HOW TO CONSTRUCT
OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES

A guide for Weld Trust grant applicants

This guide supports grantees and Program Officers in creating meaningful performance measures that strengthen programs, foster learning, and drive continuous improvement.

This guide was developed by The Weld Trust and was inspired by the Walton Family Foundation's publication, "How to Construct Performance Measures" (2022). Content has been adapted to reflect The Weld Trust's evaluation approach and community context.

Our Evaluation Approach

Evaluation at The Weld Trust

At The Weld Trust, evaluation is a tool for learning, improvement, and accountability to the communities we serve. We believe that meaningful evaluation helps both grantees and The Weld Trust understand what's working, what can be strengthened, and how our collective efforts contribute to lasting impact in Weld County. Our approach emphasizes learning over compliance, using data and reflection to guide decisions, improve program effectiveness, and deepen understanding of community outcomes across our Key Funding Initiatives.

Understanding Where Outputs and Outcomes Fit

A logic model illustrates how your program's resources and activities lead to measurable change. It shows the logical connections between what you invest, what you do, and what results you expect to see. In this framework, **outputs** capture the immediate products of your activities, while **outcomes** reflect the short-term and intermediate changes that occur as a result, ultimately contributing to the program's long-term **outcomes**.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
- Funding - Staff - Volunteers - Facilities - Equipment - Materials - Curriculum - Etc.	- Provide direct services - Host educational or skill-building sessions - Support navigation and referrals - Provide community outreach or engagement events	- Number of clients served - Number of sessions held - Number of referrals or connections made - Number of materials or resources distributed	**- Short-term:** Participants report increased understanding or confidence. **- Intermediate:** Participants apply new skills, access resources, or change behaviors. **- Long-term:** Sustained improvements in health, education, stability, or overall well-being.

What's the difference between **outputs and outcomes?**

Understanding the distinction between outputs and outcomes is essential to telling the full story of your program's impact, what you did, and what difference it made.

Outputs

Outputs are the direct products of your activities—the tangible actions, services, or deliverables your program provides. They describe *what was done* and *who was reached*.
Think of outputs as answering the question, "**How many?**"—for example, how many workshops were held or how many participants were served.

Outcomes

Outcomes describe the changes or benefits that result from those activities. They capture *what changed* for participants, organizations, or communities as a result of your work.
Outcomes answer the question, "**How much change occurred?**"—for example, how much participants' skills, confidence, or stability improved.

How **outputs and outcomes** are used

- **Drive long-term outcomes:** Outputs and outcomes help clarify how program activities contribute to lasting change. They show the link between what is being done today and the long-term impact your organization seeks to achieve in the community.
- **Guide learning and continuous improvement:** Performance measures are not just for reporting, they're tools for reflection. They generate actionable insights that help identify strategic adjustments, strengthen implementation, and enhance impact over time.
- **Strengthen shared understanding:** Clear, well-written outputs and outcomes ensure that both your organization and The Weld Trust share a common understanding of what success looks like and how it will be measured.
- **Connect to The Weld Trust's strategy:** Outcomes should align with The Weld Trust's **Theory of Change**, **Logic Models**, and **Big Bets**, which outline how we aim to achieve measurable improvements across our **Key Funding Initiatives**. These frameworks can be found on The Weld Trust website and serve as useful reference points when developing your measures.

Deciding What to Measure

Start by envisioning what your long-term outcomes looks like

When developing outputs and outcomes, start by brainstorming all the possible results your program could influence—both immediate, intermediate, and long-term. Then, narrow your focus to the few measures that best capture the most meaningful changes for your participants and community. As you refine these ideas, consider how each can realistically be measured using the data, tools, and capacity your organization already has in place.

How many measures should you include

At The Weld Trust, we don't have strict requirements for the number of outputs or outcomes based on grant size or length. However, we generally align with guidance that **larger or longer-term grants should include a greater number of outcomes**, reflecting the broader scope and investment of the project.

All applicants must include **at least two outcomes** in their application. While the application form does not have a separate section for outputs, applicants may use one of the outcome fields to describe an important output if it is **clearly linked to a meaningful outcome.**

That said, **outputs alone are not sufficient.** Every grant must include at least one or more **well-defined, outcomes-based measures** that demonstrate meaningful change—showing not just what was done, but what difference it made for participants or the community.

Note: Adding more outcomes will not increase your chances of funding. What matters most are strong, measurable outcomes that are well aligned with The Weld Trust's Logic Models and Big Bets.

Make sure that your outputs and outcomes are **SMART**

The SMART framework offers a practical way to turn broad goals into clear, measurable outcomes that can guide learning, accountability, and improvement throughout your project.

S

Specific – clearly defines the change you want to see: An outcome should be focused and detailed, leaving little room for interpretation. For example, instead of saying *"participants will improve health,"* specify *"participants will increase daily fruit and vegetable intake."*

M

Measurable – supported by data you can track:
Decide ahead of time how you'll know if the change happened. This could be through surveys, attendance records, test scores, or other concrete measures.

