



The Open University

Defra Waste & Resources Evidence Programme  
WR0211 Unlocking the potential of community composting

## Annex 2

### Evaluation Framework

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## 1. Introduction

This document reports on the development of the Evaluation Framework for groups and organisations involved in community based composting. This is part of the project called ‘Unlocking the Potential of Community Composting’ (WRT0211) funded by Defra’s Waste and Resources Evidence programme. The application of the Framework in this project will also allow the project team to evaluate the work of the community composting<sup>1</sup> groups who were involved in designing and testing the framework.

The Evaluation Framework was developed, tested, revised and applied through a series of nine participatory workshops. This document (Annex 2) outlines the processes and activities undertaken in those workshops. Annex 3 reports on the findings from the workshops. The Framework has been further developed as a ‘toolkit’ for practitioners available at [www.valuingcommunitycomposting.org.uk/](http://www.valuingcommunitycomposting.org.uk/)

## 2. Developing the Evaluation Framework

The Evaluation Framework is intended to help community composting organisations to work through and assess how and to what extent their activities bring about social, environmental and economic change. It focuses on inputs and activities that lead to outputs and outcomes and then considers ‘ways of knowing’ these outputs and the more difficult to count yet sometimes more important outcomes, such as changes in people’s attitudes, actions and abilities. The Evaluation Framework was developed specifically for the community composting sector through applying and building upon **nef’s** outcomes measurement and evaluation work as described in *Proving and Improving – a quality and impact tool for social enterprises*<sup>2</sup>.

Findings from our earlier work, profiling and characterising the Community Composting Sector (see Annex 1), showed that many more groups in this sector work informally without legal status compared with the wider community waste sector, suggesting that any evaluation framework needs to be designed to address the needs of resource limited organisations. For example, around 38% of organisations involved in community composting are people working informally in groups or as un-incorporated groups with a governing document. In contrast, the vast majority of organisations in the wider community waste sector are companies limited by guarantee and/or registered charities (Williams et al, 2005). In addition, many community composting groups rely on volunteer working to carry out their activities. Consequently, capacity and resources to carry

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘community composting’ includes groups that collect and/or receive material and carry out the composting as well as community based groups involved in promoting composting within their community.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.proveandimprove.org](http://www.proveandimprove.org)

out evaluation work is often limited and doesn't take place in any structured way. Therefore, in order to be fit for purpose it is important that the Framework incorporates an evaluation process that provides appropriate and meaningful information whilst being straightforward and inexpensive to carry out.

In recent years social accounting and auditing procedures have been developed to enable social enterprises to assess and demonstrate the impact of their activities. The impact and evaluation framework discussed here draws on this approach by incorporating a number of different accompanying tools that have evolved to operationalise the accounting and audit processes. Although organisations in the wider community waste/resource sector, notably furniture re-use, have undertaken social accounting and auditing, research suggests that this approach has not yet been adopted by the groups in the community composting sector. Embarking on the process needs commitment, resources and often some specialist knowledge or experience of evaluation. Consequently, for many community composting groups a full social audit process is currently beyond their capacity and resources. The Framework developed for this project is an evaluation tool that helps groups embark on the first steps towards social accounting in a way that is manageable and useful whether or not a full social audit is planned. What it does is to provide project officers with a process that can be used to involve a range of their stakeholders to identify and measure the most important effects resulting from their activities.

## ***2.1 The Workshops***

The Evaluation Framework was developed and applied through a series of nine participatory workshops. These workshops were structured into Round 1 and Round 2. In Round 1 we developed, tested and revised the Framework itself and in Round 2 utilised the Framework with groups and their stakeholders to identify outcomes, impacts and appropriate ways of measuring these.

### ***2.1.1 Round 1 Workshops***

The Round 1 workshops helped scope the issues facing the sector, by building on earlier work identifying successes and challenges facing groups and how these relate to different schemes. In addition, these workshops provided the opportunity to develop and test an Evaluation Framework for identifying the important activities and specifically the theory of change underpinning the link between the outputs achieved and their resulting outcomes.

#### **Round 1 Workshops - Objectives**

1. To bring together project officers from groups (one or a maximum of two representatives from each project) operating in one of three identified areas of composting, in order to:
  - a) Share experience and learning.

