Using Results-Based Approaches
in Global Citizenship Education / Development Education

A Practical Toolkit

IDEA
IRISH DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Updated for the 2027 Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Grants Round (Nov. 2026)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction → 03
Building a Results Framework → 05
Overall Project Goal → 07
Project Timeframe → 10
Outcomes → 11
Planned Outputs/Activities → 16
Performance Indicators → 19
Baselines, Targets & Results → 24
Data Source, Collection Method & Frequency Of Measurement → 27
Review and Troubleshooting → 28
Resources → 29

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

This toolkit has been developed from IDEA's work on measuring the results of Development Education (DE)/ Global Citizenship Education (GCE)[1] projects. Since 2012, Irish Aid-funded DE projects have been obliged to demonstrate measurable results. Irish Aid states, '*Planning for results requires supportive, comprehensive and integrated systems for budgeting, monitoring and reporting which are appropriate for the organisation concerned, taking size, scale and focus of the project into account.*' [2] Irish Aid's strong emphasis on results has brought benefits by encouraging critical reflection about what we do, why we do it, how we do it and how we can improve. At the same time, the emphasis on results puts pressure on organisations that work towards long-term, complex change, as this type of work does not fit easily into standardised models for results-based approaches. IDEA has attempted to create an approach that balances the need to deliver results with the need to do justice to the complex learning that takes place in DE/GCE.

This toolkit is aimed primarily at organisations involved in Irish Aid's Global Citizenship Education Grants programme. In previous years, this programme covered one-, two- and three-year grants, and the toolkit contained guidance for both annual and multi-annual applications. However, for the 2027 round, Irish Aid have stated that applications can be submitted for one-year projects only. Multi-annual applications are not being accepted in this round.[3] Therefore the 2027 toolkit has been adapted for a grant timeframe of one year.

This toolkit uses the format and language required for the GCE Grant 2027 application, and addresses the particular challenges associated with formulating and achieving 'results' within one year and with a relatively modest budget (the average grant from the GCE grants scheme last year was €63,450 per annum).[4]

It also assumes that the proposed project is primarily educational in nature. However, the toolkit is transferable to other contexts and we encourage you to use it in any situation in which it is helpful.

In the following pages, IDEA provides practical guidance based on our understanding of Irish Aid's approach to results in their GCE Grants application form. It is important to note that the toolkit does not necessarily express the opinions of IDEA or of its members about the benefits and drawbacks of using results-based approaches in DE/GCE. It also should be noted that this brief toolkit confines itself to the specific task of helping users to complete the Results Framework in the Irish Aid GCE Grants application. It does not attempt to explore many interesting and varied contexts in which results-based thinking can be applied. Finally, the toolkit generally uses the term 'Global Citizenship Education' (rather than Development Education) in order to align with the Irish Aid grant application form and related documents.

IDEA recognises that some actors prefer the term 'Global Citizenship Education' and some prefer the term 'Development Education', but for the purposes of this toolkit, the distinctions are not of significance, and the same advice applies equally to GCE and DE projects. For an overall framework of quality educational and organisational practice in this area, see the *Code of Good Practice for Development Education* (IDEA, 2019).

1 The name of the Irish Aid fund in 2022 changed from 'Development Education' (DE) to 'Global Citizenship Education' (GCE).

2 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Application Form, p15.

3. Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Application Form, p. 2

4. From the Irish Aid website, which states that a total of €2,030,400 was granted to 32 organisations for 2026 (this does not include DEAR Co-Funding Grants). The range of GCE grants was from €16,000 to €160,000 per annum. See the *2026 GCEU Partners Funding PDF*.

What does a 'results-based approach' mean?

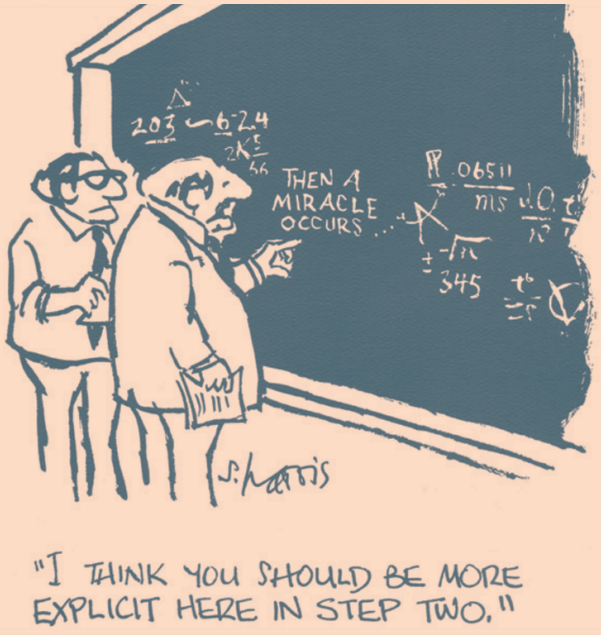
A 'results-based approach' is about describing the change you wish to create, and then mapping out the steps in the journey towards reaching this change. This is demonstrated in a 'Results Framework' (RF).

In order to build an effective Results Framework, you need to be knowledgeable about the internal and external contexts of your work, and you need to possess a strong understanding of how change happens in your targeted area. You need to set out a 'results chain' which demonstrates how your desired changes will be achieved. A very basic results chain looks like this:



Change happens in different ways in different contexts. Also, it is important to recognise that the 'results chain' is an analogy or conceptualisation, and that in reality, change rarely happens in a strictly linear way. Instead, change is a complex process involving sideways and even backward steps as well as a progression forward.

Do not worry if your results chain looks a bit different from ones you may see in how-to guides (including this one). What you do need to ensure, though, is that there is a logical thread running through the chain, with clear causal links, and no huge or unexplained leaps of faith.



BUILDING A RESULTS FRAMEWORK

The Results Framework in the Irish Aid GCE Grants Application (Annex A) looks like this:

PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK											
ORGANISATION NAME											
OVERALL PROJECT GOAL											
PROJECT TIMEFRAME											
OUTCOMES	PLANNED OUTPUTS / ACTIVITIES	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGETS AND RESULTS							DATA SOURCE, COLLECTION METHOD AND FREQUENCY OF MEASUREMENT
				YR 1 TARGETS			YR 1 RESULTS [4]				
INNOVATION CHALLENGE FUND [5]											

Irish Aid expects applicants to demonstrate a *'clarity of understanding on how the outputs and activities of the proposed project will lead to the achievement of the project's desired outcomes and contribute to the overall goal.*[6]

The RF is where you need to demonstrate this understanding and where you will need to set out the logical flow from activities to results to goal.