A

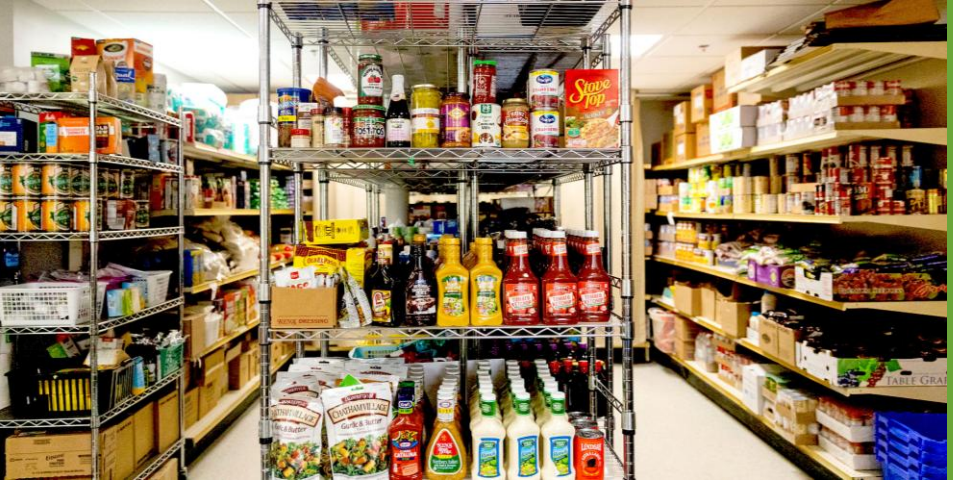
Achievable – realistic given your resources:
The outcome should stretch your program toward impact but still be possible with the time, staff, and funding available.

R

Relevant – tied to your program goals:
Make sure the outcome connects directly to the mission and priorities of your program, not just to activities that are easy to count.

T

Time-bound – includes a timeframe for change:
Outcomes should specify when the change is expected (e.g., "within 6 months" or "by the end of the school year") so progress can be reviewed and accountability maintained.



Putting your Outcomes into Words

Constructing your outputs and outcomes

When writing your outputs and outcomes, this framework can serve as a practical guide. It helps translate broad goals into clear, measurable statements by identifying what will change, who will benefit, when it will happen, how much change is expected, and how you'll know it occurred. Following this format keeps your outcomes focused, actionable, and aligned with the results your program aims to achieve.

What will change or be accomplished through the program?

Who will the change or accomplishment impact?

When the change or accomplishment will occur?

How much change will occur, or what level of accomplishment will there be?

How we will know the change occurred?

Example outcome from Physical and Behavioral Health:

By June 2026 **[WHEN]**, at least **80%** **[HOW MUCH]** of youth participating in school-based mental health workshops **[WHO]** will demonstrate improved coping and stress management skills **[WHAT]**, as measured by pre- and post-program surveys **[HOW WE WILL KNOW]**.

Three basic steps for creating quality outputs and outcomes

The development of effective performance measures follows three core steps, each described in more detail below.

1. Identify SMART outputs and outcomes

2. Identify targets for each output and outcome

3. Identify a measurement strategy for each target

1 Identify SMART outputs and outcomes

The first step in developing strong performance measures is to identify **SMART outcomes and outputs**—those that are *Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant,* and *Time-bound*. These statements should clearly describe **who** will do **what**, and define the measurable changes you expect to see. The number of outputs and outcomes you include will depend on the size and scope of your project, but each one should be focused, meaningful, and realistically measurable within the grant period.

EXAMPLE: Improving early childhood literacy

To help grantees think through the outputs and outcomes for their grant, the diagram below provides an example from a literacy initiative designed to improve early reading proficiency. In this example, one **output** leads to a series of **outcomes** that build on one another as a chain of effects — what happens first, what happens next, and what happens as a result over time.

Output
Tutors and volunteers deliver small-group reading interventions to K–3 students identified as below grade level.

Short-term Outcome
Students participating in reading sessions show improved literacy skills and increased reading confidence by the end of the school year.

Intermediate Outcome
A higher percentage of students who received reading interventions meet or exceed grade-level reading benchmarks.

Long-term Outcome
Over several years, participating schools see sustained increases in third-grade reading proficiency across the district.

2 Identify targets for each output and outcome

Once outputs and outcomes are identified, the next step is to determine the **numerical target** for each measure — *how much* change or accomplishment you expect to achieve and *when* it will take place. Setting clear targets helps establish what success looks like while keeping goals ambitious yet realistic. Performance is not judged by whether every target is met, but by the **progress made toward those targets** and the **insights gained** about what worked well and where adjustments might strengthen impact in the future. We recognize that many factors influencing outcomes — particularly long-term community change — are outside a grantee's direct control. The purpose of setting targets is not to assign blame if a goal isn't met, but to create a shared understanding of what level of change is achievable within the grant period and to inform future learning.