- b) Identify commonality in ways of working.
  - c) Identify contacts for sharing skills and knowledge in the future.
2. Explore the following questions and issues in each workshop (then compare across the workshops):
  - a) What are the different systems that groups are running?
  - b) What are the groups trying to achieve? Consider their story, mission and values.
  - c) What are the social, environmental and economic impacts that they bring about and seek to achieve?
  - d) What issues/problems they face and how these can be addressed?
  - e) Identify key success factors and explore whether these are shared amongst different groups.
3. Outline future aims of the projects.
4. Revise the framework in the light of feedback and the Round 1 workshop findings.

### **Round 1 Workshops - Developing the Evaluation Framework**

The research team were contracted to carry out 3 workshops in Round 1. These were carried out across England to give as wide a geographical and characterisation spread as possible. The workshop locations were also chosen as community composting operating in each of these areas represented different types of collection environments. The locations and 'collection environments' are outlined below:

Exeter – largely rural environments

Sheffield – urban and suburban environments

London – inner city and rural environments

Round 1 workshops were primarily aimed at community composting groups per se and were designed to bring together a large number of representative groups active in carrying out composting. However, where appropriate, local authority officers involved specifically in helping develop community composting initiatives in their area were also invited.

In addition, the research team carried out an additional workshop in Round 1 to contribute to the scoping of barriers and success factors and to test out the questions for the Storyboard exercise (outlined below). The additional workshop was conducted at the Community Composting Network's annual conference in September 2007 and was attended by representatives from groups carrying out different composting activities in their community.

In total the first round of workshops were attended by 55 participants representing 46 different groups. This represents a large proportion (around 40%) of the sector currently active in community composting (see Annex 1).

### 2.1.2 Models of Different Community Composters

Using the data collected earlier in the project (see Annex 1) and the findings from the Round 1 workshops it was clear that certain characteristics could be used to classify different types of community composting activity. The sector is diverse and could be represented by many models, however when focusing on groups dealing with household waste, characteristics can be grouped into five main models that represent most community composting activities. These five models were used as the basis for selecting groups to participate in the Round 2 workshops. The characteristics of each of the models are outlined below:

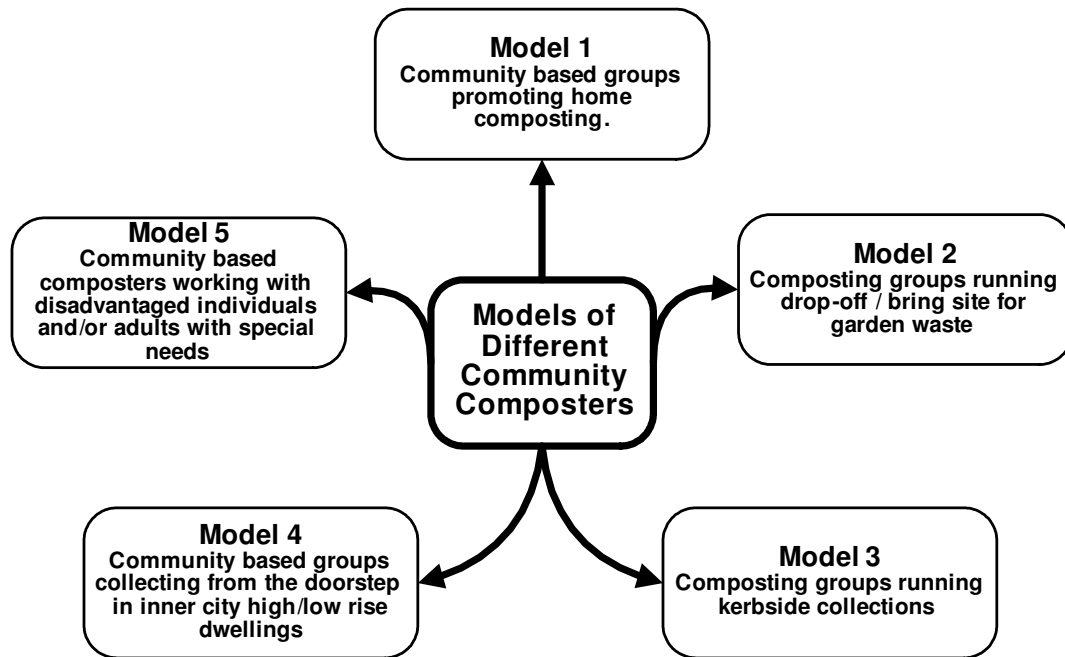


Figure 1 - Five models of community composting used as the basis for selecting groups to participate in Round 2 workshops

