



Monitoring and Evaluation for Effective Ocean Communication

The research and evidence ‘better practice principles’ of the Advancing Strategic Ocean Communication project advocate for the establishment of **effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks**. This guide seeks to help practitioners make the case for adequate resources to be invested in monitoring and evaluation; suggest a monitoring and evaluation framework strategy that can be adapted for campaign use; and set out a list of potential key performance indicators.

At its core, M&E is a structured process of tracking and assessing whether, and how well, your communications are achieving their intended objectives. **Monitoring** is about collecting information in real time, such as media coverage, audience reach or audience responses, to understand whether the campaign is on track. **Evaluation** is about analysing that information to assess impact, i.e. did your messages change awareness, attitudes or behaviours, and to learn what worked, what didn’t and why.

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1 WHY IS MONITORING AND EVALUATION IMPORTANT?

It helps you improve this campaign or comms effort (and the next!) to maximise impact

M&E creates a feedback process that enables campaign teams to reflect on what's working, and what isn't, while there's still time to course-correct. It also builds a bank of insights you can apply to future campaigns, increasing your evidence base and sharpening strategy over time.

It helps you demonstrate impact and report success internally and to funders

Funders and partners want to see that their investment is moving the needle and creating change on the water. While it can be particularly tricky to prove causality from communications campaigns, M&E gives you the tools to demonstrate with clarity and confidence that your work is contributing to an overall intended effect.

It improves campaign efficiency, thus ensuring value for money

We know from experience that communications budgets are often squeezed, so achieving bang for your buck is essential. Feedback from a good M&E process can help ensure you are spending your energy and budget on what works and diverting efforts away from what isn't. Investment in M&E upfront can give big savings in the long term.

It can situate your project in the wider landscape of action and impact

No communications campaign operates in a vacuum. Good M&E helps you understand how your work fits into the bigger picture and where you can align, amplify or differentiate. It can also support collective learning across the sector, having a broader impact on ocean communication effectiveness.

2 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'GOOD' MONITORING AND EVALUATION

There are many different models and frameworks for M&E, and a seemingly endless array of metrics that can be gathered, from social media engagement to nationwide attitudinal polling. Sometimes the options seem so vast that organisations don't know where to start and in some cases this means that they don't start at all.

This guide seeks to offer a practical approach to M&E in ocean communication. We are not suggesting a one size fits all approach, but we are advocating that most organisations can and should be gathering data to improve their campaigns.

By 'good' M&E, we mean an approach to M&E that is purposeful, proportionate and pragmatic for your organisation. We do not recommend research for the sake of research alone. We believe in data collection, analysis and research that provide actionable insight for you, your partners and your campaigns. We recommend asking yourself these three questions as you decide your approach:

Is it PURPOSEFUL?

In all types of research and data collection, we advocate for purposeful data that provides actionable insight. All M&E should link back to the campaign objectives. For all M&E data collected, organisations should ask themselves: How does this insight help us? What does it tell us about the campaign's performance? How might it help us improve our approach? How might it feed into our longer term strategy? You should be clear about *why* you are asking the questions you are asking and gathering the data you are gathering.

Is it PROPORTIONATE?

The level of M&E conducted should be proportionate to the project. While large programmes might develop complex and rigorous M&E approaches, the same level of data collection and insight would not be expected from a small NGO project. Think carefully about what is proportionate and therefore appropriate for the project. Resource-wise, a good rule of thumb is to ringfence 5-10% of the total communication budget for M&E.

Is it PRAGMATIC?

Pragmatism is an important consideration. Organisations and grantmakers must consider what level of M&E approach is feasible, given what they know of the capacity and capabilities of the team. Developing a complex set of indicators for an organisation with minimal experience of M&E is unrealistic and has a higher chance of resulting in data that is unfit for purpose, while a basic but well thought-out approach could be accessible and effective for smaller teams.

3 CAN WE REALLY PROVE EFFECT?

A common challenge in M&E is how we can demonstrate impact, especially in complex communication environments. While it is natural to want to prove that a campaign directly caused a particular change, this is rarely straightforward in practice. It is important therefore to distinguish between **causal attribution** and **causal contribution**. In most strategic communication contexts, causal contribution is the more appropriate and achievable goal.

Causal attribution seeks to establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship between a campaign and observed outcome. Casual attribution essentially claims ‘We did A and B, and that equalled C.’ While it might be possible in tightly controlled environments, this approach is challenging in complex, real-world settings where multiple variables shape audience behavior. In these cases, numerous factors influence outcomes, many of which are beyond the control of any single campaign.

