Delivery partner resource

Project M&E planning guide

Version 5 –September 2025

Hort Innovation

Contents

Disclaimer

Purpose

The Project M&E planning guide has been developed to support the implementation of Hort Innovation's Organisational Evaluation Framework (Framework) at the 'project' investment level.

Its specific purpose is to guide delivery partners in developing a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan, including a program logic model, for projects they are delivering.

The relevant research and development (R&D), trade or marketing investment process owner at Hort Innovation and the Industry Insights Team will support project M&E planning and implementation by delivery partners.

Hort Innovation's Framework can be downloaded at here.

Definitions

Monitoring refers to the routine and systematic collection of data that may be used for management and/or evaluation purposes. **Evaluation** refers to the systematic process of determining the value, merit or worth of an intervention, policy, program or the like. In the context of Hort Innovation's activity, evaluation helps to provide perspective on the 'so what' of an investment in terms of achieving its intended outcomes for the select beneficiaries.

Monitoring and evaluation refers to the collective application monitoring data and activities to inform evaluation. A project M&E plan outlines the scope of M&E for a specific project, as well as what data will be collected (how, when and by whom) and how it will be analysed and used to meet identified M&E requirements.

Monitoring and evaluation in the project cycle

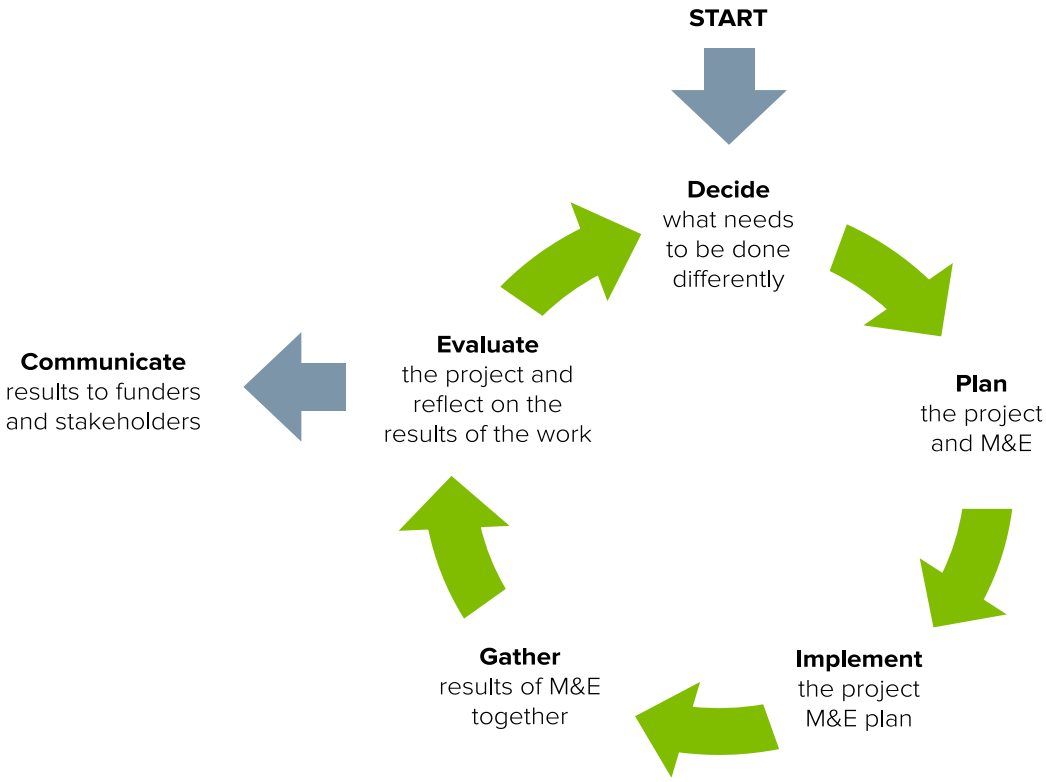
Monitoring and evaluation are critical components of project management throughout the project cycle as shown in **Figure 1**. M&E enables accountability, demonstrates performance, facilitates continuous improvement and supports advocacy of R&D and marketing project outcomes (i.e. helps tell the project story).