Irish Aid states: '*There must be a clear logic of intervention between*: (i) *the intended target group*; (ii) *how the intervention will address the target group; (iii) what change the intervention is expected to achieve*'.[7]

4 The 'Results' columns are left blank at the application stage and are completed at end of project reporting stage only. **Do not complete at application stage**. See Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Application Form, Annex A , Note 1. This footnote applies to all copies of the Results Framework included in this document.

5 Irish Aid states: '*To be considered for the Innovation Challenge Fund, please use specific outcome and outputs*'. Irish Aid GCE Application Form 2027, Annex A, Note 2.

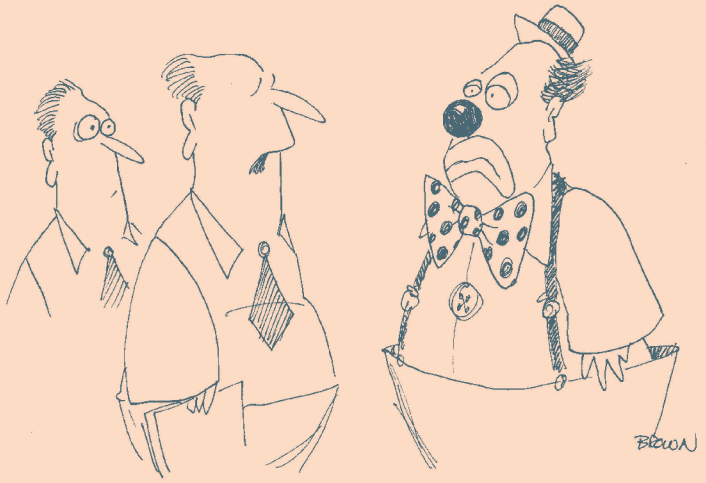
6 Irish Aid GCE Grant Application Form 2027, p.15

7 Irish Aid GCE Grant Application Form 2027, p.15.

It is important to spend adequate time reflecting on the substance of the three points above in the context of your proposed project. The choices that you make when creating your results framework will direct how your organisation will allocate human and financial resources over the lifespan of the project. Irish Aid notes that this process should lead to the *'prioritisation of the results which the organisation has achieved in the proposed project.'* [8]

There is a maxim that 'what gets measured, counts' and it is worth ensuring that what you propose to track and measure in your results framework is what is truly important to your project and to your organisation's broader goals. In addition, you must ensure that your proposed project contributes to the Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy (2021 – 2025). As stated in the Guidelines for Applicant Organisations *'Irish Aid provides annual funding for Global Citizenship Education projects to implement specific, innovative, results-focussed initiatives that contribute to the achievement of the goal, outcome and outputs of the Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021 – 2025.'* [9]

The following sections of the toolkit will take you through each heading of the RF.



"When we said to be creative with your grant proposal presentation, this is not what was meant."

8 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Application Form, p.15.

9 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Guidelines for Applicant Organisations, p.2.

OVERALL PROJECT GOAL

The 'Overall Project Goal' is highlighted below:

PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK						
ORGANISATION NAME						
OVERALL PROJECT GOAL						
PROJECT TIMEFRAME						
OUTCOMES	PLANNED OUTPUTS / ACTIVITIES	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGETS AND RESULTS		DATA SOURCE, COLLECTION METHOD AND FREQUENCY OF MEASUREMENT
				YR 1 TARGETS	YR 1 RESULTS	

Your first step is to articulate the overall goal of your programme.

The overall goal of your proposal should describe a substantial change for your target groups that will happen, in due course, as a result of your organisation's work. There is always a bit of a balancing act here between ambition and accountability. You need a goal that carries a reasonable level of significance, but you also need to ensure that you are capable of making some measurable progress towards it during the one to three year timeframe.

In the notes on the 2027 GCE Grants Application Form, Irish Aid provides the following guidance for 'Project Goal': *'This is the high-level statement that provides overall context for what the project is trying to achieve. The overall goal should describe a substantial change for the chosen target groups that will result from the project and should contribute to the implementation of the Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021–2025.* [10]

Your overall project goal needs to lie within the parameters of the Strategic Goal of the *Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021–2025* (on page 13 of the Strategy): 'That people in Ireland have access to quality, lifelong Global Citizenship Education, enabling them to become active global citizens committed to a fairer and more sustainable future for all.' As this is such a broad goal, it is very likely that your project can be situated within it without difficulty. In fact, the Irish Aid goal may be useful to you in articulating your project's goal.

