Project Implementation

Module 4
Grant Application and
Project Implementation Guidance

Internet Society
Foundation

Introduction

Module 4: Project Implementation represents a new phase in this training. The previous modules were focused on developing your grant application. This module shifts perspectives to the implementation phase. It is good to review this as you are developing your grant application to anticipate what will be expected of you and your team if your grant application is approved for funding by the Foundation. This module is connected to the guidance in Modules 1, 2, and 3 and provides instruction on how to apply monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) principles throughout project implementation, to ensure stronger, more impactful projects.

What to expect

To provide real-life examples to the sometimes-abstract-sounding concepts in this training, there are two personas that will serve as guides. Adam is a Grant Applicant from Sri Lanka who is interested in applying for Foundation funding for a specific project. Mariam is a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Expert that represents the Foundation.

Mariam: Now that you have finished designing your project let's imagine that your application was successful (It was the strong MEL principles that strengthened your application!). For this module, let's imagine you are now a grantee instead of a grant applicant. It's time to think about implementing.

Through this module you will learn how to incorporate monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) into the implementation of a project. It is likely that you and your team are already conducting a lot of these practices informally, through conversations and interactions among staff and partners that you would consider project implementation. This guidance will support you in formalizing some of these practices into processes to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness of the information you are gathering on your project.

You will also learn how to improve your reporting to the Foundation based on MEL principles.

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Integrating monitoring into implementation

Monitoring data is typically collected through **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** that are tracked internally within your organization and reported to the Foundation as a supplement to each narrative report (submitted on a biannual basis).

The KPIs and the corresponding targets (what you hope to achieve) should be selected during the proposal phase but can be adjusted during project implementation with approval from the Foundation (see more details in the **KPI module**).

Adam: So, all I need to do is keep my KPI table up to date and submit it with my reports to the Foundation?

Mariam: Yes, basically. You may want to look at your KPI table more often than you report, depending on how often your indicator values might change. Generally, the more you integrate this process of checking whether your project is on track into implementation, the higher your chances of delivering it well and with high impact.

Integrating evaluation into implementation

Throughout implementation you will be collecting data on the progress of your project. By evaluating the information you collect, you will be better able to judge how your project is progressing, and to show your impact to the Foundation who can then share it with others.

If your project spans several months and activities, it is useful to look regularly at all the information you know about the project data (KPI results, observations, feedback from participants, etc.) to measure your progress and think about what it means for you after every activity, or every opportunity to receive feedback from participants/target communities. As a standard practice, we recommend that you meet for reflection meetings at least once per quarter. At the very least you should conduct a reflection meeting prior to beginning your narrative report as required by the Foundation, but at that point, it may be difficult to remember everything – when it comes to reflecting on progress, the more times the better!

Adam: We have collected some data on what our training participants did as a result, and some of them have applied for internships and formal training in relevant companies, just like we hoped for!

Mariam: That sounds great. Now you can evaluate that information by asking what the data tells you about your work? For example:

- Are the girls that now have applied for internships and formal training in relevant companies the same girls that indicated a high increase in knowledge and skills at the end of the training? If yes, your project may have helped them make that decision, you would want to find more information to verify that. If not, maybe the problem these girls were facing was not a lack of skills or knowledge, but something else? How could we figure that out?

Top tip

Evaluation should be included as part of each narrative report submitted to the Foundation and your organization should take time to reflect on the data being collected at regular intervals (the more frequent the better!).

Integrating learning into implementation

Evaluating your data throughout the project is a crucial step to capture lessons learned that you could integrate into current and future projects. Through an evaluation process, you and your team may note that the individuals you are targeting for a specific initiative aren't attending, or that the increase in skills demonstrated by a pre- and post- intervention survey, is lower than you anticipated. How will you change your approach in the project to address these issues? This is the learning.

While learning may take many shapes, there should be regular opportunities for team members to reflect on, and integrate lessons gained from data collection and analysis efforts to continue improving the project. We recommend combining learning reflection sessions with your evaluation sessions – or at least holding them within a similar timeframe (at least after every activity, or every opportunity to receive feedback from participants/target community). At the very least you should reflect prior to beginning your narrative report as required by the Foundation.

Lessons learned should be included as part of each narrative report submitted to the Foundation.

Here is a meeting guide with learning prompts to support this process with your organization.

Adam: We hit a serious obstacle in our project – two of the schools that we planned activities with decided to cancel our agreement. We tried to work with the school administrators to reschedule instead of cancel, but it wasn't successful. Luckily, we did find two additional schools that are interested in partnering with us, but it's set implementation back several months. We don't have a narrative report due for another four months. Should I mention this to the Foundation in the narrative report only? Or should I contact them about it now?

