



Data, learning and impact for the Social Investment Fund

The Social Investment Fund partners with organisations to help New Zealanders overcome a range of challenges and achieve their goals.

The Fund has a strong focus on learning and evaluation. We want to support our partners to be successful; to learn more about what works for who; and to understand whether our investments and partnerships are making a difference.

This document explains how data, learning, and impact work for the Fund; what's required from the organisations we partner with; and how we work together to understand outcomes.



How we measure changes in outcomes together

Social investment takes a different approach to understanding whether initiatives are making a difference. We focus on outcomes - changes in people's lives, behaviours, or conditions - rather than counting activities or outputs.

Data collected through the Fund allows us to adopt a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation than has typically been used by Government when working with the social sector in New Zealand. The Fund is committed to supporting partner organisations to work with us on the development of evaluation plans.

Our principles for measuring outcomes are:



We will only ask for the data we truly need: We will only ask organisations to collect data that is essential for understanding outcomes, and we will explain why we need it. If government can collect data from another source, we won't ask organisations to duplicate this effort.



We will share and learn together: We will share all our methods and analysis with organisations delivering social services so we can learn together. SIA will share government data and insights, and we welcome the opportunity to learn from other forms of knowledge including qualitative information, community insights and whānau stories.



We will focus on outcomes and broader value: We will focus on measuring and understanding how initiatives deliver meaningful outcomes, including both our priority outcomes and the broader set of outcomes which initiatives may deliver for people and communities.



We will value expertise and intellectual property: We trust organisations to collect the information they need to manage their services and deliver what matters most to their communities. We will respect the knowledge, expertise and intellectual property of the organisations we work with.

What data is required to support this approach?

We understand organisations delivering initiatives in communities already face significant government reporting requirements. While the social investment approach requires data sharing so we can better understand outcomes, we aim to minimise additional burden while maximising the value that organisations can get from better data and information.

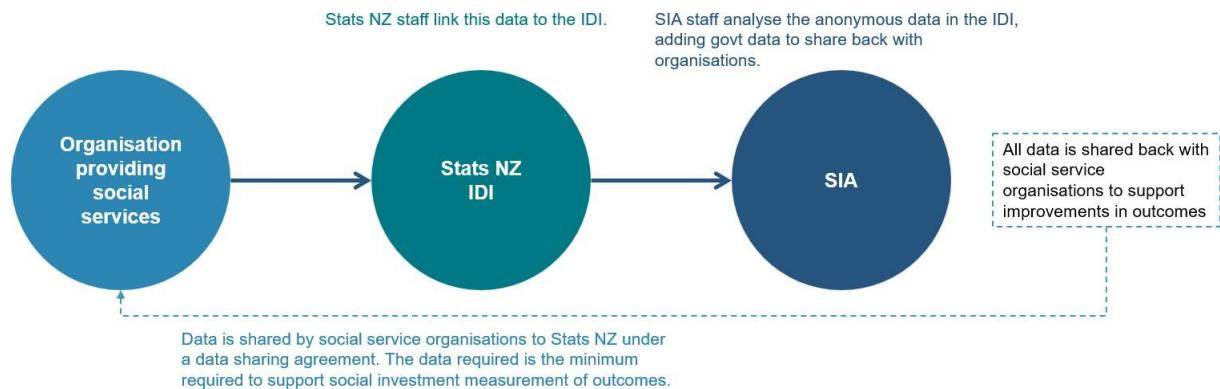


Figure 1: The data sharing steps for Social Investment Fund investments. Note the information shared back to the organisation is aggregated and sent in a form that individuals cannot be identified.

Minimal data sharing requirements

We work with organisations to agree what data needs to be shared - we're working hard to keep this at a minimum.

