
Evaluation Workbook VIII.

Complex initiatives

Key points

It is common for an initiative to have an overarching objective and include several connected sub-initiatives.

- Each sub-initiative may contribute to distinct outcomes or benefits, or the sub-initiatives may work together to produce shared outcomes or benefits.
- An overarching logic model can be used to summarise a complex initiative.
- A high-level monitoring and evaluation framework can provide an overarching evaluation plan, and guide reporting against key performance indicators for the initiative.

Introduction

To support evaluation, a logic model should be used to set out how the initiative is expected to contribute to intended outcomes and benefits (see *Workbook I. Foundations of evaluation*). The logic model can be used to support monitoring and evaluation planning (see *Workbook II. Monitoring and evaluation framework*).

For large or complex initiatives (which include several connected sub-initiatives), it may be useful to develop an overarching logic model that summarises the key components of the initiative, as well as more detailed individual models for the sub-initiatives that make up the larger initiative.

The monitoring and evaluation framework should be designed to plan for:

- evaluation of how the larger initiative produces outcomes and benefits
- when and how to evaluate individual sub-initiatives.

Complex initiatives

Many initiatives may involve an overarching objective, with several connected activities (sub-initiatives) designed to work together to achieve this objective. Initiatives may be delivered in collaboration with other agencies, or sub-initiatives may be delivered individually by a number of agencies.

Under a complex initiative there may be:

- sub-initiatives that individually achieve discrete outcomes or benefits, or
- sub-initiatives that work together to achieve outcomes or benefits.

Logic model

Large-scale or complex initiatives can be framed by an overarching logic model.

An overarching logic model can provide a high-level summary of a complex initiative, where there are too many inputs, activities and outputs to track individually in one diagram.

Use an overarching model to identify the initiative objective, key activities, and outputs of each sub-initiative, and how these may inter-link to achieve outcomes or benefits (see *Figure 1* for an example of a logic model for complex initiatives).

More detailed models for individual sub-initiatives can be developed to support the overarching logic model.

Monitoring and evaluation framework

For complex initiatives, a **high-level monitoring and evaluation framework** can provide an overarching evaluation plan, and guide reporting against key performance indicators for the initiative (see *Figure 2* for an example monitoring and evaluation framework for a complex initiative). Evaluation of the initiative will examine the net impact of the broader initiative. When conducting an economic evaluation, compare the total benefits of the broader initiative against total costs.

Where individual sub-initiatives are independently responsible for discrete outcomes and benefits, the sub-initiatives can also be evaluated as standalone activities against the outputs, outcomes and benefits that they are intended to achieve. The framework for evaluation may include a series of evaluation and data collection activities undertaken in different timeframes for different sub-initiatives. An understanding of the total impacts of the initiative can then be established, with the contribution of the sub-initiative to the total outcomes or benefits of the broader initiative identified. Detail the monitoring and evaluation activities for the sub-initiatives, and the relevant timeframes for their evaluation.

Alternatively, sub-initiatives may work together to produce outcomes, or the discrete outcomes from different sub-initiatives may combine to produce benefits. Where sub-initiatives work together to produce outcomes or benefits, evaluate the total outcomes and benefits achieved by the broader initiative. Detailed investigation of an individual sub-initiative should be undertaken where there are concerns about its implementation or successful contribution to the broader initiative, or where the scale and risk of the sub-initiative indicates that an individual evaluation should be undertaken.

In both cases, additional evaluation questions for the complex initiative may then include:

- How effectively do the outputs or outcomes of sub-initiatives combine to produce total outcomes and benefits?
- Are there any areas of overlap or duplication across sub-initiatives?
- Are there any gaps (missing components) that are needed for the sub-initiatives to successfully work together to achieve total outcomes and benefits?
- Are there any sub-initiatives that are:
 - not achieving intended outputs or outcomes?
 - achieving greater outcomes than expected?
- Are governance or delivery relationships between partner agencies working effectively?

Evaluation of a complex initiative should then ask:

- Is this the most effective package of activities to address the identified problem/opportunity or meet objectives?