Mariam: It's perhaps even more important to share information about obstacles, problems, and 'failures' on a timely basis. In this case, you should go ahead and get in touch with your point of contact at the Foundation and notify them of this change. It sounds like the issue is resolved - and just caused some delays – but don't forget that the Foundation is a resource as well as a donor, and they want you to succeed. When you notify the Foundation of the issue, they can support you in addressing it.

And don't wait until the narrative report, the sooner you contact them, the less time you will lose for implementation.

Top tips

- The Foundation may ask at intervals what your organization is doing to integrate lessons learned into the project implementation. It's likely that you are already doing this automatically and that your efforts will be to formalize this process and document it for your internal records and to share with the ISOC Foundation.

- The Foundation wants to know about the learning, be it positive or negative. This is an opportunity for us to adapt our grants accordingly and possibly even share these lessons with other grantees.
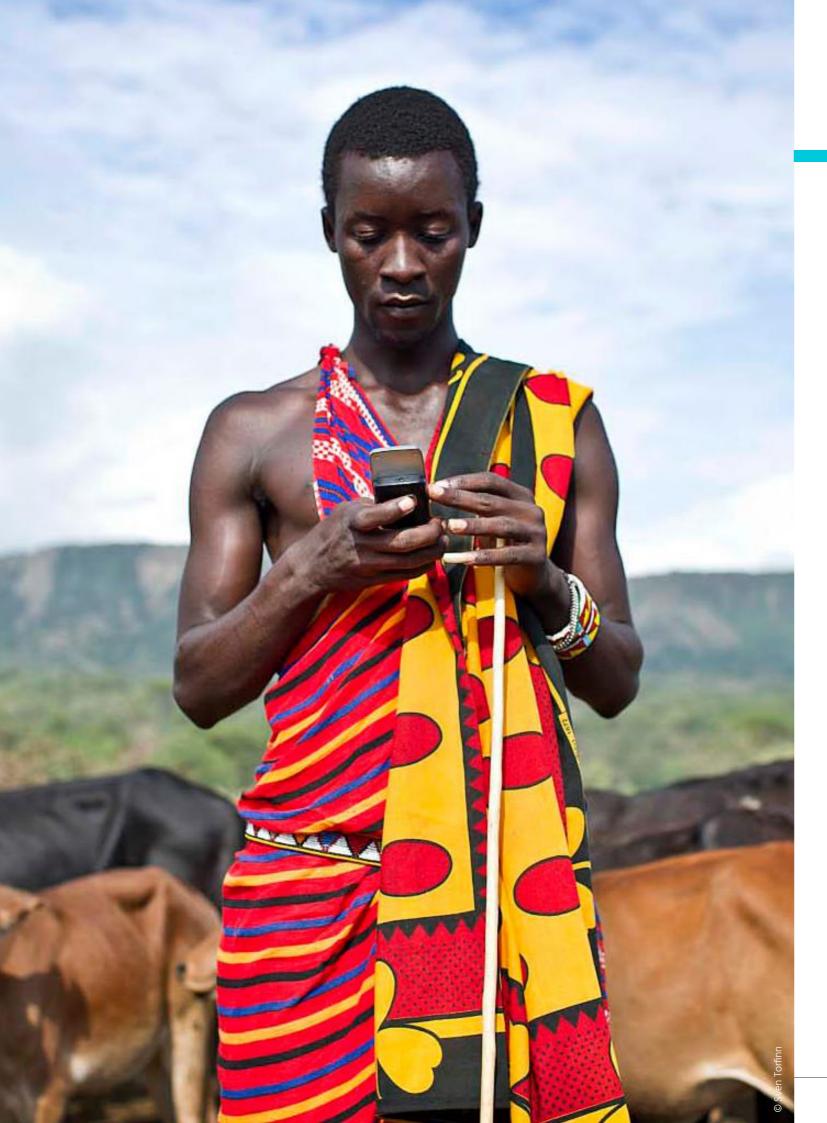
Communications

Communications is an important component of project implementation. Clear and regular communication with the Foundation, your local stakeholders, and the general public enables you to showcase the value of your project and could open the door to new partnerships that may strengthen the impact and reach of your work.

Communicating with the Foundation:
Project narrative reports

There are different requirements around project reporting, depending on the programme area from which you are receiving funding. For many projects the Foundation requires submission of a narrative report on a bi-annual basis, depending on the start date of your project. For other projects, the Foundation may require more frequent reports or just a final report. Your project's reporting deadlines will be outlined in your grant agreement, but you can always check-in with your point of contact at the Foundation to be clear on deadlines.

