Requirement to Provide Estimates of Outcomes and To Track Progress for Proposed Grant and Cooperative Agreement Projects Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why do grantees have to measure?

EPA's Environmental Results Policy (EPA Order 5700.7 (PDF) (29 pp, 180 K, About PDF)) requires applicants to provide qualitative and quantitative estimates of expected outcomes and outputs of project activities in their proposals and a plan for measuring and tracking their progress towards achieving the expected outputs and outcomes. Furthermore, grantees need to provide outcome measures to demonstrate a connection to the Agency's Strategic Plan. Goal 4, objective 4.2 in the Draft FY 2011-2015 EPA Strategic Plan states that EPA will work to conserve and protect natural resources by promoting pollution prevention and the adoption of other stewardship practices by companies, communities, governmental organizations, and individuals.

Why do grantees need to describe how they calculate P2 results?

EPA's Quality Assurance Policy requires grantees to provide environmental data in a clear and understandable fashion. This includes the responsibility to describe the relevance and quality of outcome results, so that these numbers can be understood in a meaningful way. A description of outcome calculations, data collection methods, conversion factors, underlying assumptions, and other relevant information help reveal the nature of the P2 results.

Why are grantees being asked to gather baseline data?

Without gathering preliminary data on current conditions, it is impossible to see any distinct change or to determine if any results were made specifically as a result of the project. Baseline data describes the existing situation, provides relevance to the data you collect, and allows comparisons to be done before and after a project to determine its successes and failures.

Can grantees use P2 measures for their own benefit?

P2 measures should offer value to the grantees by providing sound data for internal and external communication, program evaluation and management decisions.

When should measurement begin?

Measurement is most helpful at key stages of a project's life span: project planning, project implementation, and project completion.

Planning stage: Baseline information is gathered, objectives are established, and the audience of the project is characterized.

Implementation stage: Progress is tracked to determine if mid-course correction of the project is necessary. Milestones are examined.

Completion stage: Determine if goals were achieved, what worked well, next steps, and future modifications.

How to measure the right thing

The key to measurement is that measurements only have meaning in relation to the question(s) they seek to answer. It is vital to have a clear picture of the objectives and goals of the project before any measurement activity takes place. Ask yourself a few key questions when determining what to measure:

- What are the specific issues to be addressed through this project?
- What do I already know about these issues?
- How will I know if I have achieved my goals?
- How will I know if my program is having an impact?
- Once you answer these types of questions, you are ready to determine how to gather your data.

How and what should grantees measure?

Output Measures: Output measures include important activities, work products, or actions taken during the project. Examples include:

- Number of fact sheets/videos/manuals/guides/documents distributed and to whom
- Number and locations of workshops held and number of persons attending
- Number and locations of meetings/press events held/media images produced, etc.

Behavioral Changes: Changes include the things that changed or were modified as a result of your activities. Examples include:

- Customer satisfaction/awareness (through testimonials, survey data, etc.)
- Changes in customer behavior (through number of best practices adopted, etc.)
- Improved regulatory compliance

Outcome Measures: Impacts are measures of specific environmental and human health improvements in a defined area. These indicators help measure what impacts the project is having on environmental problems in your project area. Some examples tied to EPA's strategic plan are:

- Pounds of hazardous materials reduced
- BTUs of energy conserved
- Gallons of water saved
- Dollars saved through P2 efforts

Why do I need an up-front estimate?

Estimating the outputs and outcomes of proposed activities will allow comparison of efforts and will help in setting up a system to capture actual results of the project(s).

Do all listed grant activities need to be measured?

Not all grant activities need to be measured. Grantees should prioritize and select measurement efforts based on budgetary and time constraints, as well as their programmatic knowledge and experience. The goal is to acquire the most useful outcome measures with available resources.

How much time and effort should a grantee spend on measurement?

EPA recommends that between 10% and 20% of a project budget be allocated to measurement. These costs should not be included as a line item in your budget projections but should be reflected in your work plan.

What standard of accuracy must measurement efforts achieve?

Measurement activities can meet different standards of accuracy and confidence based on practical considerations. In some instances, P2 assistance efforts may be very specific, resulting in direct and tangible outcome results. In other instances, results may be provided by third parties or based on reasonable assumptions. All these approaches are legitimate as long as the process is clearly expressed.

Will grant proposals with larger outcome numbers be ranked higher than proposals with lower outcome numbers?

While the quantity of outcome results are noted by proposal evaluators, it is the quality and context of the numbers that are of primary importance. In isolation, outcome numbers offer little insight into the success or value of a P2 project. Larger issues such as public health, occupational well-being, ecological impacts, environmental justice, regulatory developments, market conditions, and technological considerations provide the context that help proposal evaluators assess the relevance and importance of expected P2 outcome results.