

Results-Based Accountability

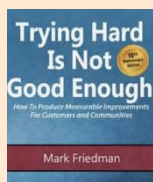
An Introduction to Results-Based Accountability (RBA)

The content of this fact sheet is based on a Family and Child Evaluation Community of Practice session about Results-Based Accountability (RBA). It describes the key components and steps of RBA, and examples of its application in Australia and New Zealand.

WHAT IS RESULTS-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY?

Results-Based Accountability (RBA) focusses on defining results or outcomes that can be used as the starting point for making decisions to improve the quality of life for communities and the performance of programs, agencies and service systems.

RBA, also known as Outcomes-Based Accountability, was developed by Mark Friedman, author of *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough: How to Produce Measureable Improvements for Customers and Communities*.



RBA is used in Australia by different levels of government and non-government organisations as a method for planning, evaluating, delivering and improving services to communities.

Some essential elements of RBA are:

- working backwards from ends (outcomes) to means
- the use of plain or common language
- data and evidence as measurement tools
- getting from talk to action.

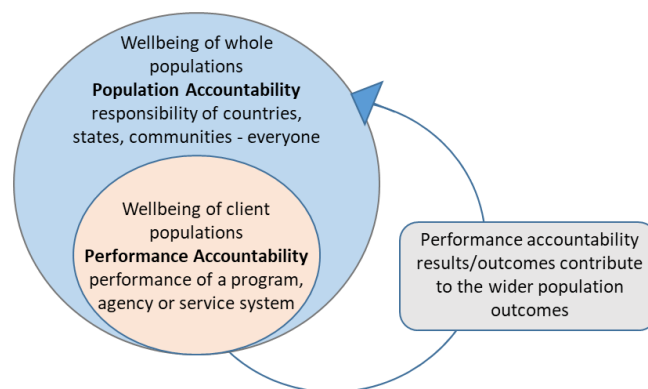
WHY USE IT?

- Gets from talk to action quickly.
- Simple process that everyone can understand.
- Helps groups to surface and challenge assumptions that can be barriers to innovation and continuous improvement.
- Builds collaboration and consensus.
- Uses data and transparency to ensure accountability for community wellbeing and performance of programs.

1. Overview

RBA makes the distinction between results of a whole **population** and the outcomes for clients of a program or service (the **performance** of a program or service). This split of population/performance is core to RBA thinking and practice:

- **Population accountability**—Within a geographic area a desired result or condition of wellbeing is identified for a particular target group (Friedman 2005). Responsibility for achieving this result must be shared among the whole community and public and private sectors because accountability cannot rest with any one organisation or partner. For example, the health of all children in Queensland cannot be the responsibility of hospital or health services alone, but should also involve partnerships with other agencies, non-government organisations, communities and individuals.
- **Performance accountability**—A manager or group of managers takes on the responsibility for the performance of a program, agency or service system (Friedman 2005), and are accountable to the clients/customers and stakeholders of that program, agency or service system. Put simply, are programs and services achieving the intended outcomes they're supposed to be achieving?



The outcomes of a program or service only **contribute** towards the wider population outcomes. Programs are **not** responsible for the wellbeing of whole populations.

Results-Based Accountability

2. Using RBA—What is it all about?

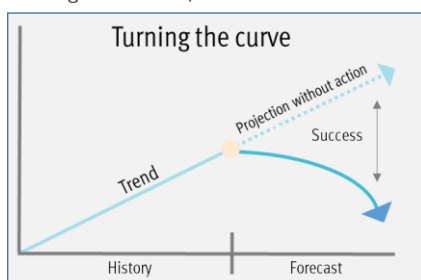
This section outlines the RBA process for determining population accountability and performance accountability. Clear Impact developed five questions, based on Friedman's process, for determining both population accountability and performance accountability. Answering these five questions (outlined below) ensures that actions are not developed before the desired result is fully understood. Further resources and readings are provided at the end of this fact sheet.

