



SOCIAL VALUE

INTERNATIONAL

Standard on applying Principle 1:

INVOLVE STAKEHOLDERS

About Social Value International

About

Social Value International is the global network for social value and impact management. Our members share a common goal: to change the way society accounts for value.

All too often key decisions about resources and policies are made using a limited economic concept of value, which fails to consider important effects on people and the environment. As the gap between rich and poor increases and the effects of climate change become more apparent, our work has never been more urgent.

Social Value International works with our members to embed core principles for social value measurement and analysis, to refine and share practice, and to build a powerful movement of like-minded people to influence policy. This pioneering community contains members from 45 countries, drawn from a huge range of different sectors and disciplines.

Our goal at Social Value International is to support, connect, and represent our members through training, knowledge-sharing and networking. Social Value International is much more than a professional network.

Together, we are building a movement for change.

Our Vision

A world where decision making, ways of working and resource allocation are based on the principles of accounting for value leading to increased equality and well-being and reduced environmental degradation.

Our Mission

To change the way society accounts for value through principles, practice, people and power:

Principles: Our principles will lead to the inclusion of social, environmental and economic value in decision making.

People: We will build and support a network of like-minded individuals who want to work with us to put these principles into practice.

Practice: We will develop guidance, tools, and support to help put the principles into practice.

Power: By connecting these individuals and supporting their learning, growth and influence we will build a movement to change the way society accounts for value.

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The MSC is part of the governance of Social Value International, the role of the group is to develop technical guidance and standards for applying the Social Value Principles. The committee is co-chaired between Jenni Inglis and Sara Olsen. Full member list is provided below¹. Special acknowledgement should go to Jeremy Wyatt of Hall Aitken who led on the drafting of this standard.

This is the second version of the standard for involving stakeholders, the first being written and published in 2013. The process of writing this document involved several stages of consultation including the opportunity for all members of Social Value International to contribute. There are too many to acknowledge by name, but we would like to thank everyone for their contributions.

We are aware that accounting for social value is rapidly developing with more and more practitioners all over the world coming together to practice and improve how we do this. We present this document as a latest version and we anticipate further versions to be released as practice develops. If you would like to comment on this document and/or contribute to future versions, please contact us (hello@socialvalueint.org).



www.hallaitken.co.uk

¹ Tom Adams, Erik Bichard, Priscilla Boiardi, Rebecca Cain, Ben Carpenter, Alnoor Ebrahim, Simon Faivel, Alison Freeman, Tim Goodspeed, Jenni Inglis, Stuart Jefford, Oliver Kempton, Sara Olsen, Stephanie Robertson, Lilian Wang, Jeremy Wyatt

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Introduction

The [Seven Principles of Social Value](#) (The Principles) are intended to guide organisations and individuals from all sectors on best practice in accounting and reporting social value. The Principles provide a framework for creating a complete account of social value based on all material outcomes. This framework goes beyond measuring progress towards intended outcomes or ‘goals’. Consequently, the data collected is designed for supporting continuous improvement (decisions on how to optimise the value being created for stakeholders) and the approach allows stakeholders to hold the organisations to account².

The Social Value Principles

1. Involve stakeholders
2. Understand what changes
3. Value the things that matter
4. Only include what is material
5. Do not over-claim
6. Be transparent
7. Verify the result

The principles are the framework underpinning the work of Social Value International (SVI) and are the basis for the SVI Report Assurance Standard and Accreditation schemes that SVI provides. The [SVI Report Assurance Standard](#) is designed to test your understanding and application of the Principles. Going through the Report Assurance process can give you confidence in your approach and the judgements you have made. It is designed to be a useful learning process providing recommendations on how to improve your social value accounting and have more confidence in using the information when making decisions about how to maximise the value of your activities.

This document sets out SVI’s Standard for applying Principle 1: *Involve your stakeholders*. Involving stakeholders is at the heart of accounting for value and plays a key role in how you apply the other social value principles: *Understand what changes*; *Value the things that matter*; *Only include what is material*; and *Do not over-claim*. The standard focuses on involving all stakeholders (not only intended beneficiaries) who experience change in their lives (outcomes) as a result of an activity or intervention.

A crucial part of stakeholder involvement is closing the feedback loop by responding to the information that is gathered. Stakeholders are giving up their time and providing information, this should be turned into ideas for how to improve services (or products) and as many as possible should be implemented.

This Standard should be read in conjunction with the [other SVI Standards](#) relating to the other Principles. Stakeholder involvement in Social Value analyses is also required in calculating Social Return on Investment (SROI), and for people using this guidance as part of SROI, there are references to SVI’s [Guide to SROI](#). This Standard does not cover different methods of stakeholder involvement in detail, though links to key sources are provided.