Causal contribution on the other hand recognises that communications efforts take place within a broader ecosystem of influences, including media coverage, policy developments, public discourse, and societal trends. Rather than claiming sole responsibility for a change, this approach focuses on understanding how and to what extent a campaign contributed to a broader shift. This might look like ‘We did A and B, and alongside other efforts and external factors, these actions helped move us closer to achieving C.’

This form of analysis allows evaluators to identify patterns, connections, and plausible links between campaign activities and observed outcomes. It also provides a more realistic and nuanced understanding of effectiveness, which can support learning, adaptation, and strategic decision-making over time. For ocean communicators, aiming for causal contribution offers a more credible and practical way to assess and communicate impact.

4 TWO APPROACHES TO MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As stated above, there are multiple different frameworks for communications M&E, which can be adapted to suit the needs of your campaign and organisation. Below we will set out two potential approaches which you might find useful. The first takes a 'Theory of Change' approach of four steps, taking the user from the initial activity to the 'contributing to' end point, with key performance indicators for each. The second more simple approach breaks M&E into three buckets of activities, measures of performance and measures of effect.

4.1. THEORY OF CHANGE

A Theory of Change is a strategic framework that sets out how and why a communication campaign is expected to lead to its intended outcomes. At its core, it functions like a hypothesis: if certain actions are taken, they are expected to lead to specific changes. M&E helps assess whether those changes are actually occurring, and why.

This model is based on a clear logical sequence of four simple stages, linking campaign activities to longer-term goals:

IF: This stage outlines the specific activities being undertaken: what is being created or delivered, how, and to which audience.

THEN: This describes the immediate expected response from the audience, i.e. the short-term reaction or engagement with the content or activity.

THEREBY: This stage identifies the broader change or effect intended among the target audience over time (e.g. increased understanding or attitude shifts).

CONTRIBUTING TO: This final step connects the campaign to its overarching strategic objective, such as policy change, behaviour change, or public discourse shifts.

To make this model operational for M&E purposes, each of the four steps can be linked to a corresponding evaluation category. These categories help identify what type of data to collect, and where KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) should be assigned.

THEORY OF CHANGE STEP	EVALUATION CATEGORY	FOCUS OF MEASUREMENT
IF	Inputs	Activities or content produced (e.g. number of materials created, events held)
THEN	Outputs	Reach and immediate audience engagement (e.g. views, clicks, likes, shares, demographics)
THEREBY	Outtakes	Audience response or understanding (e.g. feedback, survey results, focus groups), short term behavioural change
CONTRIBUTING TO	Outcomes	Longer-term change (e.g. shifts in public opinion, policy development, behavioural changes, environmental improvement)

The following table suggests example key performance indicators for each stage of a theory of change monitoring and evaluation framework.

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE KPIS
Inputs (If...)	What the campaign produces or delivers	- Number of communication materials created (e.g. videos, reports) - Number of campaign events held - Volume of social media or website content published - Media or stakeholder partnerships established - Budget and staff time allocated to communications
Outputs (Then...)	What reaches the audience, in what numbers, and how they interact with it	- Impressions and reach (social media, email, media) - Engagement rate (likes, shares, comments) - Video views, click-through rates - Website metrics: dwell time, bounce rate - Event attendance figures - Audience demographics reached - Media coverage volume and sentiment
Outtakes (Thereby...)	What the audience thinks, feels, or understands	- Survey results (awareness, understanding) - Qualitative feedback from audience - Sentiment analysis (social media or press) - Focus group or interview insights - Use of campaign language by stakeholders - Search trends or keyword use related to campaign
Outcomes (Contributing to...)	Broader, longer-term changes the campaign contributes to	- Policy or legislative change linked to campaign goals - Behavioural change in target groups - Institutional uptake of recommendations - Long-term public opinion shifts - Increased participation in related initiatives - Evolution of media narratives - Emergence of new partnerships or networks

4.2. ACTIVITIES, MEASURES OF PERFORMANCE AND MEASURES OF EFFECT

This more straightforward approach to M&E breaks metrics into three groups: activities, measures of performance and measures of effect.

Activities: These are the specific actions taken to implement the communications campaign. They include message dissemination, stakeholder engagement, media outreach, and digital strategies. This is really where you show how the campaign delivery money is being spent.

Measures of Performance: Measures of Performance are output and process indicators. These metrics assess how well the campaign is being implemented, focusing on reach, engagement, and delivery. They help determine whether the campaign activities are being executed as planned.