Principles for project monitoring and evaluation

Consistent with Hort Innovation's Framework, project M&E should:

- Be focused on the **achievement of outcomes**, i.e. on benefits to growers
- Articulate the **logic of the project**, clearly outlining how benefits will be delivered
- Identify **performance measures** (indicators) based on the logic of the project
- Be selective in **what is measured** to ensure that resources are used efficiently
- Be **strategic**, clearly linking to the relevant industry SIP and the Framework
- Be **consistent** where possible but sufficiently flexible to ensure that the specifics of each individual project are considered
- Be **commensurate** with the size and scale of the project
- Be as **practical**, implementable and simple as possible
- Be used for **continuous improvement**.

Figure 1. Monitoring and evaluation in the process cycle



Project monitoring and evaluation planning

Each Hort Innovation project is required to develop a project M&E plan. Exemptions may include short-term desktop studies, projects for which the purpose is evaluation of another project or program (impact assessment projects), where the project purpose is to provide data that feeds into a larger program or where the project is delivering a component of a larger program.

In addition to accountability requirements, good project M&E planning can help delivery partners adaptively manage their project to get the most out of the resources at their disposal.

Project M&E plans will vary in length, complexity and approach depending on the project scope and value. The important thing is a project M&E plan is fit-for-purpose to ensure that the necessary evidence is collected to demonstrate investment impact.

Hort Innovation requires independent mid-term evaluations for projects that exceed an investment or risk level threshold*. The relevant Hort Innovation process owner will advise if an independent mid-term evaluation is required. The purpose of an independent mid-term evaluation is to ensure that investment delivery is on track in accordance with achieving its intended outcomes.

* To be advised by Hort Innovation at procurement or during project delivery.

What to include in your project M&E plan

Hort Innovation project M&E plans include consideration of the following:

- **Program logic** clarifying the project impact pathway, and how the project is expected to contribute to Hort Innovation goals and the relevant industry SIP outcomes
- **Scope**, including purpose and audience for the M&E, outlining who will use the M&E results and what they will use it for. M&E plans often use key evaluation questions (KEQs) to guide data collection
- **Performance expectations** for assessing and judging project performance against agreed indicators or measures
- **M&E data collection, collation, synthesis, and analysis** arrangements including methods (and specific data sources and responsibility for collection)
- **Reporting** arrangements.

Each of these requirements is outlined in more detail in the following sub-sections. The Project M&E plan template reflects each of these sections. The The Project M&E template is available here.

1. Program logic

What is program logic?

Program logic is a thinking tool used by Hort Innovation to:

- Consider how outcomes can be achieved through investment (the causal chain or impact pathway)
- Monitor, evaluate and report on progress and achievements of investment.

Figure 2 shows a simplified program logic model. Activities, outputs, and outcomes are the essence of the logic of your project. Inputs and broader goals represent the relevant upstream inputs and downstream linkages of the project contributing to the broader Strategic Investment Plan (SIP).