² For more information on why the principles are important for accountability and maximising value see [Seven Principles and Accountability](#)

Definitions

Principle 1: Involve stakeholders

Inform what gets measured and how this is measured and valued in an account of social value by involving stakeholders.

Stakeholders are those people or organisations that experience change as a result of your activity – and they are best placed to describe the change. This Principle means that stakeholders need to be identified and then consulted throughout the analysis. This means that the value and the way that it is measured, is informed by those affected by, or who affect, the activity.

Stakeholders are defined as: people or organisations that experience change as a result of your activity, or those who affect the activity under analysis. They can be individuals, groups of individuals and organisations. Throughout this guide we do not differentiate between stakeholders that affect the activity (sometimes called implementing stakeholders/partners) and those that are affected by the activity (often referred to as customers, end users or beneficiaries). This standard advises that both are treated in the same way.

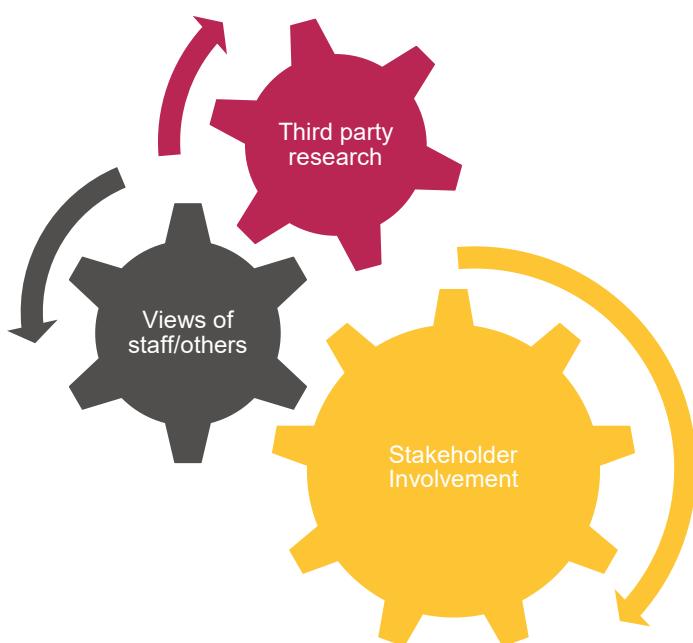
‘Involvement’ is the process by which a group of people can take part in data collection and therefore influence decisions about the social value analysis.



[Image](#) by Save the Children Nepal [[CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)]

The role of stakeholder involvement

Speaking to and involving the people who experience changes is an essential part of the accounting for value process. **It is worth acknowledging that speaking directly to stakeholders is not the only source of relevant information. Other people, often the staff within the organisation, will have valuable knowledge and experience to help paint the picture of what changes are occurring. Third party research may also be complementary and useful in triangulating what you hear from stakeholders.** Ultimately though, accounting for social value should always start with stakeholders' perceptions of outcomes (what has changed for them) and involve a sample in understanding the value or importance they place on these outcomes. Where other information regarding outcomes is used that is contradictory to what the stakeholders express, this should be stated and justified for reasons of transparency.



Some risks of relying solely on information from stakeholders are:

- some stakeholders may not be well informed;
- they may have short-term priorities, restricting their ability to consider longer-term outcomes;
- within any group, some people may have their views heard more effectively than others.

Some risks of relying solely on information from those responsible for the activity (typically staff or employees of the organisation delivering the activity) are:

- they may not know all of the outcomes that stakeholders experience;
- they use language that is more generic and does not accurately reflect specific stakeholders' experiences, and this can lead to outcomes that are not well defined being measured;
- they may exclude or explain away any negative outcomes that are experienced (no causality, not relevant, activity not understood, etc).

Some risks of relying solely on third party research are:

- the research does not relate to a similar group of people, in a similar context, involved in a similar activity;
- the research was not based on a process of involving stakeholders to identify all outcomes.

The main things to remember are:

- Stakeholders should be involved in the process of determining the outcomes that they are experiencing, allowing for any outcomes to emerge whether they are intended or unintended, positive or negative.
- Information from stakeholders should be triangulated with the views of others (i.e. staff delivering the service) and other third-party research or evidence.
- There will be a trade-off between the resources you have available and the level of involvement that is possible. Any trade-off should be acknowledged in the reporting of social value, highlighting any risks that material outcomes may not have been identified.
- The number of interactions with stakeholders and their time required should be kept to the minimum to avoid unnecessary disturbance or intrusion.

The judgement on how to use the information that arises from involving stakeholders remains with those undertaking the analysis. At relevant places in this Standard, some short examples of the issues raised by this are included in italics.

Please remember that the approach in any of the examples may not be appropriate in your situation and that each situation should be considered on its own merits.

We have included an example that appears in SVI's *Guide to SROI* (Wheels to Meals) and the [Supplementary Guidance on Using SROI](#) to demonstrate some of the points on involving stakeholders – as well as a selection of others covering a range of situations.

