical business model.

What next?

The sector needs to invest in the right technology for shared measurement—incorporating tools into easy-to-use software systems or web-based platforms. Funders also need to support shared measurement and commit to long-term funding to allow the tools to reach a stage where they can scale up and achieve sustainability. The recommendations section in our report lists a number of actions the sector can take to develop and embed shared measurement.

Inspiring Impact aims to change the way the UK voluntary sector thinks about impact, and make high-quality impact measurement the norm for charities and social enterprises by 2022. Over the next decade we will work towards five key objectives under five themes, answering the key questions for the sector. Find out more at www.inspiringimpact.org.

Read more...

To read the full shared measurement report, which includes case studies of six shared measurement approaches, visit www.inspiringimpact.org. This report is the first working paper of the Inspiring Impact shared measurement programme, and we welcome feedback and comments on what we have found.