Figure 1: Example logic model for complex initiatives

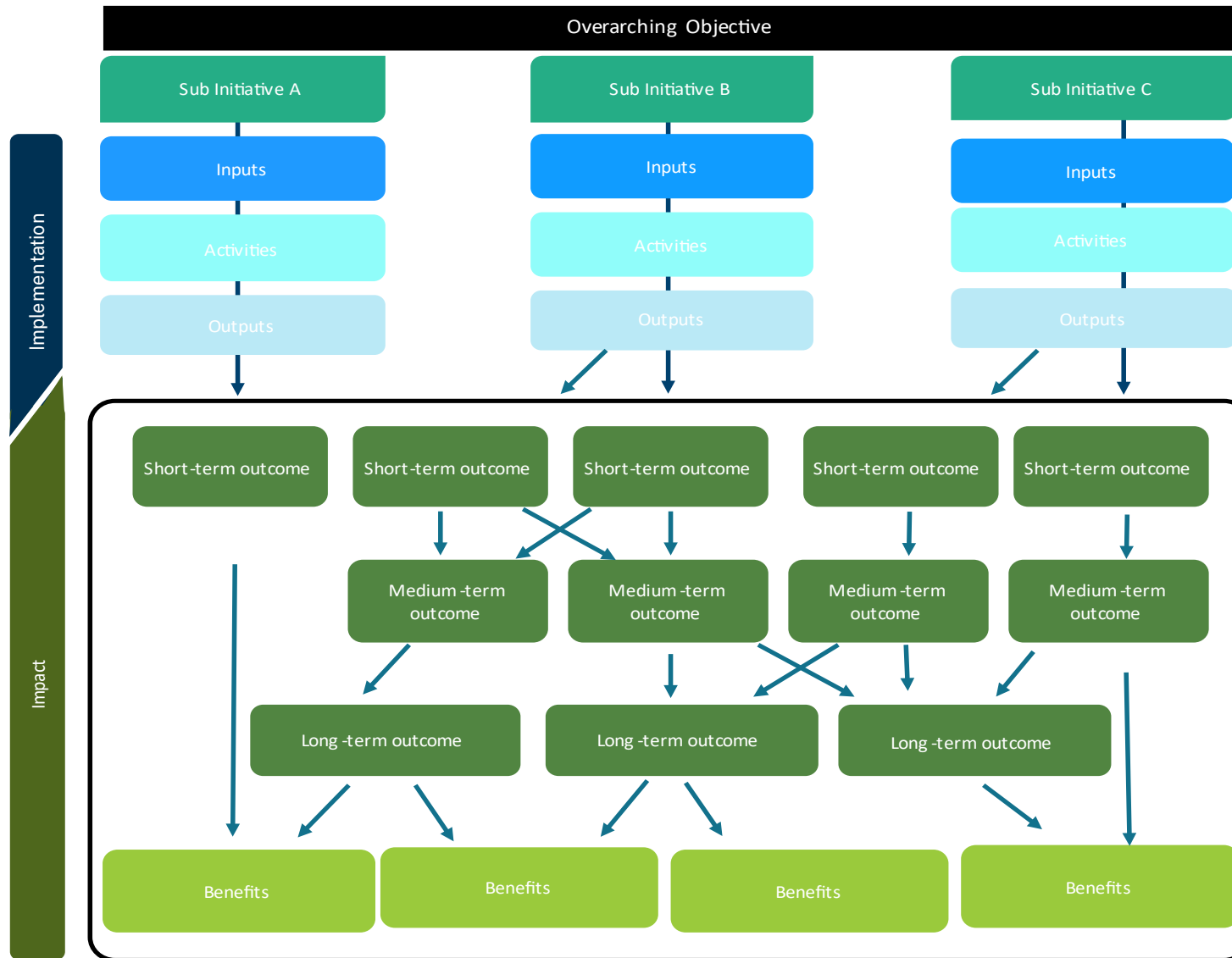


Figure 2: Example monitoring and evaluation framework for complex initiatives

