Citizen Data in Action:

Measuring Impact and Telling Stories that Matter

Collaborative on Citizen Data

May 2026

This work is a product of the Collaborative on Citizen Data and its development was co-led by the United Nations Statistics Division and the Danish Institute of Human Rights.

About the Collaborative on Citizen Data

The United Nations Collaborative on Citizen Data is a global, multi-stakeholder initiative working to strengthen the production and use of citizen data. It brings together national statistical offices, civil society organisations, research institutions, human rights institutes, and regional and international partners to promote more inclusive, accountable, and effective data systems.

Launched at the 4th UN World Data Forum in April 2023, the Collaborative responds to growing demand for greater coordination, trust, and innovation in how citizen data is produced and used. It builds on mandates from the United Nations Statistical Commission and provides a platform to share knowledge and experiences, foster collaboration across different communities, identify conceptual and methodological gaps and capacity needs, and inform the development of guidance.

For more information, visit the website.

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Translations

If you wish to create a translation of this publication, please reach out to the Collaborative on Citizen Data, as we might be able to cooperate. If you create an unauthorized translation, please add the following disclaimer along with the citation above: “This translation was not created by the Collaborative on Citizen Data”.

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The toolkit was authored by Natalia Tuero Germán, Collaborative on Citizen Data consultant.

Throughout the development process, workstream members contributed valuable expertise, feedback and practical insights, including through piloting the toolkit in real-world contexts. Their contributions were instrumental in strengthening the toolkit and ensuring its relevance and usefulness for practitioners working with citizen data on the ground. It is our hope that this toolkit, along with future interactive editions, will support practitioners in more effectively assessing and communicating the impact of their work, helping to advance broader recognition of the value and importance of citizen data.

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Executive Summary

Citizen data is increasingly recognized as a valuable source of evidence for more inclusive, responsive, and accountable decision-making. Across diverse contexts, community-led and citizen-driven data initiatives are helping to fill critical data gaps, surface lived experiences and inform policy and practice. Yet, demonstrating the impact of these efforts—and communicating that impact effectively—can be challenging.

This toolkit responds to that challenge. It provides practical guidance to help citizen data practitioners measure the impact of their initiatives and translate that evidence into clear, credible, and compelling impact stories. In doing so, it bridges two areas that are often treated separately: impact assessment and storytelling. By bringing them together, the toolkit supports practitioners in not only understanding what has changed but also communicating why that change matters.

Developed as part of the United Nations Collaborative on Citizen Data, this toolkit contributes to making the Copenhagen Framework for Citizen Data actionable in practice. It is designed for a diverse range of practitioners, including civil society and community-based organizations, national statistical offices (NSOs), and other actors working with citizen data.

A combined approach to impact assessment and storytelling

At the core of this toolkit is a practical, integrated approach that connects impact assessment and impact storytelling.

For impact assessment, the toolkit provides a clear three-step process to help practitioners identify, assess, and make use of evidence of change:

- **Step 1: Identify the impact assessment method(s)**
- **Step 2: Apply the chosen method**
- **Step 3: Make use of the findings**

For impact storytelling, the toolkit offers a structured process for translating evidence into clear and engaging narratives:

- **Pre-step: Prepare to Develop an Impact Story (Quick Checklist)**
- **Step 1: Learn about Impacts: Understanding Your Evidence Base to Find the Story**
- **Step 2: Set Storytelling Goals**
- **Step 3: Craft the Story**
- **Step 4: Validate the Story with Stakeholders**
- **Step 5: Package and Disseminate**
- **Step 6: Track Use and Learning**

Recognizing the diverse realities of citizen data initiatives, the toolkit also introduces two complementary entry points for developing impact stories:

- **Evidence-to-story**: for initiatives that already have evidence from monitoring, evaluation, or impact assessment
- **Story-to-evidence**: for initiatives that do not yet have formal evidence, where the process of developing a story helps surface and validate evidence of change

Together, these processes ensure that impact stories are grounded in credible evidence while remaining accessible and relevant to different audiences.

From evidence to influence

Ultimately, the value of citizen data lies not only in its production, but in how it is used to inform decisions and perceptions, shape policies, and strengthen accountability. This toolkit supports practitioners in making that value visible.

By strengthening both the assessment and communication of impact, it enables practitioners to:

- Generate credible evidence of change
- Communicate that evidence effectively to different audiences
- Support learning, advocacy, and decision-making processes
- Demonstrate the contribution of citizen data to broader social, institutional, and policy outcomes

In doing so, the toolkit contributes to building stronger evidence ecosystems—where citizen data is not only produced, but recognized, trusted, and used.

1. Introduction

1.a Collaborative on Citizen Data

Citizen contributions to data, broadly defined as the engagement of citizens in multiple processes in the data value chain, are increasingly recognized as critical to help overcome many data challenges of our times (Collaborative on Citizen Data, 2025). In the context of the 2030 Agenda's underlying principle to ensure that no one is left behind, such engagement helps fill critical data gaps for marginalized groups and increases the extent to which their experiences are reflected in statistics. By bringing lived experiences and community knowledge into evidence ecosystems,[1] citizen data has the potential to inform public decision-making, shape more responsive policies, guide resource allocation, and strengthen accountability. In addition, these initiatives can further advance important values such as fairness, inclusiveness, openness, and transparency in statistics and public policy.

Unleashing the full potential of citizen data, however, faces many challenges. These, for example, include a lack of trust between state and non-state actors, concerns about the quality and sustainability of data collected by non-state actors—underscoring the need for quality frameworks adapted to citizen data—and the statistical capacity of civil society organizations, among others. Responding to these challenges, the United Nations Collaborative on Citizen Data was created as a global, multi-stakeholder initiative working to strengthen the production and use of citizen data, bringing together national statistical offices (NSOs), civil society organizations, research institutions, national human rights institutions, and regional and international partners to promote more inclusive, accountable, and effective data systems.

Building on this collaborative foundation, the Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data was developed to provide a roadmap for citizen data implementation. Among its key priorities are *bridging efforts and fostering knowledge exchange*—sharing experiences, impact stories, and lessons learned across contexts—and *developing knowledge products and tools* that make citizen data more actionable. This toolkit sits at the intersection of these priorities, supporting practitioners in assessing the impacts of citizen data and translating them into evidence-based stories that can be shared and used across different contexts. It complements the growing body of resources developed by the Collaborative by focusing on how to assess and communicate impact and is designed for use alongside other Collaborative tools focusing on specific citizen data domains or use cases[2].

Specifically, the toolkit provides practical guidance on two complementary processes: *impact assessment*, which generates evidence on what citizen data initiatives achieve, and *impact storytelling*, which translates that evidence into compelling, accessible narratives. Designed to be practical and adaptable, the toolkit equips citizen data practitioners to measure the impact of their initiatives and communicate it effectively to diverse audiences—helping to inform policy discussions, strengthen advocacy, and demonstrate the value of citizen data in driving change.

[1] Evidence ecosystems refer to the interconnected actors, relationships, and processes through which evidence is produced, shared, and used to inform decision-making (Mulgan, 2024).
[2] See Collaborative tools at https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/citizen-data/.

1.b Purpose of this toolkit

This toolkit provides both an overview and step-by-step guide on impact assessment and impact storytelling as they relate to citizen data initiatives. While citizen data has become increasingly influential in policy processes, public decision-making, advocacy, and community-driven change, practitioners often face two challenges: to systematically measure and assess the impact of their initiatives, and communicating that impact in ways that are credible, engaging, and accessible to different audiences. This toolkit addresses those challenges by offering practical methods, guiding principles, and adaptable approaches that can be used across a wide range of citizen data initiatives, from small, community-based efforts to larger and more institutionalized initiatives.

By the end of this toolkit, readers should be able to: 1) Identify tools and methods for measuring the impact of citizen data initiatives; and 2) Develop evidence-based impact stories , that can be used for learning, accountability, advocacy, and to inform more responsive and people-oriented public policies.

1.b.i Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is designed for citizen data practitioners in all their diversity—whether community-based organizations, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, National Statistical Offices (NSOs), local governments, government agencies, research institutions or others. It will be especially useful for those leading or supporting citizen data initiatives who want to strengthen how they assess impact and communicate results to funders, policymakers, communities, and the wider public.

1.b.ii How to use this toolkit

The toolkit is not a rigid manual but a flexible resource. It can be read from start to finish for a full overview of impact assessment and impact storytelling as it relates to citizen data, or, alternatively, readers can dip into sections most relevant to their needs. It is organized into two main parts:

A. **Impact Assessment:** introduces key concepts *(section 2)* and step-by-step guidance for conducting impact assessments *(section 3)*.

B. **Impact Storytelling:** introduces key concepts *(section 4)* and step-by-step guidance for developing evidence-based impact stories *(section 5)*.

Above all, this toolkit is meant to be practical and adaptable, grounding impact assessment and impact storytelling in both conceptual clarity and hands-on methods to help practitioners take stock of what their initiatives have achieved and translate that evidence into compelling stories that inform, persuade, and inspire.

2. Impact Assessment for Citizen Data

2.a What is Citizen Data?

"Citizen data" refers to data originating from initiatives for which citizens are engaged at various stages of the data value chain—from collection, analysis, dissemination and final impact—guided by key principles that promote inclusive, responsible, professional and ethical production and use, regardless of whether these data are integrated into official statistics (Collaborative on Citizen Data, 2025, p. 5).

In practice, citizens can play a role across all stages of the data value chain in diverse ways. The diversity of these approaches is reflected in the range of terms used to describe citizen engagement in data—such as citizen science, community science, citizen-generated data, crowdsourcing, volunteered geographic information, citizen observatories, citizen engagement in social innovation, community-based monitoring, participatory mapping, participatory action research, community-driven or community-generated data (Collaborative on Citizen Data, 2025, p. 4). The Copenhagen Framework and this toolkit use 'citizen data' as an inclusive, consistent term that encompasses citizen involvement in data collection, production, and use.

Key definitions:

Citizen data

Refers to data originating from initiatives for which citizens are engaged at various stages of the data value chain, guided by key principles that promote inclusive, responsible, professional and ethical production and use, regardless of whether these data are integrated into official statistics (Collaborative on Citizen Data, 2025, p. 5).

Data value chain

Describes the evolution of data from collection to analysis, dissemination, and the final impact of data on decision making. The data value chain has four major stages: **collection**, **publication**, **uptake**, and **impact**. These four stages are further separated into twelve steps: **identify**, **collect**, **process**, **analyze**, **release**, **disseminate**, **connect**, **incentivize**, **influence**, **use**, **change**, and **reuse** (Open Data Watch, 2018).

Throughout the process, from one end of the value chain to another and back again, there should be constant feedback between producers and stakeholders.

The Copenhagen Framework additionally maps the stages of the data value chain using the **Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM)**—an international standard developed to describe the processes involved in producing official statistics (Collaborative on Citizen Data, 2025, p. 5). While originally designed for statistical agencies, the model may provide a useful reference for situating citizen data activities within broader statistical systems.

2.b Impact Assessment for Citizen Data: What Is It?

For the purposes of this toolkit, impact assessment refers to **the systematic evaluation of long-term and/or significant changes, whether positive or negative, intended or unintended, brought about through an initiative**. It can be carried out using a range of tools, methodologies and approaches, and is always concerned with change—and the pathways that lead to it—rather than with activities or deliverables" (Simister N., 2017).

This section explores the following aspects of impact assessment in citizen data:

c. Impact Assessment in the Data Value Chain

d. Why Impact Assessment Matters for Citizen Data

e. Understanding the "Impact" in Impact Assessment

f. Impact Beyond the "Project Cycle" in Citizen Data

g. Impact Assessment and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

h. Impact Assessment and Impact Evaluation

i. Challenges of Impact Assessment for Citizen Data

j. Guiding Framework for the Toolkit: The Citizen Science Impact Assessment Framework (CSIAF)

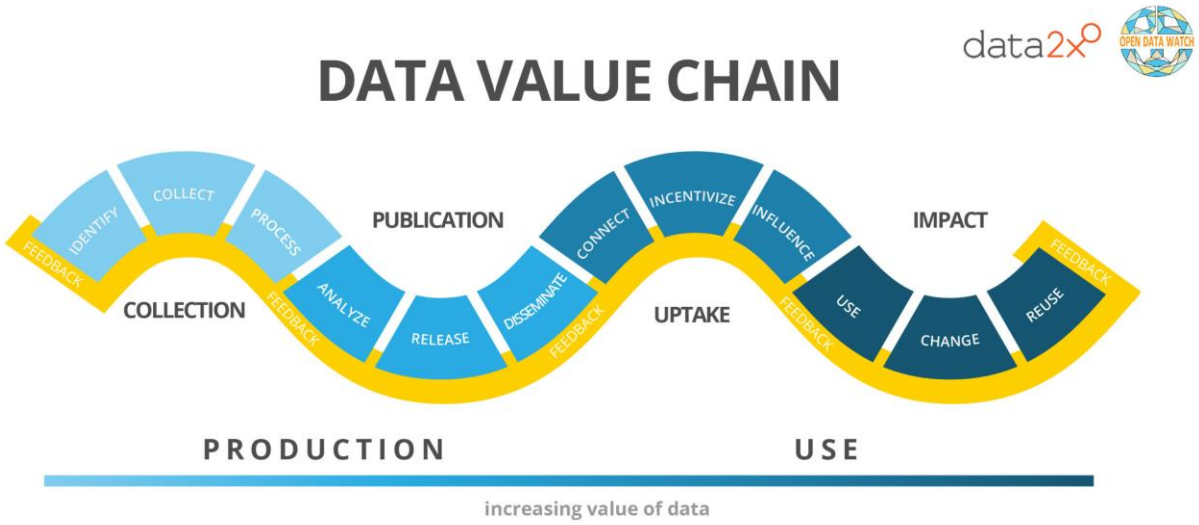
k. Questions to Consider Before Starting an Impact Assessment

2.c Impact Assessment in the Data Value Chain

Impact assessment builds on evidence generated across the data value chain and is most closely associated with the later stages, where data is used and begins to influence change. At this point, the focus shifts from producing and disseminating data to understanding what has resulted from its use—examining outcomes, identifying patterns of change, and reflecting on how and why these changes occurred.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the data value chain can be understood as a continuous and iterative process, where feedback loops connect different stages. Impact assessment draws on evidence from across this process but plays a distinct role in making sense of accumulated findings—helping to clarify what change has taken place, under what conditions, and with what implications for future action.

