

photo credit: Damon Noe

Social and Economic Indicators for Projects and Programs

How could your organization benefit from better quality or an expanded set of indicators?

Most organizations are quite aware that indicators are needed to track progress towards goals. However, your current set of indicators could be insufficient and you may be missing opportunities to fully show your organization's impact on human well-being. The questions below can help you assess your organization's need for this work.

- 🌿 Do your projects have benefits for which your organization is not getting recognition?
- 🌿 Would you like to quantify these additional benefits to help increase your organization's access to new sources of funding?
- 🌿 Would your organization see value in evaluating the human well-being impacts your programs may be bringing about?

Human well-being impacts

These are measurements of the direct change to people, households or communities on a quality of life attribute such as education, health, income, safety and security, and governance and empowerment. Examples can include an increase in the number of households with full time employment; improvement in nutrition for families; enhancement in access to exercise and recreation; and increase in the number of viable farms while maintaining the rural character of the county.

Level of Rigor	Assessing the impact of a community's Main Street Program	Assessing the impact of a flood reduction intervention in a community
Low	Roughly a third of visitors to the town are likely to visit the community's Main Street	Flood reduction likely to benefit 2 dozen homes
Medium	30% of visitors to Main Street are from outside of the county and spend money in at least one Main Street business	Flooding reduced by 1 inch per flood event to 20 homes
High	The economic impact of visitor spending on Main Street is \$1.2 million per year	\$10,000 average in damage costs avoided per flood event to each of 20 homes

Why does the quality of your project and program indicators matter?

- More funders are requiring evidence that organizations successfully deliver the impacts they claim.
- Many mission-based organizations genuinely want to assess if they are achieving their intended impact.

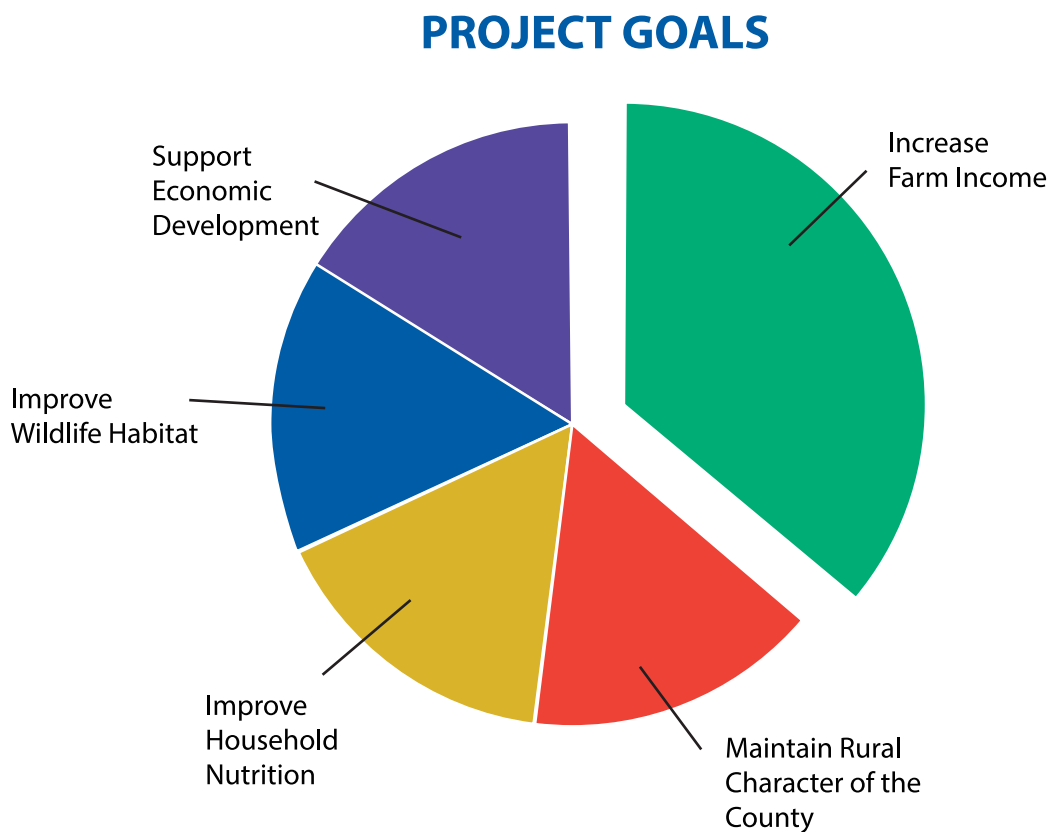
Anecdotes provide an important role in sharing your organization's story, but many organizations reach the point that they need more rigorous project and program indicators to demonstrate their successes. The table above shows two examples of increasing rigor in indicators. As the level of rigor increases, the cost and time needed to monitor and evaluate may increase as well.

The key is to select the appropriate indicators before you implement a project or program, design a simple monitoring plan, and select a method for assessment that fits into your budget.

Why could having an expanded set of indicators benefit your organization?

- You might not be getting credit for all the benefits that your project naturally provides.
- Identifying additional benefits can help increase your eligibility for new funding, while making your project more competitive for the funding you are currently using.
- Identifying all potential benefits from the beginning of a project can help organizations deliberately expand the project scope, bring on new partner organizations, and design projects appropriately to more fully attain these additional outcomes.
- Accurate identification of additional project benefits may also enable you to find connections to new organizations with missions that are quite different than that of your organization. These non-traditional partnerships can bring more resources to a project such as shared technical or engineering services, shared construction labor, or additional legal expertise.
- Some project attributes may lead to an injury or negative impact to certain groups of stakeholders. Accurately identifying the full range of potential project impacts helps the sponsor plan mitigation strategies for any unintended consequences.

For instance, an agritourism project may have a stated goal of increasing farm income (note the green wedge in the pie chart below). Yet further analysis shows that the agricultural project is also contributing to economic development, improving habitat for wildlife and household nutrition, and helping the county maintain its rural character. The pie chart below gives a visual representation of how increasing the project scope can allow you to more accurately identify the additional benefits your project is already providing.



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