There are two approaches:

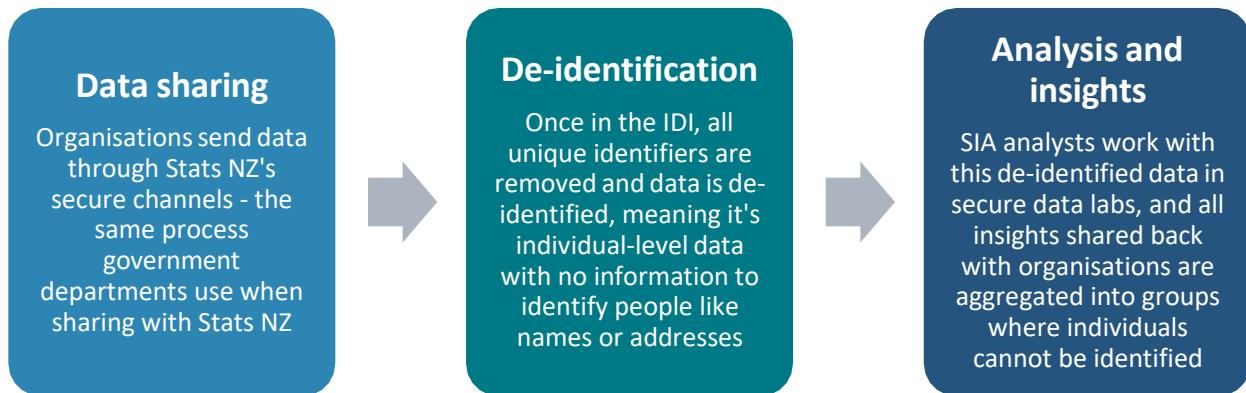
- **If you're already collecting and using a government unique identifier:** We work together to determine the minimum data needed, which typically includes the date service started, the date service ended, and the unique identifier.
- **If you're not collecting a government unique identifier:** We work together to determine the minimum data needed, which typically includes the date service started, the date service ended, full name, date of birth, and address.

Any personal data shared is sent directly to Stats NZ through safe and secure processes. Personal information - whether unique identifiers or names and addresses - is used only by Stats NZ staff to link data with other government data in the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI). This information is not used for any other purpose, and only the Stats NZ data linking team can access or handle this personal data.

Once in the IDI, all identifiers are removed and data is anonymous, meaning it's individual-level data with no information to identify people. All insights shared back with organisations are aggregated into groups where individuals cannot be identified.

Process for data sharing

Stats NZ operates the IDI, New Zealand's secure government data system that safely brings together government data for analysis. The data sharing process works in three clear steps:



Information shared back with organisations

We recognise data sharing represents a significant responsibility for organisations, and we take our role in protecting information seriously. When we ask for data, we're committed to sharing valuable insights back with the organisations and communities that provided it. This two-way flow of information supports continuous service improvement and community benefit.

When SIA asks organisations to share minimal data with SIA, SIA is committed to sharing back:

- **Insights about the individuals, whānau and families the initiative is reaching** (aggregated into groups, not individuals) - such as what other services they are receiving, their demographics, and life circumstances visible in government data
- **Insights about other individuals, whānau and families in the community** the service is not yet reaching - helping organisations understand who might also benefit from their initiatives
- **What impact the initiative is having** - how outcomes are changing for whānau, families and individuals receiving the service compared to similar groups who are not receiving the service.

How SIA will analyse impact

Where feasible, the Social Investment Fund works out the impact of a service by comparing what happened to people who received the service with what might have happened if they hadn't.

We do this by comparing the outcomes of people who received a service with other people, places, or times as a comparison. The difference between these outcomes tells us how much of a difference the service made.

For this to work, we apply statistical methods and work with organisations on the design of their initiative to assess whether suitable comparisons can be identified. This includes considering factors such as scale, eligibility, referral pathways, defined outcomes, and consistency of delivery, which influence whether meaningful comparisons can be made.

One possible method involves matching people who received the service with other who did not receive the service

but are “similar” in relevant ways that we can measure using the IDI.

