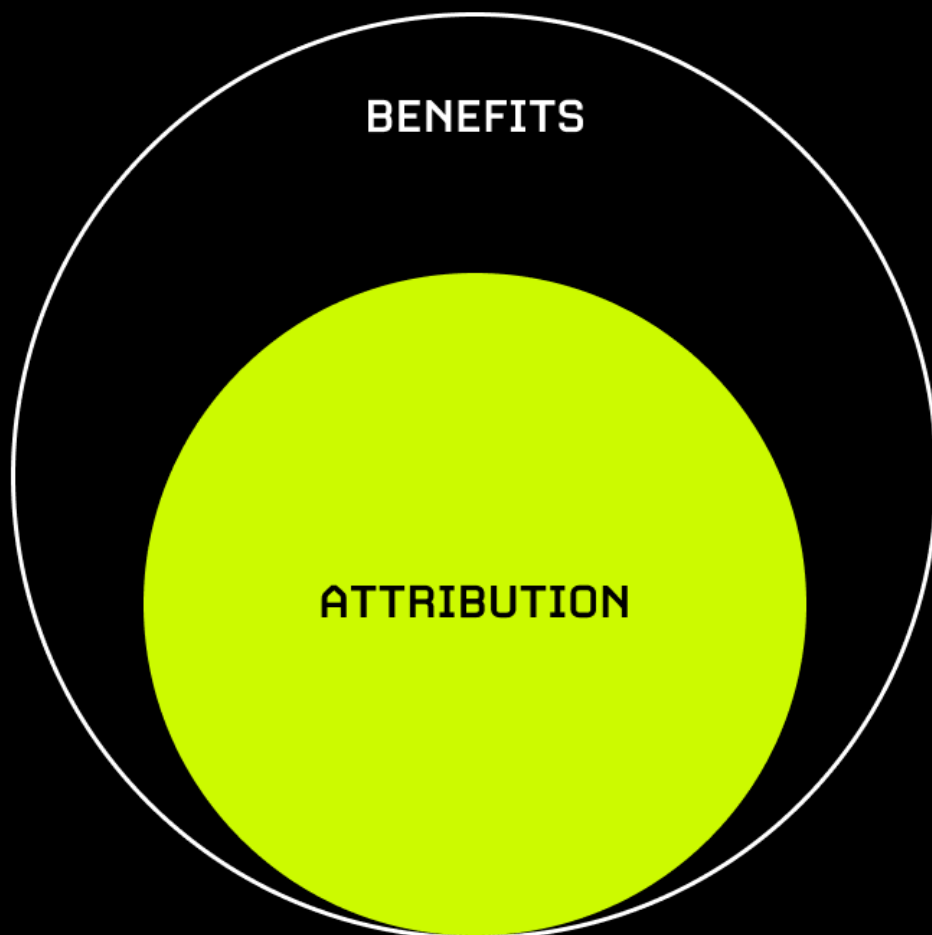


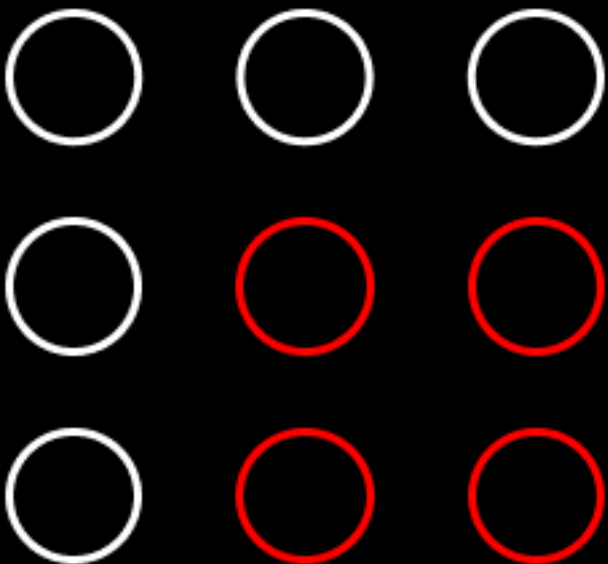
ATTRIBUTION

What is the size of your social impact?



1. Introduction

What is Attribution?



