



Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan Guidelines and Framework

Rural India Supporting Trust

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1 Introduction

This Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning plan is a written document that describes how you will monitor and evaluate your program, so that you will be able to describe the “What”, the “How”, and the “Why It Matters” for your program and use evaluation results for program improvement and decision making together with RIST.

RIST’s Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan (MEL) is based on Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Principles and Guidelines of Development Evaluation and includes the following:

- **RELEVANCE:** Is the intervention doing the right things? The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries¹, global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.
- **COHERENCE:** How well does the intervention fit? The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution.
- **EFFECTIVENESS:** Is the intervention achieving its objectives? The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.
- **EFFICIENCY:** How well are the resources being used? The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.
- **IMPACT:** What difference does the intervention make? The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.
- **SUSTAINABILITY:** Will the benefits last? The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue.

This MEL Plan will help to track and assess the results of the interventions throughout the life of a program. It is a living document that should be referred to and updated on a regular basis to reflect program changes and priorities over time.

¹Beneficiaries is defined as, “the individuals, groups, or organisations, whether targeted or not, that benefit directly or indirectly, from the development intervention.” Other terms, such as rights holders or affected people, may also be used

This plan will serve as a bridge between evaluation and program planning by highlighting program goals, clarifying measurable program objectives, and linking program activities with intended objectives.

While the specifics of each program's MEL plan will look different, they should all follow the same basic structure and include the same key elements as mentioned below.

2 Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Plan

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan (MEL) is an organized process for collecting and analyzing a program's results to determine the level at which the program is achieving the goals and objectives identified at the beginning of the program. This is tracked through the creation of and reporting of the MEL Plan.

Each MEL Plan should contain specific activities, outputs, objectives, and finally the program goal. Each of these will have corresponding indicators². Activities, output and objective indicators have baselines and targets, data sources, and frequency of data collection. RIST has provided a recommended template for the project MEL Plan. It is not required that applicants use the below template, but the applicants using their own template should be sure to include all components detailed with the recommended MEL Plan Template. Each component is described in detail below.

2.1 Step 1: Identify Program Goals and Objectives

The first step to filling out the template is to identify the program goals and objectives. If you already have a theory of change (TOC), then your program goals are most likely already defined. However, if not, below steps leading to a MEL Plan will be a great place to start.

²a quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect the changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor

2.1.1 Theory Of Change

Theory of Change is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It is focused in particular on mapping out or “filling in” what has been described as the “missing middle” between what a program does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goal being achieved. It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goal and then works back from these to identify all the conditions (objectives) that must be in place (and how these related to one another causally) for the goal to occur.

**Note: A TOC is a high level, zoomed out view of how your organization is meant to effect change. A TOC aims to articulate big picture concepts while the M&E framework below will provide more details into objectives and goal related with these concepts. Your organization’s TOC and M&E framework should be interconnected. The concepts they respectively convey should tie together, with the TOC serving as the umbrella under which your M&E framework sits. A TOC will assist you in developing your program goals and objectives more easily.*

We recommend the following resources that will help you get started.

1. *Poverty Action Lab Step by Step Guide to building a theory of change*. Please note that in this brief:
 - (a) Input is equal to Activities for RIST
 - (b) Outcome is equal to Objectives for RIST
2. *UNICEF Theory Of Change and related Webinar*. Please note that in this brief:
 - (a) Implementation Strategies is equal to Activities for RIST
 - (b) Outcomes is equal to Objectives for RIST
 - (c) Impact is equal to Goal for RIST
3. *Development Impact Theory of Change toolkit and a related video to walk you through the template*
4. There are several examples from DFID you can download [here](#) that articulate the diagrammatic representation of a TOC.

2.1.2 Goals and Objectives

Goals are high-level statements that provide the overall (often longer-term and less tangible) context for MEL, while **objectives** are concrete statements describing what the MEL project is trying to achieve (often shorter term and precise).

