

# Measuring Social Impact

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**Hosted by Deb Levy and Kathy Brennan (May 2005 - Closed)**



## **How do you measure social impact?**

We are all striving to affect change in one way or another: change in the way social problems are addressed and/or change in the lives of the constituents we serve. How will we know when we have succeeded?

Every social entrepreneur struggles to identify when he or she has moved beyond implementing a good idea to achieving real change. As change agents, the success of our endeavors depends on our ability to demonstrate the impact of our work to staff, funders, clients, other stakeholders and the general public.

Undoubtedly, there are many barriers to measuring social impact—the first being the perception that social change cannot be measured or defined by metrics or data points. Many take the “I know it when I see it” approach; in other words, change is measured by anecdotal evidence gathered when clients and constituents are seen benefiting from services, not from numbers and statistics. At Innovation Network, we believe that qualitative information can be very effective in measuring social change. The challenge is to be systematic in how you collect and use qualitative data to evaluate your work.

The second challenge is the tendency to equate program performance or program activities with impact. Measuring social change is not only about counting the number of people served, number of micro loans made or new health clinics established. These benchmarks can help you confirm if you are on the right track, but they don’t tell the full story about your impact. Measuring impact is akin to asking: We served these people, we made these loans but **so what?** What change occurred as a result of our work?

To measure impact, you need to draw on the same creative and critical thinking skills used to launch your program. In order to measure social impact, you need to get concrete about what you hope to achieve. It’s your vision—so you have to define your own success.

The basis for your success is the outcomes or expected change you hope to see among clients, communities, systems or organizations as a result of your work.

In general, your outcomes should:

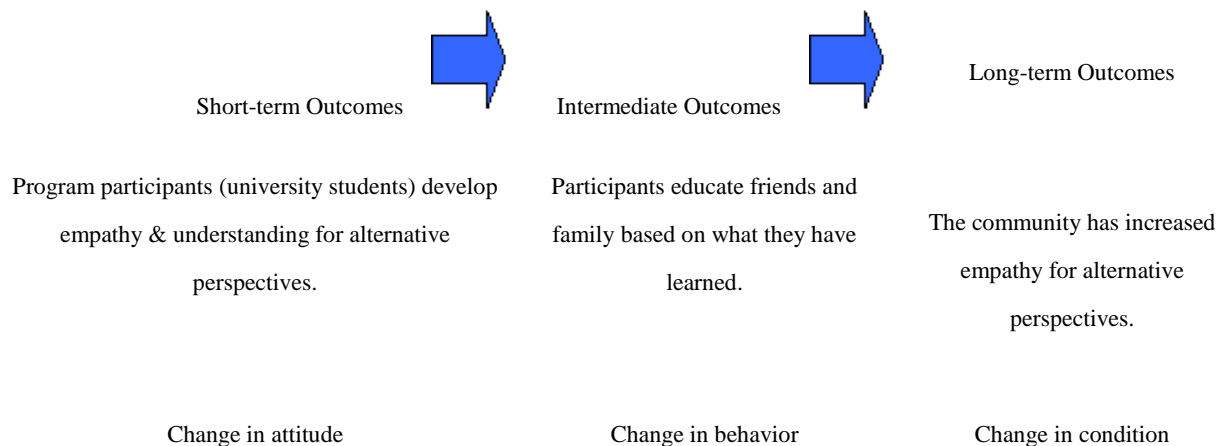
- Represent changes that can logically be expected to result from activities articulated in a logic model,
- Be within the program’s sphere of influence,
- Be generally accepted as valid by various stakeholders of the program,
- Be phrased in terms of change, and
- Be measurable.

Often entrepreneurs are tempted to stay focused on the big goals that they have set out for their programs. However, we have found that it is helpful to think about outcomes along a continuum of change starting with what is in your immediate control at one end to what you hope to accomplish in the long-range at the other end. Think about:

- What changes do you **expect to see**?
- What changes would you **want to see** after that?
- What changes would you **hope to see** after that?

This helps you to ensure that your outcomes are measurable and realistic.

We recently worked with Liza Chambers, a 2004 Echoing Green Fellow. Liza’s organization Soliya is dedicated to promoting intercultural understanding and awareness and galvanizing young adults to act as constructive global intermediaries. For Liza’s Connect program, she has defined the following short term, intermediate and long term outcomes:



Identifying outcomes provides structure to your vision by articulating where you want to go and what you hope to achieve. How will you know when get to where you want to go? You need evidence or indicators that signal that you have succeeded in achieving the desired outcomes.

Indicators can be quantitative or qualitative. They should be meaningful, direct, useful, and practical to collect. In creating indicators of your success, think about the following:

- **What.** Describe the condition, behavior, or characteristic that you will measure.
- **Who .** Specify the target population you will measure.
- **How Much .** State the degree of change you expect to see.
- **How many .** Identify the amount of change among your target population that would indicate a successful level of achievement. This sets the target for your work; base this on an understanding of your baseline and a level of change that is reasonable for your program.
- **When.** Note the timeframe in which this change should occur.

Examples of Soliya’s indicators are as follows:

<b>Outcomes:</b>	Program participants (university students) develop empathy & understand for alternative perspectives.	Participants educate friends and family based on what they have learned.	The campus community has improved empathy for alternative perspectives.
What do we want to achieve?			
<b>Indicators:</b>	The majority of participants will be able to express views that are different from their own by the mid-point of the program.	The majority of students report speaking to friends and family by program completion.	Increased attendance for public cultural events, lectures, academic courses, etc. in the year following the program.
How will we measure our success?			

Once you have defined your outcomes and indicators, you are well on your way to measuring social impact in a systematic and credible way!

<http://www.socialedge.org/discussions/success-metrics/measuring-social-impact/>