WHAT IS IT?

Outcome Harvesting is a form of program evaluation that uses an partner or participatory approach to identify the outcomes produced by an intervention or program.[1]

Outcome Harvesting uses principles from outcome mapping and utilisation-focused evaluation to identify how an outcome was achieved.

An outcome is described as any change in behaviour, activity, action, policy, relationship, and/or practice
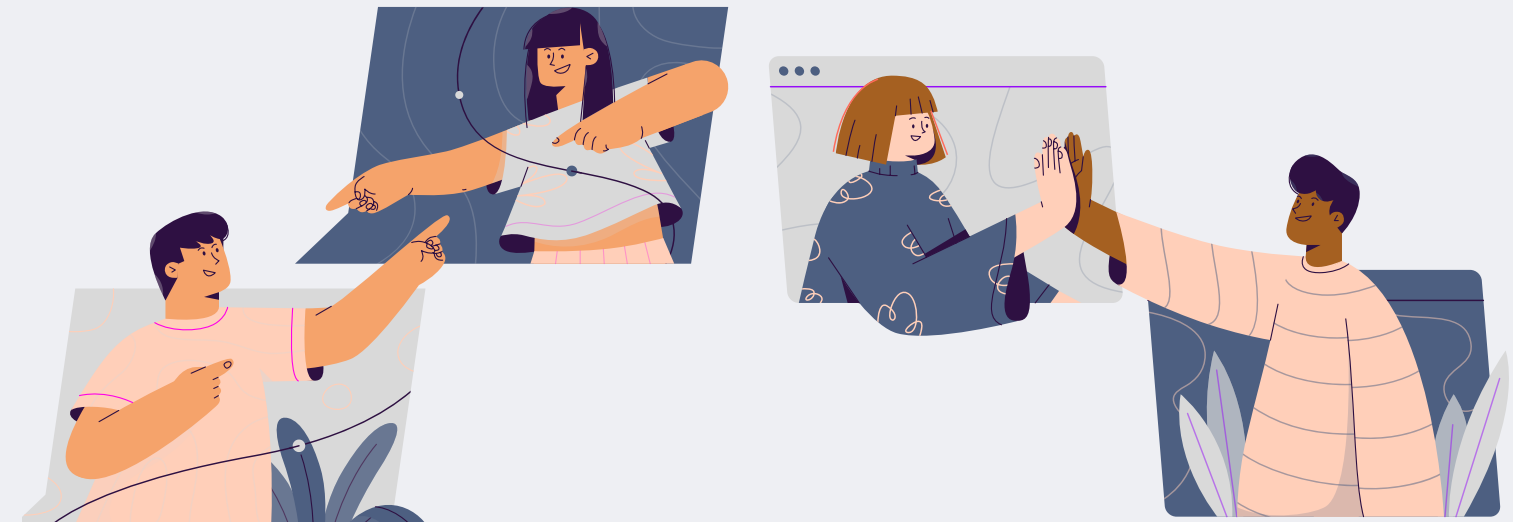
HOW TO USE IT

The ethos of Outcome Harvesting requires identifying outcomes and working backwards to determine how these outcomes came to be. This process is completed in six steps:[2]

1. DESIGN THE HARVEST

The first step involves identifying who will be using the results of the outcome harvest and why they need to conduct the harvest. Specific, useful and actionable questions will then be developed to guide the harvest and the information required to answer these questions will be identified.

2. REVIEW DOCUMENTATION

Any report, or performance document created by the agency can be used to identify and describe potential outcomes. This step involves looking for change agents such as: facilitate and support, inspire and encourage, and/or pressure or persuade.

3. ENGAGE WITH PARTNERS

The lead will review the outcome descriptions developed in step 2 with internal and/or external sources who have knowledge of the program or intervention being evaluated. The purpose is to clarify or confirm what was identified in the document review and discuss any other potential outcomes.

4. SUBSTANTIATE

Rigour is applied to the process through the triangulation of the conclusions drawn with a third-party. This third party has knowledge on the subject area.

5. ANALYSE AND INTERPRET

Patterns across outcomes are explored and outcomes are classified in consultation with the partners/key actors. For larger multi-dimensional harvests a database can be helpful in storing and analysing outcomes across datasets. This step aims to provide evidence-based answers to the questions developed in the first step by using the information gathered during the process.

6. SUPPORT USE OF THE FINDINGS

This step is focused on *sense making*. The purpose is to identify how the findings can be used or applied. It considers the *so what?* or *what now?* of the outcome harvest.

Outcome harvesting is not a linear process. It is expected that each step may need to be revisited multiple times.

WHEN TO USE IT

- It is well suited for when the purpose of the evaluation is to understand what has happened and how it happened; the focus is on the process of change and how the organisation, program, intervention, etc. has contributed to the change.[3]
- Ideal candidates for Outcome Harvesting are programs or interventions that are based in advocacy, campaigning, and policy.

- Outcome Harvesting is best suited for evaluations that focus on outcomes rather than activities, as Outcome Harvesting studies effectiveness not efficiency.
- Similarly, Outcome Harvesting is intended for social change issues that do not have clear cause and effect relationships.[3]

Outcome Harvesting

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
- Well suited for contexts that are dynamic, evolving, uncertain, and where it is challenging to measure predetermined objectives - Reveals how an outcome occurred and can therefore be beneficial to process evaluation - Can be used for program monitoring as well as evaluation - Generates verifiable outcomes when cause and effect is not clear	- Quality and success of the outcome harvest are influenced by the partners/key actors involved in the process - Can only capture outcomes that partners/key actors are aware of - Can be time consuming, as it often involves re-visiting steps more than once - It is crucial to have by-in from those involved in the whole process, which may be challenging to achieve - Can be challenging to separate out attribution from contribution

EXAMPLES

- Sightsavers is using Outcome Harvesting to evaluate the Accelerate program in the elimination of trachoma. Click here to listen to the iCHORDS podcast that interviews Geordie Woods and Mack Giancola on the topic.

- Outcome Harvesting was used to help identify and analyse the outcomes of a US$54 million initiative funded by the Ford Foundation aimed at strengthening human rights worldwide. Click here to view the report.

- The Global Child Protection and Crisis Network used Outcome Harvesting along with a Network Functions Approach to assess how the network influenced child protection policy and practice and enhanced the network's standing within the child protection field. Click here to view the report.

References & Resources

1. outcomeharvesting.net
2. Wilson-Grau, R. (2021, November 2). Outcome Harvesting. Retrieved from: betterevaluation.org
3. Wilson-Grau, R., & Britt, H. (2013, November). Outcome Harvesting Brief. Retrieved from: https://outcomeharvesting.net/outcome-harvesting-brief/