Some common ways of describing **goals vs. objectives**³:

Goals are broad	Objectives are narrow
Goals are more long-term	Objectives are more short-term
Goals are general intentions	Objectives are precise actions
Goals are often intangible	Objectives are tangible
Goals are abstract	Objectives are concrete
Goals are difficult to measure	Objectives are measurable

Goals	Objectives
Something you try to achieve	Actions you need to take to achieve a goal
Define direction and destination	Steps that get us there
Where we want to go - Big picture	How we will get there - Specific Tactics

Objectives are about changes, often in program participants or organizations as a result of the program. They often include specific changes in awareness, knowledge, skill, and behavior.

Examples

Goals	Objectives
Support the creation of high quality jobs in the home performance industry	Provide 10,000 hours of work for local contractors participating in the program within two years%
Facilitate the development of the workforce in the local market, working with partners to expand training opportunities for professionals	- Increase the number of newly trained professionals by 25% over five years - Train an additional 100 home improvement professionals to achieve certification over the next two years

³Adapted from <https://elpaso.ttuhs.edu/oire/>

CHECKLIST FOR GOALS⁴

1. Aligned with your program/organization mission statement
2. Define direction
3. Long-term

CHECKLIST FOR OBJECTIVES⁵

1. Use the SMART criteria
 - S** Specific
 - M** Measurable
 - A** Achievable (attainable, action-oriented)
 - R** Relevant (realistic, reasonable)
 - T** Time-bound
2. Distinctive from one another
3. Not “bundled”

Example: The Office of Institutional Planning and Assessment will facilitate the preparation for reaffirmation of accreditation **AND** work cooperatively to monitor progress of a strategic plan.
4. Avoid directionality (e.g., use of the words “increase” or “decrease”)
5. Ensure that a quantifiable target is provided
6. Measurable – Is it possible to collect accurate and reliable data for each?
7. Accurately reflect the key results of the operations or service offered by your program

Note that for each goal, your project will need to develop a series of objectives. Objectives must be specific, measurable, and time-bound. For RIST Projects specifically, you will need to have a minimum of 3 objectives and a maximum of 5.

⁴Adapted from <https://el Paso.ttuhs.edu/oire/documents/GuideandChecklistEstablishingGoalsAndObjectives>

⁵*Ibid*

2.2 Step 2: Identify Activities and Outputs

What are Activities?⁶

Activities are actions associated with delivering project objectives. In other words, they are the major actions carried out with the grant funds during the project period, which could include but not limited to tools, processes, events, technology, human, financial, organizational or community resources. They are directly linked to the achievement of the project objectives and are sufficient to reach those objectives.

Activities should be well-defined in terms of audience, location, duration and cost:

Strong Activity Example	Weak Activity Example
Conduct two-day training program by Prof Sharma at the Delhi Civic Education Center on municipal elections monitoring process for 25 political science students from the University of Delhi to be completed 30 days before June 19 elections.	Election monitoring training.

A good activity description designates the person responsible for implementing, defines the activity location, specifies duration of the activity, indicates the number of participants, sets deadlines to be respected, and provides details to justify budget requested.

What are Outputs?⁷

Outputs are direct results of a program's activities and may include types, levels and targets of services to be delivered by the program. They are usually described in terms of the size and/or scope of the services and products delivered or produced by the program. They indicate if a program was delivered to the intended audiences at the intended "dose." A program output, for example, might be *number* of individuals attending workshops, *number* of individuals receiving services, *number* of individuals receiving referrals, *number* of classes taught, program *participation rates* etc.

⁶<https://tg.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/220/ME-Plan-Template-Instructions.pdf>

⁷*Ibid*

Each MEL Plan should contain specific activities with corresponding output indicators and objectives indicators. Fill out the framework for every year.

2.3 Step 3: Define Indicators

1. What is an Indicator?

An indicator answers the question: 'how do we know whether or how much we have achieved our objective?' They are normally accompanied by a measurable target - often in terms of percentages - to help quantify success. For example:

- Average reading test score
- Percentage of houses with access to clean water
- Number of vaccines distributed

Indicators describe the targets of the project on each expected level: Goal, Objectives or Output. In this way, the indicators make it possible to quantify the achievements, and they become the point of reference and the "navigation chart" for guiding the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the project. Well formulated indicators ensure good management of the project and allow the implementers of the project or program to decide if additional Outputs or course corrections will be necessary in order to achieve the Objective laid out. In addition, upon finalizing the intervention it will be known if the expected impact and effects on the beneficiaries was achieved.

