

**ASSIGNMENTS: 6**

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| **Assignment Brief:** | **Q 1:** Explain the value of considering the implementation capacity and what steps to take therein while developing an M&E plan in an organization. (20 mrks)  **Q2:** Explain the main qualitative features of an M&E plan, which distinguishes it from any other plan in M&E. (10mrks) |

**What is a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan?**

A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan is a document that helps 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. While the specifics of each program’s M&E plan will look different, they should all follow the same basic structure and include the same key elements.

An M&E plan will include some documents that may have been created during the program planning process, and some that will need to be created new. For example, elements such as the [logic model](https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guides/how-develop-logic-model-0)/logical framework, theory of change, and [monitoring indicators](https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guides/how-develop-monitoring-indicators) may have already been developed with input from [key stakeholders](https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guides/how-conduct-stakeholder-workshop%20) and/or the program donor. The M&E plan takes those documents and develops a further plan for their implementation.

Why develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan?

It is important to develop an M&E plan before beginning any monitoring activities so that there is a clear plan for what questions about the program need to be answered. It will help program staff decide how they are going to collect data to track [indicators](https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guides/how-develop-monitoring-indicators), how monitoring data will be analyzed, and how the results of data collection will be disseminated both to the donor and internally among staff members for program improvement. Remember, M&E data alone is not useful until someone puts it to use! An M&E plan will help make sure data is being used efficiently to make programs as effective as possible and to be able to report on results at the end of the program.

Who should develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan?

An M&E plan should be developed by the research team or staff with research experience, with inputs from program staff involved in designing and implementing the program.

When should a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan be developed?

An M&E plan should be developed at the beginning of the program when the interventions are being designed. This will ensure there is a system in place to monitor the program and evaluate success.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is designed primarily for program managers or personnel who are not trained researchers themselves but who need to understand the rationale and process of conducting research. This guide can help managers to support the need for research and ensure that research staff have adequate resources to conduct the research that is needed to be certain that the program is evidence based and that results can be tracked over time and measured at the end of the program.

Learning Objectives

After completing the steps for developing an M&E plan, the team will:

Identify the elements and steps of an M&E plan

Explain how to create an M&E plan for an upcoming program

Describe how to advocate for the creation and use of M&E plans for a program/organization

Estimated Time Needed

Developing an M&E plan can take up to a week, depending on the size of the team available to develop the plan, and whether a logic model and theory of change have already been designed.

Step 1: Identify Program Goals and Objectives

The first step to creating an M&E plan is to identify the program goals and objectives. If the program already has a [logic model](https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guides/how-develop-logic-model-0) or theory of change, then the program goals are most likely already defined. However, if not, the M&E plan is a great place to start. Identify the program goals and objectives.

Defining program goals starts with answering three questions:

What problem is the program trying to solve?

What steps are being taken to solve that problem?

How will program staff know when the program has been successful in solving the problem?

​Answering these questions will help identify what the program is expected to do, and how staff will know whether or not it worked. For example, if the program is starting a condom distribution program for adolescents, the answers might look like this:

Step 2: Define Indicators

Once the program’s goals and objectives are defined, it is time to define indicators for tracking progress towards achieving those goals. Program indicators should be a mix of those that measure process, or what is being done in the program, and those that measure outcomes.

track the progress of the program. They help to answer the question, “Are activities being implemented as planned?” Some examples of process indicators are:

Number of trainings held with health providers

Number of outreach activities conducted at youth-friendly locations

Number of condoms distributed at youth-friendly locations

Percent of youth reached with condom use messages through the media

track how successful program activities have been at achieving program objectives. They help to answer the question, “Have program activities made a difference?” Some examples of outcome indicators are:

Percent of youth using condoms during first intercourse

Number and percent of trained health providers offering family planning services to youth

Number and percent of new STI infections among youth.

These are just a few examples of indicators that can be created to track a program’s success. More information about creating indicators can be found in the

Step 3: Define Data Collection Methods and TImeline

After creating monitoring indicators, it is time to decide on methods for gathering data and how often various data will be recorded to track indicators. This should be a conversation between program staff, stakeholders, and donors. These methods will have important implications for what data collection methods will be used and how the results will be reported.

The source of monitoring data depends largely on what each indicator is trying to measure. The program will likely need multiple data sources to answer all of the programming questions. Below is a table that represents some examples of what data can be collected and how.

Step 4: Identify M&E Roles and Responsibilities

The next element of the M&E plan is a section on roles and responsibilities. It is important to decide from the early planning stages who is responsible for collecting the data for each indicator. This will probably be a mix of M&E staff, research staff, and program staff. Everyone will need to work together to get data collected accurately and in a timely fashion.

