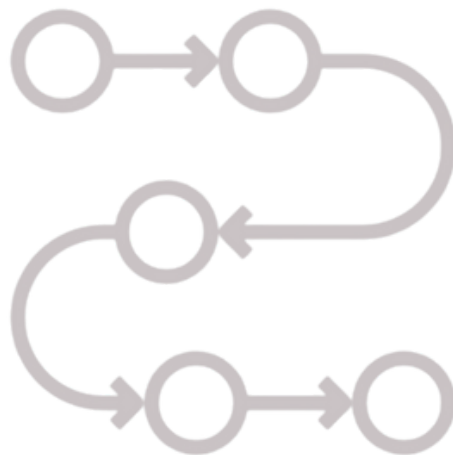




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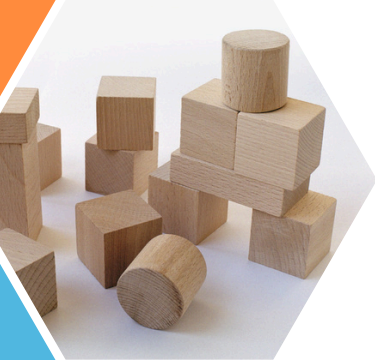
# **The Common Foundations of Impact Measurement**

## **Version 2.0**



Setting a minimum standard for the "how" of  
impact measurement in five essential practices.

[commonapproach.org](http://commonapproach.org)



**The Common Foundations** provide guidance for *how* to measure impact. These five essential practices comprise a minimum standard of impact measurement. The Common Foundations can and should be used in collaboration with other tools and approaches, which you can learn more about [here](#).



This document was written for organizations that have already answered the question, “**is impact measurement for you?**” It will guide organizations that have decided to engage in impact measurement through a practice that ensures they are on solid ground.



The Common Foundations is based on globally recognized best practices. The essential practices that we outline reiterate those put forward by organizations including **EVPA, GECES**, the G8 Task Force **and more**. We have expanded on these broad common processes with specific sub-practices that clearly define a minimum standard.

We believe a minimum standard should reflect actual practice. In the case of the Common Foundations, our definition of a minimum standard is a standard that reflects the real practices of approximately 60% of social purpose organizations.



As impact measurement practice evolves, the minimum standard will change to reflect this evolution. What is a minimum standard today will no longer be a minimum standard in the future, as this practice changes over time.

The Common Approach is committed to championing an evolving approach to impact measurement practice that is driven by those whose lives are most affected by an organization’s actions. You can read more on this [here](#).



In alignment with its vision, the Common Approach is planning for future versions of the standard to include a much greater number of required practices focused on engagement with those most affected. Learn more about our vision for Version 3.0 [here](#).





## Common Foundations

1.0 Describe Your Intended Change .....	3
2.0 Use Indicators .....	4
3.0 Collect Useful Information .....	5
4.0 Gauge performance and impact .....	8
5.0 Communicate and Use Results .....	10



## Notes for reading this document

**Essential practice** outlines what must be implemented to meet the minimum standard.

**Suggestions** are ideas on how to meet the minimum standard or best practices that are beyond the minimum standard.

**Engage with those most affected** refers to future-looking practices. These practices are not required but the Common Approach recommends them and intends to make them required in future versions of the standard.



# 1.0 Describe your intended change



A description of the intended change is a foundational practice of all **impact** measurement approaches.

The description must specify how and why your work will bring about change. It can be as simple as a paragraph describing the change, sometimes called an **impact thesis**. It can also be a diagram—such as a **theory of change**, **outcomes map**, or **logic model**.

The purpose of the description is to focus your measurement efforts; describe the scope of these efforts, and clarify who should be involved in the process.

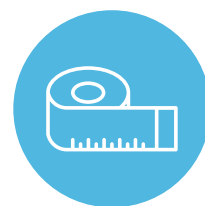
Essential Practice	Explanation
<b>1.1 Describe the change you want to achieve.</b>	Identify the broad, long-term change that fulfills your mission. This is the change that matters most to the people and/or natural environments most affected by your organization’s actions.
<b>1.2 Identify the positive results most central to that change.</b>	Describe the near-term or interim results that will most directly contribute to achieving the change.
<b>1.3 State the main activities you will undertake.</b>	Specify the actions that will achieve your desired change.
<b>1.4 Describe the process of change.</b>	Specify how and why your work achieves results by explaining the relationship between what you do and what will change as a result.

