



SOCIAL INVESTMENT FUND QUICK GUIDE

Understanding how we use outcomes

The Social Investment Fund (the Fund) partners with organisations to invest in initiatives that make a meaningful difference in the lives of New Zealanders. A shared understanding of outcomes is central to this partnership.

This quick guide explains, in practical terms:

What outcomes are

- what we mean by outcomes, and how they differ from outputs and measures,

Why outcomes matter

- why outcomes are important for social investment and commissioning decisions

How SIA uses outcomes

- how outcomes are used by the Social Investment Agency (SIA) to assess proposals, set up outcome-based agreements, support learning and evaluation, and report on priority outcomes to Government

This guide is intended to support organisations applying to, or funded through, the Fund to clearly articulate what change they are seeking to achieve, and how change will be understood and evidenced over time.

What is an outcome?

For the purposes of the Fund, an **outcome** is a measurable change that occurs because people receiving support achieve a goal or make a change in their lives.

Outcomes are different to outputs. Outputs are direct activities or services delivered (e.g. the number of workshops held, the number of client sessions run). Outcomes describe the change that happens as a result of those activities. Measures (or indicators) are how we observe and track whether an outcome has changed over time. In practice, a single initiative will often have multiple outcomes, supported by multiple measures.

Domains, outcomes, and measures – how they fit together

To support consistency across the Fund, SIA uses a simple hierarchy:

- **Outcome domains** describe broad priority areas set by Ministers (such as health, employment, or housing). Domains provide a common way to group and classify investments across the Fund.
- **Outcomes** describe the specific changes an initiative contributes to within one or more outcome domains. Outcomes should reflect what meaningful change looks like for the people, whānau, or communities the initiative supports.
- **Measures (or indicators)** describe how change in an outcome is observed or tracked over time.

Organisations are not expected to contribute to every domain or outcome. The focus is clearly on explaining **which domains are relevant** to the initiative and **what change it is seeking to make** within those domains. Measures support this by showing how progress will be understood, alongside learning and qualitative insight.

A Practical Example

Here is a simple example from an initiative supporting young people not in education, employment, or training through weekly group mentoring.

Element	Example
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weekly mentoring sessions delivered• Number of participants attending sessions
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased readiness for employment• Improved engagement with education or training
Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced time receiving a main benefit• Entry into employment or training

In this example:

- The organisation may collect programme-level information (such as attendance, engagement, or self-reported confidence)
- SIA uses government administrative data to report on selected priority outcomes, such as employment or benefit receipt.

Not all outcomes will be directly attributable to a single programme. Outcomes information is used alongside qualitative insights and learning to build a fuller picture of impact of how and why an initiative contributes to change.

Why outcomes are important for social investment

Clearly defined outcomes are central to social investment because they:

- Enable outcome-based agreements, giving organisations flexibility to adapt delivery while remaining focused on impact
- Support clearer commissioning and investment decisions
- Enable learning and evaluation, including understanding what works, for whom, and in what contexts
- Support reporting to Government on priority outcomes across funded initiatives

Outcomes provide a shared language for partnership conversations between organisations and SIA, focusing attention on what matters most.

Priority outcomes for the New Investment pathway

For the New Investment pathway, Social Investment Fund Ministers agreed a set of priority outcome domains. These domains provide a common framework for classifying investments and understanding their contribution at a portfolio level.

Each domain groups together a range of related outcomes. Funded initiatives are expected to contribute to one or more domains, and within those domains, articulate the specific outcomes they seek to achieve.

Priority Outcome Domains	Examples of outcomes within these domains
Improved health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced serious health events• Reduced potentially avoidable hospitalisations
Greater safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced need for children to be placed in state care• Reduced violent crime• Reduced youth crime• Reduced family violence• Reduced sexual violence
Ensuring stable and secure housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved housing stability
Improving knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved attendance in education• Improved qualifications
Growing income and wealth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Higher incomes
Supporting people into work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased employment• Reduced need to access benefits

When assessing proposals, we consider how strongly an initiative is expected to contribute to one or more of these priority outcome domains, and how clearly the organisation has articulated the outcomes it seeks to achieve within them. Organisations are not expected to contribute to all domains.

Organisation-defined outcomes and shared accountability

We recognise that the organisations, communities, and whānau often define success in ways that extend beyond government administrative measures. Funded organisations are expected to articulate their own outcomes within their Theory of Change, reflecting what meaningful change looks like in their context.

Outcome-based agreements typically include:

- organisation-defined outcomes that guide delivery, learning, and adaptation
- a subset of priority outcomes that SIA will use for reporting to Government

This reflects a shared accountability model:

- Organisations lead service delivery, learning, and continuous improvement across their Theory of Change.
- SIA brings together information on a selected set of priority outcomes across funded initiatives and reports on those outcomes to Government using administrative data.

Outcomes, evaluation, and proportionality

Outcomes information supports learning and evaluation, but not all outcomes are equally easy to measure. Evaluation approaches are expected to be proportionate to the scale, risk, and purpose of an investment.

This means:

- expectations for evidence and evaluation will vary across investments
- not all initiatives will be suited to the same evaluation methods
- learning, improvement, and understanding why an approach works are valued alongside measurement

Early clarity about outcomes helps ensure evaluation approaches are fair, feasible, and low-burden.

Organisations we work with will often have their own outcomes frameworks and ways of defining success. As will the people and families receiving support. We also recognise that Government administrative measures are often ‘deficit-focused’.

Our outcome-based agreements allow for organisations to define and focus on the goals and outcomes they include within their own theory of change. However, the agreements will also include the priority outcomes that the Social Investment Fund will focus on when reporting on outcomes to Government.

Resources

You can also explore:

- [Other Quick Guides and FAQs](#)