Data management roles should be decided with input from all team members so everyone is on the same page and knows which indicators they are assigned. This way when it is time for reporting there are no surprises.

An easy way to put this into the M&E plan is to expand the indicators table with additional columns for who is responsible for each indicator,

Step 5: Create an Analysis Plan and Reporting Templates

Once all of the data have been collected, someone will need to compile and analyze it to fill in a results table for internal review and external reporting. This is likely to be an in-house M&E manager or research assistant for the program.

The M&E plan should include a section with details about what data will be analyzed and how the results will be presented. Do research staff need to perform any statistical tests to get the needed answers? If so, what tests are they and what data will be used in them? What software program will be used to analyze data and make reporting tables? Excel? SPSS? These are important considerations.

Another good thing to include in the plan is a blank table for indicator reporting. These tables should outline the indicators, data, and time period of reporting. They can also include things like the indicator target, and how far the program has progressed towards that target. An example of a reporting

Step 6: Plan for Dissemination and Donor Reporting

The last element of the M&E plan describes how and to whom data will be disseminated. Data for data’s sake should not be the ultimate goal of M&E efforts.  Data should always be collected for particular purposes.

Consider the following:

How will M&E data be used to inform staff and stakeholders about the success and progress of the program?

How will it be used to help staff make modifications and course corrections, as necessary?

How will the data be used to move the field forward and make program practices more effective?

The M&E plan should include plans for internal dissemination among the program team, as well as wider dissemination among stakeholders and donors. For example, a program team may want to review data on a monthly basis to make programmatic decisions and develop future work plans, while meetings with the donor to review data and program progress might occur quarterly or annually. Dissemination of printed or digital materials might occur at more frequent intervals. These options should be discussed with stakeholders and your team to determine reasonable expectations for data review and to develop plans for dissemination early in the program. If these plans are in place from the beginning and become routine for the project, meetings and other kinds of periodic review have a much better chance of being productive ones that everyone looks forward to.

What is a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan?

A monitoring and evaluation plan is a guide that explains the goals and objectives of an M&E strategy and its key elements. Let’s try and explain this concept in simple words – an M&E plan is like a roadmap that helps to define, implement, track and improve a monitoring and evaluation strategy within a particular project or a group of projects; it states everything that needs to happen from the project planning phase until the project reaches its goal and creates the intended impact.

So, what is this ‘everything’ that is incorporated into an M&E plan? An M&E plan includes the following elements:

A proposed timeline for M&E

Relevant M&E questions to ask at different stages of the project life cycle

Different methodologies

An effective implementation strategy

Expected results

Defining who would implement the various components of the M&E plan

Appropriate M&E tools for data collection

Identifying where data would be stored and how it would be analyzed

Defining how M&E findings would be reported to donors, stakeholders and internal staff members to ensure project improvement, transparency and data-driven decision making

Other required resources and capacities

One thing to keep in mind – the specifics of each project’s M&E plan will differ on a project-by-project basis, however, they should all follow the same basic structure and include the same key elements.

When should we design an M&E plan?

Monitoring and evaluation plan should be created right in the beginning when the project interventions are being planned. Planning project interventions and designing an M&E strategy should go hand in hand. Planning the M&E this early on also helps to ensure that there is a robust system in place to monitor every little intervention and activity of the project and evaluate their success. It also helps the project managers and other staff members associated with the project to get a clear picture of key objectives and ensure the project is on the right track.

It is important to involve project managers, evaluators, donors, and other stakeholders in the designing of the M&E plan, as stakeholder involvement in the early phase ensures the applicability and sustainability of M&E activities. The idea is to identify opportunities and barriers as a team in the planning stage with a focus on problem-solving and maximizing impact.

Step-by-step guide to designing an M&E plan

Developing an M&E plan is a dynamic and multi-faceted process as it involves merging and connecting different elements of M&E into one holistic system to measure the performance of interventions and impact of a project. It is recommended to design the M&E work plan in a manner that it’s flexible so adjustments could be made anytime within the context of the work plan to account for issues that may arise during the M&E process.

Before we begin, it is essential to understand the rationale behind developing the M&E plan, the key elements that will be included and the steps required in developing it. Below, we have attempted to break down these elements into different steps for more clarity.

Step 1: Identifying the focal problem and the need for a project

Before we begin to conceptualize a project, it is essential to understand the underlying problem is the community of interest and explore what’s causing it, what interventions could solve this problem and how long would the intervention need to last for it to be effective. The project will thus be designed based on the need for a certain assumed intervention.