Best practices

- **Successes and Challenges**: Take time to capture success stories and challenges as they occur, throughout implementation.

- **Reflection Sessions**: Host **evaluation** and **learning** sessions after each activity to reflect on what occurred and integrate lessons learned.

- **Keep KPI Data Up to Date**: Keep the **KPITT** up to date so you have the progress data at your fingertips.

- **Focus on Analysis Within the Narrative Report**: Include your own analysis about why things are working and why (potentially) some things aren't, and what you are planning to do about it. Consider information that isn't readily available to the Foundation, but that you can provide as a result of implementing your project.

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Adam: Ok, so I can see that my project is for two years and the reporting requirements outline submission of a narrative and a financial report every six months. How frequently do I need to be gathering information for my report?

Mariam: Great question! You should be gathering information as frequently as possible (see the sections above on Integrating Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning into implementation for more details). It is helpful to have a document where you add success stories, notes on progress, feedback from participants and stakeholders as well as the summarized results of the evaluation and learning reflection sessions. All this content will help you create an outline for your report.

Additionally, while it's not required to submit a **Key Performance Indicator Tracking Table (KPITT)** at the moment, filling one out each month and/or after an activity occurs and combining that process with other data collection techniques and reflection sessions, makes the actual report writing much easier.

Adam: That sounds like a lot of information to collect. What kinds of things does the Foundation need to know about?

Mariam: They want to know about your successes AND your challenges.

- Keep Communication Open: You don't have to wait until the narrative report is due to notify the Foundation of successes, as well as failures. Keep the lines of communication open – we are here to support you.

- Report Failures (it's the Learning!): Don't be afraid to report to the Foundation when something isn't working – we trust you and we will work with you to address failures and challenges. This is where the learning happens.

Important definitions

When writing your report keep in mind the difference between...

- **Contribution**: *THIS IS MOST LIKELY* When evidence exists that an outcome or impact has occurred, and the product, activity, or training influenced the result. It's contribution if you can use the phrase...this X (activity) contributed to this Y (result) as demonstrated by Z (evidence).

- **Attribution**: When evidence exists that an outcome or impact is a direct result of a certain product, activity, or training. It's attribution if you can use the phrase...If it wasn't for X (activity), Y (result) would not have occurred, as demonstrated by Z (evidence). This is often an almost impossible claim to make as there are typically numerous contributing factors that play a role in large changes in awareness, perspectives, etc.

Adam: If the girls came to our training knowing nothing about the Internet of Things, and they leave able to answer some questions on the topic, then I can attribute that change entirely to my project, right?

Mariam: Exactly. However, if after the completion of your project, more young women start careers in emerging internet technologies, this will likely be a result of several factors. Your project may have contributed to this result through training and connections to important stakeholders, which you can evidence. However, this was only impactful in combination with the fact that many companies in the sector were urgently looking for young female students to hire, and maybe other factors.

End-of-project reporting

At the end of your project you will prepare a final report that provides an overview of the entire project. The report should include:

- Activities;

- Successes and failures;

- Analysis points; and

- Lessons learned through implementation.

Think of the report as the most efficient way to help someone learn the main points about your project, so that they can convincingly tell someone else about your achievements.

You can rely on the monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes that you used throughout implementation in order to draft the report. Follow the same **evaluation** and **learning** meeting prompts. The data you collected will help you to demonstrate the impact of your project on the target community. Focus on the main takeaways of the project and resist going into too much detail on each activity. You want the Foundation to easily and quickly access information in the report that highlights the main impact of your project and its value on the community.