The remainder of this Standard covers:

- Identifying stakeholders
- Involving stakeholders in collecting data
- Systems and processes for meaningful stakeholder involvement

Step One: Identifying stakeholders

The first step to involving stakeholders is to identify a list of those that you consider to be relevant. Before you can do this, you need to be clear on what activity is being analysed. Then you can create a list of the groups of people or organisations that have:

- affected the activity (or will do)
- been affected by the activity (or will be affected by it)

There is always a risk that this initial list is incomplete, insufficiently detailed, or includes stakeholders that are not relevant. You often need to revise this list of stakeholders as you progress with your analysis. As you start to involve stakeholders in discussions about impact you are likely to identify:

- new stakeholder groups (people or organisations that you didn't realise you had an effect on);
- segments (or sub groups) within your stakeholder groups, (emerging due to differences in the outcomes experienced or the value/relative importance placed upon outcomes);

Once you have a list of stakeholders that you think are relevant to the activity, you can begin involving them in analysing impact and accounting for social value. Through data collection you will then establish if they experience outcomes that really matter to them (and are material for you to include in your analysis). Whether an outcome is material or not depends on its relevance and significance. The significance of an outcome is calculated based on the quantity, duration, value and causality and this is covered in the other SVI standards.



[Image](#), by Peter Martin [[CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)]

You may decide to include in your analysis stakeholder groups that you don't think will experience outcomes that are significant. They may be included because you consider them to be relevant. More of this can be found in the standard on materiality³.

Once you have identified your stakeholders there are usually two phases of data collection; a qualitative phase in which a sample from each stakeholder group are involved in conversations about who else changes and what changes for them; and then a quantitative phase in which a larger sample of each stakeholder group are involved in establishing the amounts of change, the duration of the changes, the relative importance and the levels of impact (causation) for each outcome.

³ <https://socialvalueint.org/social-value/standards-and-guidance/>

Qualitative Phase Quantitative



- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Who else changes? | <input type="checkbox"/> The amount of change per outcome per person |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What outcomes occur? | <input type="checkbox"/> The duration of the outcome |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant characteristics or circumstances linked to outcomes | <input type="checkbox"/> The rate of drop off for each outcome |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> The relative importance of each outcome |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> The levels of causality (deadweight, attribution & displacement) |

However, this two-phase approach is not always necessary, for example with a small stakeholder group (approximately 10-20 individuals) it may be appropriate to do both phases of engagement (covering what changes and how much changes) at the same time.

If your resources are stretched and you cannot commit to involving stakeholders in all of the aspects identified in the table, you may have to choose a selection. It is recommended that the two aspects that should not be missed is the involvement of stakeholders in defining outcomes and in informing the relative importance of the outcomes. These two aspects will help increase accountability and minimise the risk of not capturing the outcomes that matter most to people.

Step Two: Involving stakeholders in qualitative data collection

Once you have identified some stakeholder groups the next step is to involve them in identifying **what** changes or outcomes they are experiencing in their lives as a result of the activity you are analysing. These 'changes' which we will refer to as social outcomes will form the basis of the account and the process of defining these crucial to the success of the whole analysis and it is recommended that you also read the SVI Standard on how to create a 'well-defined outcome'⁴.

There are many different qualitative research methods. This document does not provide an exhaustive list, but Appendix A explores some of the most common methods with the advantages and disadvantages of each.

It is important to note that there is no single best method to use, in fact the method should be chosen to suit the stakeholder group. Some methods are more appropriate than others and you will be placed to choose what will work best for your stakeholder group. For example if your stakeholders are shy and not used to talking in a group context then 1-2-1 interviews may be more appropriate than a focus group discussion.

You may also decide to use a mixed qualitative approach. For example, a focus group for people who have engaged well with your activity and (you suspect) have had a positive experience and 1-2-1 informal phone interviews with people who have disengaged with your activity and (you suspect) have not had a very positive experience.

2.1 Questions to ask during qualitative stakeholder involvement

The key point here is that **open questioning must be used**. This is crucial to the SVI Report Assurance standard and pivotal to the accountability framework. Asking stakeholders open questions provides people with the opportunity to disclose information that you are not expecting. For a full list of the types of open questions we recommend using see Appendix B

Ultimately, your open questioning should lead to discussions about the following:

- people's outcomes, the relative importance of those outcomes, the involvement of other people or organisations in causing those outcomes and the expected duration of the outcomes;
- people's background, characteristics and experience of the activity.

This information will help you define what outcomes to measure at the quantitative phase and also shape your thinking about who changes and the different segments or subgroups that exist.

