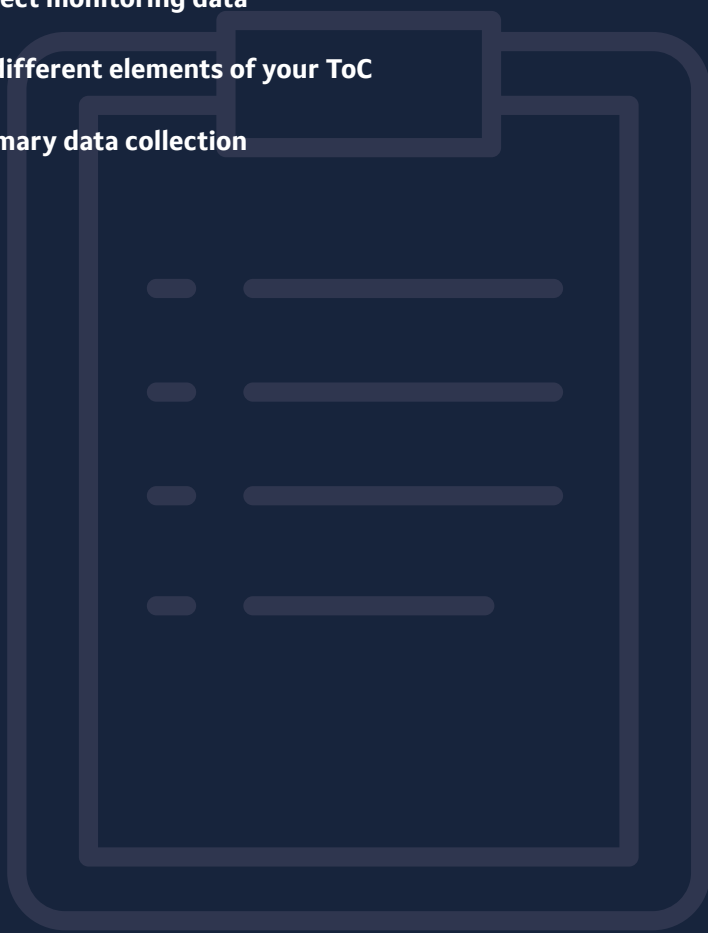


3.0

Monitoring:

Understanding if your project is working

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3.0 Monitoring: Understanding if your project is working