Adam: My project timeline is almost over. I'm feeling happy with the results and we have a lot of information about project successes, but I'm not sure how to start the report.
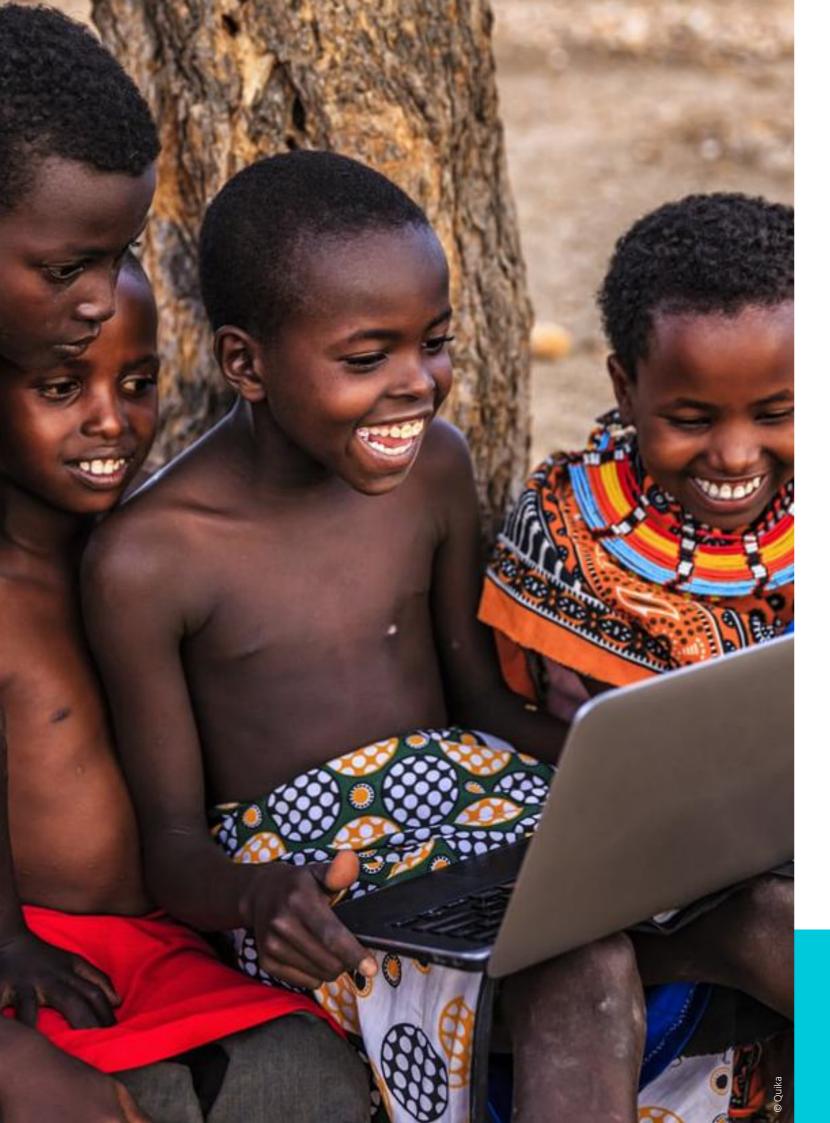
Mariam: I'm glad you asked! You should use the same process as other narrative reports – data analysis and reflection meetings with team members, review of partner feedback as well as successes, challenges and lessons learned. However, the difference with a final report is that you want it to be a comprehensive look at the entire project. It would be good, for example, to look back at your initial problem statement and theory of change and compare that to how your project actually unfolded and the final results.

Adam: Can I just copy/paste the information from the other narrative reports that we submitted every six months?

Mariam: You can use the other narrative reports you submitted (if your project required them) as a basis for your activity summaries, and overall analysis, but please don't copy/paste the details. The Foundation is looking for the major successes, challenges, and lessons learned that speak to the overall impact of the project. Keep it as high-level as possible, while acknowledging the steps that got you to where you are.

Top tip

Focus on the main takeaways and the impact of the project. Put the report's highlights up front so reviewers can easily understand the value of your project.

Communicating beyond the Foundation

In addition to the reports you are submitting to the Foundation, consider other stakeholders who should be kept informed about your project's progress (e.g. community members). What are the best ways to stay in touch with them? Phone calls, emails and face-to-face meetings are all methods you can use regularly to connect with your stakeholders.

To reach a wider audience, consider using social media to promote your work. The more you share your project with different audiences, the more the public will understand the role of the internet and technology in benefitting people's lives around the world.

Additionally, once your project is ending, we encourage you to reach out to your point of contact at the Foundation to discuss options for featuring your project on the Foundation's website (**example of a feature story**). Sharing your story is a great way to showcase the impact your project is going to have and provide inspiration for others.

Top tips

- **Social Media**: Once your project is underway, promote the great work you are doing through your favorite social media channels such as Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter to announce that you have received a grant and share highlights on your project as it gets underway.

- **Blogs and/or website**: If you already maintain a blog or website about your work, adding posts about your project's progress – particularly once you reach a milestone or complete a significant phase of the project – is an easy way to promote your work widely.

- **Video**: If preparing a video about your project, remember that most people have an attention span of about 2-3 minutes. Keep your video short. If you don't have a budget to produce videos, consider using the video apps that comes free on your mobile phone. You can shoot footage on your phone and use the app to edit.

Mariam: Communicating about the successes of your project is so valuable, not only for the success of the current project, but to increase the chances that it could be funded by other sources in the future. If something is working well, find time to share it!

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