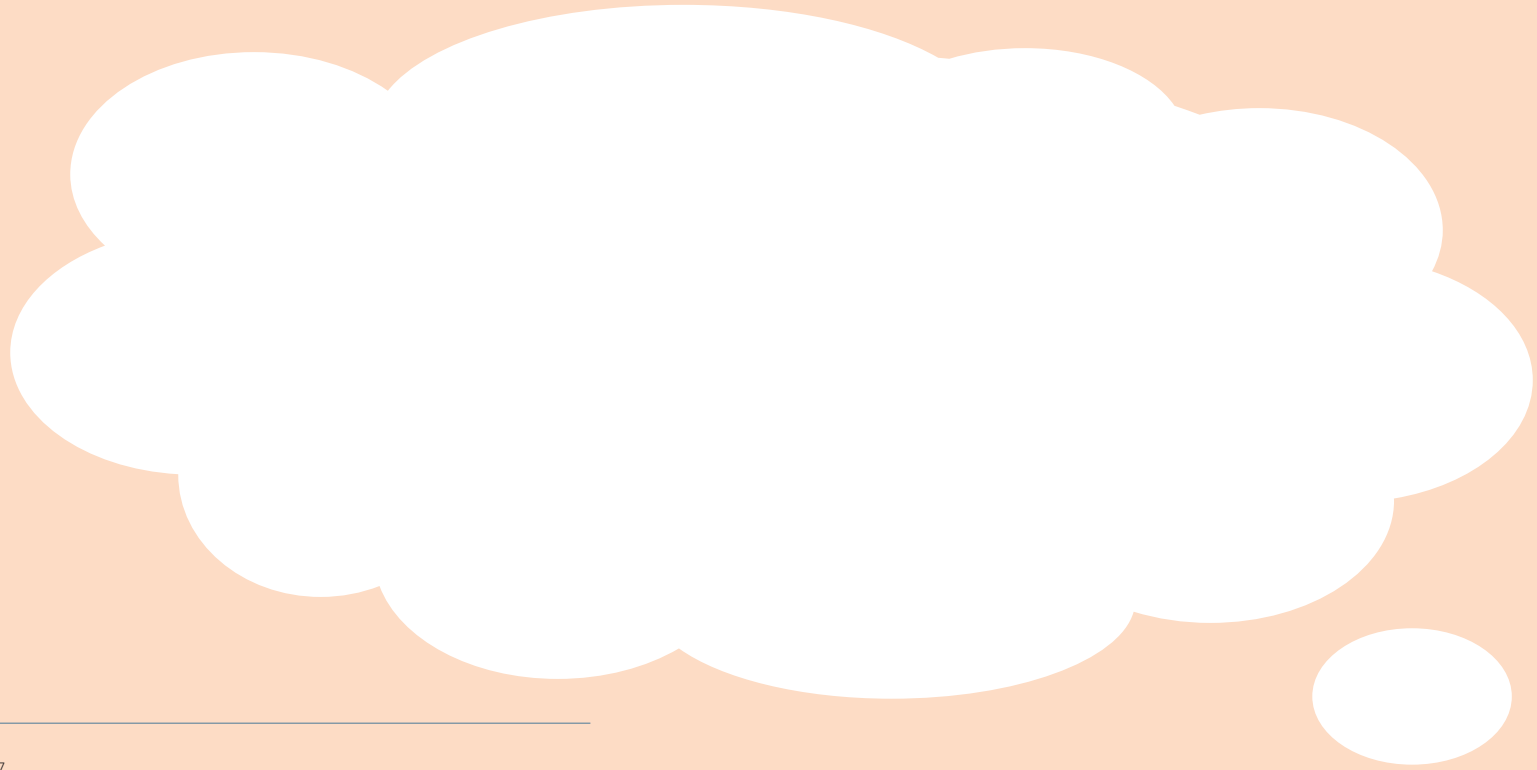
For most organisations, this big picture of change does not change from year to year. Despite being funded in the current grants round for a 12 month timeframe, many GCE Grants projects are conceived on a scale of many years. In other words, their project work does not go into fresh territory every year, but builds on work accomplished in the previous year. If this is your case, you can use the same overall goal that you used in the previous year, perhaps adapting the language slightly to reflect your achievements thus far.

10 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Application Form, p. 15

In the narrative portion of the application (Section 3: Strategic Approach), you are asked about your organisation's Strategic Plan, including your organisation's strategic objectives and how they relate to the Irish Aid GCE Strategy 2021–2025.[11]

You can use your response to this question to help articulate the goal for your RF. However, you will need to change from the language of planning to the language of results (see language point on page 9).

Sometimes it helps to visualise the goal. Think... if you had adequate time and resources, what would you achieve? What would success look like?? Sketch it out in the space below.



11 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Application Form, p 6 – 7.

Try to write the goal as briefly and simply as possible. You do not need a lot of detail here; the detailed components of the goal belong in the 'Outcomes' section. For the purposes of the Irish Aid RF, the goal is there to 'set the scene' for your long-term aims. A simple example of a goal could be: 'Primary school pupils in our region act as informed global citizens.'

It often is helpful to write down a few possible versions of your goal, and then leave it aside until you have done some work on your outcomes, and then come back and tweak the goal.

LANGUAGE POINT
Use the language of results when writing your goal (*'Primary pupils act as informed global citizens...'*) rather than the language of planning (*'To empower primary pupils...'*)

Our Goal

PROJECT TIMEFRAME

The 'Project Timeframe' is highlighted below:

PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK						
ORGANISATION NAME						
OVERALL PROJECT GOAL						
PROJECT TIMEFRAME						
OUTCOMES	PLANNED OUTPUTS / ACTIVITIES	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGETS AND RESULTS		DATA SOURCE, COLLECTION METHOD AND FREQUENCY OF MEASUREMENT
				YR 1 TARGETS	YR 1 RESULTS	

This is a simple section consisting of just one line (Row 6 in the excel version of the RF spreadsheet). Give the start and finish date for your proposed project. Applications must have a start date on or after 1 April 2027 and not later than 1 September 2027. Projects must be completed by 31 August 2028.

12 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Guidelines for Applicant Organisations, p.5.

OUTCOMES

The 'Outcomes' field is highlighted below:

PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK						
ORGANISATION NAME						
OVERALL PROJECT GOAL						
PROJECT TIMEFRAME						
OUTCOMES	PLANNED OUTPUTS / ACTIVITIES	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGETS AND RESULTS		DATA SOURCE, COLLECTION METHOD AND FREQUENCY OF MEASUREMENT
				YR 1 TARGETS	YR 1 RESULTS	

Once you have your overall project goal stated, you need to be able to break down this high-level statement into more specific, achievable, measurable 'small goals'. These are the benefits or changes which you expect to happen as a result of your work, and which will ensure that you make progress towards your goal. There are a number of benefits to thinking in terms of these 'small goals', including an increased clarity about the change you seek to create, and a greater understanding about how your activities help to achieve your desired change.

If you sketched out your goal as a picture in the previous section, then go back to that visualisation and think about the various scenes that would be taking place within the picture.

Think: Who is doing what differently? How, where and when are they doing it? For example, if you envisioned a scene in which primary pupils became more active citizens, what are the details of the scene? Try sketching out what a picture of success would look like. Describe what is happening in the notes area.

WHO is doing *WHAT* differently? How, where and when are they doing it?

These small goals are 'outcomes', which Irish Aid defines as '*the benefits or changes which you expect to happen as a result of your work or interventions, and which will ensure that you make progress towards your goal. They should be specific and achievable, and written in the language of results.*'[13]

Therefore, in the 'outcomes' column you need to articulate what specific changes have to occur in order to make progress towards your goal.

In results-based thinking, you need to focus not on what you did but instead on the changes in your target groups as a result of your interventions. You have to be able to think past a successful delivery of your activities (outputs) and look to what your target group is able to do as a result of your work (outcomes). This is probably the most important aspect of Results-Based Thinking. Once you have shifted the focus to the outcomes of your activities, you are well on your way to creating a successful Results Framework.