Figure 1 : The Data Value Chain: From Data Production to Impact



Source: Open Data Watch (2019)

2.d Why Impact Assessment Matters for Citizen Data

In practice, impact assessment—understanding not just what was done, *but what changed as a result*—helps demonstrate the value and credibility of citizen data. This is closely linked to the definition of citizen data and the idea of meaningful engagement: citizen data initiatives are meaningful when they empower citizens to act as data agents and to influence the issues that matter to them and affect their lives, including local and national policies. Impact assessment helps make this connection visible by systematically identifying and measuring change, it enables communication of results to communities, partners and policymakers—supporting learning and decision-making. It also strengthens the legitimacy of citizen data as an evidence source, showing how locally generated information can influence policy, awareness, and action.

2.e Understanding the 'Impact' in Impact Assessment

While definitions of impact vary widely, they generally describe the significant or lasting changes—intended or unintended—that result from an initiative (Simister N., 2017). Some focus on long-term effects, while others consider shorter-term but meaningful changes. Both are relevant for understanding the impact of citizen data initiatives and are addressed in this toolkit. In addition to outcomes or changes in people's lives, the impact of an initiative can also encompass shifts in policy, institutions, local practices, perceptions or other changes that extend beyond its immediate scope.

Recognizing behaviour change as impact

Not all meaningful impact takes the form of formal policy or system change. In citizen data initiatives, impact often includes changes in behaviour, perceptions, practices, relationships, or norms—such as how decision-makers engage with evidence, how communities act on data, or how institutions respond to citizen voices.

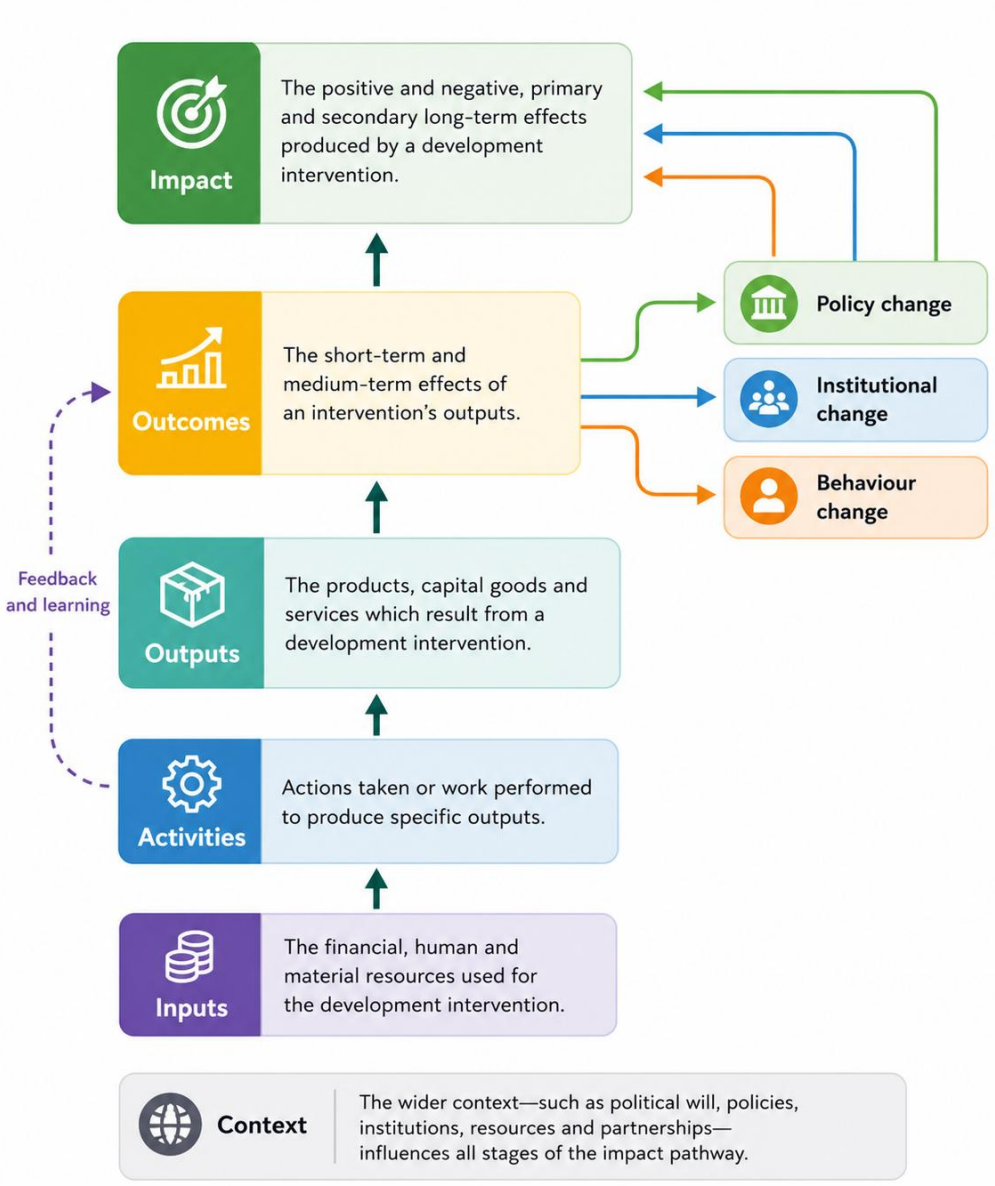
Making these forms of change visible is an important part of impact assessment, particularly where citizen data influences processes gradually or indirectly.

This diversity of definitions of impact reflects the flexibility needed to assess impact across different contexts. Pathways to change in citizen data initiatives are often non-linear and shaped by complex social, political, and institutional dynamics. Because citizen data frequently operates through participation, dialogue, and shifts in norms or practices, impacts may emerge gradually or unevenly over time. Rather than being an obstacle, this underscores the importance of choosing impact assessment approaches that align with each initiative's purpose, scale, and context. For this toolkit, what matters most is that impact—whether long- or short-term—is based, as far as possible, on evidence of change that can be traced to a specific initiative.

One way to make these processes of change more visible is through an **impact pathway**—sometimes also represented as a **results chain**—which helps map how different stages of an initiative may contribute to longer-term impact. While impact pathways can reflect the complexity and non-linear nature of change, a results chain offers a simplified, step-by-step view of how change unfolds.

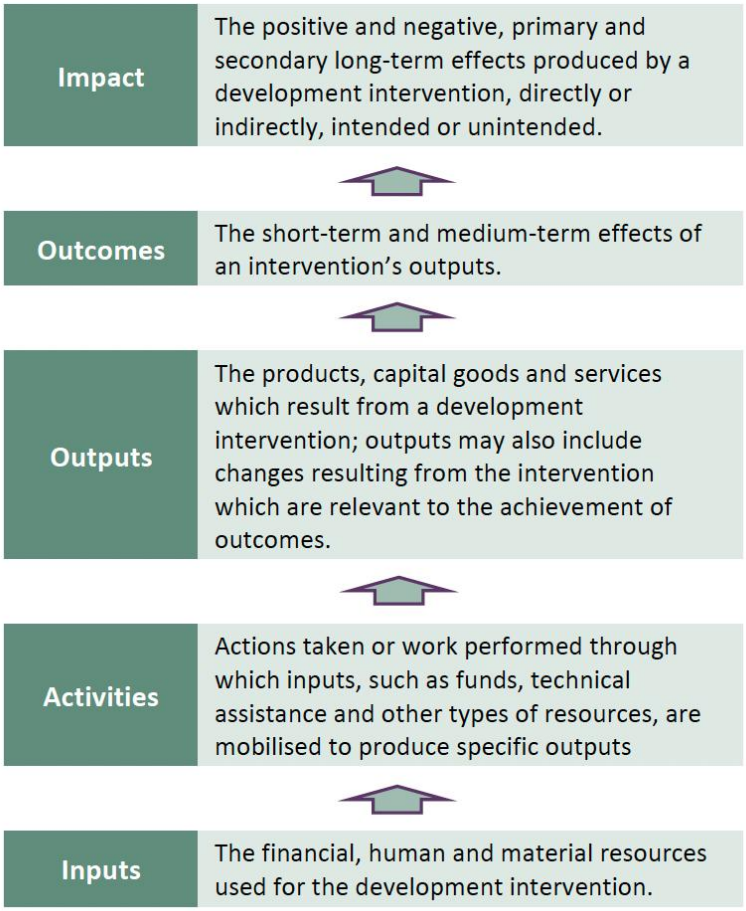
The diagrams below (Figure 2 and 3) offers a simple way to visualize this logic, showing how elements such as inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts build on one another over time. This helps illustrate how citizen data efforts, even small or localized ones, can contribute to broader pathways of change—moving from data collection to insight, to action, and ultimately to meaningful, sustained change.

Figure 2 : Impact Pathway



Source: AI-generated illustration based on results chain illustration from INTRAC (2023)

Figure 3: The Results Chain



Source: INTRAC 2023, "Outputs, Outcomes and Impact", pg. 1

Key definitions: Theory of Change, Impact Pathway and Indicator

A **theory of change (ToC)** is a theory, or model, of how an intervention is intended to produce change. It is often represented as a logic model or impact pathway that shows how changes at one level are expected to contribute to changes at other levels. Typically, a ToC also includes major assumptions, as well as descriptions of what else might influence the desired changes aside from the initiative (INTRAC, 2024).

An **impact pathway** shows how an initiative may contribute to change over time. It maps the sequence linking activities, outputs, and outcomes to longer-term impact, along with the assumptions and external factors that shape that process (BetterEvaluation, 2014).

Relationship between an Impact Pathway and Theory of Change:

A **theory of change** explains the overall logic and assumptions behind how change is expected to happen, while an i**mpact pathway** maps the sequence through which that change may unfold in practice.

Example: Citizen Data for Urban Accessibility

Theory of Change

If citizens document barriers in public spaces using participatory mapping, city planners will use this data to design more inclusive and accessible infrastructure that benefits people with disabilities and the wider public.

Impact Pathway

Citizens map accessibility issues using an open-source app → Data compiled and analyzed by local NGOs → Evidence presented to city planning departments → Co-design workshops with government officials → New ramps, crossings, and accessibility policies implemented.

Indicator

An **indicator** is a quantitative or qualitative piece of information used to show whether change is happening. Indicators provide evidence that activities or initiatives are producing results, but they do not represent the change itself (Simister N., 2015).

Recognizing early and incremental impact

Impact of citizen data initiatives often develops gradually. While long-term or systemic change may be a goal, meaningful impact can also be seen in earlier or intermediate results—such as improved access to information, increased use of data, stronger coordination among actors, or clearer problem definition.

These forms of impact are not "lesser" outcomes. They are often important steps along longer pathways of change and can provide credible evidence of progress, learning, and contribution. Recognizing incremental impact helps initiatives reflect, adapt, and demonstrate value even when larger results take time to emerge.

Documenting these incremental changes, whether through brief notes, examples, or observations, or through more structured monitoring and evaluation processes, can help ensure they are not overlooked. Over time, this creates a stronger evidence base to support reflection, learning, and impact storytelling.

2.f Impact Beyond the "Project Cycle" in Citizen Data

While citizen data may emerge through time-bound projects or initiatives, it is not limited to these contexts. This toolkit also recognizes citizen data as an ongoing process—a continuous flow of data, relationships, and learning that extends beyond specific initiatives. Citizen data efforts may intersect with funded initiatives, but they do not necessarily begin or end with them; they may continue to generate insights about community priorities, local conditions, and systemic gaps. Sustaining this impact over time

depends on strengthening local capacities and fostering community ownership of data processes and their use.

In line with the Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data, this toolkit views citizen data as part of a wider data ecosystem that strengthens fairness, inclusiveness, and transparency in statistics. Assessing impact therefore means looking not only at initiative-level results or deliverables, but also at how the data are interpreted and taken up to create change—informing decisions, filling evidence gaps, contributing to social, institutional or policy change and empowering communities over time.

2.g Impact assessment and monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

Impact assessment sits alongside and often draws from monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes. M&E tracks a project or initiative's progress, asking whether planned activities are being implemented, target audiences reached, and outputs delivered as intended. Information generated at different stages of M&E can also provide useful evidence for understanding how change occurs over time. Impact assessment may therefore build on these insights to examine whether and how these efforts contribute to impact.

2.h Impact evaluation and impact assessment

The terms *impact evaluation* and *impact assessment* are often used interchangeably, but they can refer to different levels of analysis. *Impact evaluation* usually takes a broader view. It looks not only at what changed, but also at how the initiative was implemented and why certain results were achieved—examining an initiative's design, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and lessons learned (Sure Impact, 2022). It may also seek to determine the extent to which observed changes can be attributed to the initiative itself, rather than other factors, broader trends, or changes that might have occurred regardless of the intervention (BetterEvaluation, n.d.-b).

Impact assessment, as used in this toolkit, is more focused and practical. It concentrates on identifying and measuring what has changed as a result of an initiative, tracing pathways of change without examining every aspect of implementation or efficiency. In other words, while impact evaluation asks *why* and *how* results occurred—taking into account a broad range of factors—impact assessment focuses on *what difference* an initiative made.

