



SOCIAL INVESTMENT FUND QUICK GUIDE

Continuous Learning

The Social Investment Fund invests in organisations and initiatives that **actively learn** over time, so they can better support New Zealanders to overcome their challenges and achieve their goals.

This quick guide explains what the Fund means by ‘continuous learning’, why it matters, and how it will be considered when assessing applications.

Why Continuous Learning Matters

Initiatives that support people facing complex or multiple challenges cannot be designed perfectly at the outset. Contexts change, assumptions are tested in practice, and different groups of people often respond differently to the same activities.

A social investment approach recognises this reality. Rather than relying on tightly specified services, the Social Investment Fund takes a high-trust approach that depends on organisations being able to:

- listen to the experiences of the people they support
- reflect on what is working and what is not
- adapt their approach over time in response to what they are learning

Continuous learning is how initiatives remain relevant, effective, and responsive – and how evidence strengthens over time. It also supports organisations to test and refine the assumptions that sit within their Theory of Change.

What We Look For

When assessing applications, we look for evidence that learning is intentionally built into both organisational practice and initiative design.

This may include:

- Regular feedback from people receiving support, frontline staff, or partners.

- Use of data or information (formal or informal) to understand reach, engagement, and outcomes
- Structured reflection, such as team discussions, reviews, or hui that consider what is being learned
- Clear examples of adaptation, showing how insights have led to changes in practice, delivery, or focus.

These learning cycles or ‘feedback loops’ are critical to the social investment approach.

We do not expect learning systems to be perfect at the outset. What matters is that learning is purposeful, proportionate, and actively used – not simply collected.

Learning Cycles and Feedback Loops

A useful way to think about continuous learning is as a simple cycle:

Listen ® Reflect ® Adjust ® Check

For examples:

- Listening to participant feedback or service data
- Reflecting on what this suggests about what is (or isn’t) working
- Adjusting delivery, targeting, or supports
- Checking whether those changes improve outcomes or experiences

These feedback loops help initiatives improve in real time and support stronger evaluation over the longer term.

How We Will Work and Learn Together

Each funded initiative can be thought of as a medium-term learning partnership between the Social Investment Fund and the funded organisation.

We will work with organisations to develop a jointly agreed evaluation approach that is appropriate to the initiative’s scale, risk, and maturity. This helps ensure that learning and evaluation are realistic, useful for decision making and aligned with how the initiative works in practice.

Over time, learning from individual initiatives also contributes to system-level understanding about what works, for whom, and in what contexts, helping to inform future investment decisions.

Using Data, including the IDI

As part of evaluation and learning, we rely on funded organisations providing data to Statistics New Zealand's Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI). This data supports analysis of outcomes over time and helps build a stronger evidence base across investments.

This includes:

- **Personal identifiers** (used only by Statistics New Zealand for linking)
- **Start and exit dates** for engagement with the initiative

Funded organisations will need appropriate systems, or plans to put systems in place, to collect and share this information safely.

The agreed evaluation approach will set out what additional information is needed to support learning and evaluation, and how this will be collected over time in a way that is realistic for the organisation and appropriate to the initiative. This may include qualitative insights or operational data generated through service delivery and reflection.

Resources and Support

- [The Hub – Social Investment Agency](#) – NZ evidence and evaluation library
- [Centre for Social Impact](#) – Easy-to-use toolkit and insights
- [Better Evaluation](#) – Global guidance on evaluation and learning
- [Other Quick Guides and FAQs](#)

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