If you would like to learn more about the **types of indicators**, click [here](#) to download this information.

RIST projects will track two types of indicators namely **Results Indicators** which measure the degree of fulfillment of the Goal and Objective of a program or project, and **Process Indicators** which measure the progress in the processes of the program or project: The products and services delivered (Outputs) and the actions to do so (Activities). *Please note that while RIST will be evaluating only Results Indicators for our reporting purposes, it is essential that you map out the Process Indicators to observe progress being made towards anticipated results and accurately reflect the goal and objectives of the program or project*

2. Process Indicators

Activity Indicators are essential to understand the extent to which a project

was delivered as planned, and to highlight obstacles to implementation. Activity indicators describe the various project components in specific and measurable terms, including the resources required and individuals responsible for various tasks. By describing the various project components in specific and measurable terms, including the resources required and individuals responsible for various tasks, activity indicators provide an important project management tool. A given set of activities must connect to a particular output or outcome.

Activity indicators should include three essential elements; who conducted the activity, what they did, and where were they working. For example, when delivering a police training program, it might be important to know whether staff or contractors delivered the training, what the training sessions covered, how long each session lasted, and whether the training was provided in metropolitan police districts, rural districts, or both. You may not know which activities will be essential for your project's success, and your choice of indicators should be informed by conversations with those who are responsible for delivering services and the intended beneficiaries (e.g. police, arrestees or members of religious or ethnic minority communities).

Output Indicators Output indicators describe the delivery of good and services, like *number* of staff provided training and technical assistance; *number* of standards and legislative documents created; *number* buildings and infrastructure invested in; *number* of staff hired to implement a project.

Objective Indicators measure the extent to which a project objective is being achieved. Objective indicators often measure change (e.g., change in the knowledge of participants, change in percent of women in workforce, change in beneficiary's behavior etc.). Each objective must have at least one objective indicator. Objective indicators should answer the question, "*How will we know achievement when we see it?*" / "*Have program activities made a difference?*"

In differentiating between objective indicators and output indicators, it can be useful to think of outputs as tying to activities (e.g., outputs of a training program include the number of individuals trained and number of training sessions held). Multiple outputs when taken together build to achieve a desired objective (e.g., two training sessions with 60 people each lead to an overall increase in knowledge of participants). Another useful way to distinguish between outputs and objectives is to consider whether the indicator describes project effectiveness (an objective). Objective indicators showcase develop-

mentally significant changes that impact the beneficiaries, while outputs are lower-level steps that are essential in achieving results. Output indicators should answer the question, "Are activities being implemented as planned?"

For example, installing fingerprinting technology in district police precincts and training the police on forensic techniques are both outputs; they offer no indication of whether the new technology is actually used or whether it improves police effectiveness. The objectives for this project, their short to medium term effects, may include increased use of forensic evidence in court, changes in the rate of successful prosecutions, or reductions in the use of police interrogation as the primary method of gathering evidence

Measures should be in **quantifiable** terms and clearly defined. Qualitative indicators are acceptable if they provide a reliable means to measure a particular phenomenon or attribute.

Examples:

Objective Indicators
Change in the number of university students participating in the municipal elections monitoring process

Output Indicators do not measure change. They instead measure the products of project activities. Example: *Number of training sessions held* (product of activity, no change)

Activity	Output Indicator
Conduct two-day training program by Prof. Sharma at the Delhi Civic Education Center on municipal elections monitoring process for 25 political science students from the University of Delhi to be completed 30 days before June 19 elections.	<p>Number of students trained on the municipal elections monitoring process</p> <p>Number of training modules provided</p>

2.4 Step 4: Identify Sources and Means of Verification

Baselines and Targets: Besides defining the indicators in the MEL plan, it is also important to set baselines and targets for each indicator and describe the methodology for measuring the indicators (e.g., pre-and post-test surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc.), including the data source (e.g., training sign-in sheets, website hits, survey data) and the frequency of measurement (e.g., after each workshop, quarterly, annually). Baselines and targets must be specified for each indicator included in the MEL plan.