Measures of Effect: Measures of Effect are outcome and impact indicators. They evaluate changes in audience awareness, attitudes, or behaviour to which the campaign has contributed. They measure the impact or effect of an activity. If Measures of Performance ask 'Did we reach the right audience in the right number?', Measures of Effect ask 'Did we reach them in the right way?'

The following table suggests example key performance indicators for activities, measures of performance and measures of effect.

ACTIVITIES - What the campaign does	MEASURES OF PERFORMANCE - Whether the campaign content reaches the right people in the right numbers	MEASURES OF EFFECT - Whether the campaign content makes the audience think, feel or behave in the intended way
Number of communication materials created (e.g. videos, reports) Number of campaign events held Volume of social media or website content published Media or stakeholder partnerships established Budget and staff time allocated to communications	Impressions and reach (social media, email, media) Engagement rate (likes, shares, comments) Video views, click-through rates Website metrics: dwell time, bounce rate Event attendance figures Audience demographics reached Media coverage volume and sentiment	Survey results (awareness, understanding) Qualitative feedback from audience Sentiment analysis (social media or press) Focus group or interview insights Use of campaign language by stakeholders Search trends or keyword use related to campaign

5 EXAMPLES OF M&E FRAMEWORKS IN USE

In the following pages you will find examples of both types of monitoring and evaluation frameworks in use. For the purposes of these examples, we have created two imaginary campaigns, which we think represent the type of communication effort that many communicators work on.

The first campaign is intended to be a public facing behavioural change campaign, with the objective of reducing the purchase of single use plastic. The intended audience is supermarket shoppers.

The second campaign is a campaign for the establishment of a national marine protected area. The target audiences are national policymakers, ministerial advisors, and senior officials.

EXAMPLE THEORY OF CHANGE M&E FRAMEWORK - PLASTIC REDUCTION CAMPAIGN

THEORY OF CHANGE	CATEGORY / DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE KPIS
If the campaign produces clear, relatable messaging and practical tools that highlight the impact of single-use plastic and promote easy, accessible alternatives, delivered via social media, community partnerships, and in-store channels to reach regular supermarket shoppers	Inputs / What the campaign produces or delivers	- Number of short videos showing alternatives to plastic packaging - Social media toolkit co-designed with supermarkets - Plastic-free shopping guides and signage placed in stores - Weekly Instagram content and targeted ads - Number of partnerships established with regional supermarket chains
Then supermarket shoppers will encounter the campaign materials at multiple touchpoints, leading to increased awareness and initial engagement with the topic	Outputs / What reaches the audience and how they interact with it	- Number of impressions across Instagram and in-store displays - Number of video views with average 70% completion rate - Number of downloads of the plastic-free shopping guide - Number of survey responses collected from in-store QR codes - Number of store locations with visible campaign materials
Thereby shoppers will have increased understanding of plastic-free choices, feel more confident about reducing plastic use, and begin making changes to their purchasing behaviour	Outtakes / What the audience thinks, feels, or understands	- Percentage of survey respondents say they now consider plastic packaging when shopping - Percentage of survey respondents reporting increased confidence in switching to reusable or unpackaged options - Focus group participants describe the campaign as motivating and practical - Social media comments show discussions of personal changes and tips
Contributing to a sustained shift away from single-use plastics among shoppers, supermarket-led reductions in plastic packaging, and wider momentum for policy or retailer standards that support reusable systems	Outcomes / Broader, longer-term changes the campaign contributes to	- Percentage increase in reusable bag and container usage (sales data) - Supermarkets commit to 40% packaging reduction in 18 months - Policy proposal for standardised refill systems submitted to council - Media coverage highlights public attitude shift - Ongoing retailer collaboration to support shopper behaviour change

EXAMPLE OF SIMPLIFIED M&E FRAMEWORK - PLASTIC REDUCTION CAMPAIGN

ACTIVITIES	MEASURES OF PERFORMANCE	MEASURES OF EFFECT
Short videos showing alternatives to plastic packaging	Number of impressions across Instagram and in-store displays	Percentage of survey respondents say they now consider plastic packaging when shopping
Social media toolkit co-designed with supermarkets	Number of video views with average 70% completion rate	Percentage of survey respondents reporting increased confidence in switching to reusable or unpackaged options
Plastic-free shopping guides and signage placed in stores	Number of downloads of the plastic-free shopping guide	Focus group participants describe the campaign as motivating and practical
Weekly Instagram content and targeted ads	Number of survey responses collected from in-store QR codes	Social media comments show discussions of personal changes and tips
Partnerships established with regional supermarket chains	Number of store locations with visible campaign materials	