## Engage with those most affected

To focus on the changes that matter most to the people and natural environments most affected by your organization’s actions, involve them in articulating your intended change. This will allow you to uncover assumptions and expectations that strengthen the basis for measuring impact.







## 2.0 Use indicators

The use of *indicators* to measure change is another essential practice of many impact measurement approaches. Indicators help you to assess how well you carried out your work and what effect your work has.

A good set of indicators will inform *how* to create impact and *what* changes have occurred. Indicators can be qualitative (non-numerical) or quantitative (numerical).

Essential Practice	Explanation
<b>2.1 Think of how you will know that progress and change have happened.</b>	Consider which results will lead to the change you seek, and what information you will need in order to tell you if you have achieved these results.
<b>2.2 Identify indicators that show progress and change.</b>	<p>Identify relevant qualitative and/or quantitative indicators that reflect the progress and change you want to achieve.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> Explore existing indicators. If these indicators meet your needs, use them. Three or four key indicators are often sufficient.</p> <p>Think about indicators that describe what changed, and also how much (duration, depth, and scale) it changed.</p>
<b>2.3 Refine indicators so they are time-specific and can be observed or measured.</b>	<p>Ensure the qualitative and/or quantitative indicators identified have clear timelines and are focused on changes that can be observed or measured.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> The best indicators are precise, easy to interpret, and give insight into both the quality and quantity of the change.</p>

### Engage with those most affected

Involve those whose lives are most affected by your organization's actions in defining indicators. Be sure you know how they define and understand success. They likely know some concrete, measurable markers of change and the relative priority of the indicators. By involving those whose lives are most affected, you can ensure the indicators you choose are meaningful to those most affected and closely reflect the changes that are most important to them.



## 3.0 Collect useful information

Gathering data can be a resource-intensive task. An essential practice of impact measurement is that the information collected should be *useful*.

Information collection should not be burdensome for your organization, or for those from whom you are collecting information. It should help you improve your work and demonstrate that you are making progress.

Essential Practice	Explanation
<b>3.1 Decide what data you need to collect in order to interpret the change.</b>	<p>Determine what data is needed in order to understand the change suggested by the indicator data. There are often many different factors or variables that influence change. It is not usually possible to assess all factors. Decide what specific data will be the most useful to you.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> Consider information that will help you refine program delivery based on impact measures. For example: Is it important to know how people found you? Attendance rates? Which facilitator ran the session that they attended?</p> <p>Consider what information you need to answer who experienced the change. This will allow you to disaggregate and compare by gender, race, age, geography, etc. Make your life easy by re-using and building upon existing data.</p>
<b>3.2 Select data-collection methods that will give you the evidence you need.</b>	<p>Choose methods that are most appropriate given the qualitative data and quantitative data you need to help you understand how change happens and what has changed—as well as the data you need to track your indicators.</p>

### Engage with those most affected

Share your data collection plans with those whose lives are most affected by your organization's actions. Ask them for their thoughts. Invite them to contribute to the data collection, and ask them for their preferences on how they contribute. Choose methods that will enable broad participation. Consider focus groups, storytelling, surveys, interviews, unstructured conversations, workshops, videos, etc.