Formulating outcomes can be challenging because outcomes are not standardised. Outcomes can look or feel different to different target groups and in different contexts. Furthermore, outcomes don't happen suddenly in one 'ah-ha' moment; outcomes develop through small increments. Sometimes it is helpful to distinguish between short, medium and long-term outcomes. To take an example of a GCE learning programme for teachers, you could have a range of outcomes:

Short-term
Teachers report that their GCE knowledge and skills have increased as a result of your programme.
Medium-term
Teachers integrate material from your programme into their classroom practice.
Long-term
Teachers develop and implement their own GCE initiatives.

Given this range of outcomes, how do you decide what type of outcome to use in the 'Outcomes' column in your GCE Grants RF? This is a difficult question, and it reveals inherent challenges in using outcomes in the context of a one year grant timeframe. Outcomes take time to happen. It takes time for you to plan and implement activities and then it takes time for participants to change as a result of these activities: firstly, in terms of their level of knowledge, skills and confidence, and secondly in terms of how they apply their learning, and so on. Therefore, it is not realistic to expect many long-term outcomes if the timeframe is only one year. As the grant timeframe for the 2027 round is one year only, most outcomes in your RF table could be expected to be medium-term outcomes.

How many outcomes should an annual RF contain? In the 2027 application form, Irish Aid suggests a '*limited number of outcomes*'[14] and provides space for up to five outcomes[15] on the Results Framework Spreadsheet. This is a good guideline, but bear in mind that this table was originally designed for use in both multi-annual and annual projects., and that multi-annual projects would usually contain more outcomes than an annual project. If you articulate too few outcomes, you may make your project seem insubstantial, and if you articulate too many, your project may seem to lack coherence.

Ideally, each outcome should cover a different aspect or level of the overall change that you will need to create in order to achieve your 'picture of success'. For example, one outcome might deal with changes in teachers, another with changes in students and a third with institutional change. The institutional change might be very small over the course of just one year (for example, one new policy might be adopted) but it is still worth tracking this important element of change, especially if you hope to build it into a future project's baseline.

Try to avoid a compound outcome, e.g. '*Young people increase their knowledge about international debt and take actions at EU level*', as it will be too difficult to measure. It is better to have two separate outcomes, one around increased knowledge levels and another around the actions taken.

13 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Application Form, p. 15

14 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Application Form, p. 15

15 Not including the row for the optional 'Innovation Challenge Fund', which would require its own outcome, see Irish Aid GCE Grant Application 2027, Annex A, Note 2

IDEA's GCE Impact Initiative

IDEA's new *GCE Impact Initiative* will be very useful in supporting applicants to articulate their outcomes.

The GCE Impact Model has three levels -- Intermediate Outcomes, Long-Term Outcomes, and Vision. At Intermediate Outcome level, the model sets out 14 Intermediate Outcomes ranging across Educators, Learners and Organisations. Look through the Intermediate Outcomes and identify the ones which are most relevant to your proposed programme. You then can "personalise" the outcomes to reflect the specific context and content of your work.

LANGUAGE POINT

Use the language of results to describe a change that happened as a result of what you did ('Increased actions taken by...').

Do not use the language of planning ('To increase actions taken by...').

Include as many details as possible about *who* is doing *what*, *where* and *when*.

Remember your outcome should be about your target group and not about you.

Try articulating some outcomes*

**It is crucial to check that there is a clear line of logic between the outcomes and the overall project goal. In other words, if you successfully achieve the outcomes, will they have a collective impact and help you to make substantial progress towards your overall project goal?*

The 'Innovation Challenge Fund'[16] was introduced in the 2022 grant round and is available again in the 2027 round. IDEA encourages applicants to avail of this opportunity to reach new audiences in GCE, try new technologies, implement novel approaches to whole-school GCE, etc. Irish Aid have shared results relating to funding for the Innovation Challenge Fund in the *information on partners funded in 2025 here*. The Innovation Challenge Fund has its own dedicated row in the RF template, with a note stating, '*to be considered for the Innovation Challenge Fund please use a specific outcome and outputs*'.[17]

Articulating an outcome in the Innovation Challenge Fund may prove to be more difficult than for the other outcomes in your project, because innovative projects are inherently less predictable than tried-and-tested ones. When writing your innovation outcome, it is helpful to consider Irish Aid's definition of 'innovation', which sets out four types of innovation: product innovation, process innovation, marketing innovation and organisational innovation.[18] The Guidelines also state that 'funding will be available to support the following forms of innovation:

- Reaching new audiences for GCE in line with our strategic objective to "engage people from the broadest range of backgrounds, including those marginalised from formal education".
- Use of new technologies to engage new learners of all ages in Ireland, including creating links with the Global South.
- Innovation in whole school or whole of innovation approaches to embedding GCE.
- Innovative approaches to monitoring and evaluation.
- Others – partners are invited to set out clearly how their proposed initiative is innovative.[19]

In previous years, Irish Aid released a list of projects that were awarded funding in the Innovation Challenge Fund. The brief description of funded projects may help you to generate some ideas. You can access this brief information on projects awarded funding for the Innovation Challenge Fund at the end of the document listing all GCE projects funded in 2025 here (and similarly for 2024 and 2023 on the main webpage for the Irish Aid GCE grants): *2025 GCEU Partners Funding pdf.*

Your outcome should focus on tracking the change created by the type of innovation you do. For example, if your proposed innovation is a 'process' innovation, then shape your outcome around how using this new process will enhance the impact of your project. Concentrate your outcome on what aspects of your proposed innovation are known (e.g. what target group you are reaching out to, what methodology you are going to experiment with, etc) and describe the 'unknown' elements with as much detail as you can at this stage.