There are many strategic ways to identify the focal problem and its causes, but one common way organizations define these are through a ‘Problem Tree Analysis.’ This is a group activity that involves input from project team members, stakeholders and beneficiaries who can contribute relevant technical and local knowledge.

The first step is to define the main problem that all the team members mutually agree upon and visualized it on a flip-chart or a white board as the trunk of a tree. Next, through many rounds of discussions and dialogues, the team identifies the causes of the problem and visualizes them as the roots of the tree. Finally, the team brainstorms on the potential consequences of the problem and exhibits them as the branches of the tree. Team members can also add additional branches for solutions, concerns and decisions.

This is an effective practice as it maps out a realistic picture of a problem from economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions, while building a shared sense of purpose, action and understanding amongst the involved parties.

Step 2: Planning the project

Once we have fully grasped the underlying problem and mapped out its causes and consequences, we can begin to plan our project.

Identifying project goals, objectives and inputs/activities

Before we begin the groundwork of M&E plan, it is essential to understand where we need to go and how we are going to get there. This is possible by identifying clear and concise goals, objectives and relevant activities.

Goals: The final impacts on the lives of the beneficiaries or the environment that the project intends to achieve

Objectives: longer-term change in the environment or the behavior of project beneficiaries that is needed to achieve the overall goal

Activities/Input: direct interventions and processes of the project

Identifying key players

This step involves identifying key internal and external stakeholders who will be involved in the project or who will benefit from the project. The key stakeholders include the project team, donors, and stakeholders in the wider community (community groups, networks, residents etc.), partner organizations, local and national policy makers, other government bodies/ministries and the project beneficiaries.

Identifying monitoring and evaluation questions

In this step, program managers or M&E specialists with input from all stakeholders and donors identify the most important M&E questions the project will investigate. M&E questions, when answered will allow the managers to determine their internal capacity and processes in terms of vision, leadership, budget, management, sustainability etc. The M&E questions also allow the managers to gauge the relevance, effectiveness, impact and contributions of the interventions at different stages of the project life-cycle.

By identifying these questions early on in the process, project managers or M&E specialists are prepared to design tools, instruments, and methodologies required to gather the needed information. M&E questions may require revisions every now and then depending on the status of the project.

Roles and responsibilities

This is another important step to include while planning a project because defining the roles of project staff members and stakeholders early on will clarify who would be in charge of what activities, including communications, project management, project design and implementation, data collection, data analysis, reporting etc. and avoid unnecessary confusions later on during project implementation.

Cost estimates for the monitoring and evaluation activities

It is essential to allocate tentative budget and provide an explanation of the needed resources in the planning phase. This includes – money and personnel, capacity development, infrastructure, etc. M&E experts suggest allocating approximately 5 to 10 percent of total project costs for M&E programming.

Understanding the overall context

It is important to understand the political and administrative structures of the community where your project will take place, along with the roles and influences of existing policies that may affect project implementation. Likewise, it is also recommended to start thinking about the potential risks and unexpected circumstances that might arise during project implementation, for eg., any reluctance on the key players’ part for cooperation etc.

Once a clear picture of the overall goals and objectives of the project are defined, the key players are identified and the context is well understood, it is time to select an appropriate approach and sketch out the detailed design of the implementation plan.

Step 3: Defining a monitoring and evaluation framework

By the time we reach this step, we should have sufficient background knowledge to design a framework. A framework increases understanding of the project’s goals and objectives and defines the relationships between factors key to implementation. A framework also articulates the external and internal elements that could affect the project’s success.

It is important to keep in mind that there is no one size fits all when it comes to frameworks. Different kinds of projects use different kinds of frameworks, the best way to determine your ideal type is by understanding the scope of your project and then choosing the one that best fits the purpose. These three types of M&E frameworks are widely used in the development and humanitarian sectors:

Theory of Change – A theory of change shows a bigger picture (which could sometimes get complex) of all the underlying processes and possible pathways leading to long term behavioral changes in the institutional, individual or community levels, while visualizing all the possible evidence and assumptions that are linked to those changes.

Logical Framework (Log Frame)/Logic Model – Unlike the theory of change, a Log Frame is to the point and focuses only on one specific pathway that a project deals with and creates a neat and orderly structure for it. This makes it easier for the project managers and stakeholders to monitor project implementation.

Results Framework – A results framework emphasizes on results to provide clarity around the key project objectives. In other words, it outlines how each of the intermediate results/ outputs and outcomes relates to and facilitates the achievement of each objective, and how objectives relate to each other and the ultimate goal. Want some tips on how to design a Results Framework?