A **Baseline** measure for an indicator is collected before or at the start of a project and provides a basis for planning and/or assessing subsequent progress and impact. This measure explains the current state of the result or output prior to the project start (e.g., number of people who already have vocational training, percent of women who already vote). If a prior program already provided vocational training to 100 women, then the baseline for “number of women trained” should be 100. For RIST projects, the baseline may often be 0, but it does not have to be. Some projects must perform a baseline assessment to establish baselines. For example, if an indicator was “Number of women with knowledge of voting process,” the project might conduct a pre-test to determine how many women already have knowledge of the voting process.

Targets are reasonable estimates of the outputs or results to be achieved by the project over its period of performance. Targets are estimates. Performance may be higher or lower than the target, given realities of project implementation.

Objective Indicator	Baseline	Target	End of Project Total
Change in the number of university students participating in the June 19 municipal elections monitoring process.	0	20	22

For any baselines for targets expressed as percentages, please include information on how the percentage was derived, as demonstrated in the example below:

Objective Indicator	Baseline	Target
Percent of workshop attendees who go on to monitor the June 19 municipal elections.	0	80%(80% = 16 attendees go on monitor elections of the target 20 total workshop participants)

The **Data Source** is the collection tool by which the project will obtain objective indicator or output indicator information throughout the program. Data collection tools should be easy to use for both the participant and the person responsible for analyzing the data. Suggested data collection tools include, but are not limited to:

- Pre- and post-tests
- Pre and post intervention surveys/questionnaires
- Meeting minutes
- Attendance sheets
- Site visit checklists
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Secondary Data: Data that already exists (e.g.: Government reports, census information)
- Program reports

Objective Indicator	Baseline	Target	Data Source
Change in the number of university students participating in the June 19 municipal elections monitoring process.	0	20	Attendance Sheets

Frequency of Data Collection establishes schedule of when data will be collected (e.g., monthly, quarterly, and bi-annually) and validates its feasibility for program design. Note that this is not necessarily the frequency of the activity (e.g., literacy classes delivered daily), but rather the frequency by which data will be collected

(e.g., program participant information collected quarterly). Consider what timing makes sense for each indicator.

Objective Indicator	Baseline	Target	Data Source	Frequency
Change in the number of university students participating in the June 19 municipal elections monitoring process.	0	20	Attendance Sheets	One Time

RIST wants to afford recipients the flexibility to design an MEL plan that is customized to the specifics of the project. RIST recognizes that sometimes it may be difficult for recipients to design truly results-oriented MEL plans, but we encourage recipients to develop an MEL plan that is as comprehensive, ambitious, and creative as possible.

The MEL plan is meant to detail how the objectives and outputs of project activities will be measured quantitatively. Yet, sometimes the results of a project are more easily conveyed qualitatively. Recipients can describe how project impact will be assessed qualitatively at the beginning of the MEL plan. If awarded, RIST encourages recipients to provide success stories and anecdotal or other qualitative evidence of project impact in the quarterly progress reports, as well as showing how well the project is meeting the targets set in the MEL plan.

3 Filling out the MEL Template

Fill out the below template with your application. This MEL template will provide information about project activities, output indicators and the objective indicator(s) for each objective as well as a brief description of how data will be measured or collected, and any critical assumptions that underpin this project.

Download the template [here](#) by clicking on the download button on the upper left or right hand corner. **Also refer to Appendix B to download a cheat sheet on further information on filling out the template⁸**

A visual way to think about the template can be seen below.

⁸If you have any questions, please contact the program staff directly

Project Goal	Indicators of Success	Sources and means of verification (MOV)	Important assumptions and risks

Objectives, Outputs, and Activities

[Write item under each heading below]	Indicators of Success	Sources and means of verification (MOV)	Important assumptions and risks
Objective 1			
Output 1.1			
Activity 1.1.1			
Activity 1.1.2			
Activity 1.1.3			
Output 1.2			

Figure 1: MEL Template
*See Below for Examples

Constructing this MEL framework will follow a general pattern, but it is also an interactive and dynamic process in which you will develop many drafts before finalizing one. The essential tasks for completing a logical planning framework are as follows:⁹

