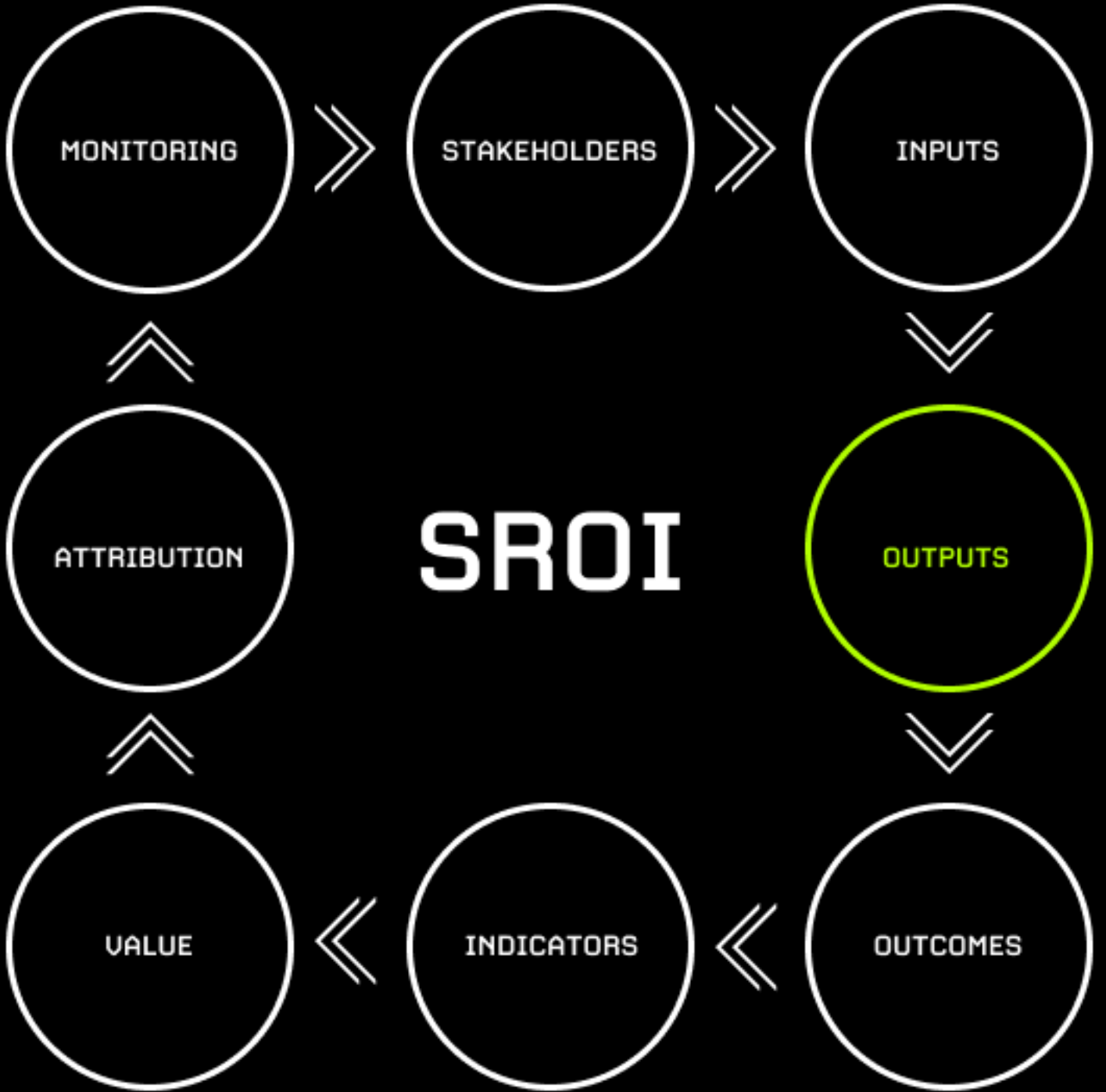


Outputs

Tracking What You Produce or
Provide





1. Introduction

What are Outputs?



Outputs are the tangible, immediate results of your activities and the things you delivered or produced.

They are usually easy to count and directly linked to your work, e.g. workshops run, hours of service provided, or number of people reached.

While outputs don't reflect long-term change, they are essential for showing what was delivered and help create the foundation for later outcomes.

Importantly, outputs are *not* the same as outcomes. Outputs describe delivery and not change. For example:

- **Output:** We held 12 parenting workshops.
- **Outcome:** Parents felt more confident in raising their children.