Figure 2. Simplified program logic model

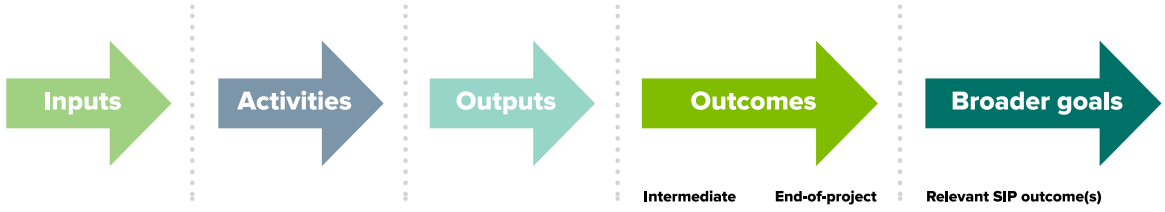
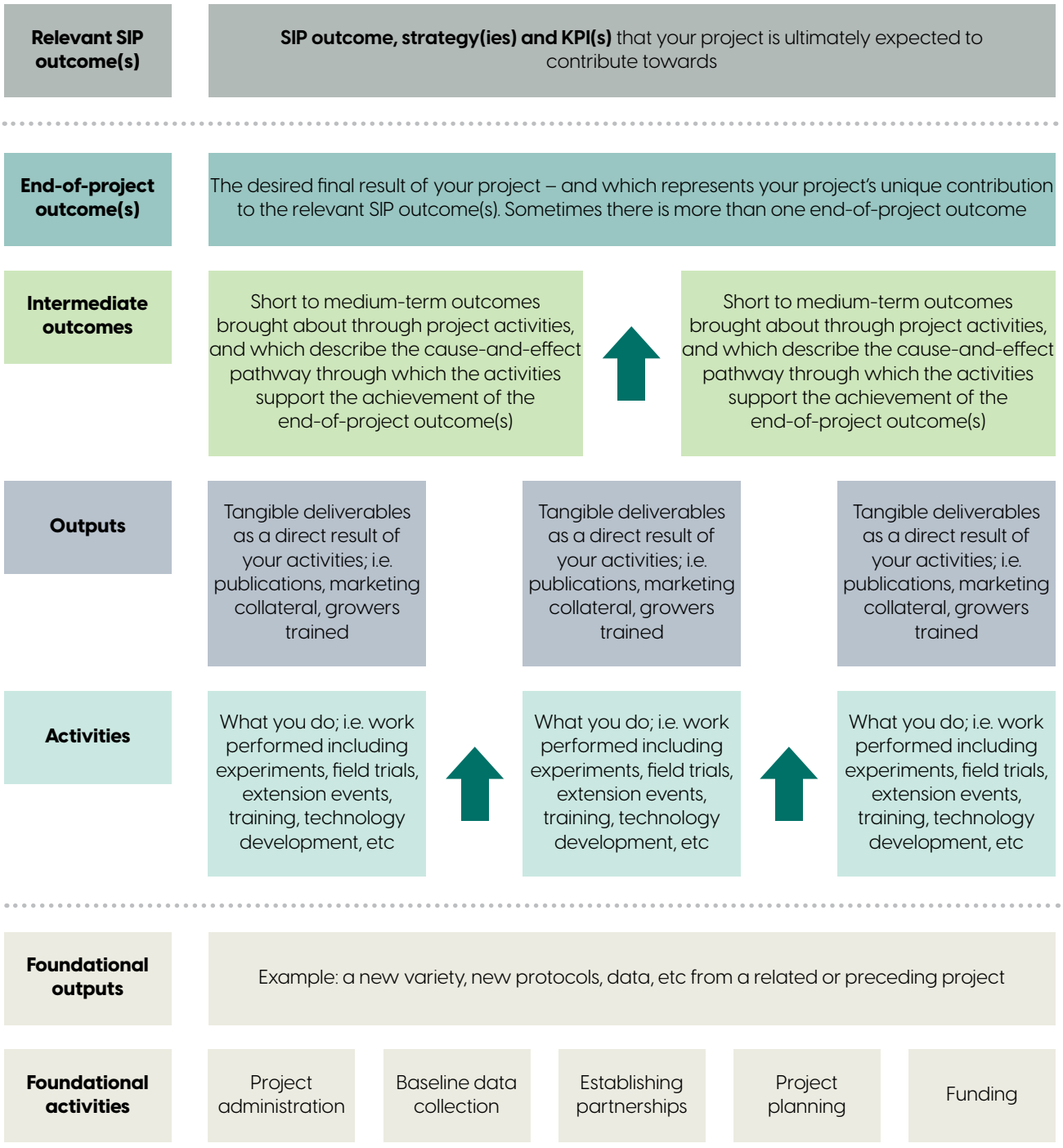


Table 1 outlines the Hort Innovation levels and definitions for program logic at the 'project' investment level.