These three frameworks may have some differences in practice, but there are also some common elements that run through them, like the need for the identification and involvement of key stakeholders; the need for well-defined goals, objectives, activities and outputs, the same general purpose of describing how the project will lead to results and the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Step 4: Identifying relevant indicators

Once the program’s goals and objectives are defined and an outline of an M&E framework is in place, it is time to define indicators for tracking progress towards achieving those goals. A good mix of process, outcome and impact indicators is always recommended.

Process indicators track the progress of the project. These indicators help us get clarity on whether activities are being implemented as planned. On the other hand, outcome indicators track how successful program activities have been at achieving project objectives. Unlike process indicators, these indicators focus more on what the project is trying to achieve rather than how it is being achieved. Impact indicators measure the long term goals or impacts of a project

Step 5: Identifying data collection tools and methodologies

After creating monitoring indicators, it is time to identify and collect relevant data to demonstrate the actual results of the project interventions against our indicators. M&E experts recommend to involve the project team and stakeholders in the discussion to make the process more participatory. Before collecting data, it is a good idea to discuss these questions as a team:

Will the data be qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of the two?

What baseline data already exists?

What are the most relevant methods and tools to collect new data?

How will the collected data be recorded?

How and when will the data be analyzed?

Who will be responsible for data collection and analysis?

The golden rule to follow here is to collect fewer useful data properly than a lot of data poorly. It is important for project managers to take into consideration staff time and resource costs of data collection to see what is reasonable.

What is a good way to determine the most relevant source of monitoring data? This depends largely on what each indicator is trying to measure. The program will likely need multiple data sources to answer all the monitoring and evaluation questions. Data sources could be participants themselves, literature, national statistics, the whole community, individual homes or anyone or anything that can help to generate the relevant data. Once the appropriate sources have been selected, the next step would be to decide on the appropriate tools and methods to collect the data from the data source. Some common types of data collection methods are as follows:

Surveys

Questionnaires

Focus groups

Case studies

Interviews

Workshops

Content analysis of materials etc.

Apart from the traditional pen and paper methods, there are many digital data collection tools available in the market to help data collectors gather data faster and more efficiently. These online or offline tools also help to avoid human errors that can arise during data collection and input. Some widely used data collection tools are [Kobo Toolbox](https://www.kobotoolbox.org/), [Compare](https://www.dimagi.com/commcare/), Surveyor, [ONA](https://ona.io/home/) etc.

Once the process of data collection is determined, it is also necessary to decide how frequently data will be collected. This will depend on the needs of the project, donor requirements, available resources, and the timeline of the intervention. Most data will be continuously gathered by the program, while others at certain intervals. Gathered data is usually recorded every few months, depending on the agreed upon timeline. Want to know how to prepare your dataset for analysis?

Step 6: Reviewing M&E Work Plan (M&E practitioners recommend conducting this on a periodic basis)

Now that we’ve mapped out our indicators and data collection plan, it is time to revisit our M&E plan to see our progress toward the project goals and objectives and revise it based on the current needs of the project – what is the status of the project? How well are the activities being implemented? Are they generating intended outcomes or to what extent are our interventions in line with the needs of the community? What needs to be improved, added or changed at this point? etc.

At this stage, it is also good to revisit the fund allocation for the evaluation and see if our plan fits well within the available budget and resources. Roles and responsibilities for each component of the work plan should also be clearly explained. Would we need to outsource a particular segment of the evaluation to an external party?

Reviewing our M&E work plan also allows new team members, if any, to familiarise with the project and get a sense of what his/her responsibilities are and how the other roles and responsibilities are divided amongst the group.

Step 7: Reporting

Once data is gathered and analyzed, it must be reported to the relevant members as regularly as possible to discuss and interpret findings. The intention of reporting should always be to provide clarity on the most up-to-date results to staff members and stakeholders about the progress, success and failure of the project and to help them make data-driven decisions for modifications of project components and to develop future work plans as necessary. Also, data must be reported so that it can increase knowledge and make contributions to the related field for the future projects and practices to be more effective. If the project results and data are not dissemination adequately then it might lead to duplicate monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Thus, the M&E work plan should include an effective strategy for internal dissemination of data among the project team, as well as wider dissemination among stakeholders, donors and external audiences. The plan should also articulate what format will be used to share the findings – formal meetings with donors and stakeholders, written reports, oral presentations, program materials or community and stakeholder feedback sessions.

Besides the traditional reporting techniques, many organizations are also opting for digital M&E tools and software like [Teradata.](https://www.toladata.com/) These tools usually come with dashboard and portfolio features that allow users to visualize data into graphs, charts, reports and images for real-time reporting. These tools make reporting so much easier and help organizations to provide more clarity on their progress and ensure transparency and accountability at all levels.

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