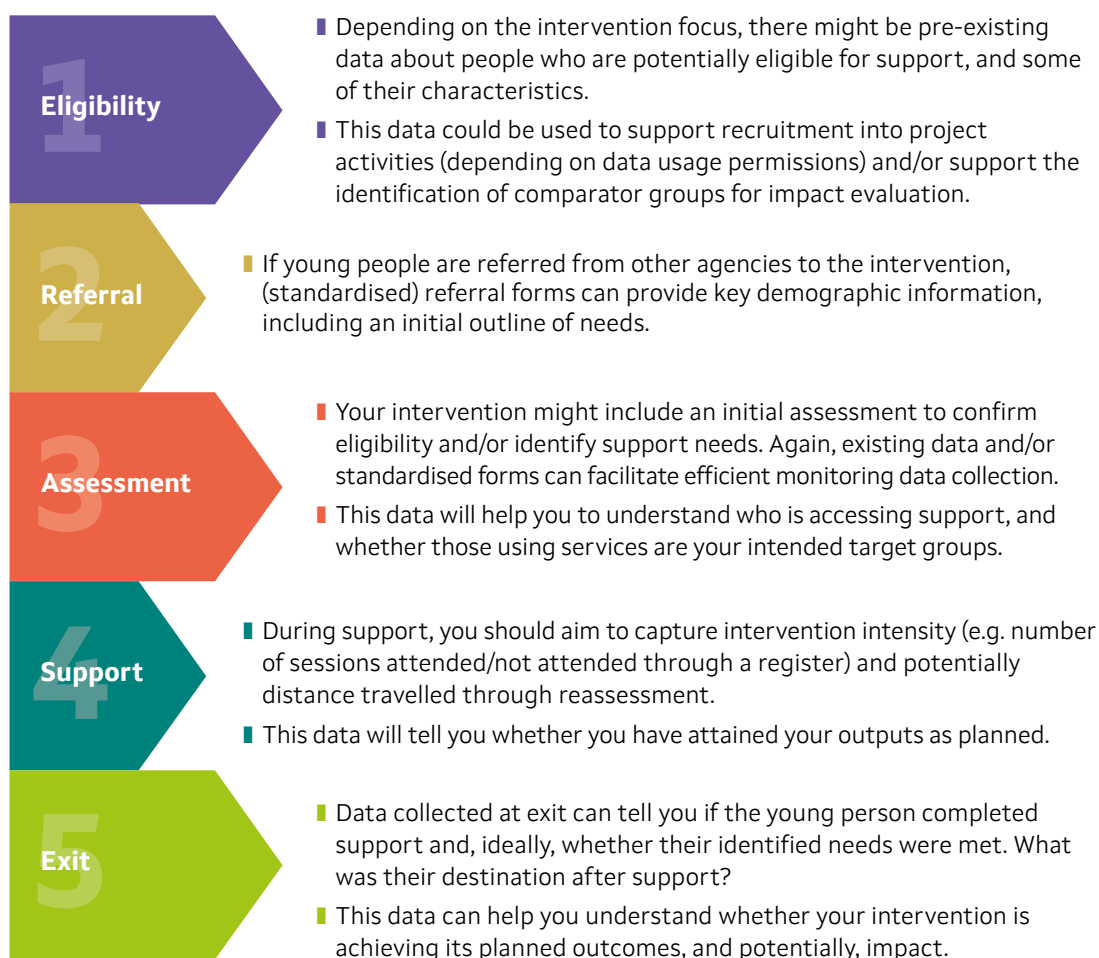


It's likely that your organisation is well experienced in collecting monitoring data, especially the routine information asked for by funders. However, most routine monitoring focuses on outputs, and many organisations are less used to collecting data on outcomes. This means there is often a gap in understanding how outputs lead to outcomes, and with that, a gap in knowledge about what works. Getting your ToC in place (and with it, a clear understanding of what your project aims to achieve) can help you figure out what aspects of your intervention you should be collecting evidence about to prove what works. Once you know this, you can set up your monitoring processes at the outset of project delivery, meaning the right data is in place to answer questions about efficacy when you get to the point of evaluating your work.

When to collect monitoring data

Through consultation interviews, delivery partners told us it can be difficult to engage participants in data collection, and that there can be a lack of time to collect data. It can be useful to identify key touch-points for data collection, and how the data at each stage of delivery can help you understand whether your intervention is meeting its aims. Figure 5 provides some examples of the types of data you could collect at different points of delivery.

Figure 5: Useful points for collecting monitoring data aligned to your ToC

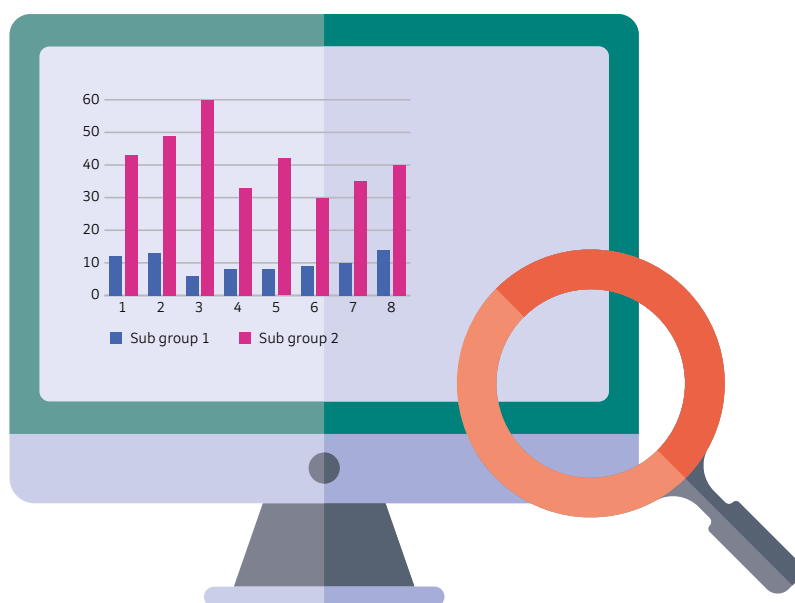


Monitoring different elements of your Theory of Change

When planning your monitoring approach, it can be helpful to take those time points for data collection one step further and map sources of information against the different elements of your ToC. Doing this will assure you that once you get to the stage of evaluating your project, you have evidence in place for all elements of your ToC and can demonstrate whether your project has done what it set out to do. The elements or metrics in your ToC should, where possible, have been developed to be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (as explained in section 2.3). This means that monitoring each of these elements should be easier.