Table 1. Project level logic hierarchy

SIP outcome(s)	SIP outcome(s) that the project is ultimately expected to contribute towards. These are articulated in the SIP relevant to your project. The project must demonstrate contribution to at least one outcome of the SIP. Example: Increased consumer demand through improved product quality.
The 'line of accountability'	
End-of-project outcome(s)	These outcomes are the desired result of the project, and represent the project's unique contribution to the relevant SIP outcome(s), strategy(ies) and Key Performance Indicator(s). They represent what the project could be reasonably expected to achieve given the level of investment and the timeframe for delivery (though some outcomes may be realised after the project period). Includes: practice or behavioural changes; adoption; incremental improvements stimulated through R&D; use of new information/protocol/technology; increased recognition of Australian horticulture products; increased consumer demand; improved product quality; commercialised intellectual property (IP). Example: An increase in product meeting minimum quality standards.
Intermediate outcomes	Short to medium-term outcomes brought about through project activities, and which describe the cause-and-effect pathway through which the activities support the achievement of the end-of-project outcome(s). Includes: changes in grower knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations (KASA); marketing campaign brand health; access to new information; training accessed by growers. Example: Industry stakeholders aware of quality standards and initiated implementation within their business.
Outputs	Project outputs are the tangible products or services (deliverables) that are produced from the project activities. Will include: publications; data; field trial and experiment results; minor use permits; new farm management protocols or standards; new technology; marketing campaigns and collateral; training/extension events delivered; industry development services; trade shows; study tours; reports; patents; prototypes; new varieties or technology. Example: Publication of quality standards, training of growers, and quality standards testing.
Activities	The activities delivered by the project to bring about the desired changes, and the immediate effects – or tangible deliverables/outputs (products or services) – of those activities. The activities are what projects are funded to do. Activities include collecting field trial data, conducting consumer surveys, conducting an information event, product quality sampling. Example: surveying consumers to develop triggers and barriers to purchase.
Foundational activities	Preliminary or 'preparatory' activities that are an important for the success of the project but are not directly associated with changing or influencing the external environment as project activities are. Foundational activities include: establishing a project team; outputs from previous or linked projects; data sets; a new variety, protocol or technology that is to be extended in your project; scoping study results. Example: Development of a quality standard, formation of project team and establishment of quality standard benchmarks.

Figure 3 provides a template example of how program logic for a project investment could be represented in a visual hierarchy. When developing a program logic model, its important to begin with the end in mind, considering what contribution the project is seeking to deliver for the beneficiaries and how this is aligned to the relevant industry SIP in consideration with an outcome, strategy(ies) and key performance indicators (KPIs).



2. Project monitoring and evaluation scope

The scope of a project M&E plan will be underpinned by the KEQs that will guide data collection and inquiry for the project.

Key evaluation questions

KEQs are overarching questions that guide evaluative inquiry into the effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness, relevance and, impact of Hort Innovation's investments. They facilitate judgements and are used to guide an evaluation. They form the basis of data collection but are not the same as survey questions.

Table 2 outlines the KEQs that have been determined in Hort Innovation's Framework as most relevant to guide project level evaluation.

Those KEQs most relevant for your project will depend on who you have identified as the primary M&E audience for your project and their information needs.

KEQs should be tailored to each specific project.

Table 2. Key evaluation questions relevant at the project level

Domain	Key evaluation questions
Effectiveness	1 To what extent has the project achieved its expected outcomes?
Alignment	2 How relevant was the project to the needs of intended audience?
Engagement	3 How well has the intended audience been engaged in the project? 4 To what extent were engagement processes successful to the target audience/s of the project?
Efficiency	5 What efforts did the project make to improve efficiency?

Definitions of domains

Effectiveness: the extent to which an intervention (a project) has attained (or is expected to attain) its intended outcomes.

Alignment: the extent to which the expected outcomes of an intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, government priorities, etc.

Engagement: the extent to which a project/program is operating as intended.

Efficiency: the extent to which an intervention produces outputs and outcomes without wasting time, money, effort or other resources.

3. Performance expectations

Performance expectations such as indicators, standards, or measures can be set for assessing the performance of the project in achieving its intended outcomes. Performance expectations can be expressed quantitatively as a measure or an indicator, qualitatively as a set of standards or criteria, or as a combination of both. Examples of performance indicators are as follows:

Quantitative

- Share of consumer satisfaction
- Share of grower adoption of variety
- Share of product meeting maturity standard
- Share of area covered in benchmarking participation
- Number of workshops delivered, attendance levels.