2.2 Segmenting and sampling of stakeholder groups

Unless you are working with small numbers of people and can involve everyone, you will need to select a sample of your stakeholder groups to involve at this initial qualitative stage. Start by segmenting your stakeholder groups based on the characteristics of the people in the group and this can be the basis

⁴ Understand what changes (Part One: Creating well defined outcomes)
<http://www.socialvalueuk.org/resource/understand-change-standard/>

for selecting a representative sample. The stakeholder characteristics you identify could be things like age, gender, location, or levels of involvement in your service (e.g. some people may have been accessing your service for many years while others may be new to your service).

As well as characteristics you should also consider segmentation based on the different outcomes or variety of experiences for example if you know that there are a group of people who have had a particularly bad experience you may want to group them together. A common problem is to only collect data from stakeholders that have had positive experiences. Acknowledging that a segment of your stakeholder group have a negative experience (as a result of your activities) allows you to plan data collection to achieve better representation in your sampling.

Identifying segments is an iterative process and you will no doubt revise your segmentation as you hear new data. For example, in an employment programme your initial segmentation maybe based on gender or location (urban or rurally based). However, through more qualitative data collection you may notice that other characteristics are an important factor. Using the same example, those who are gaining employment (positive outcome) often have a supportive family background (characteristic data), which may mean you need to segment your stakeholder group according to this characteristic, the extent of family support.

As you collect more data over time you will become more informed and will start to see correlations between stakeholder characteristics data and the outcome data (including quantitative). This will allow you to identify segments of stakeholder groups with more sophistication based on data.

This is very much trial and error but good practice when trying to account for value and ultimately optimise the value of your activities. Consideration of subgroups based upon demographic characteristics and outcome data is required to meet the SVI report assurance standard.

It has been mentioned before that there is no golden rule as to how many people you will need to engage with qualitatively. The accepted approach when meeting the SVI Reporting Standard is that you need to involve enough people until you reach the point where you no longer hear anything different or new; you have become 'saturated'. This will form the basis of your understanding of change. More information is available in the supplement on [well-defined outcomes⁵](#).

2.3 Frequency of qualitative data collection

Carrying out a regular qualitative data collection exercise where open questions are asked about who changes and how do they change, will help refine your understanding of the consequences of your activities. If your activities remain the same and the type of people engaging with them remains the same then you may feel less compelled to re-run the qualitative exercise. If you do decide to skip this bit you increase the risk of excluding outcomes that are occurring and this should be disclosed in the reporting.

⁵ <http://www.socialvalueuk.org/resource/supplementary-guidance-principle-2/>

Step Three: Collecting quantitative data

Once we have determined **who** our stakeholders are and have involved them in understanding **what** outcomes they have experienced⁶ we can start to estimate some quantities – how much social value has been created. This requires some quantitative data collection. The main quantitative methods with their advantages and disadvantages are set out in the Appendix C

3.1 Questions to ask during quantitative data collection

Your questions will be developed based on the following aspects of each outcome:

- the amount of change (usually on a scale) for each outcome;
- the length of time/duration that each outcome lasts for (or is expected to last);
- the rate in which the outcome will drop off in future years;
- the relative importance/value of each outcome;
- the likelihood that the outcome would have happened anyway (quantitative deadweight);
- an estimation of how much of the outcome should be attributed to your activities (quantitative attribution);

These quantitative data points for each outcome should be collected and together can reveal whether an outcome is materially significant.

Other questions that are normally asked during the quantitative phase (through surveys/questionnaires) but are qualitative are:

- what would have happened without the activity (qualitative deadweight);
- who else contributed to the outcomes (qualitative attribution)?

Whilst these questions do not contribute to the calculation of whether an outcome is significant, they are useful because having an idea of what would have happened without you and who else is helping helps you to design better services.

More detail on types of questions to ask can be found in Appendix B



[Image](#) by [andibreit](#) on Pixabay

⁶ Do not forget you can do a forecast of social value and in this situation the stakeholder involvement process should be the same but you should ask people to think about what outcomes they might experience as a result of the activity.

3.2 Segmenting and sampling stakeholders for quantitative data collection

Stakeholders must be involved in providing quantitative data on outcomes i.e. how many people experience the outcome and how much change they experience. If you are working with a small number of people it may be possible to involve them all, otherwise you will need to select a sample. Just like during the initial qualitative phase, you also want the data you collect at this quantitative stage to be representative of the experience of the whole group.

Deciding on a sample size can quickly become a complex statistical question requiring information that includes population size, the level of confidence you require, the variability and distribution within the population. This means there is no simple answer, even for a known population size.

The pragmatic solution is to consider the different segments you want to study and then select a desirable sample size for each segment. Selecting the right sample to provide results that others will accept as robust is not easy. Unless you are working with small numbers where you can include everyone, plan your sampling carefully. Take advice from a research/statistics expert or refer to an expert guide – for example this one from National Audit Office: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2001/06/SamplingGuide.pdf>

Achieving a random selection is not easy and is complicated further if those selected do not respond or provide the data, as your sample would no longer be random, and you will have sampling error. The solution is to try and involve as many as you can initially (perhaps using a method like email or SMS survey). Follow up with face to face or phone interviews with a sample as representative as possible. Lastly, consider who is not responding and try to incentivise responses.