16 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Guidelines for Applicant Organisations, p. 3
17 Irish Aid GCE Grant Application 2027, Annex A, Note 2
18 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Guidelines for Applicant Organisations, p. 3
19 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Guidelines for Applicant Organisations, p. 3

PLANNED OUTPUTS/ACTIVITIES

The 'Planned Outputs/Activities' is highlighted below:

PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK						
ORGANISATION NAME						
OVERALL PROJECT GOAL						
PROJECT TIMEFRAME						
OUTCOMES	PLANNED OUTPUTS / ACTIVITIES	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGETS AND RESULTS		DATA SOURCE, COLLECTION METHOD AND FREQUENCY OF MEASUREMENT
				YR 1 TARGETS	YR 1 RESULTS	

This is a relatively straightforward section. Outputs/activities are what you are going to DO with your allocated resources in order to achieve your desired outcomes. The outputs/activities need to connect logically to the outcomes: If we do X, then our target group should be able to do Y. 'Outputs' are slightly higher-level than 'activities'; Irish Aid describes outputs as '*the shorter term results or product of actions and activities*'.[20] Activities and outputs relate to what your organisation does or provides and not to how the target group changes as a result of your intervention. Irish Aid notes that outputs are 'specific and tangible'; see the 'Language point' on p. 17.

Outputs/activities need to be within your sphere of control. Do not include an output/activity unless you are confident that your organisation will be able to carry it out, barring exceptional unforeseen circumstances. Once you have drafted your outputs/activities, it is a good idea to examine potential risks to their delivery, and to consider how you will safeguard against these risks. A summary of risks, and your mitigation strategies, should be included in your Risk Table in Section 5.3 of the application.

The application form states that you should '*list the relevant project outputs/activities, aligned to the relevant outcome and performance indicator*'.[21] This instruction can lead to some confusion, because for each outcome in the Results Framework Excel sheet, there is one cell for outputs/activities and three cells for performance indicators. Applicants often ask if they should keep the 'outputs/activities' as one cell or should they subdivide it into three, so that each activity is associated with its own performance indicator. A note in the RF states 'there may be a number of outputs/activities linked to one outcome'[22]. You should do what makes the most sense in your particular context. At this stage, just put your ideas for outputs/activities into one cell. When we go on to look at indicators (the next section of this toolkit) you can decide if the outputs/activity cell would be better sub-divided.

20 Irish Aid GCE Grant Application Form 2027, p. 15

21 Irish Aid GCE Grant Application Form 2027, p. 15

22 Irish Aid GCE Grant Application Form 2026, Annex A.

When listing your activities, be specific as possible about what you are doing and who you are doing it with. You are asked to transfer the activities line directly into the budget table (see Application Annex B 'Project Budget'). Therefore, the activity descriptions need to be specific enough to justify the figures that you put in the budget table.

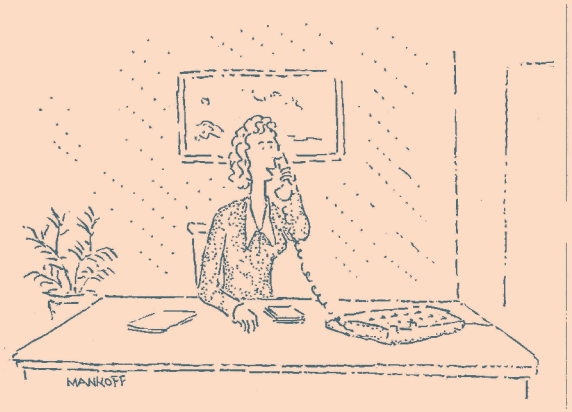
BUDGET TABLE (ANNEX B)

NAME OF APPLICANT ORGANISATION						
PROJECT TIMEFRAME						
PLANNED OUTPUTS /ACTIVITIES	OVERALL COSTS					
(as set out in the Project Results Framework)	Project Personal Costs (€)	Event Costs (€)	Project Transport Costs (€)	Materials/Fees (€)	Total Budget (€)	Irish Aid Contribution (€)
a.	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -		
b.	€ -	€ -	€ -	€ -		

LANGUAGE POINT

Make sure you articulate the activities/outputs in terms of something concrete and specific, not something vague or intangible like 'empowering young people'. Use action verbs — *design, run, research,* etc.

A good way to check if something can be considered an activity/output or not is the 'telephone test': If someone phoned your organisation and wished to speak to Mary, you might say 'She can't come to the phone right now because she is running a workshop'. You would not say 'She can't come to the phone right now because she is empowering young people'.



In the worksheet below, try drafting some outputs/activities related to your outcomes:

OUTPUT/ACTIVITY 1A	LEADING TO OUTCOME 1
OUTPUT/ACTIVITY 1B	
OUTPUT/ACTIVITY 1C	
OUTPUT/ACTIVITY 2A	LEADING TO OUTCOME 2
OUTPUT/ACTIVITY 2B	
OUTPUT/ACTIVITY 2C	
OUTPUT/ACTIVITY 3A	LEADING TO OUTCOME 3
OUTPUT/ACTIVITY 3B	
OUTPUT/ACTIVITY 3C	

Check the logic: Match up activities to the outcomes. Visualise it if you can, and think, if we carried out outputs/activities 1A, 1B and 1C would it be realistic to expect to see good progress towards Outcome 1? If not, why not? It could be:

- *You need an additional activity in order to achieve the outcome*
- *Your drafted outcome may be too ambitious and needs to be scaled back*

Play a bit of back-and-forth; try changing the scope and/or wording of the activities and of the outcomes and see how it looks. Not all of your outcomes will have the same number of outputs/activities. The number of outputs/activities will depend on the nature of the outcome.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The 'Performance Indicators' are highlighted below:

PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK						
ORGANISATION NAME						
OVERALL PROJECT GOAL						
PROJECT TIMEFRAME						
OUTCOMES	PLANNED OUTPUTS / ACTIVITIES	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGETS AND RESULTS		DATA SOURCE, COLLECTION METHOD AND FREQUENCY OF MEASUREMENT
				YR 1 TARGETS	YR 1 RESULTS	

What are indicators?

There is often a lot of confusion around indicators but the idea is actually very simple — an indicator is something that indicates whether or not we are making progress towards our intended outcomes. The word 'indicate' is significant — an indicator is not 'proof', it is just a sign or symptom that is helpful to us. We all use indicators in our everyday lives; for example, someone's temperature is a simple indicator of their overall health. The Irish Aid Application asks applicants to '*identify a small number of indicators that reflect the changes connected with the global citizenship education intervention*'.[23]

You might go back to your sketch/visualisation and ask yourself:

- *How will I be able to tell if I am making progress towards the change I want to happen?*
- *What will I see or hear, or what will other people be able to notice, that will show that a change has occurred in our target groups?*

It might help to imagine what target groups were like before they participated in your programme, and how they are afterwards. Try not to be too 'woolly' when visualising this change; Indicators need to be as SMART as possible — Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound.