In this sense, impact assessment is particularly useful for citizen data initiatives. By focusing directly on identifying and understanding the impacts that emerge from an initiative, it offers a practical way for practitioners to examine what difference their data efforts are making, without requiring a full evaluation of programme design or efficiency.

Together with M&E, impact assessment and impact evaluation form a continuum—from tracking activities and outputs, to understanding outcomes, to examining impact. Not all of these approaches need to be applied at the same time; rather, they represent different ways of understanding change that may be used depending on purpose and context.

2.i Challenges of Impact Assessment for Citizen Data

Citizen data initiatives operate across diverse contexts and often contribute to change through evolving relationships between communities, civil society organisations, institutions, and data systems. Pathways through which citizen data contributes to change are often iterative and shaped by social, institutional, and political dynamics. This means that impacts may emerge in different forms—from informing decision-making and filling evidence gaps to strengthening participation, accountability, or community capacity.

For practitioners, the challenge is therefore not simply measuring impact, but identifying and articulating the different ways citizen data contributes to change across these contexts. In practical terms, this can also be constrained by limited technical and non-technical capacity, as well as the time and resources available to conduct systematic reflection on impact.

2.j Guiding Framework for the Toolkit: The Citizen Science Impact Assessment Framework (CSIAF)

To support citizen data practitioners in designing and carrying out credible and meaningful impact assessments, this toolkit draws on the Citizen Science Impact Assessment Framework (CSIAF) from Wehn et al. (2021b) as a guiding framework. Originally developed for citizen science, CSIAF offers a flexible, principle-based approach to impact assessment that is well-suited to citizen data initiatives, given their participatory nature, diverse objectives, and often non-linear pathways to change. In this toolkit, the principles of CSIAF, adapted to citizen data, guide how impact assessment is approached and underpin the three-step approach to conducting an impact assessment.

CSIAF identifies six guiding principles that inform how impact assessment is approached in this toolkit:[3] These are adapted below to reflect the terminology and context of citizen data initiatives.

1. **Acknowledging a variety of purposes of citizen data impact assessment**

   Impact assessments may serve different aims depending on the initiative, from accountability and advocacy to learning and improving practice. Clarifying the purpose of the assessment helps guide the methods chosen and how findings are communicated. **In this toolkit, identifying these changes provides both insight into the impacts of citizen data initiatives and the evidence base for impact stories.**

2. **Non-linear conceptualization of impact journeys to overcome impact silos**

   Change rarely follows a straight line. In citizen data initiatives, impacts may emerge at different scales and times and cut across multiple domains. Recognizing these non-linear pathways helps avoid forcing impacts into rigid categories. **In this toolkit, this perspective is reflected in the concept of impact pathways introduced earlier.**

[3] The guiding principles originate from the Citizen Science Impact Assessment Framework (CSIAF) and are adapted here to reflect the terminology and context of citizen data initiatives.

3. **Adopting comprehensive impact assessment data collection methods and information sources**

   No single tool or metric can capture the full breadth of impact. In citizen data initiatives, combining qualitative and quantitative evidence and drawing on diverse sources can help generate more robust and credible assessments. **This toolkit reflects this principle by encouraging the use of multiple forms of evidence and cross-checking findings.**

4. **Moving beyond absolute impact**

   Instead of asking only "how much impact was achieved," impact assessment stresses the value of examining *relative* contributions. This may include identifying added value, shifts in perspectives, or enabling conditions that may not be visible in headline numbers. **In this toolkit, this perspective is reflected in the emphasis on recognizing diverse forms of impact and conveying plausible contributions to change rather than strict attribution.**

5. **Fostering knowledge exchange of impact assessment results across citizen data initiatives**

   While citizen data initiatives vary widely in their goals and contexts, documenting impacts in consistent and transparent ways makes it easier to learn across initiatives and build a stronger collective evidence base. **In this toolkit, impact assessment is used not only to understand the results of individual initiatives, but also to support broader knowledge exchange and shared learning across actors and domains. Impact stories help communicate these insights** by showing how citizen data has contributed to change, what lessons emerged, and how these initiatives can inform future initiatives**.**

6. **Cumulative enhancement of the impact assessment process over time**

   Impact assessment approaches can evolve over time as practitioners refine methods and learn from experience. **In this toolkit, this principle is reflected in encouraging practitioners to revisit and build on their approaches to assessing impact as new insights emerge.**

Together, these principles help frame the impact assessment process in ways that recognize the diverse contexts in which citizen data initiatives operate and the varied pathways through which they contribute to change.

2.k Questions to Consider Before Starting an Impact Assessment

Before carrying out an impact assessment, it's important to think through when, how, and to what extent it makes sense for your initiative. The following questions help citizen data practitioners reflect on timing, scope, and available resources, and to adapt their approach accordingly.

⇒ **When should I conduct an impact assessment?**

Impact assessment is often carried out toward the end of an initiative, when it is possible to look back and evaluate the changes it contributed to. However, the timing and format of an impact assessment will depend on the nature of the initiative and how it operates.

For **initiatives with a defined project timeline**, impact assessment may take place at the end of the project to examine the overall extent of change generated. Monitoring and evaluation activities throughout the initiative can help track progress, capture lessons, and generate evidence that will feed into the final impact assessment.

For longer-term or ongoing initiatives, waiting until the end may not be practical. In these cases, periodic or interim assessments can help examine outcomes to date and identify emerging patterns of impact. These reflections can inform learning and adjustments while the work continues.

For **smaller initiatives or initiatives without formal monitoring systems**, impact assessment may rely on simpler approaches, such as reviewing existing records, gathering reflections from participants, or documenting stories of change (see next question).

In some cases, an evaluability assessment **(see Box 1, pg. 22)** may also help determine whether an initiative is ready for an impact assessment by checking its objectives, available data, and resources.

⇒ What if my initiative is small or there aren't enough resources to have a monitoring and evaluation component?

Even small-scale initiatives without a dedicated M&E component can conduct some form of impact assessment. In such cases, focus on proportionate and pragmatic approaches: draw on existing records, hold participatory reflection sessions, or use simple tools like interviews, surveys, or observation notes to capture evidence of change. The aim is not to create a complex M&E system, but to ensure that there is at least a basic evidence base to understand and demonstrate impact. Being clear about your initiative's scope and limitations will help keep the process credible while still surfacing valuable lessons.

⇒ How do I decide what to measure?

Start by considering the kinds of change your citizen data initiative aims to generate or contribute to. Mapping an impact pathway (see Figure 2)—tracing how your activities may have contributed to outcomes and longer-term change—can help clarify what kinds of impact are most relevant to examine.

Some initiatives focus on measuring change using defined indicators and quantitative data to demonstrate results. Others rely more on qualitative approaches—such as interviews, focus groups, or participatory reflection—to explore how and why change occurred.

Deciding what to measure also depends on the purpose of the impact assessment (e.g. to understand and document change, support learning and improvement, or share results) as well as on available capacity and resources.

The following section of this toolkit provides guidance on selecting appropriate impact assessment methods and identifying the kinds of evidence most suited to your initiative.

⇒ Who should be involved in an impact assessment?

Impact assessment works best when it is participatory. Different stakeholders—including community members, partners, and beneficiaries, among others—should be involved throughout the process. This means engaging them not only in assessing whether change has occurred, but also in identifying the kinds of change they hope to see in the first place. Involving stakeholders throughout the assessment helps ensure that it reflects shared priorities, produces credible findings, and strengthens ownership of results.

3. How to Measure the Impact of Citizen Data: Step-by-Step

Having explored what impact assessment is and why it matters, this section turns to the question of *how* to conduct the assessment. It outlines a practical, three-step approach that provides a flexible structure for conducting an impact assessment in citizen data contexts: **Step 1) Identifying impact assessment method(s); Step 2) Applying the chosen method**; and **Step 3) Making use of the findings**. These steps are presented as a logical sequence, but in practice they may overlap or inform one another as learning emerges throughout the process.

Box 1: Optional consideration- Evaluability Assessment

In evaluation practice, an evaluability assessment is sometimes conducted before an impact assessment to determine whether an initiative is ready to be evaluated. It helps assess whether the initiative's objectives are clear, whether sufficient data exist, and whether the available time and resources make an assessment feasible.

In this toolkit, many of these same reflection questions are already built into the early stages of the impact assessment process. For most citizen data initiatives, a separate evaluability assessment is therefore not necessary.

However, practitioners who wish to explore this approach further—particularly for larger or more complex initiatives—may find it useful as a way to confirm readiness before investing in a full assessment. For additional guidance, see Methods Lab's *Evaluability Assessment for Impact Evaluation: Guidance, Checklists, and Decision Support* (BetterEvaluation, n.d-a).

3.a Step 1: Identifying the Impact Assessment method(s)

To identify the most suitable impact assessment method for your citizen data initiative, use the questions below to reflect on your initiative's purpose, complexity, available data, and stakeholder engagement. Each question offers multiple-choice answers—simply select the one that best describes your context. Once completed, tally your responses and note which letter appears most often. Then, refer to the decision-making matrix to find the methods that align most closely with your results. This approach ensures that the method you choose fits both your initiative's goals and practical constraints.

Because many citizen data initiatives serve more than one purpose—such as combining advocacy with learning or accountability—you may find that different answers apply to different aspects of your work. If that is the case, try completing the questions more than once, emphasizing a different purpose or context each time. Comparing your results can help you identify complementary methods or blended approaches that best reflect the multifaceted nature of your initiative. The goal is to choose what works best given your purpose, context, and capacity. In citizen data initiatives, flexibility is key—methods can be adapted or blended to reflect how data is generated, used, and shared. The aim is not rigidity, but insight: to produce findings that are both meaningful and useful.

Tip: *If your initiative serves multiple purposes, try completing the questions more than once.*

Context note: working with available data

In practice, citizen data initiatives do not always generate or control all the data that can be used for an impact assessment. Relevant data may be produced by partners, third parties, or existing systems, and may predate an initiative's involvement. Step 1 therefore focuses not on ideal data conditions, but on understanding what data and evidence are available or accessible, what is known about their quality, and how they can realistically be used when selecting impact assessment methods. In some cases, this process may reveal that little or no usable data are available—an insight that can itself be valuable and noteworthy for an impact story or also for learning and strengthening future data collection efforts.

Reflection prompt:

As you answer the questions below, consider whether your initiative works with groups who are often underrepresented in official data, and whether different experiences of change may exist within the communities involved. This can help you choose methods that make those differences visible.

3.a.i Guiding Questions for Step 1: Identifying Your Impact Assessment Method(s)

Purpose and use

What is the primary purpose of your impact assessment?

A. Accountability to funders or partners

B. Learning and adaptation to improve future work

C. Advocacy, communication, or storytelling

D. Supporting funding proposals or early planning decisions

E. Understanding broader or longer-term change

Theory of Change (ToC) and Impact Pathways

Do you have a shared understanding among stakeholders of how your citizen data is expected to lead to change (often called Theory of Change or impact pathway)?

A. Yes, and it has already been tested or used

B. Yes, but it still needs refining

C. No, but we plan to develop one

D. No, and the work evolved in emergent or adaptive ways

E. Yes, and we want to explore how our initiative contributed to observed outcomes

Complexity and Context

How complex is your initiative in terms of the people involved, the systems it engages with, and the contexts it operates in?

A. Simple or locally focused

B. Moderately complex (several groups, data sources, or places involved)

C. Highly complex (many actors and systems, adaptive work, or engagement across multiple levels)

Data Environment

What data do you have available or have access to (including data produced by partners or third parties)?

A. Reliable baseline and monitoring data (from this initiative or other sources)

B. Some data, but patchy or not well aligned with outcomes

C. Mostly qualitative, experiential, and/or anecdotal data

D. Little or no usable data (quantitative or qualitative)

Resources and Time

What level of time, skills, and resources can you realistically dedicate to conduct the impact assessment?

A. High (dedicated staff or volunteers, budget, and/or additional support available)

B. Moderate (some staff or volunteer time, limited external support)

C. Low (very limited capacity; methods need to be simple and low-resource)

Participatory Intent

To what extent do you envision community members or citizen participants being involved in shaping and carrying out the impact assessment?

A. High – Central to the process (e.g. collective reflection, co-analysis, story collection)

B. Moderate – Important, but not central

C. Limited – participation is minimal or not feasible at this phase

Next, tally how many A, B, C, and D's you have in your answers and match the dominant letters to the suggested methods in the decision matrix below:

Table 1: Decision Matrix for Impact Assessment Method

Answer pattern	Suggested method	Why this method fits
Mostly A's	Theory-Based Evaluation	Well suited to initiatives with a clear understanding of how change is expected to happen, relatively strong data, and sufficient time and capacity to conduct an impact assessment. This method supports accountability and helps test whether expected pathways to change are unfolding as planned.
Mostly B's	Contribution Analysis or Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA)	A good fit for initiatives with moderate complexity and partial or uneven data. These methods combine structured reasoning about change with reflection and learning and can be strengthened through participatory validation with those involved.
Mostly C's	Outcome Harvesting or Most Significant Change (MSC)	Particularly useful for adaptive or emergent initiatives that rely largely on qualitative or experiential data, or that place strong emphasis on community participation. This method helps surface and interpret outcomes that were not anticipated.
Mostly D's	Most Significant Change (MSC)	Well suited to initiatives with limited data or more adaptive, community-driven ways of working. This method focuses on storytelling and collective reflection to capture meaningful change from participants' perspectives.
Mixed responses, with 'E' appearing most often	Contribution Analysis or Theory-Based Evaluation	Appropriate for initiatives seeking to understand broader, systemic, or longer-term change. These methods support tracing contributions across complex contexts and examining how different factors interact to produce observed outcomes.