**Table 1 - Characteristics of each of the five models of community composting**

| <b>Model 1 - Community based groups promoting home composting.</b>   |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary activity of groups is education of householders and promotion of home composting</li> <li>• May adopt the Master Composter model where volunteers are trained in home composting activity and agree to encourage and support people in their local community to start composting at home or to offer support to people that are already composting but may be having difficulties or need encouragement</li> <li>• Attend and run a variety of events and composting demonstrations</li> <li>• May also supply products for home composting</li> <li>• Heavily reliant on volunteers and an important success factor is the availability of / or accessing funds for a paid employee to coordinate and enable volunteer activities</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Model 2 - Composting groups running drop-off / bring site for garden waste</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out composting and running a small composting site is an important activity</li> <li>• Material for composting is brought to the composting site by householders</li> <li>• Predominantly compost garden waste</li> <li>• Groups may be involved in other related activities (e.g. re-use, recycling)</li> <li>• Community run drop-off sites tend to be most common in rural areas</li> <li>• May run a 'composting club' where householders pay a small fee to take their waste to the site (or it may be collected) and in return receive the composted material for their own use</li> <li>• Typically these groups are heavily reliant on volunteers</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Model 3 - Composting groups running kerbside collections</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out composting and running a small composting site is an important activity</li> <li>• Material for composting is collected by the community group and taken to their own site for processing</li> <li>• Predominantly collect from households and may also include some commercial premises</li> <li>• Garden waste is most commonly collected. Some groups have ABPR approved systems and also collect and process kitchen waste</li> <li>• Groups may be involved in other related activities (e.g. re-use, recycling)</li> <li>• Community run kerbside collections tend to be most common in urban/suburban areas with suitable housing/gardens</li> <li>• May run a 'composting club' where householders pay a small fee to have their waste collected and in return receive the composted material for their own use</li> <li>• Running an effective collection system requires a reliable and robust service and hence requires regular workers. Although these schemes may involve some volunteers they rely on paid staff to provide a regular, quality service.</li> </ul> |

|   |
|---|
| <b>Model 4 - Community based groups collecting from the doorstep in inner city high/low rise dwellings</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out composting and running a small composting site is an important activity</li> <li>• Material for composting is collected by the community group and taken to their own site for processing</li> <li>• Predominantly collect from households and may also include some commercial premises</li> <li>• Kitchen waste is collected for processing in ABPR approved systems</li> <li>• The collection and processing of kitchen waste and use of composted material may be based within an estate (closed-loop)</li> <li>• Groups may be involved in other activities (e.g. re-use, recycling)</li> <li>• Doorstep collections of kitchen waste from high/low rise dwellings are a relatively recent initiative developed in London</li> <li>• Running an effective collection system requires a reliable and robust service and hence requires regular workers. Although these schemes may involve some volunteers they rely on paid staff to provide a regular, quality service.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Model 5 - Community based composters working with disadvantaged individuals and/or adults with special needs</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary activity of groups in this model is to provide a service for disadvantaged individuals and/or groups with special needs</li> <li>• This may be in the form of:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- social interaction and inclusion</li> <li>- training opportunities</li> <li>- communication skills</li> <li>- interpersonal skills</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Groups operating in this model often provide different services for their clients and are involved in a range of activities.</li> <li>• Only a small number are involved in community composting (relatively new area for them)</li> <li>• Focus on garden waste</li> <li>• May run collection service and/or drop-off service</li> </ul>  |

It should be noted that this modelling exercise is comprehensive but not exhaustive. It includes most of the activities carried out by the sector and focuses on groups and organisations involved in specifically composting (or promoting composting of) 'household waste'. It does not include groups involved in composting waste predominantly produced on-site, such as allotments, city farms and commercial premises (e.g. hotels, prisons) as this does not fall under the category of 'household waste'. It also excludes community groups that collect organic waste and take it to a commercial composting site for processing because although the collection element contributes to activity of the community waste sector, carrying out the composting at commercial sites means



it does not fit under the category of community composting. It should also be noted that the five models are not mutually exclusive, and that the activities of some groups may span across the different models. The models provide a useful way of thinking about the activities of different groups in this diversified and complex sector.

### **2.1.3 Round 2 Workshops - Applying the Evaluation Framework**

The Round 2 workshops applied the evaluation framework developed in Round 1. This application was through workshops held with individual groups (identified from the Round 1) and a representative range of their stakeholders, including workers, volunteers, users, local authorities and support agencies. These 2<sup>nd</sup> round workshops focused on the social as well as the environmental impacts of a projects' work and we examined in detail how project officers and other stakeholders associated with a particular project can identify what is important to measure, and how to go about measuring it in a meaningful way.