When you measure social impact, it's important to avoid overstating your achievements. You might see big improvements in the people or places you work with, but is this change all down to your own programme, or did others help?

This idea—pinpointing exactly which part of the change you caused—is known as attribution.

Attribution shows how much of an outcome you can fairly claim as your own contribution. It stops you taking 100% of the credit if other organisations or factors played a part.

By being honest about your share of the results, you build trust with funders and show them you are transparent and realistic about your impact.



Gains Funders' Trust

Funders want evidence that their support truly makes a difference. If you can show which part of an outcome is genuinely yours, they know their money is well used.

Avoids Over-claiming

Being too quick to claim 100% of the credit can undermine your credibility. Attribution ensures your reported results match reality.

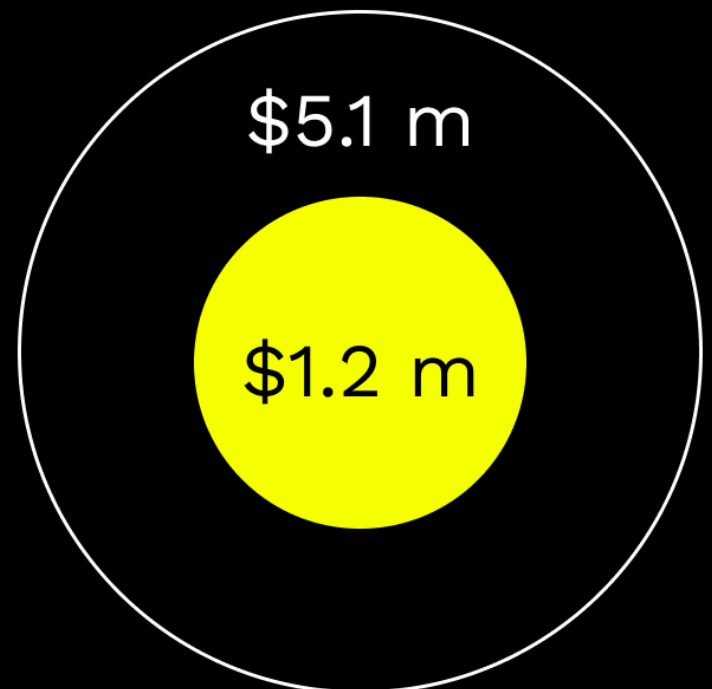
Encourages Collaboration

Many social outcomes happen because of partnership. By sharing credit, you acknowledge others' roles and can build stronger, more collaborative relationships.

Improves Decision-making

Attribution can reveal where you are most effective—and where others might be making a bigger difference. You can learn from this and refine your programme accordingly.

2. Why Attribution Matters



3. The Four Essential Factors

In any social impact analysis, you typically look at four factors to arrive at your “truly caused” portion of the outcome.

3.1 Deadweight (What Would Have Happened Anyway)

•**Definition:** The share of an outcome that would occur without your intervention.

•**Example:** If, on average, 30% of unemployed people in your area find work each year even without any special programme, that 30% is deadweight.

•**Why It Matters:** Subtracting deadweight stops you from taking credit for changes that would have happened naturally.

3.2 Displacement (Shifting a Problem)

Definition: Occurs when your positive outcome in one place causes a negative outcome elsewhere.

Example: If your local youth programme helps participants get jobs, but they simply take positions another group would have filled, you haven’t increased total employment—you’ve just moved the advantage around.

Why It Matters: Displacement means there is no real net gain overall, so you should reduce your claimed impact accordingly.

3.3 Others Share (Contributions of Others)

Definition: The portion of an outcome caused by other organisations, partners, or external factors.

Example: If your job-training course is just one part of a bigger package—alongside government benefits and other charities—then some of the success is due to these other actors.

Why It Matters: You only claim the share that you directly influenced. This ensures you give credit where credit is due.