After reviewing your tally results, refer to the typology below for short descriptions of each suggested method. Use it to understand what each approach offers, when it works best, and how it can be adapted to assess citizen data initiatives. A more detailed version of this table—including key features, limitations, and practical considerations for each method—can be found in the annex.

Not all citizen data practitioners have the time, data, or budget to conduct a comprehensive impact assessment. In such contexts, lighter approaches—such as Outcome Harvesting, Most Significant Change, or story-to-evidence storytelling—can still generate credible, ethical, and useful insights when applied in a transparent and participatory manner.

Good Practice: Applying an intersectional lens in method selection and impact assessment

Citizen data initiatives often work with groups that are underrepresented or invisible in official data, such as women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ+ communities, migrants, nomadic populations, and other groups. An intersectional approach to impact assessment helps ensure that these different experiences are not treated as a single story, but are understood in relation to overlapping identities, contexts, and forms of exclusion.

When assessing impact, consider not only *whether* change occurred, but *for whom* it occurred, under what conditions, and whose voices may still be missing. Citizen data offers an opportunity to surface impacts that are difficult to capture through standard statistics—such as increased confidence, collective agency, access to services, or recognition by authorities, among others—particularly for marginalized groups.

Applying an intersectional lens does not require complex methods, but it should inform both how methods are chosen and how impact is assessed. In practice, this can involve:

- Engaging diverse participants in reflection and interpreting findings;
- Disaggregating findings where possible;
- Paying attention to differences within communities;
- Being explicit about whose experiences are represented, and whose are not.
- Selecting methods that move beyond reliance on official baselines or standardized indicators alone
- Creating space for participants to define what meaningful change looks like
- Surfacing power dynamics and data-related risks

Making these considerations visible strengthens the relevance, credibility, and equity of impact assessments in citizen data initiatives.

3.a.ii Recommended Impact Assessment Methodologies for Citizen Data

The table below outlines the suggested methods and their relevance for citizen data initiatives, including reference links to more information to carry out the method.

Table 2: Recommended Impact Assessment Methodologies for Citizen Data

Method	Suitable for assessing citizen data initiatives because it…
Outcome harvesting	focuses on identifying real, observable changes and exploring how the initiative contributed to them, even without predefined indicators—making it ideal for capturing complex or unanticipated citizen data impacts.
Theory-based evaluation	builds a plausible case for how and why an initiative led to change, unpacking its contribution and variations across different citizen data contexts.
Participatory impact assessment (PIA)	centers on understanding change through participants' perspectives, bringing legitimacy and depth to assessments of social, behavioral, or relational change generated through citizen data.
Contribution Analysis	strengthens causal reasoning in complex settings where multiple factors influence outcomes—ideal for assessing contribution without experimental designs in multi-actor citizen data systems.
Most Significant Change (MSC)	collects and analyzes personal stories of change from participants to identify what they consider most significant, why, and how it happened—ideal for capturing qualitative, community-driven evidence of impact that might not emerge from quantitative data.

3.a.iii Applying Additional Evaluative Lenses for Impact Assessment

Impact assessment does not take place in a vacuum. In citizen data initiatives, questions of power, representation, ethics, and learning often shape both the process and the meaning of impact. The lenses below can be applied alongside any method to ensure these dimensions are explicitly considered.

Feminist Evaluation[4]: Feminist Evaluation is grounded in feminist theory and examines how gender norms, power relations, and structural inequalities shape both the initiative and the evaluation process itself. It asks who defines success, whose knowledge counts, and how evidence is produced, interpreted, and used.

Rather than prescribing a single method, Feminist Evaluation applies feminist principles across evaluation design, data collection, analysis, and use—making it adaptable to different impact assessment approaches.

[4] For more information regarding this methodology, visit: https://www.betterevaluation.org/tools-resources/measuring-change-tools-evaluate-strengthen-gender-policies-feminist-perspective.

Key principles include:

- Centering lived experiences, especially those of women and marginalized groups
- Valuing multiple ways of knowing (quantitative, qualitative, narrative, and experiential)
- Making power dynamics, ethics, and positionality explicit
- Using evaluation as a tool for transformation and learning—not only accountability

This lens is particularly relevant for citizen data initiatives that aim to redistribute voice, address gender and intersectional data gaps, or challenge dominant data systems.

Best applied when:

- Gender equality or LGBTIQ+ rights are central concerns
- Power relations and exclusion are explicit issues
- Empowerment or systemic change is part of the initiative's goals
- Communities are engaged as knowledge holders, not only data sources

Intersectional Evaluation: Intersectional Evaluation applies an intersectionality framework to examine how overlapping identities and structures of inequality—such as gender, ethnicity, disability, age, sexuality, territory, or socioeconomic status—shape experiences and outcomes. It highlights how impacts may differ across intersecting identities and helps avoid oversimplified or single-category analysis.

Key principles include:

- Disaggregated and layered analysis of outcomes
- Attention to structural and contextual inequalities
- Inclusion of marginalized voices in shaping evaluation questions and interpretation

Best applied when:

- The initiative works with diverse or marginalized populations
- There is a risk of oversimplifying impact across groups
- Differential or unequal impacts are likely
- Capturing lived complexity is central to the initiative's goals

Data Justice–Oriented Evaluation: Data Justice–Oriented Evaluation examines initiatives through a rights, fairness, and harm-prevention lens. It assesses whether data practices are inclusive, accountable, and non-extractive, and how power operates across the data lifecycle. It asks who benefits, who bears risks, who is represented or excluded, and who controls data and decisions.

Key principles include:

- Examining representation and exclusion in data practices

- Assessing control, governance, and decision-making power
- Identifying and mitigating risks related to privacy, bias, or misuse
- Prioritizing fairness, accountability, and safeguards throughout the data process

Best applied when:

- The initiative involves sensitive populations or digital/AI tools
- Data governance, ethics, or rights are explicit goals
- Accountability and harm prevention matter as much as measurable outcomes

Innovation and Learning-Oriented Evaluation: Innovation and Learning-Oriented Evaluation views initiatives as evolving processes rather than fixed interventions. It emphasizes experimentation, iteration, reflection, and adaptation, recognizing that impact may emerge through testing new approaches and adjusting over time.

Key principles include:

- Emphasizing experimentation and iterative improvement
- Using feedback to inform adaptation and refinement
- Valuing learning and reflection alongside measurable outcomes
- Recognizing uncertainty as part of innovation processes

Best applied when:

- The initiative is piloting new tools, technologies, or participatory methods
- Outcomes are evolving or not fully predictable
- Learning and adaptation are central objectives

3.b Step 2: Applying the Chosen Method

Once you have identified a method that aligns with your initiative's characteristics and goals, the next step is to plan how to apply the impact assessment in practice. The box below details the steps needed for each methodology and a link for further information (additional details for each methodology are also included in the Annex). This section also offers a step-by-step example for one of the impact assessment methods presented in Step 1: Participatory Impact Assessment.[5]

[5] Participatory approaches to impact assessment tend to involve different stakeholders, including beneficiaries, at all stages of the project or programme cycle. Stakeholders are involved in both identifying the changes they wish to see, and assessing whether, and how, those changes have been realized (Simister N., 2017).

Table 3: Recommended Impact Assessment Methodologies, Steps Involved and Additional Resource

Method	Steps
Outcome harvesting	Typically, it involves six steps: 1. Designing the harvest 2. Gathering and drafting outcome descriptions 3. Engaging informants 4. Substantiating findings 5. Analyzing patterns 6. Supporting the use of findings
Theory-based evaluation	There is no single prescribed set of steps for Theory-Based Evaluation, but it generally involves the following components: • Developing or refining the initiative's Theory of Change or logic model. • Collecting evidence across the different levels of the theory (e.g., inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact) to assess whether and how changes occurred. • Analysing the links between those levels—testing key assumptions and confirming or adapting the theory of change. • (Optional) Exploring unexpected or negative changes that emerged during implementation.
Participatory impact assessment (PIA)	The original PIA model from the Feinstein International Center outlines eight stages—from defining key questions and community indicators to triangulating data and validating results. In this toolkit, these have been adapted into four practical steps (plus a pre-step) that maintain the same participatory intent while simplifying the process for citizen data initiatives: • **Pre-step:** Define purpose and stakeholders. • **Step 1:** Revisit and clarify intended impact. • **Step 2:** Review and validate evidence of change. • **Step 3:** Analyze and triangulate findings. • **Step 4:** Reflect on outcomes together.

Contribution Analysis	1. **Set out the attribution problem** and define the key questions to be addressed. 2. **Develop a Theory of Change** that outlines the expected causal links and key assumptions. 3. **Gather existing evidence** on outcomes and contributing factors. 4. **Assemble and assess the contribution story**, showing how the initiative may have influenced change. 5. **Seek additional evidence** to test or strengthen the contribution story. 6. **Revise and strengthen the narrative**, refining the Theory of Change as needed. 7. While these steps are iterative rather than linear, they collectively help practitioners build a robust and transparent account of contribution grounded in both data and stakeholder perspectives.
Most Significant Change (MSC)	There is no strict set of steps for MSC, but INTRAC outlines a commonly used process: 1. Define domains of change. 2. Decide how and when to collect stories. 3. Collect significant change stories. 4. Select the most significant stories. 5. Verify the stories. Feedback the results of the selection process.

3.b.i Example Methodology: Conducting a Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA)

Based on the Project "Citizen Data by and for Indigenous People: Nepal's Indigenous Navigator*"*

Case Example: Nepal's Indigenous Navigator

The *Indigenous Navigator* is a global, Indigenous-led framework that uses standardized tools—such as surveys, indicators, and training resources—to collect data on how Indigenous Peoples' rights are respected and fulfilled. In Nepal, the initiative supported a small grants facility that empowered Indigenous communities to design and lead projects addressing local priorities, including biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation, cultural integrity, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. With technical support from the Lawyers Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP), communities identified achievable advocacy goals and implemented one-year projects.

This case provides a useful example of how PIA principles can be applied to community-led citizen data initiatives. Understanding how the project was designed, implemented, and what outcomes and

challenges emerged is an essential foundation for any impact assessment process, as it helps clarify what change was intended, how it unfolded, and what should be evaluated going forward.

The following steps illustrate how a PIA could be applied in practice, using the Nepal *Indigenous Navigator* experience as an example.

PIA Pre-Step: Define Purpose and Stakeholders

- **Purpose:** To clarify why the impact assessment is being carried out and who should be involved.
- **When:** Before starting the impact assessment.
- **Try This:**
    - Clarify the key questions your impact assessment seeks to answer — what you most want to understand about the initiative's impact.
    - Identify the main purpose of your impact assessment (e.g., learning, accountability, advocacy, etc.).
    - Ask: *Who needs to be part of this process for it to be credible, inclusive, and useful?*
    - Then map key stakeholders—including community members, facilitators, and decision-makers—and discuss their roles.
    - Once roles are clear, agree on how participation and decision-making will take place at each stage of the process.

In Nepal:

Before beginning data collection, LAHURNIP and Indigenous Peoples' organizations held initial consultations to present the *Indigenous Navigator* framework, clarify its objectives, and identify target communities. Community-level meetings with traditional leaders ensured that participation was voluntary and relevant to local priorities. Orientation and training sessions introduced participants to the Navigator's tools and strengthened their capacity to lead data collection and advocacy efforts. This early engagement built trust, clarified shared goals, and established a foundation for meaningful, community-driven participation throughout the process. Similar kinds of consultations may be replicated as part of the pre-step to define purpose and stakeholders—helping initiatives ensure clarity, inclusivity, and ownership from the very beginning.

PIA Step 1: Revisit and Clarify Intended Impact

- **Purpose:** To understand what the initiative originally intended to achieve and how participants define meaningful change. It also helps define the scope and boundaries of the assessment — clarifying what will be included, what falls outside its focus, and the timeframe of the changes being examined.
- **When:** After implementation, when reflecting on early intentions and expectations.

- **Try This:**
    - Review documents that describe the initiative's original goals, activities, and intended outcomes (e.g., proposals, community assessments, reports).
    - Facilitate reflection sessions where participants discuss what meaningful change looks like for them.
    - Encourage communities to co-create or refine indicators of impact based on lived experience—not just project outputs.
    - Use these reflections to anchor the assessment in community-defined priorities and values.

In Nepal

Through the *Indigenous Navigator* initiative, Indigenous communities aimed to generate and use their own data to raise awareness of their rights, advocate for evidence-based policies, and strengthen self-determination. The process was designed to shift communities from being data subjects to active data producers—empowering them to identify local priorities, document challenges, and use evidence to engage with governments and other decision-makers. With technical support from LAHURNIP, communities defined advocacy goals grounded in their own definitions of meaningful, rights-based change.

PIA Step 2: Review and Validate Evidence of Change

- **Purpose:** To identify, review and validate outcomes—both expected and unexpected—that resulted from the initiative. This step focuses on *what has changed* rather than *why* it happened, ensuring that the data collected are accurate, representative, and meaningful to those involved.
- **When:** After the initiative has been completed, when enough time has passed for changes to become visible and information can be revisited with participants.
- **Try This:**
    - Revisit and organize existing project data (e.g., monitoring reports, community records, surveys) to understand what information already exists.
    - Use participatory tools—such as storytelling, small surveys, interviews, collective reflection, outcome mapping[6] or facilitated discussions—to complement existing data and surface additional perspectives or outcomes.
    - Reconnect with the community or stakeholders involved in the initiative and ask: "*What has changed since the initiative ended?"*

[6] Outcome mapping is similar to impact pathway and theory of change but focusing on behavior change within partners; see here for more details: https://share.google/SwUkV5ksnNczPbKyw.

