



**Virtual
Learning
Community**

www.outcomemapping.ca

WHAT IS OUTCOME MAPPING?

Outcome mapping is a new approach to planning international development work and measuring its results.

Evaluating the effects of a development project, program, or organization is seldom easy. The effort involves many actors, and gauging the influence of any one participant can be complicated.

Furthermore, while everybody wants to see lasting improvements in a society's well-being -- cleaner water, less poverty, a stronger economy, reduced conflict, and so on -- an assessment of such changes in state is only one of several kinds of feedback that development professionals can use in order to learn about and improve their work.

Outcome mapping offers another option. The method focuses on measuring changes in the behaviour of the people with whom a development initiative works most closely. Outcome mapping limits its concern to those results -- or "outcomes" -- that fall strictly within the program's sphere of influence. It considers only those activities where the program can claim it contributed to a direct effect.

For example, the evaluation of a water purification project will want to know whether the quality of the water has improved. The outcome mapping approach, however, will go a step further, and will also investigate whether the people maintaining that water system now possess and employ the skills, knowledge, tools, and other resources needed to keep the system running in the long term.

Outcome mapping works on the principle that development is essentially about people. It looks at how human beings relate to one another and to their environment. Most importantly, outcome mapping recognizes that development efforts will more likely be successful when they devolve continuing responsibility to local people and to local institutions.

WHO NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT OUTCOME MAPPING?

Outcome mapping is a comprehensive approach that can be adapted and applied in various ways. It can be used in the planning, monitoring, and/or evaluation of current or completed activities, including small projects, large-scale programs, even entire organizations. It is a learning-based and participatory method that should be of interest to every person concerned about social development locally, nationally, or internationally.

Three categories of professionals will want to pay special attention.

People at the front lines -- those who carry out the everyday work -- will find a practical understanding of outcome mapping techniques to be helpful. These include employees of non-governmental or community-based organizations, project or program managers, desk officers, evaluators, analysts, statisticians, and researchers.

People involved in national and local policy-making -- for example, politicians or government officials striving to improve the effectiveness of development efforts -- will benefit from a general awareness of the outcome mapping approach.

People on staff with international development agencies or donor organizations will also gain from an understanding of outcome mapping because of the central role of relationships in development and the challenges of documenting and reporting behavioural changes.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT OUTCOME MAPPING?

The method – which was conceived by Canada's International Development Research Centre – is a versatile technique that is being used globally. Although already in use in a wide range of development initiatives, outcome mapping continues to evolve. The easiest way to learn more, to keep up with changes in the many ways outcome mapping is being applied, and to contribute to improving it, is to join the outcome mapping learning community.

A learning community is an informal group of specialists connected by shared goals and interests. These experts tackle similar issues using similar approaches, and express themselves in a common professional idiom. They come together to solve problems quickly, to showcase and trade their discoveries and “good practices”, and to support one another in capacity-building and in developing new skills. These communities are dynamic repositories of knowledge.

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HOW DOES THE OUTCOME MAPPING LEARNING COMMUNITY WORK?

The outcome mapping community is largely virtual. This doesn't mean it is imaginary, only that most of its activities take place on the Internet.

Joining is easy. Simply click on the website www.outcomemapping.ca

This “platform” is owned, populated, and updated by outcome mapping users worldwide. It includes a menu of tools that allow members to communicate efficiently, to find the information they want, and to share knowledge with others.

When you join the outcome mapping community, you can:

- *upload documents for other members to read*
- *read documents posted by others*
- *ask questions and get answers*
- *keep informed about events in the field by way of a bulletin board*
- *learn about the latest publications or projects by way of a newsletter*
- *join discussion forums and debate with other members*
- *check member profiles to see who else is working in the field*
- *maintain your own personal blog*
- *consult a fully-catalogued library of outcome mapping resources*
- *take advantage of translation services*

CAN I MEET OTHER MEMBERS OFF-LINE?

The community encourages members to set up face-to-face dialogues, or develop mentoring relationships, or carry out peer reviews of work.

Whenever you are planning to travel, you can use the website's directory to check the professional profiles of fellow members at your destinations. The community also provides templates and tools to help you carry out peer-to-peer learning in a manner useful both to you and to the whole community.

In addition, plans are underway for an exciting event: a Global Outcome Mapping Conference, to be held in the near future. This big meeting will be announced and organized by the community.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Just click on www.outcomemapping.ca

There you'll find everything you need to begin carrying out more realistic evaluations, and to help you make your development efforts more focused and effective.

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