Each group we worked with in the Round 2 workshops was selected to represent one of the five models outlined above in order to capture the diversity of the sector and explore whether some outcomes and impacts are generic to the sector and whether others are more specific to a particular model. A total of 5 workshops were carried out, each with a different community composting group and a range of their stakeholders e.g. workers from the project, volunteers, users (householders), local authorities, housing association, support agencies etc. See Annex 3 for details of these groups and the workshop findings.

### **Round 2 Workshops - Objectives**

1. To recruit community composting groups that reflect a range of examples of different types of community composting activities as highlighted in the Round 1 workshops (and figure 1 above).
2. To complete a detailed Storyboard for the project incorporating perspectives from the range of the project's stakeholders.
3. To identify the important, yet difficult to measure outcomes of the project's activity, and explore ways of measuring and communicating impact.
4. To use the findings from Objectives 1-3 to feed into development of an Evaluation Framework to help similar groups evaluate and better demonstrate the value of their activities.

### 3. The Evaluation Framework

The Framework is designed to help community composters and their stakeholders map the impact of their activities, so that they can:

- Describe the story (hypothesis) of how the composting and related activities of a project or an organisation bring about not only the short-term outputs and outcomes but also the longer term impacts
- More effectively engage with stakeholder groups so that stakeholders are involved in the process of establishing criteria for success, as well as choosing targets and indicators that are meaningful to them
- Establish a clearer understanding of what needs to be measured and how it can be measured in order that their story can best be told, and that specific measurement tools can be chosen that are fit for the purpose of managing and proving the potential positive impact of their activities.

The framework described below is a process for a workshop to provide structure for a conversation that can be undertaken with a group of project participants and beneficiaries. For a more detailed 'how-to' guide visit the website [www.valuingcommunitycomposting.org.uk/](http://www.valuingcommunitycomposting.org.uk/).

In the Round 2 workshops this process was carried out with specific groups and their stakeholders (5 separate workshops each with a different community composting group). The process is also suitable if you wish to bring together multiple groups to help them learn from others' experiences (as in the Round 1 workshops).

#### **Step One - Storytelling (to identify success factors and common themes)**

Step One provides the structure for participants and stakeholders associated with a particular project to compare their experience of working with or benefiting from a project, as well as to identify what makes it work.

- 1.1 Bring together a group of stakeholders for a meeting. These might be people who affect or who benefit from the community composting project and ideally should include a range of stakeholders with different perspectives and links to the project. These could include: workers, volunteers, users (existing and potential), clients, funders, local authorities, regulators, tenants and housing associations and support agencies.

- 1.2 Divide the group into pairs or threes (ideally grouping people that do not know each other very well). A participant in each group takes turns to explain their involvement / interest in the community composting project. They are then invited to describe a memorable occasion or example of something that happened as part of their involvement, or as a result of the project's work, which demonstrates why they think what goes on in the project is important.
  
- 1.3 The following prompts can be used to structure this conversation.
  - Describe an occasion when you have seen the effect of the composting project's work at its best, or when you have been most proud of something the composting project has achieved.
  - Who was involved, and what do you think made it work?
  - What does the experience tell you about ensuring success in the future?
  
- 1.4 Within each stakeholder group, take turns to allow all participants the opportunity to contribute something from their own experience of the project so that subsequently a broader picture can be built up of the project's priorities and areas of impact.
  
- 1.5 In plenary review the exercise by allowing participants to share (by re-telling) the stories they have just heard. Then in a general discussion record responses to the following questions on a flipchart sheet using the headings described in brackets:
  - What does success look like for each of the projects described in the stories? (Success)
  - What do the stories have in common? (Common themes)
  - Drawing from the experiences described in the stories:
    - a) What lessons are there for how to run successful projects in the future? (Lessons)
    - b) What would need to change to ensure that they are more successful? (Barriers)