- Agree on simple ways to select participants so that diverse community perspectives are included.
- Encourage participants to identify both intended and unintended outcomes observed—those that align with original goals and those that emerged unexpectedly.
- Verify findings collectively to ensure that all voices are represented, and that evidence is as complete and accurate as possible.

At this stage, the goal is to compile and confirm a clear picture of the outcomes observed, setting the foundation for the next step—examining how and why these changes occurred and what can be attributed to the initiative.

In Nepal

After implementing their community-led projects, Indigenous communities in Nepal worked with LAHURNIP to gather information on results through meetings, reflection sessions, and direct observation. They identified outcomes such as increased awareness of Indigenous Peoples' rights, strengthened community organization, and improved dialogue with local governments. For instance, several communities used the data they collected to advocate for local budget allocations supporting education in Indigenous languages and cultural preservation. Revisiting these outcomes collaboratively helped ensure that the evidence reflected community experiences and perspectives—a crucial step before analyzing what drove the observed changes.

PIA Step 3: Analyze and Triangulate[7] Evidence

- **Purpose:** To explore how and why change happened by examining and cross-checking evidence from multiple perspectives. This step deepens the analysis by connecting outcomes to the activities, actors, and contextual factors that may have contributed to them.
- **When:** After outcomes have been identified and validated (Step 2), when sufficient information is available to start interpreting patterns and drawing connections between data and impact.
- **Try This:**
  - Review all sources of evidence you have collected—quantitative data, stories of change, meeting notes, and observations—to identify recurring themes or explanations.
  - Use triangulation to cross-check findings across different data types (e.g., survey results, interviews, and official records) to ensure reliability.
  - Revisit original objectives or impact indicators to assess how closely they align with observed outcomes.

[7] The process of comparing and combining information from multiple sources, methods or perspectives to improve the reliability and credibility of findings (BetterEvaluation. n.d.-c).

- Ask: *What factors contributed most to these changes? Were there any unexpected drivers or barriers?*
- Document links between evidence and outcomes clearly—avoid overstating causality but highlight plausible pathways of influence.
- Begin identifying key messages or insights that could inform future decisions, advocacy, or impact storytelling.

In Nepal:

Once communities in Nepal had documented the outcomes of their small grants projects, LAHURNIP worked with them to interpret the results and understand *how* their efforts had led to tangible change. For example, the Magar community successfully advocated for mother-tongue education, prompting the local government to allocate budget for Indigenous language instruction in schools. Similarly, the Santhal community obtained provincial funding to establish a Museum of the Santhal Community, while the Majhi community secured local government support for a women's empowerment initiative to protect cultural traditions and promote Majhi language training.

These examples illustrate how communities used the evidence they had gathered to advocate for concrete policy and resource shifts—showing the value of connecting data validation (Step 2) with participatory interpretation and triangulation.

PIA Step 4: Reflect on Outcomes Together

- **Purpose:** To create space for the community and other stakeholders to make sense of findings, discuss their significance in relation to the original goals, and identify how these insights can inform future action.
- **When:** Soon after data has been analyzed and triangulated (Step 3), while experiences and results are still fresh.
- **Try This:**
  - Organize participatory meetings or dialogues to review the findings collectively.
  - Use accessible visuals, summaries, or stories to present results and stimulate discussion.
  - Facilitate conversations that invite all voices—including women, youth, and marginalized groups—to share perspectives on what the outcomes mean.
  - Ask: *Which changes are most significant? What surprised us? What didn't happen, and why?*
  - Capture reflections, insights, and points of disagreement—these are valuable for understanding diverse perspectives and building shared learning.

- Identify concrete next steps: how can findings inform future action, advocacy, or capacity building?
- Note any recurring messages or examples that could later support impact storytelling.

In Nepal: Following project implementation, Indigenous communities and LAHURNIP organized collective reflection sessions to review the outcomes of their small grants projects. These gatherings brought together Indigenous leaders, community members, and local government representatives to discuss what had changed, what challenges remained, and how the results aligned with their original advocacy goals—such as strengthening cultural identity, influencing local planning, or improving access to education and services. These reflections helped validate findings, reinforce community ownership, and generate shared lessons for future initiatives.

PIA Step 5 (Optional): Reflect on the Impact Assessment Process Itself

- **Purpose**: To take a step back and reflect on how the impact assessment was carried out—what worked well, what was challenging, and how the process could be improved in future cycles.
- **When:** After completing the impact assessment, ideally as a final debrief with participants, facilitators, or initiative partners.
- **Try This:**
  - Ask: *What went well in how we assessed impact? What didn't?*
  - Consider whether the methods used were accessible, inclusive, and culturally appropriate.
  - Reflect on who participated—and who didn't—and why.
  - Document lessons and practical recommendations to strengthen future assessments or adapt the approach to new contexts.

In Nepal: While the Nepal *Indigenous Navigator* experience did not include a formal reflection on the assessment process itself, similar participatory reviews could be applied. For example, LAHURNIP and partner organizations might convene a debrief with Indigenous community representatives to discuss what aspects of data collection, analysis, and advocacy worked best, and what could be improved for future cycles. This kind of meta-reflection reinforces learning, accountability, and long-term capacity for community-driven impact assessment.

3.c Step 3: Making Use of the Findings

Once you have gathered and reflected on the results of your impact assessment—whether through a method like Participatory Impact Assessment or another approach—itis time to think about how to embed those insights into current and future citizen data work. This step bridges the technical process of assessment with the goals of your citizen data work, ensuring that evidence translates into learning and action and doing something intentional with what has been learned and ensuring that those insights inform the next phase of your work.

The outputs of this step will look different depending on your context. For some initiatives, it may be a reflection workshop with participants or community groups; for others, it may take the form of a summary report, a funding proposal, or a collective action plan in the community that captures lessons and next steps. What matters is that findings don't remain static—that they are translated into actions, shared meaningfully, and used to strengthen ongoing citizen data practice, including regular documentation, learning, and feedback loops.

3.c.i Putting Findings into Action

Once your findings are synthesized, consider the most strategic and participatory ways to use them. The aim is to turn evidence into influence, helping your initiative strengthen its goals, inform policy, and foster accountability. Depending on your goals and audience, this can include:

- **Policy and advocacy:** Translating findings into clear messages that highlight community priorities or data gaps, and sharing these with decision-makers, media, or networks. Evidence from citizen data impact assessments can support advocacy campaigns, inform local or national policy dialogues, or promote more transparent and participatory data practices and governance reforms. By presenting evidence in a way that aligns with policy cycles, such as agenda-setting, budget allocation, formulation or review, citizen data can more effectively shape decision-making processes and public-sector priorities.
- **Community engagement and feedback:** Presenting results back to participating groups to validate findings, spark discussion, and co-develop the next steps. This helps close the feedback loops and ensures transparency.
- **Learning and adaptation:** Using the results to help refine future data collection methods, collaborations, or capacity-building efforts. Embedding these lessons into regular documentation strengthens the evidence base over time.
- **Resource mobilization:** Drawing on the evidence generated to support funding proposals, partnership development, or plans for continuing and expanding successful aspects of the initiative.
- **Impact storytelling:** Translating evidence into compelling stories of change that communicate the value of citizen data to different types of audiences. The next section of the toolkit will provide a how-to for developing impact stories.

By linking evidence to advocacy, learning, and communication, findings can extend beyond the impact assessment itself—contributing to stronger, more connected citizen data ecosystems.

Next steps

The next chapter builds on this foundation, showing how to translate impact evidence into compelling, evidence-based stories that communicate the significance of citizen data to diverse audiences. Practitioners are encouraged to adapt, test, and refine the approaches presented throughout this toolkit, using them as a starting point for learning and experimentation rather than a fixed set of rules.

4. Impact Storytelling for Citizen Data

4.a Impact Storytelling for Citizen Data: What Is it?

Definitions of impact stories can vary across organizations and are often shaped by communication, advocacy, and funding objectives. As a result, impact stories can take different formats and narrative styles, varying in length, structure, and framing depending on communication strategies and practical factors such as time, funding, and technical capacities.

Given this diversity, the toolkit introduces its own operational definition of impact stories—grounded in evidence, participation, and learning, which are central to citizen data initiatives. This helps distinguish the approach presented here from purely narrative or communication-driven storytelling.

For the purposes of this toolkit, **impact stories** are brief, evidence-based communication products that explain how data and evidence contribute to meaningful change. They trace the journey from information gathering to influence—showing how insights gleaned throughout the process inform decisions, policies, practices, or perceptions, and why they matter to people's lives.

This section explores the following aspects of impact storytelling in citizen data:

b. Why Impact Stories Matter for Citizen Data

c. Impact Storytelling in the Data Value Chain

d. Elements of an Ideal Impact Story

e. Complementary Knowledge Products

f. Guiding Framework for the Toolkit: The Citizen Science Impact Storytelling Approach (CSISTA)

g. Evidence: What it is and its Role as a Bridge Between Impact Assessment and Impact Storytelling

4.b Why Impact Stories Matter for Citizen Data

Impact stories can make the role and value of citizen data visible beyond technical circles. They help translate evidence into relatable narratives that inspire action, build trust, and demonstrate real change. By doing so, impact stories can strengthen communication, advocacy and partnerships—bringing data to life in ways that motivate participation, transparency, and collaboration.

In public policy contexts, impact stories can support learning and decision-making by linking citizen data initiatives to real public challenges and observed changes. By translating technical findings into human-centered, context-rich insights, they can help decision-makers understand what work, for whom, and why, and can inform reflection and learning at different stages of the policy cycle.

For national statistical offices and other data institutions, impact stories also offer a way to go beyond statistical reporting by showing how data connects to people's lives, public decisions, and real-world change.

Impact stories do more than communicate results—they help make citizen data visible, meaningful, and actionable. The figure below highlights key reasons why they matter.

Figure 4: Ten reasons why citizen data impact stories matter

Source: Collaborative on Citizen Data

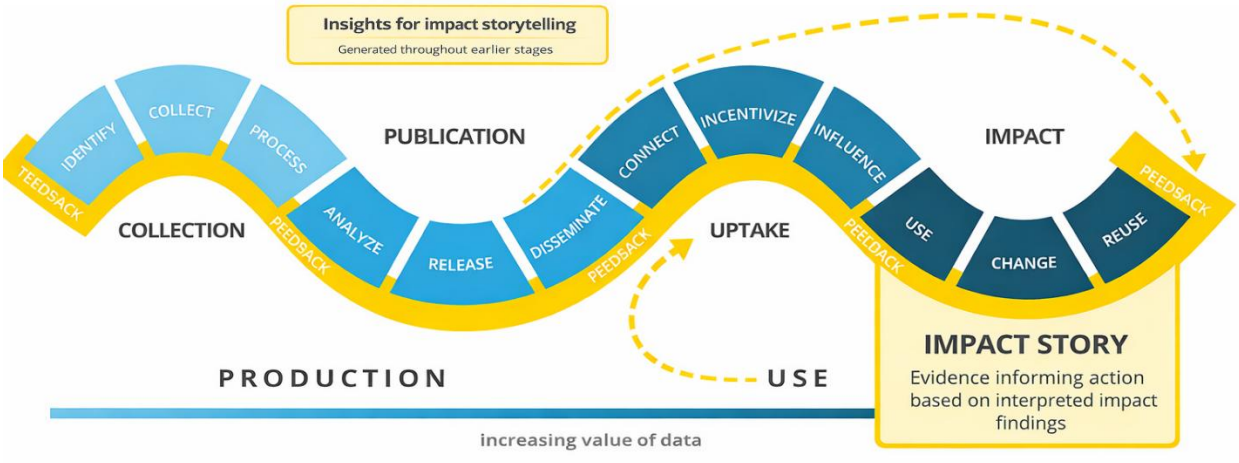
4.c Impact Storytelling in the Data Value Chain

Impact storytelling builds on evidence generated across the data value chain and as recommended in this toolkit is particularly relevant after conducting an impact assessment to have a clear understanding of the change that occurred. While it is most closely linked to later stages—where findings are interpreted and communicated—it draws on insights produced throughout earlier phases, from data collection and analysis to the identification of outcomes and impact **(see Figure 5)**. It uses these findings to explain what changed, for whom, and why it matters.

In practical terms, this means that impact stories are most effectively developed once sufficient evidence on change has been generated, rather than produced early in an initiative before outcomes or impacts can be understood.

In this sense, impact storytelling can act as a bridge between evidence and action.

Figure 5: Impact storytelling in the Data Value Chain



Source: AI adaptation of Open Data Watch (2019)

4.d Elements of an Ideal Citizen Data Impact Story

Having explored what impact stories are and why they matter, this section outlines the key elements that help make them clear, credible, and engaging. While formats may vary, these elements provide a useful reference for structuring impact stories for citizen data.

Practical guidance on how to develop these elements is provided in the following step-by-step section of this toolkit.

Core Elements of an Impact Story:

The elements below are indicative rather than prescriptive, and can be adapted to context, scale, and capacities of each citizen data initiative.

- **Concise and focused length**, keeping the story clear and engaging (typically 2-4 pages, and no more than 6 pages)
- **A compelling title** that signals what changed and why it matters
- **A strong lead** that highlights the key result or insight upfront
- **A clear "show, not tell" narrative**, explaining *how* change happened and what enabled it
- **Concrete evidence woven throughout**, such as data, examples, or quotes that substantiate the story
- **Relevant context** that explains the issue addressed and why it matters
- **A concluding insight** that distills the key takeaway or significance
- **Clear and accessible presentation**, using short paragraphs and visual elements (e.g., pull quotes, summary boxes, simple graphics) to dense or overwhelming text

4.e Complementary Knowledge Products

Impact stories often sit alongside other knowledge products used to communicate results and stories of change to different audiences. The table below highlights common formats, their purposes, and the types of evidence they draw on—many of which can also inform the development of impact stories.