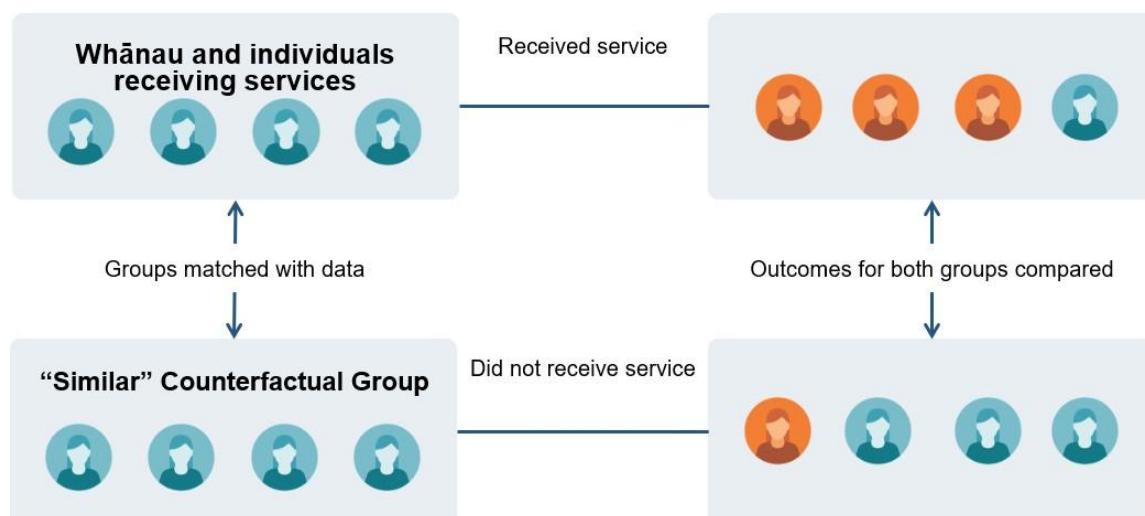


Figure 2: An example impact analysis methodology for Social Investment Fund investments

Our approach recognises that every organisation and initiative is unique, as are the whānau, families and individuals they support. Evaluation approaches are therefore designed collaboratively with organisations, and methods are selected to fit the context and delivery realities of each initiative.

While each evaluation is tailored to the specific context, the outcomes we measure align with government priorities to ensure consistency across investments.

It is unlikely that changes for individuals and whānau will be visible until 12-18 months after a service starts. Early analysis may therefore focus on indicators that a service is on track, such as whether the initiative is reaching those most in need. As additional data becomes available over time, updated views of outcomes can be provided to support ongoing learning.

How SIA works with organisations to put this into practice

When organisations apply to the Social Investment Fund, investments are chosen based on how well proposals meet the Fund criteria. At the application stage, we don't require formal Social Return on Investment calculations. What matters most is understanding:

- Who you serve and their needs
- What outcomes you're aiming to achieve
- How you know your approach will make a difference