Some qualities of strong indicators:

- An indicator should link clearly to your outcome.
- An indicator should be practical to assess. You need to ask yourself if your organisation has the time, skills and money to gather the necessary information.
- An indicator should be responsive to change and should be capable of accommodating the different ways in which change can happen. Don't box yourself into a binary (yes/no) indicator.
- An indicator should be relevant and important to your stakeholders. If possible, ask them if they see it as a valid measure of what they think the project is trying to achieve.

23 Irish Aid GCE Grant Application Form 2027, p. 15

An indicator should be GDPR-compliant. Make sure that the indicator does not rely on you collecting information that you will not be able to store and share.

Indicators need to be directly linked to baseline information, targets and data collection methods (see next sections of this toolkit)

Some questions to consider

Quantitative and/or Qualitative? Quantitative indicators are numerical and address such questions as, How many? How much? or, How often? Qualitative indicators are descriptive, drawing on people's perceptions and experiences, and address such questions as How? Why? In what way?

In our everyday life, we routinely draw on both quantitative and qualitative assessments of how well something is progressing, so it is only natural that we would do this in our RFs. Quantitative and qualitative indicators should be mutually supportive, so as to build up a composite picture of change. There is a wise maxim: 'No number without a story, no story without a number.'

Perception-based indicators? Some people may argue that perception-based indicators are not sufficiently robust, but realistically they are one of the most effective ways to measure educational change, particularly in the short timeframe of a one-year grant. For example, an indicator in a project for youth leaders could be: Change in youth leaders' level of confidence in working with global justice issues.

How to set indicators

Start out by making a list of all possible indicators. If possible, chat with target groups so that you can get an idea of what success 'looks like' from their perspective. Be creative and think as widely as possible, so that you produce indicators that reflect different aspects of your work and the effects it may have. If you used any of the 14 Intermediate Outcomes in *IDEA's Impact model* to help articulate your outcomes, you can now return to the model and look at the draft indicators proposed for the Intermediate Outcomes you used. Whilst these draft outcome indicators are very much a work-in-progress, they can provide a structure upon which you can build your indicators. You should adapt the indicators to reflect the specific context and content of your work. The indicators are available to IDEA members on the *GCE impact tool platform* or contact IDEA for the list of indicators.

If you have worked previously with RFs, take a look at your indicators from your most recent RF. If some of your previous indicators have served you well and are still relevant to your proposed new programme, by all means use them again, tweaking where necessary. You also can avail of independent 'indicator banks' but be prepared to modify to fit your own context. You will now have a longlist of possible indicators.

You can narrow down your selection using the AIMS acronym:

- *Action-focused.* Indicators should inform action. If you can't imagine what you would do with the indicator data once you have collected it, it probably would not be worth collecting it.
- *Important.* It is only worth measuring what people care about and is relevant to them.
- *Measurable.* The data for an indicator needs to be collectable in a practical and relatively easy way — e.g. through surveys, interviews, user records.
- *Simple*. The indicator needs to be clear and direct enough to be understood by all stakeholders.

Go through your list of possible indicators. You can use the 'AIMS' matrix below to compare indicators. It is not necessary to measure everything that is going on in your project. Instead, focus on the simplest ways that will show what direction your project is headed in. Keeping it simple is especially important in smaller projects. Remember if you have too many indicators, you will not have time to gather, record and analyse all the data, and your users may get fed up with being surveyed too many times. But if you have too few indicators, you may not capture the full range of your outcomes. When choosing your indicators, make sure you have a good mix of quantitative and qualitative.

Beside each indicator add a score of 1 Low – 3 High for each attribute.

POSSIBLE INDICATOR	ACTION-FOCUSED	IMPORTANT	MEASURABLE	SIMPLE	TOTAL SCORE

If you have used some of the indicators in previous years, take a bit of time now to think how they could be adjusted slightly to reflect any changes in contexts or in your desired outcomes.

LANGUAGE POINT
Indicators need to be neutral.
State 'change in level of awareness'.
The 'increased' goes into the target.

Terms to use in indicators:
The level of... The extent to which...
The type of... The number of...
The ability to... The percentage of...

The Guidelines for Applicant Organisations set out the data that is required in progress reports: numbers reached by gender, geography, and target group.'[24] This data is used by Irish Aid to map the overall provision of DE/GCE throughout Ireland. Once you have drafted your indicators, check that this information, as far as possible and appropriate, is included.

Efficient Use of Data

When selecting indicators, it is worth considering data that you will need to collect anyway. Please note that in your annual progress report to Irish Aid, you will need to provide the following information[25]:

- Numbers directly reached during reporting period broken down by target group: Primary students, Post-Primary students, Primary teachers (CPD), Post-Primary teachers (CPD), Student teachers (Primary), Student teachers (Post-Primary), 3rd level students (other than student teachers), Young people (18–25, non-formal), Adult learners (non-formal), Youth workers, ACE educators, Other
- Numbers indirectly reached
- Institutions supported/Partnerships including primary schools, post-primary schools, HEIs, CSOs (please grade as 'co-operation, 'collaborative' or 'partnership for collective impact' or other, please define)
- Knowledge products produced — please distinguish between new and updated products and append a list (books, other printed materials, videos/podcasts, other on-line materials, journal articles, games)

If you can incorporate any of the relevant information listed here into an indicator, you will be making efficient use of your data collection capacity. However, please note that the data listed here is purely quantitative. For the purposes of your RF, this quantitative data should be complemented by a qualitative element, e.g. if you are collecting data on number of youth workers reached, you also should collect data on changes in their knowledge, skills and/or attitudes.

Another factor to consider when articulating indicators is that partners in receipt of Irish Aid funding of over €50,000 will be required to provide '*a short case study which they consider best illustrates the results or impacts of their projects focusing on a relevant setting, for example a specific school, HEI, youth group, organisation in the ACE sector or other.*'[26] If you are obliged to collect a case study, you could incorporate this into an indicator, for example you are working on an institutional partnership, you could have an indicator that tracks movement on the 'partnership scale' (as per the third bullet point above) and also include a case study of one partnership that moved 'up the scale'. Please note that the case study focuses on the *results/impacts* of your project and is not a description of the activities, e.g. a specific event. The IDEA Quality and Impact working group developed a template to gather case studies of impact from the IDEA membership. These questions are available from IDEA and a selection of case studies are on the *IDEA website*.