Table 4: Examples of Complementary Knowledge Products and Their Uses

Format	Useful for:	Audience	Useful evidence for impact storytelling:
Feature Story/Human Interest Article	Explaining results through people's experiences.	General public, donors, advocacy audiences.	Qualitative data, testimonials, quotes, photos.
Case Study	Provides explanation or contextualizes the citizen data initiative or citizen data.	Practitioners, researchers, learning partners.	Mixed data (quantitative and qualitative), evaluation findings.
Photo/Video Story	Visualizing a story and can inspire or raise awareness.	Public audiences, funders, social media.	Visual documentation, short quotes, high-level results.
Learning Snapshot/ Reflection Note	Sharing lessons or early signals of change during or after implementation. Variants include *Progress Snapshots* or *Promising Practice Notes* for multi-year or ongoing initiatives.	Internal teams, partners, donors, peer networks.	Process documentation, reflections, early outcomes, M&E data.
Policy brief	Summarizing evidence to inform or influence a specific policy issue, decision, or set of policy options.	Policymakers, government officials, national statistical offices, advisors, and technical decision-makers	Synthesized quantitative and qualitative data, analysis of trends or patterns, and findings from studies or assessments.

While these knowledge products can provide valuable material for developing impact stories, they do not replace the need for a structured process to identify and validate evidence of change. Impact stories should be grounded in evidence generated through impact assessment or other evidence-surfacing approaches, as will be outlined in the following step-by-step section. Complementary knowledge products can, however, serve as useful entry points—highlighting relevant examples and pointing to where more detailed or validated evidence can be found. They can also be developed from the evidence generated from the impact assessment.

4.f Guiding Framework for the Toolkit: The Citizen Science Impact Storytelling Approach (CSISTA)

This toolkit draws from the Citizen Science Impact Storytelling Approach (CSISTA) as a foundation for developing citizen data impact stories that are evidence-based and audience-focused. CSISTA was originally developed in response to a growing demand for methods to capture and communicate the value of citizen science in policy and decision-making (Wehn et al., 2021a). In adapting it for citizen data, this toolkit extends the approach beyond research-led contexts to initiatives led or shaped by communities and civil society, operating at different decision-making scales, and producing locally grounded data and evidence that are often used directly for dialogue, advocacy, or collective action, among others.

While it was initially designed to assess and communicate policy impacts, this toolkit adapts its core principles to a broader range of outcomes relevant to citizen data—such as improved data use, enhanced accountability, and more inclusive decision-making. The approach is grounded in three iterative steps—1**) learn about impacts**, **2) set storytelling goals**, and **3) craft the story**—that guide practitioners in translating evidence into meaningful narratives. These core steps are complemented in this toolkit by additional steps that support ethical validation, effective dissemination, and ongoing learning in the context of citizen data.

At the core of this approach is the CSISTA Impact Inquiry Instrument (adapted in section 5.c.iii)—a qualitative reflection tool designed to surface and document observed changes. In practice, it consists of a structured set of prompts that guide practitioners in identifying and describing how their citizen data initiatives have contributed to outcomes, influences or impacts. By encouraging users to reflect on what has changed, how it happened, and what evidence supports these connections, the instrument helps organize and make explicit the information needed to develop impact stories. This process ensures that impact stories are grounded in credible insights rather than assumptions, linking observed change to the data and actions that helped bring it about.

In this toolkit, the CSISTA serves as a flexible **methodological foundation rather than a prescriptive framework**. Its three steps can be applied by both practitioners who have conducted a formal impact assessment and those who have not. For initiatives that already have evaluation results, the approach builds on existing evidence to guide the development of coherent, evidence-based stories. For smaller initiatives or those without a completed assessment, the same steps offer a light-touch, qualitative entry point for identifying and articulating observed changes in a structured way. In both cases, the focus

remains on grounding stories in credible evidence and connecting data to the outcomes and impacts it helps to create.

Importantly, CSISTA positions storytelling not as an optional add-on, but as a core practice that links data, outcomes, and impacts into coherent narratives that can influence both policy and practice. By articulating credible links between citizen data and observed changes, CSISTA helps practitioners reflect on how their initiatives may connect to wider policy, accountability, or practice contexts.

4.g Evidence: What it is and its Role as a Bridge Between Impact Assessment and Impact Storytelling

Evidence is at the heart of every impact story. It connects data, insight, and meaning. **This toolkit defines evidence as the information—quantitative, qualitative, or experiential—that demonstrates whether and how change has occurred, and why it matters**. Evidence encompasses not only formal data and indicators, but also lived experience, collective reflection, and participatory insights that help explain how knowledge contributes to impact.

While this toolkit emphasizes qualitative and participatory forms of evidence—given the narrative nature of impact stories—this does not mean that quantitative evidence is less important. Quantitative data plays a critical role in showing scale, trends, and magnitude of change, and is often most effective in impact stories when combined with qualitative insights that explain how and why change occurred.

Evidence can take many forms. While this toolkit offers a working definition, there is no single, fixed understanding of what constitutes evidence; rather, it reflects different ways of knowing, shaped by purpose, context, and use (Hayman and Bartlett, 2013, p. 10). In practice, evidence may draw on formal research, lived experience, or collective knowledge, each offering distinct insights into how change happens and why it matters.

For the purposes of impact storytelling, this toolkit highlights a set of evidence forms most relevant for capturing and communicating change (Hayman and Bartlett, 2013, p. 11-12):

- **Analytical or descriptive evidence** explains what is happening, who is involved, and what has changed.
- **Impact evidence** shows the difference made and how an initiative has influenced outcomes, policies, or practices.
- **Experiential or participatory evidence** reveals what change means to people, drawing from lived realities and local perspectives

Strong evidence anchors these stories in reality, making them credible, grounded, and meaningful. It demonstrates that citizen data is not merely anecdotal, but a valuable source of knowledge and influence. In doing so, evidence bridges the technical and the human—linking community experiences with broader systems of change.

In this toolkit, evidence is both the product of assessment and the foundation of storytelling. Whether you start with an impact assessment or use storytelling to uncover and validate evidence of change, what matters most is that your evidence is fit for purpose, transparent, and timely. The goal is not perfect data, but appropriate evidence—the kind that tells the right story, at the right time, for the right reason.

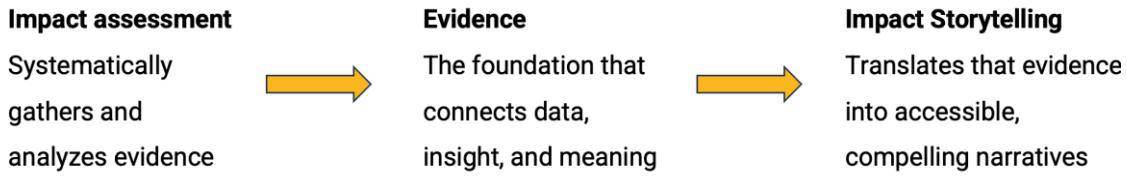
Good practice: balancing numbers and narrative depth (United Nations Global Pulse, 2023)

Quantitative data are essential for showing scale, trends, and measurable change. However, numbers alone rarely explain how or why change happens. Impact stories are strongest when quantitative evidence is complemented by qualitative and participatory insights that add context, meaning, and plausibility. Credibility comes from combining different forms of evidence in coherent, transparent, and accessible ways.

Good practice: using evidence responsibly

While experiential or participatory evidence is essential for understanding how change is experienced, impact stories should avoid relying on isolated or selectively chosen examples. Instead, key messages should remain coherent with the broader body of available evidence.

Figure 6: From Impact Assessment to Impact Storytelling – The Role of Evidence



In this toolkit, evidence is both the outcome of assessment and the foundation of storytelling.

This section has introduced what impact storytelling is, its purpose in the context of citizen data, and some of the common questions and challenges that arise when considering whether and how to produce an impact story. The actual construction of an impact story—what the process looks like step by step—will be covered in the next section, which adapts the CSISTA framework into practical guidance for citizen data initiatives.

5. How to Develop Impact Stories: Step-by-step

Having established what impact stories are and why they matter, this section turns to the question of how to develop them. It provides a set of practical steps and an overarching framework to help citizen data practitioners translate data and evidence into meaningful narratives that demonstrate how change happens and why it matters.

5.a Pre-Step: Preparing to Develop an Impact Story

Quick checklist

Before beginning the process of developing an impact story, it is important to ensure that you are building on a solid foundation. This preparatory step helps clarify whether you have the necessary evidence, perspectives, and conditions in place to proceed. Use the questions below to guide your preparation:

⇒ **Do you have enough credible evidence to tell a story?**

Take stock of the material available to you. This might include data sets, monitoring reports, field notes, partner updates, or stories shared by community members, among others. At this stage, you are not looking for polished evidence but for indications of change—signs that something is shifting, improving, or taking root. Consider what these pieces suggest about the impact so far, and what additional information may be needed to confirm or deepen the story. Mapping what is already known and what remains to be explored will help identify promising story angles and evidence gaps early on.

⇒ **Who should be involved in telling or validating the story?**

Engage people close to the work—or those who can accurately represent it—to ensure authenticity and accuracy. At a minimum, this should include the initiative team responsible for implementation. Where relevant, involve monitoring and evaluation staff to ensure the story is evidence-based, and communications staff to shape the narrative for target audiences. Just as importantly, include community members and other stakeholders who contributed data or were directly affected by the initiative. Their participation helps ensure that stories are credible, respectful, and grounded in lived experience, while also fostering shared ownership.

⇒ **At what stage of progress is the initiative?**

Consider where the work is in its journey. Is the initiative still underway, or has it reached completion? The stage of the work determines what kind of story can be told—and how confidently impact can be described. Be transparent about what the current evidence represents: whether it points to early signs of progress, ongoing outcomes, or more established results. Clarity about the initiative's status and the maturity of its evidence will help set realistic expectations and strengthen the credibility of the story.

Together, these questions help clarify your starting point and ensure that you are ready to proceed.

5.b Introduction to the Impact Storytelling Steps

The steps below—adapted and expanded from the CSISTA Framework[8]—provide a structured process for developing impact stories. Step 1 can be approached in two ways depending on whether evidence has already been gathered or needs to be developed. This distinction is explained following the steps below.

- **Step 1: Learn about impacts** – gathering or reviewing evidence of change to understand what has happened and why.
- **Step 2: Set storytelling goals** – deciding the purpose, audience, and intended influence of the story.
- **Step 3: Craft the story** – translating evidence into clear, engaging narratives tailored to the chosen audience.

Building on this core process, the toolkit introduces additional steps that reflect good practice in ethical, participatory, and learning-oriented impact storytelling for citizen data. These include:

- **Step 4: Validate the story with stakeholders** – ensuring that the impact story is accurate, ethical, and co-owned by those it represents.
- **Step 5: Package and disseminate the story** – sharing the story through channels that best reach and influence the intended audience.
- **Step 6: Track use and learn** – ensuring that storytelling remains part of an ongoing cycle of learning, where evidence generates insight, and insight informs future action.

Working with Evidence in Step 1: Two Entry Points

In this toolkit, **Step 1: Learning about Impacts** can be approached in two ways, depending on whether evidence has already been gathered.

Evidence-to-Story Approach

When evidence is readily available—such as through an impact assessment—practitioners can move directly into developing an evidence-based narrative.

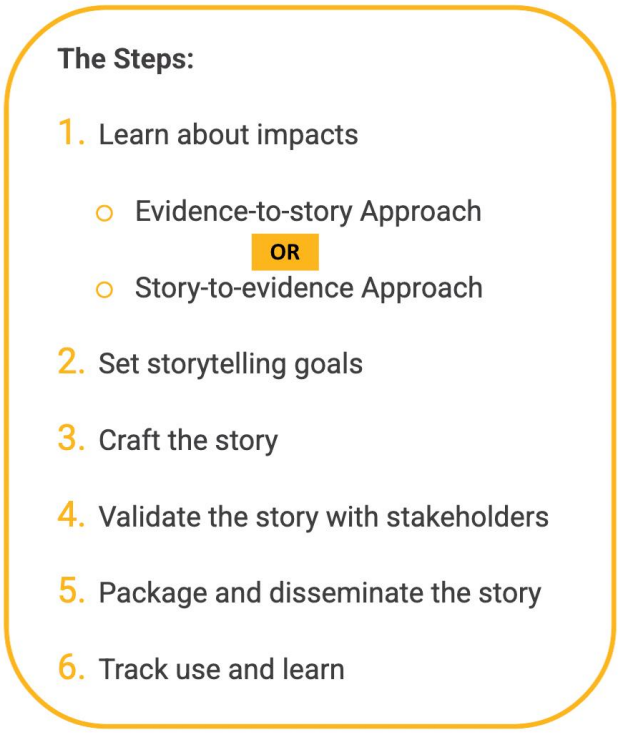
Story-to-Evidence Approach

Where no assessment exists, storytelling can instead be used to surface and validate evidence of change.

In both cases, the process then continues through the remaining steps. These two entry points and the steps will be unpacked in detail in the next section.

[8] The impact storytelling approach developed for the toolkit includes an adaptation of the three steps of the CSISTA framework approach (steps 1-3) and adds three additional steps (steps 4-6).

Figure 7: Impact Storytelling Steps



At a glance: the impact storytelling process in this toolkit

This toolkit follows a six-step process for developing impact stories. The first three steps draw from CSISTA (learning about impacts, setting storytelling goals, and crafting the story), while the following steps focus on validation, dissemination, and learning. Together, they form an end-to-end, ethical, and learning-oriented approach to impact storytelling for citizen data.