- 1. Fill in column one.** If you built a theory of change, you can use it to fill in the first column with the goals, objectives, outputs, and activities for project summary. Add the activities for each of the outputs; do not list detailed activities but major categories such as “train women farmers on improved seeds” and “develop manual on promoting girls education”. Remember that each activity must correspond to the outputs which then lead to objectives. Refer here to Step 1 and Step 2 above while filling this part of the template
- 2. Fill in column four - Important assumptions and risks:** Critical assumptions represent those factors that lie outside the control of the project yet under-

⁹<https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/crs-files/institutional-strengthening-10-monitoring-evaluation.pdf> p. 14–15)

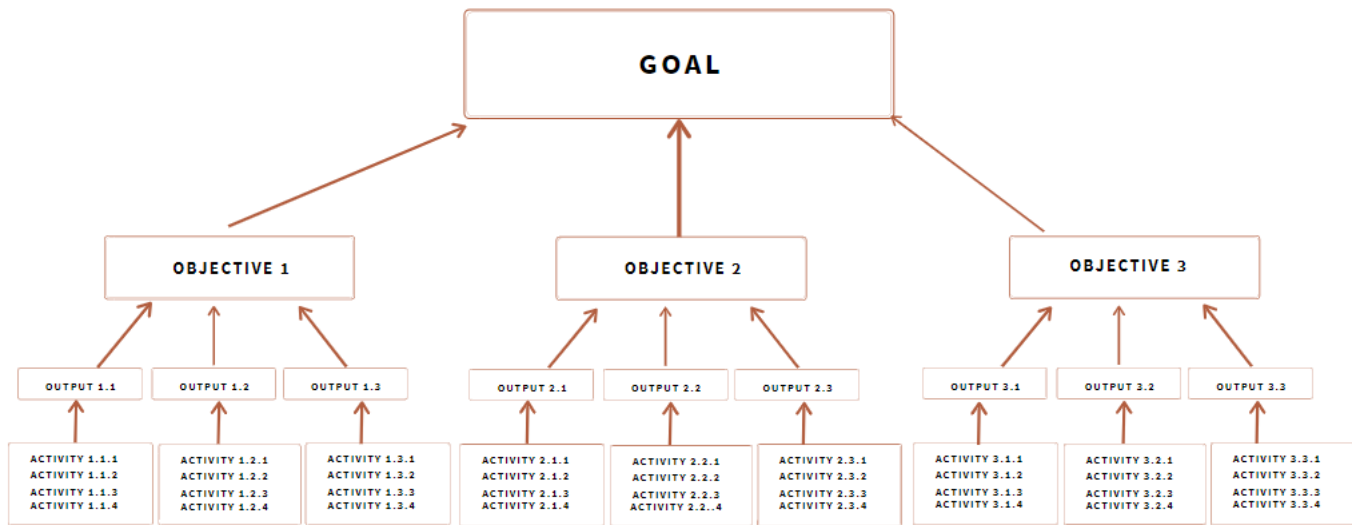


Figure 2: MEL Template
**See Below for Examples*

pin its ultimate success. For example, the success of a project may be built on the critical assumption that a stakeholder will fulfill its commitments; failure to do so would jeopardize that success. Critical assumptions are most important at the lower level of objectives because this is where assumptions about uncontrollable events have the most influence. Based on your discussions about critical assumptions, you may need to revisit column one to add other activities to lessen the risk to the project.

3. **Fill in columns two and three - Indicators of Success and MOV** Start from the top and work down because, in the process of selecting indicators and measurement methods, you may find objectives that cannot be measured as stated and therefore need revision. This, in turn, may require revision of others farther down the matrix. Include a balance of both quantitative and qualitative data. It can take time to decide on all of the indicators and measurement methods and then ensure they match the objective statement. Take sufficient time to complete these columns, because they are the driving force for your project's MEL system. Note that there can be more than one indicator for a single objective. Refer to Step 3 and Step 4 above while filling this part of the template
4. **Finalize the MEL framework.** Once you have finished the framework, rec-

concile any changes in the strategic objectives with those in your theory of change, if you have one.

Download Example [One](#), [Two](#), [Three](#). These examples will help guide you through filling out the template as well.

4 Appendix A

Additional Resources on Theory Of Change

- NPC's 10 steps to building a theory of change
- Telling the difference between Logic Models and Theory of Change

5 Appendix B

Please download Cheat Sheet For filling out the M&E Template [here](#)