While the monitoring of inputs, activities, and outputs is usually routine, monitoring outcomes can be more challenging. This usually involves some sort of consultation with services users to understand the effects of the intervention, and this can be difficult within time and budget constraints. We believe that approaches to monitoring (and evaluating) your ToC should be proportionate to the scale of your intervention and the types of activities you deliver.

Table 1 provides examples of different data sources that could be used to evidence different elements of your ToC, while Table 2 explores the pros and cons associated with different primary data collection methods (that is, data you collect directly from participants). You might use some of these methods as part of your routine monitoring of outcomes, and then use others during your evaluation to supplement your monitoring data (see section 5).



3.0 Monitoring: Understanding if your project is working



Table 1: Monitoring different elements of your ToC

ToC component	Source of monitoring data
Inputs	
Funding	Organisational financial records and accounts
Partnership meetings	Meeting notes and minutes
Use of school premises	Session records, booking confirmations
Staffing	Timesheets
Activities/outputs	
Number of people attending group sessions in schools	Session registers, school data
Number of people attending 1-2-1 mentoring sessions	Mentor's session notes
Number of training sessions provided to professionals	Session registers, trainer session notes
Outcomes	
School pupils have an improved understanding of the impact of violent crime	Session feedback forms
Participants develop improved social and emotional skills	Completion of standardised wellbeing scales at the start and end of support, observations of participants.
Professionals are better equipped to support young people at risk of violence	Session feedback forms, follow up interviews with sample of professionals trained.
Impact	
Reduced reoffending amongst those supported	Follow up interviews with participants at multiple time points after leaving the project.
Analysis of secondary data on offending rates.	



3.0 Monitoring: Understanding if your project is working



Table 2: Pros and cons of different methods for collecting primary data

	Pros	Cons
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Online surveys can collect lots of data quickly and cheaply. ■ Can identify subgroup patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Not always accessible. ■ Risk of low response rate.
Interviews and focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Collects in-depth insight into an intervention and can complement quantitative data collection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Time consuming. ■ Biased views. ■ No numerical estimates.
Monitoring information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Low cost and quick. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can have a high admin burden on staff who collect it.
Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allows for a deeper understanding of individual experience. ■ Reduces bias from self-reporting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Participants may act differently if they know they are being observed. ■ More costly.
Case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can capture real life situations. ■ Complements other data collection methods such as surveys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Difficult to generalise findings to other settings.

Based on: Quick guide to research methods commonly used for evaluation, Magenta Book (2023).



Ethics in primary data collection

When collecting primary data, it is vital to take an ethical approach. This is particularly important considering that the target groups for many VRU-funded interventions will face multiple vulnerabilities. The core principals of social research ethics include:

- **Social responsibility:** researchers should aim to maximise the benefits of the research and minimise the potential risk or harm to participants and researchers. This is often referred to as a ‘**Do No Harm**’ approach.
- **Independence:** mitigate conflict of interest or partiality on behalf of the researchers, funding or commissioning body.
- **Informed consent and voluntary participation:** research participants should be given sufficient information about the research and how their data will be used and offered the opportunity to consent or refuse participation without negative consequences.
- **Anonymity and confidentiality:** ensure that there is no way to identify a person from the information provided (i.e., by keeping personal details separate from survey responses, interviews, or focus groups) unless they explicitly agree. Also, ensure that only the researchers collecting or analysing the data have access to respondents’ personal information.
- **Integrity and transparency:** All stages of research design and data collection, cleaning, coding and analysis should be documented appropriately so the research process is transparent and there is an audit trail.¹⁸

More information can be found here:

- [Ethics in evaluation: Why it is important](#)
- [Understanding the Ethics of Data Collection](#)
- [Ethical considerations in research and evaluation with Children and Young People](#)

¹⁸ Halej, J. 2017. Ethics in primary research (focus groups, interviews and surveys). Available at: <https://forms.docstore.port.ac.uk/A816773.pdf>