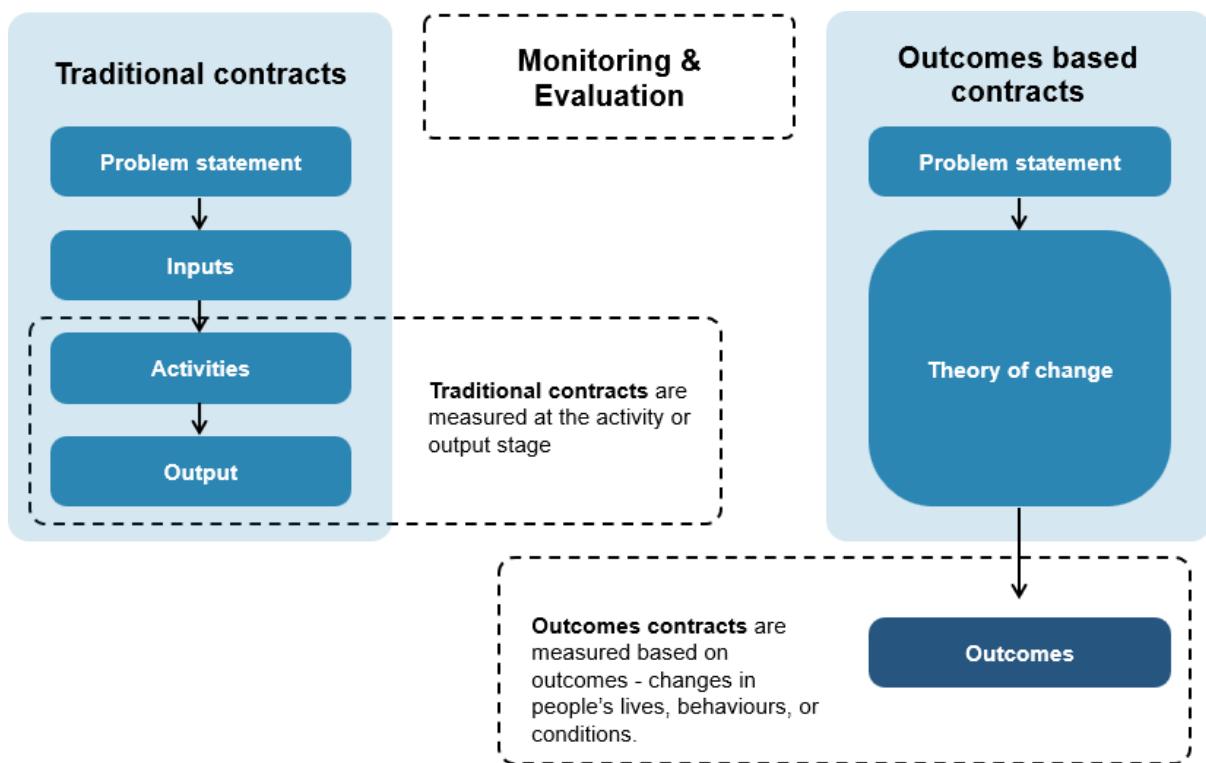


Figure 3: The contract measurement and evaluation approach for Social Investment Fund investments

In practice, learning and evaluation approaches are developed with organisations and reflect the scale, context, and delivery realities of each initiative.

Once initiatives are selected, SIA will work with each organisation to understand their Theory of Change, agree on the outcomes to be measured, and establish a learning and impact plan. This plan is negotiated as part of the agreement between an organisation and SIA and reflects the scale, context, and delivery realities of the initiative.

Once the outcomes and learning and impact plan are agreed, SIA will support organisations to set up data sharing agreements, including sharing data securely with Stats NZ, and understand the insights generated. SIA may support the impact analysis in line with the agreed plan.

Learning and impact plans are developed to complement organisations' own monitoring, learning,

and evaluation activity. Evaluation guidance and access to expertise may be provided by SIA or through external experts, with responsibilities shared in ways that are proportionate to the investment and context.

Support for organisations

SIA provides evaluation guidance and access to expertise to support learning and, where feasible, impact analysis as part of the social investment approach. This support is designed to complement organisations' own monitoring, learning, and evaluation activity. Organisations are expected to contribute to evaluation and may need to resource additional evaluation work where appropriate to their context.

The way this works is SIA works with each organisation to develop a shared understanding of their Theory of Change. This is used to create a learning and impact plan, including outcomes to measure, which is negotiated as part of the contract.

Once agreed, SIA supports organisations to set up data sharing agreements, share data securely, and understand the insights generated. Learning and impact analysis is completed in line with the agreed plan, where feasible, and findings are shared with organisations to support learning.

Insights are shared throughout the length of the contract to support ongoing learning partnerships. Evaluation experts, either from SIA or external experts, are available to support learning conversations and the appropriate use of evidence, alongside organisations' own knowledge and experience.

We will hold regular conversations with organisations while they are delivering initiatives to bring together data insights and what organisations learn through their direct work with whānau, families and individuals.

We're taking a 'learn by doing' approach, recognising these methods are new at scale for social services in New Zealand. As the investment portfolio grows, standards will be developed with the sector to help organisations to prepare for evaluation and to support SIA and other government and non-government organisations put social investment into practice.

This approach to data and evaluation represents a new way of working that puts outcomes at the centre. By working together, we can build evidence that supports stronger practice and improves outcomes for communities across New Zealand.