## **Step Two - Building a Storyboard**

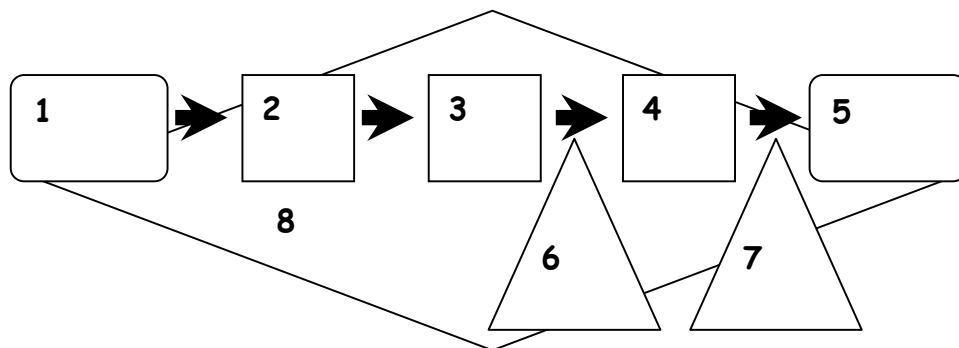
Where Step One drew on individual experience of the project, Step Two provides a way of bringing together that experience to develop a more general narrative for how the project brings about change.

- 2.1 Invite participants to read through the eight questions described in the left hand column of the Table 1. In the light of the discussions had at the end of Stage One, ask them to think about the answers they would give from their particular perspective as worker or volunteer, user or beneficiary

**Table 1 - Questions to Build the Storyboard**

| Questions  | Prompts  |
|--|--|
| 1. Why is the (community based composting/other activities) work carried out by this project important?  | Describe this both in terms of the general <b>need</b> that the project is addressing as well as from your own perspective.  |
| 2. What are the <b>activities and actions</b> that this project runs that you are involved/interested in?  | These will include activities and action around the community based composting, and may also include other activities the project/organisation is involved in (e.g. offering training opportunities, providing a re-use/recycling service). The activities and actions will cover services offered by the project and could also include things like project planning, obtaining resources and involving people in different ways.   |
| 3. What do you consider to be the <b>immediate results</b> of these activities and actions that:<br><br>a) The project has most control over and that are easiest to count<br><br>b) The project has least control over, that are less easy to count but that are nonetheless important?     | These immediate results relate to outputs as a result of activities undertaken. They can relate to physical and quantitative elements of a project (e.g. types and quantity of material composted) as well as the behaviour of people affected by the project.   |
| 4. What do you consider to be the <b>medium term effects/benefits</b> of the immediate results that:<br><br>a) The project has most control over and that are easiest to count<br><br>b) The project has least control over, that are less easy to count but that are nonetheless important? | The 'effects/benefits' relate to the more medium-term impact or changes that come about as a result of the projects activities and immediate results. They can relate to material and physical changes as well as changes in the attitudes, actions and abilities of people involved/affected by the project. At this stage focus on positive changes, but make a note of negative effects as part of question 8 below.  |
| 5. What is the long-term goal of this project?<br>What is the change in the wider world that you hope this project is contributing to?   | Think about the 'wider' and 'bigger' issues that this project is a part of.  |
| 6. What assumptions do we make that mean that the immediate results (3) lead to the medium-term effects (4) of the project?  | Questions 6 and 7 present an opportunity to explore the assumptions that have been made that one change will automatically lead to another. To test the assumptions about those changes you need to be clear what else needs to happen or be part of the experience to make it so.<br><br>For example, providing a service to collect/receive garden waste for composting does not on its own lead to good quality compost being produced; good understanding, knowledge and management of the composting processes is needed to achieve this. |
| 7. What further assumptions do we make that mean the medium-term effects or pre-conditions (4) lead to the long-term goal (5) being achieved?  | Try and describe precisely how each of the more immediate changes will lead to further changes in the future or for a wider group of people. Sometimes asking "Why is that important?" or "So What?" of each thing you mentioned in response to questions 3 and 4 can help with this.  |
| 8. What challenges/barriers could prevent the projects' goals/benefits from being achieved of? Think of:<br><br>a) operational challenges;<br>b) policy/regulation barriers<br>c) other issues   | Use this question to highlight internal and external challenges to the project. Think of this question as a useful opportunity for a reality check.  |

- 2.2 Prepare a large sheet of paper (A3 or larger depending on how many people are taking part in the exercise) by reproducing the blank flow chart diagram as in Figure 2 below.
- 2.3 Having allowed the stakeholders (in pairs or groups) to discuss each of the eight questions in detail (and to do so more in the spirit of a conversation than an interview) invite them to summarise (in note form) their responses in each of the corresponding numbered boxes on the flow chat. You can fill in the boxes in any order, so by all means start with the easy ones. Suggest that participants feel free to add extra comments to boxes as and when ideas occur to people during the conversation.