Statisticians overcome this problem largely by being transparent about the imperfections (of their sample) and by only comparing the data with comparable data sets. One technique to do this is propensity scoring where the representation within two samples are compared. Without going into detail about this technique, the underlying assumption is that you are looking to match two similar participants and understand why they give different outcomes. This allows for decisions and assumptions to be drawn with imperfect samples if the samples are imperfect in the same way.

3.3 Frequency of quantitative data collection

It is recommended that you regularly collect quantitative data from your stakeholders about the outcomes they are experiencing. How regular will depend on your circumstances i.e. the resources you have and how appropriate it is to collect data from people. This will be a judgement call based on ethics (it is intrusive to ask people too frequently) and practically whether you think enough time has elapsed to capture changes. The key thing to consider is the more data you collect, the more opportunities you have to gain insights to inform decision making.

Stakeholder involvement required to meet the SVI Report Assurance Standard

The table below provides a summary of the different stages that stakeholders *could* be involved in contributing to data collection or analysis and identifies the points where they *must* be involved if your analysis is to meet the SVI Assurance Standard⁷.

Note the language in the table is “Must be involved in informing...” This wording has been carefully chosen to reflect that direct stakeholder involvement may not be the only source of informing this decision. As stated earlier in this document that this is a ‘stakeholder informed’ approach *not* ‘stakeholder-led’.

Table 1: Stakeholder involvement at different stages of an analysis

| Principle of Social Value | Section of the <i>Guide to SROI</i> | Details of stakeholder involvement |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Be Transparent | 1.1 Establishing the scope | Could be involved in testing the logic of the initial scope of the analysis i.e. which activities the analysis is based upon. |
| Involve stakeholders | 1.2 Identifying other stakeholders | Must be involved in informing a long list of stakeholders. |
| | 1.3 Deciding how to involve stakeholders | Could be involved in testing that the proposed methods for involvement are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appropriate to the stakeholder group/s • match the resources available (yours and the stakeholders’) • will generate the quantity of involvement ‘necessary’ |
| Understand what changes | 2.5 Defining outcomes | Must be involved in informing what outcomes should be measured – defining all of the changes they have experienced (or are likely to experience). Must be involved in informing the decision about which outcomes in the chain of events should be the ones to measure quantities for (e.g. amount of change, the value & counterfactual etc) |
| Understand what changes | 2.5 Defining outcomes for hard to reach stakeholder groups | Could be involved in developing outcomes for other stakeholders; for example, involving families of young children may help you understand outcomes for young children. |
| | 3.1 Validating the chosen indicators | Could be involved in validating the chosen indicators |
| | 3.1 Defining indicators | Could be involved in developing bespoke indicators that can measure the amount of each outcome. |
| | 3.2 Collecting outcomes data | Must be involved in informing the amount of change for each outcome i.e. usually measured as movement on a scale and identifying if the movement is positive or negative. |

⁷ The table also references relevant sections of the Guide to SROI for further detail.

| Principle of Social Value | Section of the <i>Guide to SROI</i> | Details of stakeholder involvement |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Value what matters | 2.2 Identifying inputs | Must be involved in informing the different inputs and quantities of inputs (e.g. how much time was required). |
| | 2.3 Valuing inputs | Must be involved in informing the valuation (monetary and non-monetary) of inputs. |
| | 3.4 Understanding the relative importance of different outcomes | Must be involved in informing the relative importance of the outcomes they have experienced. |
| | | Could be involved in verifying the appropriateness of monetary valuation used in reflecting the relative importance of the outcomes they experience. |
| Do not over-claim | 4.1 Deadweight & Displacement | Must be involved in informing what might have happened without your activities |
| | | Must be involved in informing the likelihood of the outcomes happening without the activity |
| | 4.2 Attribution | Must be involved in informing who else has contributed to the changes (outcomes) |
| | | Must be involved in informing the estimation about how much of the outcome can be attributed to the activity. |
| | 4.3 Drop-off | Must be involved in informing the rate of drop-off for each outcome. |
| Verify the result | 5.4 Establishing the duration of outcomes | Must be involved in informing how long the outcomes are lasting |
| | 7.1 and 7.3 Verification | Must be involved in reviewing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The theory of change • The outcomes included for analysis • The relative importance/value of outcomes • How likely the organisation in question will use the information provided by them |
| | | Must be involved in reviewing and providing feedback on proposed changes to the activity that have arisen based upon impact data. |

Systems and processes for meaningful stakeholder involvement

This section addresses the importance of good systems and processes for stakeholder engagement. A key part of this is good planning which allows you to give stakeholders adequate notice, embed data collection where it's most convenient, capture as many stakeholders as possible and minimise the demands on your stakeholders.