Common Mistakes with Indicators

Formulating indicators can be tricky and it is easy to make mistakes. Irish Aid produced a helpful document entitled *Common RF Mistakes 2018*, which is based on RFs submitted in the 2018 Annual Grant Round. It is worth looking at these examples which are still relevant, to ensure that you do not make similar errors.

Problems with indicators include:

- Choosing indicators that are not SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound). You should not use words that are vague and open to widely different interpretations.
- Choosing indicators that do not clearly relate to the desired outcomes.
- Choosing indicators that do not provide sufficient evidence that the desired outcome has been achieved (e.g. using a number of hits to an educational website to measure increased DE capacity in teachers).
- Listing the data collection method (e.g. survey, participant feedback) as the indicator without stating what the data collection method is actually measuring.
- Confusing an indicator with the actual outcome — remember that an outcome is a change that is meaningful in itself and an indicator is simply a **sign** that shows that progress towards the desired change has occurred.

24 Irish Aid GCE 2027 Guidelines for Applicant Organisations, p.8 – 9

25 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Guidelines for Applicant Organisations, p. 9

26 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Guidelines for Applicant Organisations, p. 9

A final comment on indicators brings us back to the point discussed in the 'Outputs/Activities' section (page 16) about aligning activities with indicators: once you have some indicators listed for each outcome, you can see whether or not it makes sense to sub-divide the output/activity cell.

For example, if your Outcome One relates to empowering youth workers, and its associated activity is an eight-week course, you may have three indicators but they all are giving you information about the performance of the one course. In that case, leave the activity cell as one. If, on the other hand, your Outcome One relates to empowering youth workers, and you are planning three separate activities to achieve this outcome (e.g. a one-day course, a peer-support system, and an online conference), each with their own distinct performance indicators, then sub-divide the activity cell into three (you may need someone who is familiar with Microsoft Excel to help you to do this!). This can be important if you think that you might drop one activity if you do not receive full funding; if this happens, then you can drop the associated indicator when you drop the activity. Whatever you do, be guided by what makes sense and what will help an external reader to understand the logical link between activities and indicators.

BASELINES, TARGETS AND RESULTS

'Baselines, Targets and Results' are highlighted below:

PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK						
ORGANISATION NAME						
OVERALL PROJECT GOAL						
PROJECT TIMEFRAME						
OUTCOMES	PLANNED OUTPUTS / ACTIVITIES	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGETS AND RESULTS		DATA SOURCE, COLLECTION METHOD AND FREQUENCY OF MEASUREMENT
				YR 1 TARGETS	YR 1 RESULTS	

Baselines

Baselines are your starting point and will allow you to measure progress against your selected performance indicators. A baseline has to fit hand-in-glove with your indicator. If you followed the 'AIMS' criteria for selecting indicators (see previous section) then you should be able to identify relevant and measurable baseline data. Remember, there is no point in laboriously collecting baseline and follow-up data about some aspect of your work that does not say something meaningful about your progress towards your outcomes and overall goal.

If your proposed project is an extension of work you are already doing, then setting up a baseline is fairly straightforward. In theory, last year's target, having been fulfilled, becomes this year's baseline. If you are fortunate enough for this to be the case, congratulate yourselves. If not, do not panic. Often, we have incomplete data sets, or data that does not correlate exactly with what we intended to collect (this often happens when we are relying on a partner organisation to collect data for us). Just look through last year's report and ask yourself: What data contained here gives a good picture of where we are now, and is relevant to where we want to be at the end of next year? Provide as much detail as possible. Organisations usually have much more data available than they realise. Act like a detective to find some stored data that will give you a sense of where you are at the start of the project.

If your indicator relates to the level of learning amongst individual learners, and if you are working with a new cohort of learners each year, you have to be careful that you do not put last year's target as this year's baseline. For example, if your target group is Transition Year students, you will have a new intake

of students this year and they cannot be expected to start at the level of knowledge at which last year's class finished! In this type of situation, use the same baseline as last year and put in a footnote which states that this is for a new cohort of learners. However, you must ensure that not all of your baselines follow this pattern; the donor will be looking for 'progression' amongst other indicators.

What should you do if your proposed project covers a totally new area of work for your organisation? You could use a proxy baseline, which is a figure borrowed from another organisation that has worked on a similar project. If there really is no data available, then include some data (as specific as possible) that demonstrates that you have adequately researched your context and have identified a gap in provision which justifiably should be filled.

In Irish Aid's 'Common Results Frameworks Mistakes 2018' you can see examples of baselines which are characterised by 'insufficient data or vague incomprehensible text.'[27]

Targets

Targets are a way of expressing the level you wish to achieve in relation to your outcome. The GCE Grants application advises applicants to *'Identify a small number of targets that are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) to show what achievement will look like and are clearly aligned to the indicators.'*[28]

Your targets need to be connected to the baseline so that progress is visible. However, most projects change from year to year (this is a good thing — it demonstrates that you are responding to formative feedback and to a changing social context), so do not worry if you are measuring something slightly different in this year's target, as compared to a baseline that was gathered last year. If this requires an explanation, explain succinctly in a footnote and describe it more fully in the 'lessons learned' (Section 4) part of the narrative.

Do not make all your targets purely numerical. You should have some targets that measure qualitative changes in your participants. The Irish Aid '*Common RF Mistakes*' document criticises RFs that 'only contain targets for numbers reached and which do not contain any targets regarding the depth of engagement or the change in participant knowledge / critical thinking / recognition of global interdependency / attitude / behaviour / professional practice.'[29]

A good solution might be to combine quantitative and qualitative elements, e.g. '60% of participants report an increase of at least 20% on a scale rating their confidence to teach about development issues'.

Be realistic about what you can achieve in a one-year timeframe. Setting targets is a balancing act. You want to make your application look attractive to the donor, but you do not want to make unrealistic promises that you will not be able to deliver. Remember that you will need to fill in the 'Results' column when reporting at the end of the year and you want to avoid having to justify/explain why you did not achieve the target that you set for yourselves. This is particularly important to bear in mind if you are applying for the 'Innovation Challenge Fund', where 'results' are inherently less predictable.