Output	Short-term Outcome	Intermediate Outcome	Long-term Outcome
Tutors and volunteers deliver small-group reading interventions to K–3 students identified as below grade level.	Students participating in reading sessions show improved literacy skills and increased reading confidence by the end of the school year.	A higher percentage of students who received reading interventions meet or exceed grade-level reading benchmarks.	Over several years, participating schools see sustained increases in third-grade reading proficiency across the district.
Target: By May 2025, at least **300 students** will participate in small-group reading sessions across **12 elementary schools**.	**Target:** **75% of participating students** will demonstrate improvement in reading fluency by the end of the grant period.	**Target:** At least **60% of participants** will meet or exceed grade-level reading benchmarks on district literacy assessments the following spring.	**Target:** By 2028, participating schools will achieve a **10% increase** in the percentage of third-grade students meeting or exceeding ELA expectations.

Note: Because most Weld Trust grants span one year, outputs and short-term outcomes are the most realistic to measure, while intermediate and long-term outcomes—though valuable conceptually—may take more time and external factors to demonstrate.

3 Identify a measurement strategy for each target

The final step is to determine how each output and outcome will be measured—your plan for **how we will know** if progress has occurred. Some outcomes are easier to measure than others, but grantees should aim to use the most direct data available. When direct measures aren't possible, use proxy indicators or qualitative evidence to confirm that meaningful change has taken place.

Output	Short-term Outcome	Intermediate Outcome	Long-term Outcome
Tutors and volunteers deliver small-group reading interventions to K–3 students identified as below grade level.	Students participating in reading sessions show improved literacy skills and increased reading confidence by the end of the school year.	A higher percentage of students who received reading interventions meet or exceed grade-level reading benchmarks.	Over several years, participating schools see sustained increases in third-grade reading proficiency across the district.
Target: By May 2025, at least **300 students** will participate in small-group reading sessions across **12 elementary schools**.	**Target:** **75% of participating students** will demonstrate improvement in reading fluency by the end of the grant period.	**Target:** At least **60% of participants** will meet or exceed grade-level reading benchmarks on district literacy assessments the following spring.	**Target:** By 2028, participating schools will achieve a **10% increase** in the percentage of third-grade students meeting or exceeding ELA expectations.
Measurement tool: Tutor and school attendance logs documenting student participation.	**Measurement tool:** Pre- and post-assessments of reading fluency and comprehension scores.	**Measurement tool:** School district reading benchmark data.	**Measurement tool:** Colorado Department of Education ELA proficiency data.

Putting it all together in writing

Once the first three steps are completed, put the output or outcome into its final form using the five elements (WHAT, WHO, HOW MUCH, WHEN, HOW WILL WE KNOW).

Output	Short-term Outcome	Intermediate Outcome	Long-term Outcome
Tutors and volunteers deliver small-group reading interventions to K–3 students identified as below grade level.	Students participating in reading sessions show improved literacy skills and increased reading confidence by the end of the school year.	A higher percentage of students who received reading interventions meet or exceed grade-level reading benchmarks.	Over several years, participating schools see sustained increases in third-grade reading proficiency across the district.
Target: By May 2025, at least **300 students** will participate in small-group reading sessions across **12 elementary schools**.	**Target:** **75% of participating students** will demonstrate improvement in reading fluency by the end of the grant period.	**Target:** At least **60% of participants** will meet or exceed grade-level reading benchmarks on district literacy assessments the following spring.	**Target:** By 2028, participating schools will achieve a **10% increase** in the percentage of third-grade students meeting or exceeding ELA expectations.
Measurement tool: Tutor and school attendance logs documenting student participation.	**Measurement tool:** Pre- and post-assessments of reading fluency and comprehension scores.	**Measurement tool:** School district reading benchmark data.	**Measurement tool:** Colorado Department of Education ELA proficiency data.
By **May 2025 [WHEN]**, tutors and volunteers **[WHO]** will deliver small-group reading sessions to **at least 300 K–3 students [HOW MUCH / WHO]** across 12 elementary schools **[WHAT]**, as tracked through attendance logs and program records **[HOW WE WILL KNOW]**.	By the end of the **2024–25 school year [WHEN]**, at least **75% of participating students [HOW MUCH / WHO]** will demonstrate improved reading fluency or comprehension **[WHAT]**, as measured by pre- and post-assessment results **[HOW WE WILL KNOW]**.	By **Spring 2026 [WHEN]**, at least **60% of students who participated in reading interventions [HOW MUCH / WHO]** will meet or exceed grade-level reading benchmarks **[WHAT]**, as measured by district literacy assessment data **[HOW WE WILL KNOW]**.	By **2028 [WHEN]**, participating **schools [WHO]** will show a **10% increase [HOW MUCH]** in the percentage of third-grade students meeting or exceeding expectations on the state ELA assessment **[WHAT]**, as measured by Colorado Department of Education data **[HOW WE WILL KNOW]**.