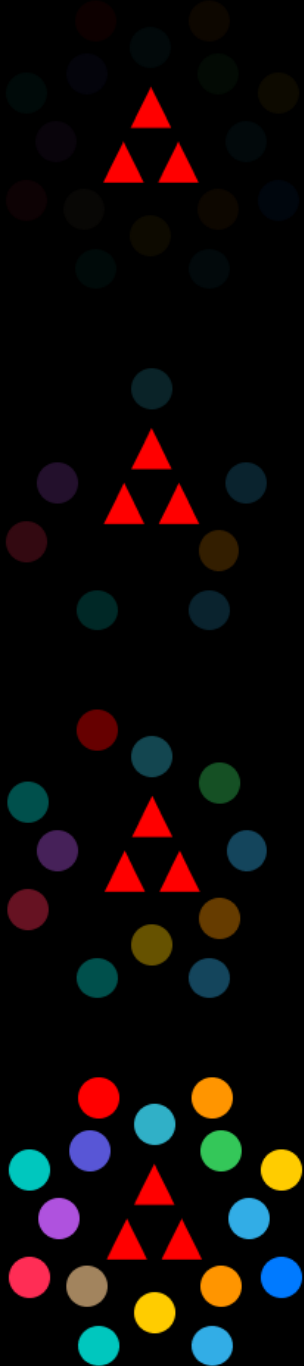
3.4 Drop-off (Decline Over Time)

Definition: Recognises that not all benefits last forever. The positive effect of your intervention might fade as people’s circumstances change.

Example: If you helped 50 people find long-term employment, a certain number may lose those jobs each year, or the skills you taught might become outdated.

Why It Matters: Drop-off prevents you from counting the full effect year after year when it may gradually reduce.

4.. Putting It All Together



A common way to calculate your net impact is:

1. **Start** with the total number of people (or total value) of the outcome.
2. **Subtract Deadweight:** How many would have achieved the outcome anyway?
3. **Subtract Displacement:** Did your success simply move a problem elsewhere?
4. **Adjust for Others' Contributions:** What share belongs to partners or external factors?
5. **Apply Drop-off (if relevant):** For future years, reduce the outcome by a certain percentage to reflect the diminishing effect.

The remainder is the portion of the outcome you can genuinely attribute to your activities.



5. Examples

5.1 Education Mentoring

Scenario: A charity offers after-school mentoring to help students improve grades.

Attribution Steps:

- **Deadweight:** Check if some students would improve on their own. If typically 20% do, subtract that.
- **Displacement:** Improved grades don't usually displace someone else's grades, so likely 0%.
- **Others' Contribution:** Students might also be helped by parents, teachers, or private tutors. If you estimate that half the improvement is thanks to these other factors, claim only 50%.
- **Drop-off:** If skills or motivation fade, you might assume a certain reduction in future years.

5.2 Community Health

Scenario: A project reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes by running exercise sessions and nutrition classes.

Attribution Steps:

- **Deadweight:** Look at how many people typically avoid diabetes without any intervention.
- **Displacement:** Stopping someone from getting ill doesn't cause illness elsewhere, so 0%.
- **Others' Contribution:** A government campaign or improved local services might have contributed. Estimate a fair share for those factors.
- **Drop-off:** Healthy habits might slip over time, so assume a percentage drop each year.



5.3 Environmental Restoration

Scenario: A group restores a wetland to improve water quality and bird habitats.

Attribution Steps:

- **Deadweight:** Was water quality improving anyway due to better regulation or changing weather patterns?
- **Displacement:** If birds move to your wetland from a nearby area, that might count as partial displacement.
- **Others' Contribution:** If local government or another NGO tackled pollution too, you can't claim all the credit.
- **Drop-off:** Without ongoing upkeep, water quality may slip back over time.

Reflections on the three examples above

- One size never fits all: Education Mentoring is dead-weight heavy; Community Health hinges on shared contributions; Environmental Restoration risks displacement as wildlife simply moves.
- Collaboration is the quiet multiplier—parents, clinicians, iwi, councils, and NGOs all shape outcomes. Map partners early and agree how to apportion credit.
- Transparency trumps precision: funders accept estimates when you show the reasoning, evidence, and sensitivity tests behind each figure.
- Carry these lessons into the four attribution checks that follow; the next section outlines quick, low-cost data sources to support your judgement.



6. Tips for Credibility



Be Transparent

Explain how you arrived at your percentages or estimates—whether it's through local statistics, stakeholder surveys, or experience. This openness builds trust.

Engage Stakeholders

Ask beneficiaries, partners, or experts to estimate what would have happened without your programme and how much others contributed. Their insights can guide fair estimates.