5.c. Step 1: Learn About Impacts: Understanding Your Evidence Base to Find the Story

The first step in developing an impact story is to **understand what evidence of change is already available—or can be surfaced through reflection**. This is the decision point that determines whether you follow **an Evidence-to-Story Approach** or **a Story-to-Evidence Approach**. Some initiatives will already have impact assessment findings or results from other documentation/analysis to draw from. Others may not have a clearly defined evidence base but can use the process of developing an impact story to help surface, organize, and validate evidence of change. Both approaches can lead to credible, grounded impact stories.

Each approach is detailed below:

5.c.i Evidence-to-Story Approach (Impact Assessment[9] Completed)

- **Purpose:** To develop an impact story using existing evidence gathered through impact assessment.
- **When:** After the completion of an impact assessment, when results and insights are available.
- **Try This:**
    - Bring together all relevant materials—impact assessment reports, monitoring data, evaluation summaries, and project/initiative documentation.
    - Identify findings that illustrate change across the results chain, particularly at the output, outcome, and impact levels (see Figure 2, pg. 14).
    - Ideally, recurring messages, outcomes, or story highlights will have already been noted during the impact assessment process. If tagging or annotating story-worthy examples was part of your evaluation, use these as your starting point.
    - Highlight concrete examples of change supported by strong evidence—these will form the backbone of your story and point toward possible story angles.
    - If available, check with your M&E focal point, evaluator, or relevant partner to confirm that your selected findings are well supported and appropriate for public communication, including accessibility considerations for persons with disabilities.

Output: A verified set of evidence and examples ready to be shaped into a compelling, credible impact story.

Example: Using Existing Evidence to Tell a Story

A citizen data initiative working on accessible public spaces had already completed an impact assessment showing that community-collected data on sidewalk obstacles and ramp access led three municipalities to upgrade crossings and install tactile paving. To identify their story, the team reviewed existing evidence—drawing on assessment and monitoring data to pinpoint results linked to improved mobility and inclusion. They framed the change by selecting examples that could clearly demonstrate progress, from individual mobility improvements to shifts in municipal planning, and considered how to convey these results through people's lived experiences. Finally, they verified and contextualized the findings with municipal records and community testimonies.

[9] See sections 2. Impact Assessment for Citizen Data and 3. How to Measure the Impact of Citizen Data: Step-by-Step of the Toolkit for more information.

5.c.ii Story-to-Evidence Approach (No Impact Assessment Conducted)

- **Purpose:** To generate credible, qualitative evidence of change through participatory storytelling when no formal impact assessment has been conducted. This approach recognizes that many citizen data initiatives operate with limited evaluation capacity yet still produce meaningful outcomes that can be captured and shared through narrative.
- **When:** When project or initiative documentation or M&E data are limited, but outcomes and experiences—including early, incremental, or locally meaningful outcomes—can still be identified and validated through interviews, reflections, surveys, and other qualitative methods.
- **Try This:**
    - Identify key people who have experienced or contributed to visible change—such as initiative participants, partners, or community representatives.
    - Conduct short, semi-structured interviews or reflective discussions using open-ended questions like *"What has changed?"*, *"Why is this change significant?"*, and *"How did data play a role?"*
    - Capture quotes and examples that illustrate outcomes or lessons learned.
    - Look for recurring themes and confirm them against available documentation where possible.
    - Validate your emerging story by checking back with participants to confirm accuracy and consent.
    - You can draw on participatory evaluation methods such as Most Significant Change (MSC) or Outcome Harvesting to structure and strengthen this process. For details on each methodology, refer to the **Annex** table.

Output: A set of interview-based stories or reflections that reveal credible evidence of change, ready to be refined into an impact story

Checklist: Identifying Change and Evidence for Your Story[10]

This checklist can be used as the core tool for identifying and organizing evidence of change. It provides a **guided structure for reflection and data gathering—whether through interviews, discussions, or review of project or initiative records**.

- **Impact Details**
    a. **Understanding the problem:** briefly describe the issue your initiative has been trying to tackle:

- *What issue is the initiative trying to solve?*
- *How long has this issue been a problem?*
- *Who is affected by this issue?*
- *What statistics or data ('official data', citizen data, etc.) show the scope of the problem?*
- *Where is the problem taking place? (geographically, demographically, etc.)*
- *What are you aiming to improve? (what, with whom and by when)*
- *Why are you tackling it now?*
- *Why did participants want to take part in the initiative's activities?*

b. **Your governance impact story:** Describe a specific instance where the initiative's work contributed to a governance change—such as informing policy, budget, management, or regulatory decisions.

- *What has changed?*
  - local regulation or bylaw changes
  - national regulation, policy or strategy changes
  - change to practices (e.g., change to perceptions, routines, procedures, timetables, etc.)
  - change to arrangement/set up of physical space
  - creation of a new committee to manage a shared resource or issue
  - use of evidence in decision-making (e.g., integration of citizen data into official or local processes)
  - other - please specify
- *Was this change planned or unexpected?*
- *Where in the governance or policy process did this change occur?*
- *Why did these changes come about?*
- *Is this change being measured? (e.g., statistics, interviews, specific measurement tools, etc.).*

[10] This checklist is adapted from the CSISTA Impact Inquiry Instrument developed by the WeObserve Impact Community of Practice (2011); see here: https://zenodo.org/records/4543603#.YCv1AZNKhTY.

- *How have the changes been perceived by your different stakeholders?*
- *Who was involved in making the changes happen?*
- *Who was not involved or left the initiative? Please elaborate.*

c. **Reflections:**

- *What was the most memorable part of your experience with the initiative?*
- *What are some of the most significant lessons learned so far based on your experience?*

d. Three keywords:

- *What are the three keywords that summarize this story from the stakeholders' perspective?*

- **Challenges**

a. Regarding the project or initiative:

- *What challenges or risks did you face during the design, implementation and evaluation phases that resulted in this impact?*
- *Were you able to overcome these challenges?*

b. Policy-related restrictions:

- *Did you encounter any policy, legal and/or regulatory restrictions?*
- *Were you able to overcome these restrictions?*

c. Further change needed:

- *What policy change/s at any level (e.g., community, national, etc.) would improve your initiative's ability to achieve other positive governance impacts?*

d. Next steps:

- *What are the next steps for your initiative? Do you foresee a follow-up initiative?*

- **Wider Impacts**

a. Measuring impacts:

- *What internal tracking or monitoring processes does your initiative have in place to identify governance/policy outcomes/results of your activities?*
- *Does the initiative have a cost/benefit analysis?*

- *Have you provided information in an accessible format to reach those most left behind, if they are part of your citizen data initiative and/or target audience?*

b. Policy recommendations:

- *Do your initiative outcomes include specific policy recommendations? {Y/N} If yes, what are they?*

c. Other impacts:

- *What other impacts do you (fore)see your initiative having (e.g., economic, educational, social, etc.)?*

d. Other initiatives:

- *Does your initiative have a link to any other initiatives (e.g. at local, national, regional or international levels)?*

Together, these questions provide a structured way to trace how change has occurred, who was involved, and what evidence supports it—laying the foundation for crafting credible and compelling impact stories.

Example: Finding the Story through Outcome Harvesting

A community-led water monitoring group wanted to understand how their data was making a difference and decided to use the Outcome Harvesting method to identify and validate emerging changes. The group began by engaging key voices—community members and local authorities who had directly experienced or contributed to visible improvements. Together, they identified outcomes by revisiting their water testing logs and asking, *"What's different now because of our data?"* They found that local authorities had started cleaning and fencing polluted wells in response to their findings. The team then formulated outcome statements—for instance, *"Our monitoring data prompted municipal action to rehabilitate contaminated wells in three villages."* Finally, they verified these outcomes by cross-checking government records and confirming details with community leaders.

This approach shows how storytelling itself can help surface and substantiate evidence of change. By using participatory methods to gather, interpret, and validate data, practitioners can build credible, people-centered stories that capture the impact of citizen data even when no formal evaluation exists.

5.d Step 2 — Set Storytelling Goals

Once you have identified and validated your evidence of change, the next step is to decide why you are telling this story, who it is for, and what you want it to achieve. A clear purpose and audience will guide what to emphasize, whose voices to include, and how to shape your story for maximum relevance and influence.

Impact stories can serve many functions: they can influence policy and governance processes, provide accountability, mobilize resources, inspire participation, or support reflection and learning within your organization or community, among others. Each of these purposes calls for a different balance between detail, tone, and evidence. When setting your storytelling goals, consider the following:

- **Purpose:** What is the story meant to do? (e.g., influence policy, attract funding, raise public awareness, ensure accountability, or share lessons learned, among others). Write a one-sentence purpose statement to anchor your focus—this will keep the story purposeful and prevent it from trying to do too much at once.
- **Primary audience:** Who most needs to hear this story—decision-makers, donors, partners, communities, or the public? Knowing your audience will guide both the content and format.
- **Decision context:** When and where will this story be used? Understanding the timing and context of its use (e.g., a policy consultation, advocacy campaign, donor report, or community meeting) helps determine the right length, tone, and level of technical detail.

Once your purpose and audience are clear, revisit your tagged evidence and ask:

- Which pieces of evidence best serve this purpose?
- Whose voices will resonate most with this audience?
- What format or tone will engage them effectively?

Your answers will help you decide which impact story format best fits your goal and audience.

Example: Set Clear Storytelling Goals

Purpose: To influence municipal decision-making on air pollution by demonstrating the health impacts of traffic near schools.

Primary audience: City council members and local transport authorities.

Decision context: A policy consultation on urban mobility planning, where evidence on air quality and public health is being reviewed.

Avoid overly broad goals: Trying to influence policy, attract funding, and raise awareness at once can dilute the focus and impact of the story, and make it harder to craft a clear narrative (Step 2), as each purpose may require a different tone, language, and emphasis.

Working with challenging stories your audience may resist

Some impact stories may be difficult for the intended audience—for example, policymakers or institutional actors—especially when citizen data highlights gaps, unintended effects, or issues that expose limitations in current decision-making processes. This does not mean the story should be

softened or reshaped to please the audience. Rather, it presents a strategic communication challenge, requiring careful consideration of how the story is framed and shared.

To navigate resistance, stay grounded in evidence and be clear about the purpose. Where helpful, frame findings around learning and improvement (rather than blame), connect insights to decisions the audience can realistically influence, and choose the right timing and channel for sharing. Building alliances with partners who can help contextualize or carry the message can also increase uptake.

Effective impact storytelling is not only about resonance—it is about communicating credible insights in ways that can still resonate in real institutional, political and community contexts.

Good practice: working with sensitive impact stories

Some impact stories involve sensitive issues—such as violence, discrimination, health, displacement, or political tension—that may carry risks for individuals or communities if shared publicly. In these cases, the primary concern is not how persuasive or effective the story is, but whether sharing it could cause harm to individuals or communities.

Consideration of the sensitive nature of the data should begin when deciding what story to tell and continue throughout the process of drafting, validating, and sharing the story.

In such cases, practitioners should take additional care to prioritize safety, dignity, and consent. This may include anonymizing details, adjusting framing or levels of detail, limiting dissemination, or deciding not to publish a story at all. Validation with affected stakeholders is especially important to ensure that stories reflect lived experiences accurately and are shared in ways that minimize the risk of harm.

5.e Step 3 —Craft the Story

5.e.i Get into a Creative Mindset

Before drafting an impact story, it can be helpful to pause and step into a more creative mindset. Approaching your evidence with curiosity about what story it might tell.

This short exercise is designed to help you get there. It is not about structuring your story or getting the wording right. It is about loosening your thinking and capturing what stands out.

Take a few minutes to write freely (pen and paper recommended): Step away from your screen and, without looking at your evidence in detail, jot down whatever comes to mind when you think about the story you want to tell. Keep it simple and intuitive. You are not writing your story yet, and you are not organizing your ideas. You are simply describing what stands out and surfacing themes or elements to build on.

- Write quickly and without overthinking—words, fragments, or short phrases are enough

- Don’t worry about order, clarity, or completeness
- Focus on what feels vivid, striking, or worth sharing (e.g. a place, a feeling, or a moment that stayed with you)

As you write, you may find it helpful to reflect on questions like:

- What words, images, or moments come up first?
- Is there something you keep returning to?
- What feels most important or memorable?
- What feels like the most significant change? Are there smaller or supporting shifts?
- Is there a moment, a way something was expressed, or a contrast that captures the essence of the change (without needing to recall it exactly)?
- Is there a setting or detail that helps you picture the story more clearly (e.g. a landscape you have in mind, or a particular atmosphere, temperature, or sensory detail that captures the place)?

5.e.ii Think about Structure

Now that you have surfaced initial ideas and reflections, it is time to shape them into a clear and engaging narrative. Crafting the story is about moving from information to meaning—connecting facts and experiences in a way that makes change visible, inclusive, and relatable.

A useful way to do this is by applying a **results chain logic to storytelling**. This means starting with the most significant results or impacts, and then tracing backward through outcomes, outputs, and activities to explain how they came about. By leading with the strongest evidence of change, you capture the reader’s attention from the start while still grounding the story in credible, verifiable detail.

This approach mirrors a journalistic or “inverted pyramid” structure. Whereas evaluation reports and donor documents often follow a chronological sequence (from inputs to activities to outputs to outcomes and impacts), impact stories reverse this order, beginning with what matters most, and then unpacking the supporting details. The illustration below shows how to apply a results chain logic to storytelling by working backwards—from impact to the steps that led to it. Following the results chain illustration, the inverted-pyramid illustration presents the same idea visually, highlighting how impact stories begin with the most important change before unpacking the supporting details. Together, these two visuals offer complementary ways of understanding the same storytelling approach.