Determining population accountability

Below outlines 5 core questions, underpinned by a detailed series of steps developed by Friedman:

1. How are we doing?

- Identifying a **population**—this can be a population in a geographical location, for example all children in Queensland. The focus is not on clients of a program or a service, as they will be the focus in the performance accountability process.
- Determine **results** (conditions of wellbeing) wanted for the population. Friedman advises that results should be in plain language, and not be limited to data or programs.
- Consider how you would **experience** the results above. What would that experience look like? E.g. stable families might look like lower rates of children in out-of-home care. Experience is used as a bridge from results to indicators.
- Using available data, **indicators** can now be determined to recognise and measure the results. Friedman recommends 3 to 5 indicators per result and to consider developing a data development agenda, if information is not readily available.
- For each indicator, a **baseline** must be created which includes historical data and forecast trends with and without action. This step helps define success (anything better than the baseline) called 'turning the curve', visualised below.



2. What is the story behind the curve?

- Investigate the **story behind the baseline**—the causes and forces behind the conditions to help determine the actions needed. For this stage the development of a research agenda about causes will not only pursue unanswered questions about causes but also challenge biases.

3. Who are our partners?

- At this point you need to determine which **partners** should be involved and their role. Friedman advises readers to think broadly and to include partners based on what they have to contribute, not on the likelihood of their contribution.

4. What works to turn the curve?

- Consider **what has worked** elsewhere, as well as low-cost and no-cost ideas (partners may also contribute to this part).
- Criteria** is now needed to set priorities and create an action plan. Friedman suggests the criteria of specificity, leverage, values and reach.

5. What is our action plan to turn the curve?

- Take the criteria and develop an **action plan**, including budget. Put processes in place to continually monitor the plan, making changes as needed, as well as report on progress.

Determining performance accountability

If you think about population accountability about deciding "What are the right things to do?", then performance accountability assists in identifying "Are we doing those things well?"

Here we will look at how agencies/services can identify and organise their performance measures. Friedman proposes a number of key questions when deciding on an approach for identifying performance measures:

- Does it make sense?
- Is it useful?
- Does it address client wellbeing?
- Does it take you from talk to action?

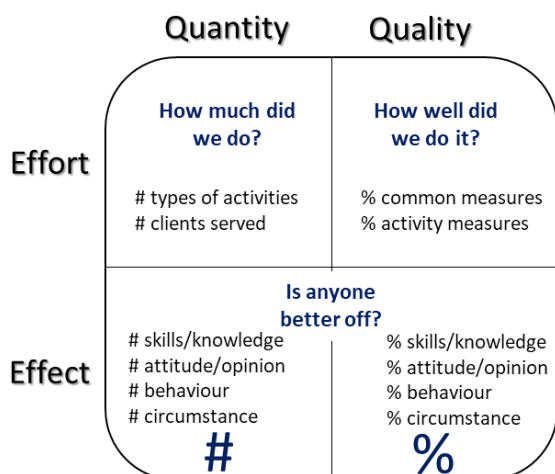
Agencies can categorise, select and use their performance measures by answering the following three simple questions:

- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- Is anyone better off?

EVALUATION FACT SHEET

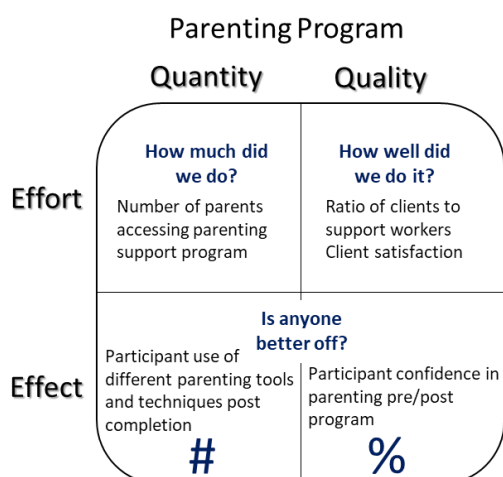
Results-Based Accountability

Answering the questions above assists to categorise performance measures into quadrants as shown in the figure below.



Identifying performance measures can be achieved by thinking about measures in terms of the quantity and quality of effort and effect. Categorising performance measures into quadrants assists to outline what is important and what is less so. Measures in the top left quadrant (*How much did we do?*) are less important compared to measures in the bottom right (*Is anyone better off, quality*). Measures in the bottom right are more difficult to measure and to control.