Avoid Over-complication

You don't need exact science or complicated formulas. Reasonable, well-explained estimates are usually enough for funders and partners.

Show You've Done Your Homework

Mention any research or comparison data you used. Even simple references to local statistics can strengthen your case.

Account for Uncertainty

If you're unsure about a percentage, try a range (for instance, 20–30%). Letting funders see you've considered different scenarios makes your analysis more robust.



7. Gathering Data to Defend Your Attribution

Even if you follow the four attribution factors, you still need solid evidence for your estimates. Below are practical ways to collect data and back up your claims.

7.1 Direct Input from Participants

Surveys and Interviews

Invite people who benefitted from your programme to share whether they believe the outcome would have happened without your help. Ask them about other services they used.

Focus Groups

In group discussions, people can reflect on different influences in their lives. This can help you judge how much your intervention mattered compared to other factors.

7.2 Drawing on Existing Research

Similar Studies

Search for research done by academics, government, or other organisations on similar programmes. See how they measured deadweight or attributed outcomes. Adapting these proven methods or statistics can strengthen your case.

Benefit Transfer

If you can't run your own detailed study, you can "transfer" findings from another credible study in a similar context. For instance, if a similar mentorship project in another town found that 25% of students would have succeeded anyway, you might use 25% as your deadweight estimate (tweaking it if your area is slightly different).



7.3 Official Statistics and Benchmarks

Government Data

Look for baseline rates—like average employment rates or school performance levels—provided by agencies or national databases. These help you decide what would likely happen without your intervention.

Local or Sector Benchmarks

Sometimes charities, sector bodies, or professional associations publish standard benchmarks. Using these can help you show you're aligned with common practice.

7.4 Collaboration with Other Organisations

Partner Discussions

If other groups worked with your participants at the same time, compare notes. Try to split credit fairly based on time, funding, or feedback from participants.

Shared Evaluations

Occasionally, multiple services will conduct a joint impact study. This can reveal who contributed to each part of an outcome. Working together can make the data more robust and accepted by funders.



7.5 Control or Comparison Groups (If Practical)

Before-and-after Comparisons

For instance, if you track a group that doesn't receive your service, you can see how they fare. This reveals how much change might have occurred naturally.

Quasi-experimental Designs

If resources allow, a more scientific approach—like matching participants to similar non-participants—can give reliable insights into deadweight and attribution. Although this is more complex, it can be very persuasive to funders.

7.6 Sensitivity Analysis

Testing 'What-if' Scenarios

After choosing a figure (e.g. 20% deadweight), see how your results change if you vary it to 10% or 30%. Presenting these scenarios shows you've thought about uncertainty.

Why It Helps

Funders appreciate organisations that consider different possibilities rather than giving a single fixed number. It shows you're aware your data has limits, but you've taken reasonable steps to be accurate.



8. Conclusion

Attribution is about being honest and fair when reporting the change you create. It ensures you claim only the impact genuinely linked to your work, while recognising what might have happened anyway, what might have been shifted from somewhere else, and how others contributed.

By carefully applying the four main factors—Deadweight, Displacement, Attribution (others' contributions), and Drop-off—you can give a realistic picture of your organisation's impact. Although it may reduce the number you report, it boosts your credibility. And that, in turn, builds stronger relationships with funders, encourages effective collaboration, and helps you make better decisions to maximise your social impact.

Remember: the aim isn't to downplay your achievements; it's to ensure they stand on solid ground. By collecting and sharing data that backs your claims—whether from participants, official sources, or similar studies—you show funders and stakeholders the true value you bring. This honesty and rigour set you apart and pave the way for more confident investment in your programme's future.

Matatihi has delivered dozens of social impact assessments across diverse sectors, from valuing the impact on Māori of 5G spectrum ownership to assessing the benefits of mentoring and many other meaningful projects along the way.

Our approach combines rigorous methods aligned with New Zealand Treasury standards, government expectations, and specific funding criteria, ensuring that your outcomes are clearly understood and valued appropriately.

Feel free to reach out anytime - I'd love to kōrero about your aspirations and explore how Matatihi can support your goals.

Dr. Jay Whitehead

Economist and Founder at Matatihi

Ōraka Aparima | Ngāi Tahu | Kāti Māmoe