Essential Practice	Explanation
<b>3.2 continued</b>	<p><b>Suggestions:</b> Data-collection methods might include storytelling, surveys, interviews, unstructured conversations, workshops, videos, photos, audio, etc.</p> <p>Use the methods and tools that are the most practical and simple to implement.</p> <p>Give staff the tools they need to collect accurate data. For example, an online form to easily input notes can serve both routine record keeping needs and provide information for impact measurement.</p> <p>Draw on data that is readily available wherever possible. Existing systems, such as sales systems and human resource systems, can often be used for impact reporting.</p> <p>Make sure your indicators are aligned with your data collection methods, or revise them if necessary.</p>
<b>3.3 Have a clear plan for data collection.</b>	<p>Build a process for how you will collect data (including from whom), when you will collect it, and who will collect it.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> Ensure your plan has support within the organization and builds on existing systems and processes.</p> <p>If requesting data from other organizations (e.g., if you are an investor or grantor asking for data from investees or grantees), ask for readily available data to not create an undue burden on others.</p> <p>Ensure that the appropriate staff are involved in the data collection planning; staff with relevant experience and knowledge, including those working most closely with those most affected by your work.</p>
<b>3.4 Collect data in a routine and consistent way.</b>	<p>Gather information at regular intervals (such as yearly or according to project and program cycles and reporting timelines).</p>

### Engage with those most affected

By involving those most affected, you will collect better data because the data will be full, more accurate and will reflect the experience and voice of those most affected.



Essential Practice	Explanation
3.4 continued	<p><b>Suggestion:</b> The task is easiest when it is part of the regular work of the organization. Look for opportunities to link data collection with existing efforts.</p>
3.5 Act ethically in collecting data.	<p>Collect only the data you need. Collect your data in a respectful manner.</p> <p>Be aware of relevant legislation about consent and the protection and use of personal information.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> Be thoughtful about what information you collect, from whom, how it is collected, and how often. Make reasonable efforts to minimize bias in the collection of data. For example, do not collect data only from people who are your biggest fans.</p> <p>Do not systematically exclude any one group from the data collection process (such as people who are more difficult to access for one reason or another). Try to collect data from a representative cross-section of the people your organization serves.</p> <p>Be aware of appropriate protocols guiding the ethical collection of diversity, equity, and inclusion data.</p>







## 4.0 Gauge performance and impact

Whether qualitative or quantitative, no data set makes sense until it is presented in a reasonable and credible context. Implicit in all impact measurement approaches is the need to assemble and analyze data. Only through this analysis can you gain insights about what works and about how well you are doing.

Essential Practice	Explanation
<b>4.1 Put a system in place to store and manage data.</b>	<p>Have a place to store and manage the information you collect.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> It should have appropriate security. Limit who has edit access and who has read-only access. Data should be stored and managed in a way that complies with existing data privacy legislation.</p>
<b>4.2 Assemble, organize, and review your information.</b>	<p>Data isn't useful if it isn't looked at and learned from. Make sure your data ends up somewhere where it can be used by those who are learning about and improving the organization. Periodically (such as monthly or yearly, or according to project cycles), look at the information collected.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> Organize the data in ways that make it easier to see in its entirety (group similar qualitative comments and/or create summary tables).</p>
<b>4.3 Analyze data.</b>	<p>Analyze your data to understand if and how changes are occurring.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> Assess progress by comparing your data against baseline data.</p>

### Engage with those most affected

Invite those whose lives are most affected by your organization's actions to help you to make sense of the information you collect. Where possible, bring people together to discuss your findings, review results and explore the reasons behind these. Allow them to check whether your results are consistent with those you set out to achieve and to identify lessons or make recommendations.

Essential Practice	Explanation
<b>4.4 Review differences and draw conclusions.</b>	<p>Using your summaries and comparisons, draw some conclusions about what your data says. Describe what changes have taken place, how, and why.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> When drawing conclusions, consider both negative as well as positive outcomes.</p>
<b>4.5 Base conclusions about impact on reasonable assumptions.</b>	<p>Consider if the changes might have happened even without your work. Moderate your claims as necessary.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> When analyzing why the change happened, consider factors outside of your work, such as participants' own actions or the services of other organizations.</p>

### Engage with those most affected

If your organization serves people, consider involving them in interpreting the data. Some organizations host a **data party**. By involving those most affected, you can ensure that the information you collect is widely understood and informs future action.





## 5.0 Communicate and use results

Implicit in all impact measurement approaches is the importance of communicating and using the data that you collect and analyze.

