

A Guide to Defining Project Benefits

What are Project Benefits and why are they important?

Benefits are the measurable improvements delivered through a project or programme which are seen by a stakeholder as positive and worthwhile. For example an improvement in educational provision in an area, or a change to a service that leads to better customer satisfaction. Project Benefits should be aligned to the objectives of the project and organisational priorities.

Benefits v's Outputs

Benefits are different from outputs; outputs are the deliverables of a project, benefits are the improvements generated through the project and its outputs. For example, in a project which aims to improve recreational access to a woodland area, the output would be new and improved pathways, the benefit is that more people can access and enjoy the area.

Dis-Benefits

You may also expect dis-benefits to result from the project; these are the negative outcomes of a project, for example, the loss of green space to accommodate a new building.

Defining and Measuring Project Benefits

It is important to define, realise and measure benefits (and dis-benefits) so we can understand and measure the impact of the project for the Stakeholders and end users. Measuring benefits is not always straight forward, so when they are defined in Stage 2 – Developing a Project the definitions need to be SMART i.e. specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. You will need to think about practical ways to measure the benefits that you are setting out to achieve.

In order to measure an improvement at a future point, the current status needs to be understood and measured. This will provide a baseline from which to measure future improvements.

Often project benefits are not realised until after the project has been delivered and closed. At the end of most projects the project team is disbanded, it is easy to forget that there is a requirement to monitor the outputs and benefits of a project beyond the end of the delivery. It is therefore important that before the project closes, an appropriate individual is nominated to be responsible for realising and measuring the benefits of the project beyond project closure. This is particularly relevant when the project roles are funded externally for the duration of project delivery, and individuals are employed on temporary contracts.