EXAMPLE THEORY OF CHANGE M&E FRAMEWORK - NATIONAL MARINE PROTECTED AREA (MPA) CAMPAIGN

THEORY OF CHANGE	CATEGORY / DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE KPIS
If the campaign delivers evidence-based messaging, compelling narratives, and targeted engagement strategies (including briefings, media content, stakeholder events, and coalition mobilisation) directed at key decision-makers and influencers in relevant departments	Inputs / What the campaign produces or delivers	- Policy briefings co-authored with scientists and coastal community representatives, with associated talking points - Short explainer videos for use in social media and presentations - Roundtable events hosted with cross-sector participation - Targeted email series sent to MPs and advisors - Coalition statement signed by 30+ NGOs and academic institutions
Then these materials and events will reach their intended policy audiences and trigger engagement, through meetings, media exposure, uptake in political discussion, or public signals of interest	Outputs / What reaches the audience and how they interact with it	- Number of briefing downloads or clicks from government websites - Media coverage in five major national outlets quoting campaign messages - Number of MPs mentioning MPA commitments during parliamentary debate in next twelve months - Number of attendees at stakeholder roundtables - Uptake of campaign messaging in policy-facing newsletters or blogs
Thereby target audiences will demonstrate increased awareness of the policy gap, greater understanding of the benefits of fully protected MPAs, and increased willingness to act, seen through shifts in discourse, internal requests, and support statements	Outtakes / What the audience thinks, feels, or understands	- Quotes from MPs or officials acknowledging need for action - Surveys of attendees show increased policy clarity and alignment - New collaborations or information requests from policymakers - Social listening shows broader shift in public framing of MPAs - Influencers begin reinforcing campaign arguments independently
Contributing to political momentum for more ambitious MPA policy commitments, e.g. new protected areas announced, stronger regulations introduced, or enforcement mechanisms strengthened	Outcomes / Broader, longer-term changes the campaign contributes to	- Government commits to designate three new fully protected MPAs - Policy paper tabled outlining enforcement framework - Budget allocated for marine protection monitoring - Regional bodies reference campaign materials in recommendations - NGO and scientific partners report improved access to decision-making spaces

EXAMPLE OF SIMPLIFIED M&E FRAMEWORK - NATIONAL MARINE PROTECTED AREA (MPA) CAMPAIGN

ACTIVITIES	MEASURES OF PERFORMANCE	MEASURES OF EFFECT
Policy briefings co-authored with scientists and coastal community representatives, with associated talking points Short explainer videos for use in social media and presentations Roundtable events hosted with cross-sector participation Targeted email series sent to MPs and advisors Coalition statement signed by 30+ NGOs and academic institutions	Number of briefing downloads or clicks from government websites Media coverage in five major national outlets quoting campaign messages Number of MPs mentioning MPA commitments during parliamentary debate in next twelve months Number of attendees at stakeholder roundtables Uptake of campaign messaging in policy-facing newsletters or blogs	Quotes from MPs or officials acknowledging need for action Surveys of attendees show increased policy clarity and alignment New collaborations or information requests from policymakers Social listening shows broader shift in public framing of MPAs Influencers begin reinforcing campaign arguments independently

6 FIVE TIPS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

1 PLAN FOR M&E FROM THE START

M&E works best when considered from the outset. Designing it alongside your strategy allows you to capture useful insights as the campaign unfolds, not just at the end.

2 CHOOSE AN APPROACH THAT FITS THE CONTEXT

There's no silver bullet or one-size-fits-all method. M&E doesn't need to be complex to be valuable. A small, well-chosen set of indicators that are tracked at appropriate intervals can offer meaningful information about how the campaign is performing and where it's having influence.

3 START WITH WHAT'S MANAGEABLE

It's better to do something well than to aim for something unachievable. Even limited data, if collected thoughtfully and reviewed with intention, can provide useful learning and support strategic decisions.

4 AIM TO UNDERSTAND CONTRIBUTION, NOT PROVE CAUSATION

In complex systems, direct cause-and-effect is difficult to isolate. Rather than trying to prove a campaign caused change on its own, focus on understanding how it contributed to a wider shift.

5 TREAT M&E AS PART OF CAMPAIGN DELIVERY

M&E is a tool for improving strategy, identifying challenges, and capturing progress, as well as reporting impact. Integrating it into everyday practice helps ensure it informs the work in real time, rather than as a retrospective task.



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