Qualitative

- Grower change in knowledge, skill, attitude or aspiration
- Consumer purchase intent.

4. Data collection, collation, synthesis and analysis

Data collection may involve a range of quantitative (numeric) or qualitative (descriptive, text-based or visual) information. The important thing is that data collection methods are fit-for-purpose; i.e. they address the information needs as defined by the KEQs and performance expectations. To address gaps or deficiencies in data quality it will often be useful to use multiple data collection methods. A suggested format for identifying data collection methods and sources is provided in **Table 3**. It is provided as a suggested format for linking project outcomes, performance measures and data collection methods.

This table provides the core information for a well thought out and effective project M&E plan. To ensure that the M&E system is balanced and appropriate it is necessary to identify what to monitor at all levels in this plan, such as, end-of-project and intermediate outcomes, as well as outputs delivered by the project.

Table 3. Project monitoring plan

Program logic level	**What to monitor** Insert aspects of the project to be monitored, for example, grower groups, trials, improved awareness or knowledge, application of a new technology	**Performance expectations** KPIs	**How to monitor** Suggested methods	**Data source** Target audience	**When**	**Responsibility** Who is responsible for the monitoring and how will results be reported
Activities	What you do, such as field trials, farm days	# trials # extension activities	Record keeping	Growers Advisors	Ongoing	Organisation/ specific project team member Milestone Reports Final Reports
Outputs	Tangible deliverables as a direct result of your activities	# articles # publications Extension participation (# growers) # minor use permits New technology or variety or protocol	Record keeping	Growers Advisors Exporters Packers	Ongoing	Organisation/ specific project team member Milestone Reports Final Reports Industry reports/ publications
Intermediate outcomes	Changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations	Increased knowledge/ use of information by # growers #/% audience reached	Event questionnaire Observation Interviews Surveys Case studies Website/ marketing analytics	Growers Advisors Processors	Intermittent i.e. annually As required for evaluation	Organisation/ specific team member Independent reviewer Milestone Reports Final Reports Industry reports/ publications
End-of-project outcomes	Levy and co-investment funded research, development, extension and marketing and extension outcomes	Uptake and adoption targets because of the project # practice changes by x% production base Increased yield by x% Increased consumer recognition x% increased sales/ exports x% increase in water use efficiency x% increase in product meeting minimum quality standards	Interviews Survey Case studies Industry data/ benchmarks	Growers Exporters	As required for evaluation	Organisation/ specific project team member Independent reviewer Final Report Evaluation Report

5. Evaluation

Evaluation comes in two forms. It may involve:

- Making evaluative judgements using the monitoring data collected and any additional data collected at the point of evaluation, and answering your key evaluation questions through self-assessment or expert judgement
- Commissioning an external evaluation study to review existing data, collect additional data and make evaluative judgements.

Both types involve making judgements and this is what defines evaluation.

Evaluation refers involves making judgments about the worth or merit of the project, focused on delivery against the KEQs and performance expectations. Your evaluation is essentially concerned with answering the 'so what' following the project delivery.

At a minimum, delivery partners are expected to self-assess and make evaluative judgements of their project (i.e. answer the KEQs) at project conclusion using the M&E data collected. Hort Innovation will require independent mid-term and final evaluations for some projects, which will be described during the project procurement stage.

6. Reporting

Investments must demonstrate their performance and 'so what' using the results of M&E to Hort Innovation, growers and other industry stakeholders through reporting. The final report will provide information on the project's performance specifically related to addressing the KEQs and performance expectations and how these support the achievement of the fund level outcomes (identified in the relevant SIP). Ongoing reporting against M&E progress will be provided through milestone reporting.

Hort Innovation will use reports provided by delivery partners in the preparation of the SIP performance analyses, the Hort Innovation annual report, fund annual reports and to inform ex-post impact assessments.

Share your thoughts

We strive to provide the best experience possible for our delivery partners. Please share your feedback on how we can improve this document for you and other delivery partners in the future by emailing us at communications@horticulture.com.au

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