It is best practice to have a systematic approach to stakeholder involvement and to set this out in a planning document or policy. Doing this encourages reflection and creates opportunities to modify or extend the way you are engaging with your stakeholders. Over time this engagement should significantly improve your organisation's social impact performance, and ability to innovate to meet stakeholder needs. A stakeholder involvement plan should cover the following issues:

Ethics

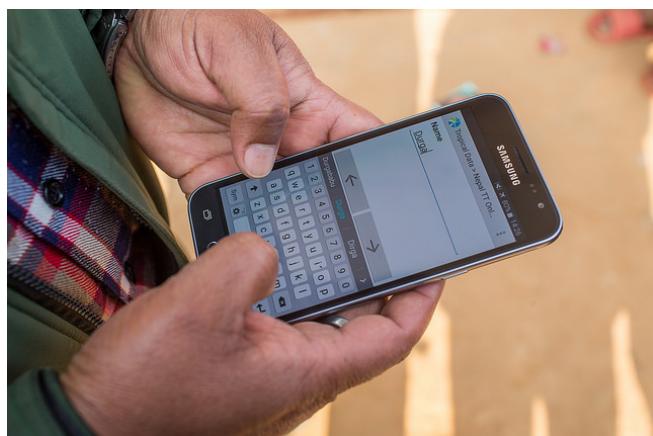
It is good practice to have an ethics policy to set out your organisation's parameters for data collection considering what is appropriate for your stakeholder groups and the best interests of the organisation.

Who is responsible for data collection?

Ensure someone within your organisation (or programme) is responsible for involving stakeholders and for identifying and resolving any conflicts of interest. Having a named individual means that it is much more likely to get done.

Which stakeholder groups will be involved and when?

Identifying the stakeholder groups and the approach to selecting which people are representative of each group should be set out in the plan. The next step is to decide when to involve them, not only in the process, but taking into account times that are convenient for those stakeholders. Careful planning at this stage ensures that those selected can be accessed and can be provided with appropriate support where necessary.



[Image](#), by RTI Fights NTDS [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0]

What methods will be used for data collection?

The chosen methods for data collection and justification for it should be included in the stakeholder involvement plan.

The framing of the discussion during qualitative data collection, and the questions to be used in quantitative data collection, will depend on context. The examples in Appendix A are intended to give an idea of the type of questions that would be included. Remember, it is important that the wording of the questions and the language used is appropriate to the situation, as this can have a significant effect on the quality of the engagement.

Your stakeholder involvement plan should include discussion guides and survey forms. Refer to other Social Value Standards and the Guide to SROI for guidance on developing these⁸.

What resources are required?

The scope of the analysis will be one of the main drivers of the amount and type of stakeholder involvement and therefore the resources required. For a new activity (or a new organisation) you will

⁸ <https://socialvalueint.org/social-value/standards-and-guidance/>

need to involve people from the group that you want to become your stakeholders. For a forecast, relating to an existing activity, you will need to involve people that have been stakeholders. These differences will inform scale and methods of involvement. Organisations will often have existing processes for involving stakeholders that can be built on.

Stakeholder involvement can be one of the most resource-intensive aspects of data collection, with financial, human, and technological resources required for those carrying out the activities, as well as for the stakeholders invited to participate. Stakeholders may wish, or need to be compensated for their time, as well as for any expenses incurred. Any financial support should be designed in such a way that it is appropriate (i.e. not providing cash to someone with drug or gambling issues if a gift voucher could be provided instead), and does not represent a potential conflict of interest (paying people to hear their views), or have financial implications for stakeholders in receipt of state benefits.

Closing the feedback loop

To establish trust, transparency, and accountability, it is critical that the results of the stakeholder involvement exercise are communicated back to participants and lead to ideas for changing services (or products). A document or ‘action plan’ that articulates how the organisation will respond to the results is useful here. It is important that the action plan is communicated consistently and equitably so that all participants receive feedback on results of their involvement and can see that the exercise has been worthwhile.

High-quality stakeholder involvement is integral to any organisation seeking continuous improvement. The ongoing success of stakeholder involvement, and people’s willingness to participate in future engagement activities, depends largely on the organisation responding to what they hear by making some changes to their services (or products). It is also good practice to report these publicly so that the broader community can identify the organisation’s knowledge and understanding of stakeholder concerns, and how it is responding to these. (See Wheels to Meals case study example below).