2. Why Outputs Matter?



Inputs → Outputs → Outcomes

Outputs matter for the following reasons:

- **Bridge Inputs to Outcomes:**
Outputs are the essential link between what is invested (inputs) and what changes (outcomes).
- **Make Outcomes Credible:**
Well-recorded outputs provide evidence that outcomes didn't just happen by chance, they're grounded in real, delivered work.
- **Support Theory of Change:**
Outputs anchor the middle of your Theory of Change and help map out how the activities are expected to lead to change.
- **Provide Accountability:**
Outputs act as a delivery check. They help ensure the claimed outcomes are based on the actual delivery of activities.
- **Help Interpret Results:**
Output data helps explain variations in outcomes, both good and bad. If uptake was low or reach was limited, that context is critical for interpreting the value generated.



Outputs will often look different depending on the type of programme or service you are delivering. Here are a few examples of outputs across different contexts:

Community and Social Programmes

- Number of workshops or hui held
- Number of meals or care packages distributed

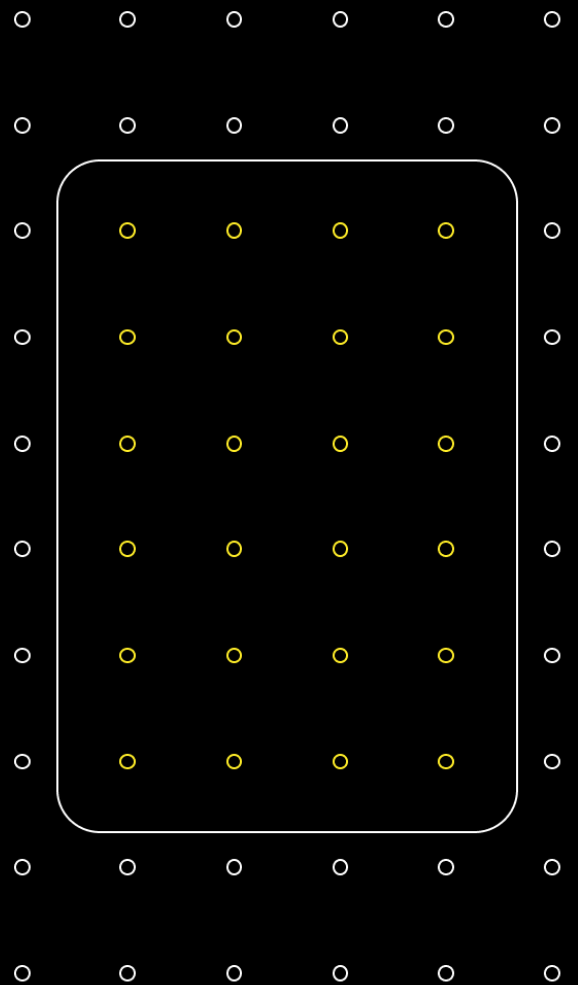
Education and Training Programmes

- Number of training sessions run or modules completed
- Number of participants receiving a certificate or microcredential

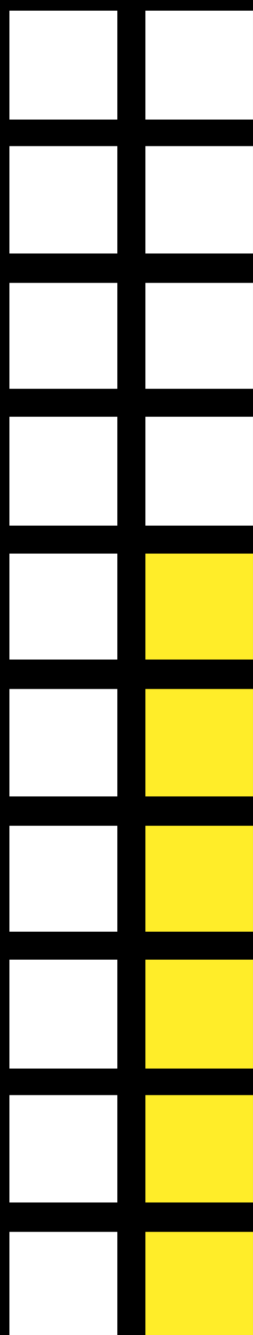
Housing Initiatives

- Number of emergency housing nights provided
- Number of repairs completed on homes

3. Types of Outputs



4. Identifying Outputs



The following steps can help identify the outputs generated:

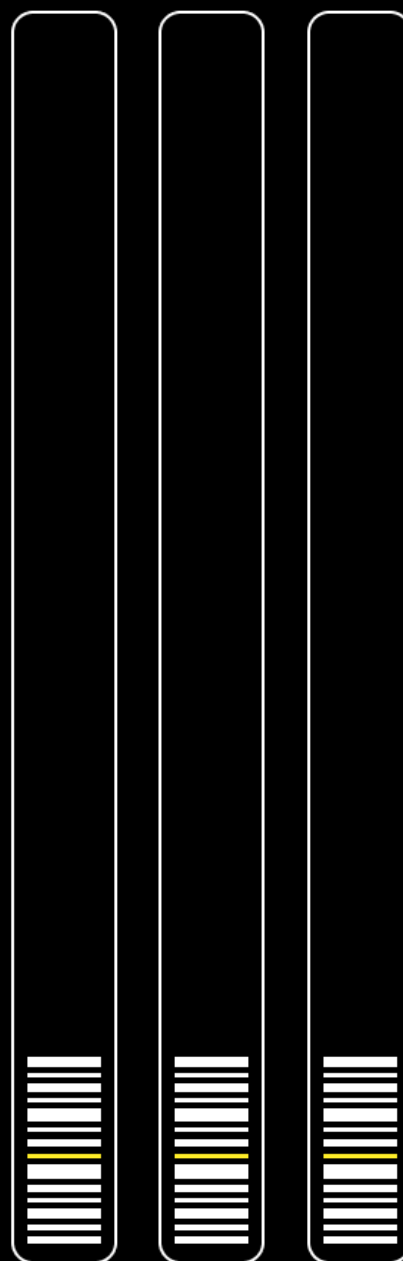
- **Start with your activity plan:** Review programme plan, service agreement, or logic model. Note any activities or deliverables committed to.
- **List what is physically delivered:** The direct, countable results are usually outputs. e.g. sessions run, visits made, items distributed, people trained.
- **Check existing records:** Outputs may already be being captured but just haven't been labelled, e.g. service logs, attendance sheets, spreadsheets.
- **Talk to frontline staff:** Ask those delivering the work what they do each day or week. Their insights will help identify real, meaningful outputs.
- **Link outputs to outcomes:** Make sure each outcome identified is backed by at least one measurable output.

To get meaningful output data, it helps to be intentional from the start about how you track, where you source information, and how consistently you apply definitions, all of which make a difference, so therefore:

- **Track Outputs Regularly:** Recording outputs shouldn't wait until the end of a project. Keep track of deliveries to build a clear picture of your reach over time.
- **Draw on Existing Systems:** Start with existing attendance sheets, booking logs, spreadsheets, or case notes.
- **Prioritise Simplicity and Consistency:** Define clearly what you're counting (e.g. participants, sessions, households) and stick to the same definitions across all sites and staff. Consistency avoids double-counting or gaps in your data. For example, decide upfront whether you're recording sessions delivered, individuals reached, or both and whether to count actual attendees or just those invited.



5. Recording and Reporting



6. Common Mistakes



- **Confusing outputs with outcomes:** A common error is labelling outcomes (like “increased confidence” or “improved wellbeing”) as outputs. Remember: outputs describe what happened, not what changed.
- **Overstating delivery:** It’s tempting to count everyone who registered, expressed interest, or was referred to the programme, but only count those who actually received the service.
- **Skipping outputs:** Make sure to record all outputs, even if they seem small.
- **Focusing only on quantity:** Numbers matter, but they’re not the full story. Consider who accessed the service, how timely it was, and whether delivery was culturally appropriate or accessible.
- **Inconsistent counting:** When different team members record outputs in different ways, data won’t be reliable. Set clear counting rules and provide training or templates to ensure consistency.

7. Conclusion

Outputs are a key part of social impact evaluation. They show what an organisation has delivered and act as the link between the resources invested and the change intended.

Tracking outputs enables organisations to demonstrate that their outcomes are grounded in real delivery. It supports transparency and accountability by showing who was reached, how services were delivered, and whether planned activities occurred.

Clear output data also strengthens logic models, provides a check against over-claiming, helps identify areas for improvement and promotes honest communication with funders and stakeholders.

Effective output tracking involves clear definitions, consistent processes, and strong links to intended outcomes. Outputs should be described in specific, measurable terms and captured consistently over time. Even simple systems such as spreadsheets or attendance logs can provide reliable data when used well.

Therefore, before impacts can be measured, it is essential to first understand and document what was delivered.

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