**Figure 2 - The Storyboard Diagram**

- 2.4 This exercise can be carried out in small groups (perhaps with one person asking the questions and the others describing their understanding of the project) or as part of a larger discussion with a facilitator asking the questions. The exercise is designed so that by answering each question it is possible to build a picture (showing a logical progression, or ‘theory of change’) of how the project’s actions and activities bring about effects in terms of value to beneficiaries from a range of different perspectives. Alongside each question is a prompt that can be used as a guide for this conversation.
- 2.5 If you cannot get everybody ‘in the room’ at the same time, you could take a large version of the flow chart to different venues and on separate occasions invite people to take part, attaching their contributions as and when they are able to do so. This will be much harder to manage, but at least people will see that they are contributing, literally, to a ‘bigger picture’.

## Step Three - Ways of Knowing

Step three involves identifying the most important outcomes resulting either directly or indirectly from the project activities, and suggesting ways of knowing (potential indicators) that those outcomes are happening.

- 3.1 Drawing on the material in the Storyboard (particularly the responses to questions 3 and 4) compile a master list of those things that could be called 'outputs' and a separate list of those things that could be called 'outcomes'. If there are any more 'outputs' or 'outcomes' the participants identify as important but that are not on the Storyboard they too can be added to this list. To help in identifying which is which it may be helpful to refer to the suggested definitions of these terms outlined in Box 1.

### Box 1: What do we mean by outputs and outcomes?

**Outputs** - relate to the direct results of a project's activities. What activities have been carried out in order to achieve the project's aims? Outputs are often stipulated as deliverables by funders.

Examples of outputs are easily countable things - such as the quantity of green waste composted or the amount of compost produced, the number of volunteers involved, the number of householders using the service, the number of hours of training delivered.

**Outcomes** - relate to the longer-term change - such as the effect of a project's activities on the attitudes, abilities or actions of people involved in the initiative or in the wider local community.

Outcomes tend to be less easy to count but are usually more closely aligned to the reasons why the initiative was set up in the first place and consequently constitute what matters most to the people taking part. An obvious example may be the impact of a training exercise in terms of building skills, abilities and confidence, or something less easy to pin down such as the bringing together of local people to work on a project which may in turn have a positive impact on a community in that people make new friends, communicate more, feel more informed and part of their locality.

- 3.2 Prepare a separate piece of flipchart paper with a left hand column headed "Outcomes" and a right hand column headed "Ways of Knowing". List the **outcomes** highlighted in 3.1 and discuss how, as project staff, supporters or beneficiaries you would know that those outcomes are happening. Against each one make a note of these potential 'indicators' in the right hand column. Use this list as the basis for a discussion amongst a project team about what is most important to focus on, and therefore spend time collecting information on in order to show that the project activities are having an effect.

- 3.3 Note that where there are not any obvious indicators for some of the harder-to-pin-down outcomes, it may be possible to justify using an easier to measure **output** as a proxy for

the change. For example, if it is going to be too difficult to demonstrate attitudinal change towards recycling amongst a local population, a case can be made for using a change in the number of requests for recycling bags as an indication (if not proof) that people are thinking differently about recycling.

- 3.4 In order for an evaluation to be useful for the growth and development of the project, the next time a formal survey or informal feedback process is carried out amongst project users it should include questions based on these project-focussed indicators. Even if there is little resource or opportunity for additional data collection exercises to be carried out, it may be that some useful information is already being collected as part of existing day-to-day monitoring, especially in relation to some of the project outputs. Overall the exercise will have explored and hopefully demonstrated how the time, money and hard work invested in the activities and actions of the project potentially bring about the desired outcomes that relate to the mission and values of the people doing the work, and the value to its beneficiaries.

## **A toolkit for practitioners**

The Evaluation Framework outlined above was tested with stakeholders representing different perspectives on five separate composting projects across the country. The projects were chosen to reflect a range of different activities and collection environments. The Framework was then developed into a web-based toolkit for practitioners. Key elements of the toolkit include:

- An overview of an approach to evaluation that looks beyond outputs to outcomes and impact, and why this is important for composting and recycling projects.
- How to make the case for investing more time and resources in measurement that is useful not only to a project team, but to other stakeholders such as volunteers, supporters and funders.
- A how-to guide for organising and running a stakeholder workshop to identify outcomes, and ways of knowing and ways of measuring that those outcomes are happening.
- Case study material from the five Round 2 workshops to show how informal conversations about outcomes can help shape and deliver a formal evaluation process.
- Links to other tools and approaches for measuring outcomes.

The toolkit is available at [www.valuingcommunitycomposting.org.uk/](http://www.valuingcommunitycomposting.org.uk/)