The figure below illustrates a simple example of a parenting program, showing how different performance measures can be categorised.



Categorising performance measures in terms of the quantity and quality of effort and effect will assist in determining performance measures.

The five questions used to determine population accountability are used again to get from talk to action—using performance measures to improve performance. Referred to as ‘Turn the curve’ thinking, shown below.

‘Turn the Curve’ Questions

1. How are we doing?
2. What is the story behind the curve?
3. Who are our partners who have a role in turning the curve?
4. What works to turn the curve?
5. What is our action plan to turn the curve?

Though the five core questions are used for both performance and population accountability, there are two differences in the process for each:

- Performance accountability begins with the clients or customers of a program or service, whereas population accountability begins with a total population of a geographical area.
- The method for identifying performance measures is different from the method used to establish results and indicators.

The link between performance and population accountability

What programs and services do for their clients contributes to the wellbeing of the wider population. For example, an indicator for a population result of healthy families might be the rate of babies below healthy weight range during the first 6 months after birth, and a performance measure of a local hospital program might be the rate of babies admitted for low weight in the first 6 months after birth.

Friedman points out that there is poor understanding about population results and program results and that there is a demand for programs to prove their impact on a higher population level. However, programs should be able to demonstrate their effect on their clients and contribution towards improving population wellbeing, but not be solely responsible for turning the curve for total population.



Results-Based Accountability

3. Applications of RBA in Australia and New Zealand

Australia

The social initiative Logan Together aims to ensure children in Logan region grow up healthy and to their fullest potential. In January 2016, Logan Together released their Framework for Action, the full report is available [here](#).

Logan Together developed a draft roadmap that encompassed about 30 different strategies for action. The Framework for Action outlines how Logan Together plans to put these strategies into action and their approach, one being RBA. A mixed approach of program logic and RBA was used in order to allow for identification and quantification of the desired results and also the exercise of working backwards from ends to means to ensure Logan Together's work contributed to the outcomes it set out to achieve.

The Framework for Action provides insight into a flexible approach of using RBA and program logic together and provides a brief diagram of how they interact in supporting program design, implementation and accountability.

New Zealand

A large New Zealand social services organisation adopted RBA in an attempt to improve the quality of measurement and evaluation of organisational and service performance.

Impact Research NZ conducted an evaluation to investigate the impact of RBA on the organisation's performance and culture, using a mixed methods approach that included interviews, focus groups, literature reviews and the organisation's communications (i.e. meetings and newsletters).

The organisation had limited capability of measuring their service performance, including from a client perspective.

Initial results found that frontline staff and some managers lacked understanding of RBA processes and/or benefits, and were sceptical of the approach. However, they did comply with requirements of using RBA.

Evaluators recommended a move away from communiques focussing on how RBA helps the organisation meet funder requirements to topics of purpose, processes, and results.

After an initial report, a focussed change process led to managers using RBA results to enhance practice and service. Overall, the implementation and uptake of the RBA approach was found to be a work in progress, though with commitment, it should lead to better outcomes for the organisation's clients.

On a broader note, the paper concludes that government agencies appear to be more readily able to link population and performance accountabilities, where smaller organisations might find it a struggle to allocate funds to implement and sustain RBA. You can read the article in full [here](#).

4. RBA and evaluation

Friedman makes the connection between evaluation and RBA in a couple of ways:

- Evaluation can provide information that is useful in both population and performance accountability by providing data for baselines and information about the story behind the baselines.
- In population accountability, evaluation can assist with identifying what has worked elsewhere and determine what programs are effective for inclusion in an action plan, as well as evaluate if desired results are being achieved.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

Clear Impact website. Includes videos and webinars. Available at: <https://clearimpact.com>

Friedman, M (2005). *Trying hard is not good enough*. Trafford on Demand Pub. Available for purchase [here](#).

Implementation Guide Results-Based Accountability. Includes tools, templates and workshop materials. Available at: <http://raguide.org/>

Logan Together (2016). Framework for Action. Available [here](#).

Weir, A., & Watts, R (2013). Results-Based Accountability: Evaluating Program Outcomes in a Social Services Organisation in New Zealand. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 13 (2), 13-19. Available [here](#).