Finally, one of the distinguishing characteristics of high-quality stakeholder involvement is the ability of an organisation to upskill and empower its stakeholders, particularly if they include groups that have been, or are marginalised in any way. Investing in people through capacity building during stakeholder consultation sends an important message to your stakeholders (internal and external) that the organisation values them, their views and is willing to invest in the relationship. Building capacity can deliver benefits to your stakeholders such as improved ability to express themselves and increased confidence. Most importantly, completing successful and considerate stakeholder engagement exercises will help you collect useful data and lays the foundation for more stakeholder involvement.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is it possible to involve all of your stakeholders?

The first question to ask is whether each stakeholder group will be able to participate in an exercise where they are required to provide (qualitative or quantitative) data about the changes 'outcomes' they are experiencing. Some groups may not be able to answer questions due to practical constraints or there may be ethical sensitivities, for example:

- a) people with certain mental health issues, special educational needs or disabilities;
- b) very young children (although most children can participate through creative methods);
- c) people who may have dropped out of your activity and are no longer in contact;
- d) people who suffered an extremely negative experience (i.e. trauma or grief where participation would be inappropriate);
- e) people who cannot be contacted for legal reasons.

In these situations, you may need to:

- take sensitivities into account when deciding how you will involve stakeholders;
- identify other people who are not responsible for the activity but who can talk on behalf of that stakeholder group.⁹
- explore involvement that doesn't require verbal questions and answers. For example, using non-verbal actors or art activities
- be transparent about your sources of data and consider risks and potential impact on results.



Image by Michael Coghlan [[CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)]

How many stakeholders to involve?

There are several issues to consider when deciding how many stakeholders to involve. The points made below refer to an approach that will meet the Assurance Standard. In some situations, this may not be good enough. In others, it may be more than is necessary.

The SVI Report Standard does not define a minimum number (or percentage) of stakeholders that should be involved as this will vary based on the context and scope of analysis. In practice, this judgement on how many stakeholders to involve should be made by whoever is collecting data and will depend on the audience and purpose of the data collection. They must judge that the level of stakeholder involvement is commensurate with the decision being made. For example, if the decision

⁹ While involving those responsible for the activity (e.g. case workers) may be a valuable source of information they cannot be the only source.

relates to a big change to the activities in question (a big change is one that is either expensive or difficult to reverse) then more stakeholder involvement is required to reduce the risk of acting on unreliable data. Alternatively, if the change is a small one (inexpensive or easy to reverse) then less stakeholder involvement may be sufficient to support the decision.

To meet the SVI Report Assurance standard the levels of involvement must be adequately justified in the report. When involving stakeholders at the qualitative stage (identifying stakeholders and defining the outcomes) we encourage the use of saturation point. Saturation point is the point at which you stop hearing new answers. Combined with this, it is important that the sample you have engaged with is as representative as possible of the whole stakeholder group. During the quantitative stage of stakeholder involvement saturation point does not apply so the key to meeting the assurance standard lies in justifying that you have engaged with a sample size that is representative of the stakeholder group¹⁰. The concept of sample size and segmentation is referred to in this document.

Inevitably, the amount of time or resources you have may influence the number of stakeholders you involve. Where this has led to a lower level of involvement than you would prefer, it is important to be transparent about this in your reporting and explicitly state the following limitations of your data:

- that decisions on what outcomes are material may be incorrect;
- that the relative importance/value of the outcomes may be incorrect.

Social Value UK's website includes [examples of social value reports](#) that can be used as guidance in conjunction with this Standard.

¹⁰ Social Value UK have written a useful blog on sample sizes that is not part of this standard but a very useful reference.

Appendix A – Table of Qualitative research methods

| Stakeholder group | Methods | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--|---|---|--|
| Individuals (often end users of the products or services) | Focus group discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants may interact and help each other to articulate views. Provides an empowering opportunity for participants to be heard. When facilitated well it provides an opportunity to explore topics in great detail and also respond dynamically to the content. Non-verbal behaviour can be observed and analysed. Through screening and through conversational detail it provides a very detailed picture of who is taking part. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some voices will dominate the conversation and potentially influence other participants thinking. Some people may feel inhibited to go into detail especially with sensitive subjects. Can be difficult logically to get participants into the same room at the same time. |
| | Face to face semi structured interviews / conversations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides time to explore individuals' experiences and develop rich understanding on both sides Better for exploring personal or sensitive issues because it's more private than a group discussion. Allows individually to speak freely without influence from others. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can require more resources (time and finances etc) No chance for a group discussion to develop a wider understanding |
| | Phone survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compromise on cost and involvement between focus group and one-to-one approaches Can provide anonymity, so potentially a good environment for sharing personal information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May not have time to explore all issues in detail Can miss non-verbal cues Hard to maintain concentration if respondent is not in a quiet place (e.g. in a work environment) |
| Organisations | Phone surveys Face to face meetings | As above | As above |

| | | | |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------|---|
| | Review policy documents | Easy and documented | Documents may not refer to specific objectives or expectations of an activity |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------|---|