“Use” can mean many things: informing, learning, improving, action. If the data you gathered did not usefully inform your work or those affected by your work, then rethink what you are measuring and why. Use the information you collect to produce a balanced account of your work and the difference it makes.

Communicate your results in such a way that people understand how you came up with your conclusions. This communication should be an honest account of your impact, rather than a public relations exercise. Communicate openly and in ways that are appropriate to different groups of people. People should be able to access your reports and results in ways that are easy for them. By communicating your results regularly and publicly, you will establish trust, transparency, and accountability among different groups of people.

Essential Practice	Explanation
<b>5.1 Use your impact data, or revise it.</b>	<p>Use the data you have collected and analyzed to inform, improve, make decisions, learn, and/or act.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> If your impact measurement offers learnings and insights, great! If not, revisit what you measure and how. Focus on getting information that you will use.</p>
<b>5.2 Choose reporting methods and communication styles targeted to the needs of different groups of people affected by your work.</b>	<p>There is no one right way to create a report. Tailor the length, detail, reading level and language(s) to be accessible to different groups of people affected by your work and different audiences.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> Organize the data in ways that make it easier to see in its entirety (group similar qualitative comments and/or create summary tables).</p>

### Engage with those most affected

Where appropriate, communicate your data and analysis with those involved in your impact measurement process. Consider making your data and analysis available to a wider set of people.

Essential Practice	Explanation
<b>5.3 Report on performance and impact regularly.</b>	Release regular public updates on the main things your organization has achieved and changed. This may be annually or at the end of a project or program cycle. This transparent account helps others to understand the impact you have made.
<b>5.4 Produce as balanced an account as possible of your impact.</b>	<p>Communicate as fully and honestly as possible on your impact, providing as balanced an account as possible.</p> <p><b>Suggestions:</b> Add explanations to help readers understand why something is (or isn't) occurring.</p> <p>Provide an account of both negative and positive results; avoid giving disproportionate attention to only positive results.</p>

### Engage with those most affected

Seek input on how you communicate results in order to ensure your report is accessible. Get feedback from those most affected by your organization's actions to learn how well your conclusions resonate with their experience.



## Additional resources

The five practices of the Common Foundations encapsulate a minimum standard for impact measurement—they are a starting point, rather than a gold standard. A social purpose organization that has these five practices in place is successfully doing impact measurement.

See where your organization stands by taking our [quick self-assessment](#)—if you are already aligned, you can start using the Common Approach logo right away!

Learn more about how the Common Foundations aligns with other standards and approaches, such as BCorp, Social Value International, Results-Based Management and more [here](#).

Standards are communities, not documents. The Common Approach is created for and governed by social purpose organizations. Help shape the next version of the Common Foundations by providing feedback [here](#).

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## **Common Foundations**

### **Summary of the five essential practices**

#### **1.0 Describe Your Intended Change**

- 1.1 Describe the change you want to achieve.
- 1.2 Identify the positive results most central to that change.
- 1.3 State the main activities you will undertake.
- 1.4 Describe the process of change.

#### **2.0 Use Indicators**

- 2.1 Think of how you will know that progress and change have happened.
- 2.2 Identify indicators that show progress and change.
- 2.3 Refine indicators so they are time-specific and can be observed or measured.

#### **3.0 Collect Useful Information**

- 3.1 Decide what data you need to collect in order to interpret the change.
- 3.2 Select data-collection methods that will give you the evidence you need.
- 3.3 Have a clear plan for data collection.
- 3.4 Collect data in a routine and consistent way.
- 3.5 Act ethically in collecting data.

#### **4.0 Gauge performance and impact**

- 4.1 Put a system in place to store and manage data.
- 4.2 Assemble, organize, and review your information.
- 4.3 Analyze data.
- 4.4 Review differences and draw conclusions.
- 4.5 Base conclusions about impact on reasonable assumptions.

#### **5.0 Communicate and Use Results**

- 5.1 Use your impact data, or revise it.
- 5.2 Choose reporting methods and communication styles targeted to the needs of different groups of people affected by your work.
- 5.3 Report on performance and impact regularly.
- 5.4 Produce as balanced an account as possible of your impact.

