

FREE STARTER KIT

MEL Framework Starter Kit

Seven questions to ask before you commission a monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework — or any evaluation work.

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Audience	Funders, programme managers, MEL leads
Use it for	Pre-commissioning conversations and scoping
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WHY THIS EXISTS

Most MEL frameworks fail in the same way

We have designed and audited monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems for funders, INGOs, social enterprises, and government programmes for the last twenty years. Most of them fail in predictable ways — and most of those failures could be prevented in the first conversation.

This is the conversation we wish every programme team had with themselves *before* they hire an evaluator. Seven questions. If you can answer them clearly, you are ready to commission. If you cannot, the questions tell you exactly what to figure out first.

Use this with your team. Use it with your funder. Use it with us.

1. What decision will this evidence inform?

If the answer is 'we just need to know how the programme is doing,' you are not ready. Every measurement decision — what to count, how to count it, who to ask, how often — should be traceable to a specific decision someone will make. *Continue or shut down? Scale or hold? Switch geographies? Add a component?* Be specific.

2. Who will use the findings, and what does 'useful' look like for them?

A funder reading a 60-page evaluation wants different things from a programme manager who needs to brief a board next week. Name the audiences. Describe what each one will do with the findings. The shape of the evaluation should follow the shape of the use, not the other way around.

3. What is the smallest amount of evidence that would change your mind?

If your answer is 'nothing would change my mind,' you do not need an evaluation, you need a stakeholder report. If you can describe a finding that would honestly cause you to redesign the programme, you are ready to commission an evaluation that is worth the money.

4. What does the existing data already tell you?

Before commissioning new fieldwork, audit what you already have. Programme MIS, partner reports, household surveys, admin data. Most programmes are sitting on more data than they realise and have not asked it the right question. New fieldwork should fill gaps the existing data cannot, not duplicate what is already there.

5. What is the unit of analysis — and why?

Household? Individual? Village? Block? Facility? The unit you pick determines the sample size, the cost, the field design, and what claims you can make. The most expensive mistake we see is teams who pick a unit because the data is easy to collect, not because it matches the question they are asking.

6. What languages do the respondents actually speak?

Not the official state language. The actual language people use at home. If your instrument needs to work in Ho, Santhali, Khasi, or Bhojpuri but it has only been piloted in standard Hindi, you have not piloted it. Multilingual instrument development is the difference between data you can use and data you have to throw

away.

7. How will the findings get into the room where decisions happen?

The single biggest predictor of whether evidence influences policy is whether someone in the room cares about it before the report is written. If your evaluation does not have a named champion inside the implementing organisation, plan for the report to be archived and forgotten. Build the dissemination strategy at the start, not at the end.

WHAT NEXT

If you got stuck on any of these

Most programme teams get stuck on at least three of these questions. That is normal. The questions are designed to be uncomfortable, because the discomfort is information.

If you want to talk through any of them with us, we offer a free 30-minute discovery call. No sales pitch. We will tell you honestly whether your question is one we can help with, and if it is not, we will point you to someone who can.

Book a free 30-minute discovery call calendar.app.google/T5wTniVtLTGxzoje9

Or read more from us

Sample work — pinpointventures.in/work.html

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