Appendix B: Example questions for qualitative data collection

Here are some general examples of questions for qualitative data collection. These are intended as starting points and would need to be developed so they are appropriate for the particular stakeholder group that you are working with.

| Identifying | Question |
|--------------------|--|
| Inputs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are you involved in the activity we are analysing? • What did you contribute to the activity (and how much)? |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What activity/activities did you experience? |
| Outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What changes did you experience, (or do you think you will)? What will you do differently as a result? • Were all the changes positive? If not, what were the negative changes? • Were all the changes expected or was there anything that you didn't expect that changed? <i>NB: Be ready to probe for a range of answers, asking:</i> • So what happened next? / Tell me more / Why is that important to you? |
| Other stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think anyone else has experienced any changes as a result? |
| Indicators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would someone else know that this had happened and what would we show them? What would it look like? • Could you measure it? |
| Deadweight | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would have happened to you if you hadn't taken part? • Would you have found something else later? |
| Attribution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who else provides something like this? • Did anyone else contribute to the experience/change? |
| Displacement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you have to give up anything to take part in the activity? • Were you getting similar support from somewhere else? |
| Duration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long did the change last for (or do you think the change will last)? • Imagine we are 2 years or 5 years from now, do you think you'll still be experiencing the change? |
| Valuation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important was this change to you? • Can you compare it to something else just as important to you? • Can you put these changes in a priority order of how important they are to you? Which are worth most / least to you? • Which of these changes will make the biggest difference to you? |
| General Feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which other ways might you/your organisation achieve the same changes? • How might we improve our services? |

Appendix C – Table of quantitative research methods

| Informal Approaches | | |
|--|--|---|
| Method | Advantages | Disadvantages |
| Ad hoc meetings, discussions, observations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not representative – limited value in counting instances of actions / behaviours |
| Formal Approaches | | |
| Method | Advantages | Disadvantages |
| Face-to-face survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to ensure questions are understood and to explore answers • Low rate of non-response • Able to provide people with assistance (i.e. if they have limited vision, or limited literacy) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming / resource intensive • Risk that person filling in the form leads the answers • Risk of error in data entry |
| Phone survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some time to check questions are understood and to explore answers • Can offer a compromise between face-to-face and email questionnaire • Able to reach people who are geographically dispersed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to find appropriate time • Difficult to obtain contact numbers • Risk of error in data entry • Slight loss of control as to who completes |
| Email / online survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively inexpensive/free • Able to reach people who are geographically dispersed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk that answers are not complete • Some people may not have online access • High rate of non-response • No control over who completes |
| Postal survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to reach people who are not connected to other technology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to obtain addresses • Expensive, requires self-addressed envelope • No control over who completes |

Appendix D: Wheels to Meals Stakeholder Engagement Plan

| Stakeholder group | Total size of group | How involved and when | Number involved in study | Resources required | Who is responsible for collecting data? | Reporting and feedback |
|-------------------|---------------------|---|--------------------------|--|---|--|
| Older residents | 30 | Focus group held during lunch | 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessary finances • Suitable room, note-taking facilities, and refreshments for participants | Wheels to Meals staff | At start of first day after data collection and analysis |
| Health Service | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of policy • Phone call with area manager | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to IT equipment • Meeting room and note-taking facilities | Advisor | Account of overall impact shared |
| Local authority | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of policy documents and contract • Meeting with contract manager and policy officer | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to IT equipment • Meeting room and note-taking facilities | Advisor | Account of overall impact shared |
| Volunteers | 5 | Focus group held at end of normal working day | 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable room, note-taking facilities, and refreshments for participants | Wheels to Meals staff and advisor | Feedback meetings arranged |

Other Useful Resources

Some sources of additional useful information include:

- AA1000SES, Stakeholder Engagement Manual, [here](#).
- National Audit Office Guide to sampling. [here](#).
- Acorn, Acorn User Guide, The Consumer Classification, [here](#).
- Cabinet Office Guide to Segmentation, [here](#).
- Catalogue of segmentation and clustering software, [here](#).
- Inspiring Impacts 'Involving users in shaping services', [here](#).
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, A Practical Guide to Engaging Stakeholders in Determining Evaluation Questions, [here](#).
- Segmentation Portal, [here](#).
- The New Economics Foundation, Participation Works! [here](#).
- SVUK links on stakeholder segmentation, developing user personas and journeys, [here](#).

SOCIAL VALUE

INTERNATIONAL

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This pioneering community contains members from 45 countries, drawn from a huge range of different sectors and disciplines. Our goal at Social Value International is to support, connect, and represent our members through training, knowledge-sharing and networking. Social Value International is much more than a professional network. Together, we are building a movement for change.

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Social Value International

www.socialvalueinternational.org
hello@socialvalueint.org

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