27 Irish Aid, '*Common RF Mistakes 2018*', p. 2
28 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Application Form, p. 16
29 Irish Aid, '*Common RF Mistakes 2018*',

In some cases, baselines may be very high, so your goal may be to simply maintain these high levels with a new cohort of participants. For example, if 95% of participants in your course last year rated it as excellent, it would be unreasonable to expect that this year's participants would rate it even more favourably. In this case, you can keep the target at the same level as the baseline and add a footnote justifying this.

Results

Do NOT complete this column at the application stage — LEAVE IT BLANK! Irish Aid states: '*This column is to be completed at end of year/project reporting and should state the actual progress made towards the targets set out in the project proposal*.'[30]

You do not need to worry about this column until reporting. However, at this stage the 'results' column serves as a useful reminder to set realistic targets — remember that in 12 short months, you will be required to enter the actual result right next to where you are now writing in your target.

30 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Application Form, p. 16

DATA SOURCE, COLLECTION METHOD & FREQUENCY OF MEASUREMENT

Data source, collection method and frequency of measurement are highlighted below:

PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK						
ORGANISATION NAME						
OVERALL PROJECT GOAL						
PROJECT TIMEFRAME						
OUTCOMES	PLANNED OUTPUTS / ACTIVITIES	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGETS AND RESULTS		DATA SOURCE, COLLECTION METHOD AND FREQUENCY OF MEASUREMENT
				YR 1 TARGETS	YR 1 RESULTS	

The guidance notes for this section instruct the applicant to '*state the sources of monitoring data, the methods by which the data was collected and the frequency of the various methods of data collection*'.[31] You need to specify how you are going to collect the data. This can be done through:

- *Questionnaires and Surveys*
- *Interviews*
- *Focus Groups*
- *Case Studies*
- *Diaries*
- *Observations*
- *Web-Based Monitoring* (*e.g. Google analytics*)

Most organisations rely heavily on questionnaires and surveys, as they are useful for collecting information from a large number of participants in an efficient, anonymous way, and if done via online tools (e.g. Survey Monkey) the data can usually be analysed easily. Furthermore, if you use scaled questions (e.g. Likert scales), you can get quantifiable information about people's opinions and attitudes. However, it is worth noting that questionnaires do have some drawbacks. For example, response rates can be low, and they rarely allow for an in-depth exploration of issues.

Different activities in a project may be measured in different ways depending on the length, depth and nature of the engagement with the learner. For some activities the survey may be the best method of data collection, but for other activities it would miss out on potentially valuable qualitative feedback.

31 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Application Form p. 16

You should look carefully at the specific data requirements that you will need for reporting; these are listed on p.8–9 of the Irish Aid Guidelines for Applicant Organisations and are discussed in 'Efficient Use of Data' in the "Indicators' section of this toolkit. If you require data in a specific format for reporting, make life easier for yourself and align this with the data collection methods for your RF.

In previous years, you may have used data collection templates based on Irish Aid's previous Strategy for Development Education (2017 – 2023) and its associated Performance Measurement Framework'.[32] If these templates have served you well, you can continue to use them, adapting them if needed to changing contexts.

Irish Aid is open to innovative methods for tracking progress towards your targets. Indeed, in the guidance notes on the new 'Innovation Challenge Fund', one of the examples is '*innovative approaches to monitoring and evaluation*'.[33] This is an opportunity for you to develop and implement creative tools that are tailored to the needs of your participants and to the context in which you work. If you devise your own tool, remember to explain in the narrative (Sections 2.1 and 2.2) the thinking behind your approach and how you plan to implement your new tools.

If you use a variety of tools, think of how they can enhance and support each other by showing different aspects of the change that has occurred. Also consider how different methods of data collection could provide alternative 'cover' if some of your planned data collection doesn't happen.

There is a wealth of information available in terms of data collection tools; some of these are listed in the Resources section at the end of this toolkit. When choosing tools, it is very important that you have a clear idea about what you want to measure; otherwise you may end up choosing a tool that looks nice but is not fit for your purpose.

Whatever tools you decide to use, be explicit in describing them. The '*Common RF Mistakes 2018*' document notes that in the Data Source and Collection Method column, a number of applications *'tell us that the project will gather evidence without specifically stating what data collection approach will be used*.'[34] Again, it is worth looking at the 'Common Mistakes' document to ensure that you do not make similar errors.

32 Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017–2023 Performance Measurement Framework, Annexes I–VII

33 Irish Aid GCE Grant 2027 Guidelines for Applicant Organisations, p. 3

34 Irish Aid, '*Common RF Mistakes 2018*', p.2

REVIEW AND TROUBLESHOOTING

Congratulations for reaching this stage in the process. Before you finalise your Results Framework, go back over it a few times, and if possible get a fresh pair of eyes to review it.

To reiterate the comments made in the Irish Aid '*Common RF Mistakes 2018*' document, the most common flaws are found in the relationship between the RF columns, for example:

- *Weak logic linking the activities to desired outcomes and goal*
- *Baseline is providing information which does not align with what the indicators or targets are measuring*
- *Targets do not align with what the indicators are measuring*
- *The data collection method outlined is too vague and/or the relationship to the indicators is unclear.*

TIP: Read through the columns horizontally to check that the baseline, indicators, targets and data source/collection method columns are all talking about the same thing.

Finally, it is important to remember that the RF is not an entity on its own but is an integral part of your application. The results framework, narrative and budget need to align with and support each other.

Take the time to proofread and double-check. Try to make it as easy to navigate as possible. Keep it clear and succinct. Your RF should not contain long chunks of text about your project. This text belongs in the narrative.

Make sure that a logical thread runs through the columns and rows of the RF. This will help the donor to understand your project and also will make it easier for you to use the table for monitoring and reporting.

We hope that this toolkit has been useful to you. It has focused on the very specific task of creating a good RF for your Irish Aid GCE Grant application form. However, once the application is sent in, we encourage you to continue to explore how results-based approaches can improve different aspects of your organisation's work.

Feel free to contact IDEA with any questions or comments on this toolkit: *communications@ideaonline.ie*

RESOURCES

IDEA's GCE Impact Initiative was launched in November 2025. Here you will find a review of approaches to measurement, details on the GCE Impact Model, and recordings of trainings on the model.

Irish Aid (2018) 'Common RF mistakes 2018' document

Quality Matters (2013) Impact Measurement

NOTES

→ ideaonline.ie

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