Figure 8: Using the Results Chain for Impact Storytelling (Working Backwards from Impact)

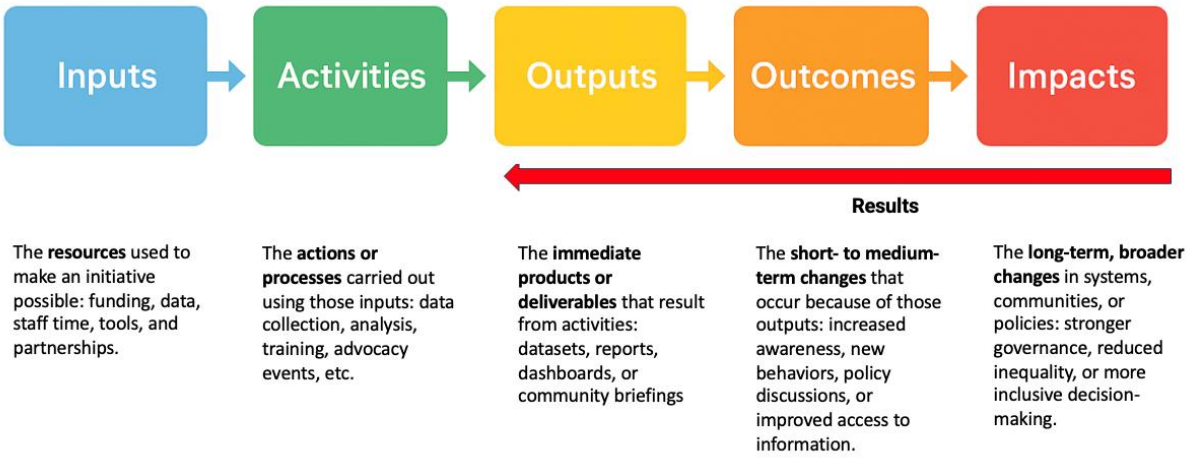
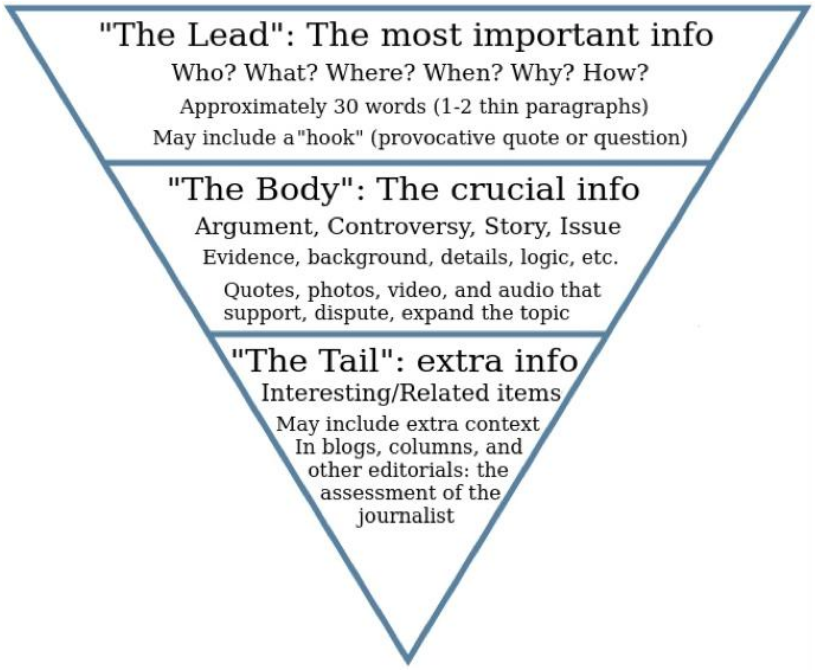


Figure 9: Inverted Pyramid Narrative Approach - Roberts (2016)



Source: Ohio State Press

Tips for creating a strong structure:

- **Lead with impact:** Begin with what changed and why it matters. Bring data and lived experience together to show tangible results.
    - What works: "Community-generated air-quality data led the city council to reroute heavy-traffic buses, reducing school-day pollution by 18 per cent."
    - What doesn't: "Our project launched air-quality monitoring activities in three neighborhoods."
- **Trace back to outcomes and outputs:** Explain what enabled this change. What actions, partnerships, or uses of data made it possible.
    - What works: "This shift was made possible by weekly pollution reports shared with the council and parents' associations using new sensors."
    - What doesn't: "We trained volunteers and held several community meetings..."
- **Anchor in evidence:** Support each part of your story with concrete data, examples, or quotes that substantiate your claims.
    - What works: "Residents reported fewer asthma flare-ups, and 72 per cent said they felt safer letting children walk to school."
    - What doesn't: "People felt the air was cleaner and believed things were improving..."
- **End with insight:** Conclude with what the change means. In other words, how it contributes to broader goals, learning, or future action.
    - What works: "This experience shows how resident-generated citizen data can inform practical municipal decisions when paired with consistent engagement."
    - What doesn't: "This project was successful and the hope is to continue similar activities."
- **Move from impact to insight, not activity to output.**
    - What works: A story that starts with the change, explains how it happened, shows the evidence, and ends with what it means.
    - What doesn't: A list of activities followed by a general statement of success.

Good practice: resisting the pressure for "big" impact

In practice, organizations may feel pressure to present impact stories that highlight large or dramatic results—often in response to funding, reporting, or accountability expectations. While these pressures are real, effective impact stories are not about producing flashy numbers or overstating results.

Strong impact stories focus on meaningful change, whether incremental or transformative, and on explaining *how* citizen data contributes to improving lives, addressing problems, or shifting practices

and/or perceptions. Being honest about the scale, pace, and limits of change helps build credibility and supports learning, trust, and long-term impact.

5.e.iii Think about Language

Attribution vs. Contribution

When presenting evidence, be careful to reflect the realistic role of the initiative in creating change. Use attribution sparingly—only when there is strong evidence of a direct cause-and-effect relationship. Prefer contribution, which acknowledges that change results from multiple actors and factors.

For example:

- **Attribution:** "Our citizen data project reduced air pollution in the neighborhood by 30 per cent."
- **Contribution:** "Data collected by residents helped city officials identify pollution hotspots and informed new traffic restrictions that contributed to a 30 per cent drop in local air pollution."

Contribution language keeps your story collaborative and credible, while still showing clear impact.

Language of change

Effective impact stories use change language, *not activity language*. Instead of describing what was done ("we trained 200 people…"), show what changed because of it ("200 data producers now apply gender-sensitive methods in their work"). This simple shift helps focus on outcomes rather than activities. Writing in a way that avoids misrepresentation is also important. For example, instead of "a new climate change law passed as a result of the data collected by X initiative..." say "Community leaders presented findings from their citizen data to policymakers, contributing to the passage of a new climate change law."

5.e.iv Make it human

Behind every data point are people and experiences. Strong stories connect evidence to human emotion and context.

- Start with people or results—open with a vivid example that shows change in action.
- Show "before and after" moments that make transformation visible.
- Include real voices—quotes, testimonials, or reflections—to make the story authentic and grounded.
- Use plain, accessible language and visuals.
- Center peoples lived experiences to reinforce good practices in policy design, fundamentally people-oriented approaches that prioritizes community needs, capacities and well-being over purely administrative or technical processes.

Above all, stay accurate. Every claim, quote, and number should be backed by evidence. Credibility is what gives your story influence.

A well-crafted impact story doesn't just inform—it helps audiences see and feel how citizen data leads to meaningful change.

Example: Using Structure and Language to Go from Reporting to Impact Storytelling

Weaker storyline:	**Improved storyline:**
The EqualityMap project conducted a survey across five cities to document LGBTQ+ people's experiences in accessing public services. Over three months, volunteers gathered 800 responses and published a report highlighting widespread discrimination in healthcare. Thanks to this project, several municipalities have started anti-bias training for clinic staff, improving access for LGBTQ+ residents.	When citizen-generated data from the EqualityMap project revealed that nearly half of LGBTQ+ residents avoided public health clinics due to discrimination, three municipalities adopted new anti-bias training for frontline staff. The evidence, gathered through a volunteer-led survey across five cities, helped spark discussions on inclusive service delivery between communities and local officials. By turning lived experience into data, the initiative contributed to shifting how cities understand and respond to LGBTQ+ health needs.

5.f Step 4 — Validate the story with stakeholders

Validation is a crucial step in ensuring that the impact story is **accurate, ethical, and co-owned** by those it represents. It goes beyond fact-checking—it's about confirming that the story truly reflects lived experiences and respects the perspectives of those involved. Engaging stakeholders in this process strengthens both the story's legitimacy and its impact when shared externally.

What you should do:

- Identify key stakeholders who should review the story—such as community representatives, partner organizations, field staff, or decision-makers.
- Share drafts in accessible formats, using summaries, visuals, or translations where needed to ensure inclusivity.
- Invite feedback on accuracy, tone, and whether the story fairly represents participants' experiences and contributions.
- Seek explicit consent for any names, quotes, or images used, following ethical standards for data and storytelling[27].

Validation is not just a technical check; it's part of ethical storytelling that centers the voices of those most closely involved and builds collective ownership of the narrative. By validating impact stories with stakeholders, the process also strengthens legitimacy, inclusiveness, and alignment across different actors and levels of decision-making.

In practice, validation can also create space for dialogue and collaboration between communities, civil society organizations, and national statistical offices (when involved in the citizen data initiative), helping align perspectives and strengthen shared ownership of evidence.

5.g Step 5 — Package and disseminate

How an impact story is presented plays an important role in how it is received. Thoughtful design can make a story more accessible, readable, and engaging—helping draw readers in and guide them through the narrative. Where possible, professional design support can enhance this. However, even simple formatting choices can significantly improve how a story is experienced.

Tips for presenting your story effectively:

- **Keep the focus on the story**
  Design should support the narrative, not compete with it. Visual elements should draw readers in and complement the text without overpowering it[11].

- **Prioritize readability**
  Use clear, simple fonts and ensure text is easy to follow. Break up long paragraphs and allow for spacing so the story has room to breathe.

- **Use clear and consistent layout**
  A clean layout can help guide the reader through the story. This can be achieved with consistent headings and a simple, well-structured format.

- **Use visuals with purpose**
  If including photographs or graphics, ensure they add context or depth to the story. Images should faithfully represent the people, places, and situations described, rather than relying on generic or stock imagery. Include captions and credits where relevant.

- **Apply branding thoughtfully**
  Logos and branding can be present but not dominant. They should not distract from the story itself.

Once appropriately presented, your story should be shared through the channels that best reach and influence your intended audience. Think strategically about where and how your story will have the most impact:

- **Policy and decision spaces:** as part of briefings, presentations, or discussions with policymakers. .
- **Community engagement:** local meetings, newsletters, or exhibitions.

[11] See examples of impact stories at the Collaborative on Citizen Data: https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/citizen-data/resources/.

Media and digital platforms: articles, blogs, short videos, or social media that can help extend the reach of the story and encourage engagement and learning In some cases, such as newsletters or short videos, it may be useful to draw out key elements from the story, like a central finding or a compelling quote, to create additional entry points for different audiences. This can help increase visibility and encourage engagement with the full story, while keeping its core narrative and evidence intact.

5.h Step 6 — Track use and learn

The impact of a story does not end once it is shared. Tracking the use of your impact stories ensures that storytelling remains part of an ongoing cycle of learning—where evidence generates insight, and insight informs future action. This helps continue the feedback loop between evidence, communication, and change.

Monitor whether the story:

- Informs decisions or policy/community discussions, actions or perceptions;
- Strengthens partnerships or collaboration;
- Attracts new resources or visibility; or
- Inspires replication, learning, or adaptation elsewhere.

Keep notes or short reflections on where and how your story circulates, who engages with it, and what kinds of discussions or actions it sparks. Over time, this practice builds a feedback process that keeps impact storytelling responsive, credible, and evidence-driven.

Good practice: tracking how impact stories are used

Keep brief notes or short reflections on where and how your impact story circulates, who engages with it, and what kinds of discussions, questions, or actions it sparks. Over time, this practice helps build a feedback process that keeps impact storytelling responsive, credible, and grounded in evidence.

Where relevant, basic analytics or platform insights (such as website or social media metrics) can complement these reflections by providing signals on reach and engagement.

Bringing It All Together

Developing an impact story is both a creative and analytical process—one that connects evidence, people, and purpose. In the context of citizen data, this process highlights how communities contribute to knowledge and influence change. Each step, from identifying your evidence base to tracking how the story is used, reinforces the idea that storytelling is part of a continuous learning cycle. When done with transparency, collaboration, and care, impact stories do more than communicate results: they show how citizen data drives insight, strengthens accountability, and bridges the gap between local experience and decision-making. Ultimately, impact storytelling is not the end of the process, but is a way to keep citizen data alive, meaningful, and in motion.

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Annex. Typology of Suggested Impact Assessment Methods

Method	Description	Best Used When	Limitations
Outcome Harvesting	A retrospective method that identifies and verifies changes in behavior, relationships, practices, or policies ("outcomes") and then works backward to assess how an initiative contributed to them. It does not require predefined indicators or a Theory of Change. Instead, gathers evidence of what has already changed, validates it with those involved, and interprets its significance for future action. **Steps involved:** Typically, it involves six steps: designing the harvest, gathering and drafting outcome descriptions, engaging informants, substantiating findings, analyzing patterns, and supporting the use of findings. **Why is it suitable for citizen data?** Because it focuses on capturing real, observable changes emerging from participatory and community-led processes. By tracing how citizen data, advocacy, and collaboration contribute to broader social or policy outcomes—even when these were not anticipated—it helps make visible the collective and non-linear nature of change. This makes it particularly valuable in dynamic environments involving multiple actors and evolving contexts.	• Operating in complex systems with multiple actors or levels of influence. • Indicators or expected outcomes were not predefined at the outset. • The focus is on advocacy, empowerment, or influencing policy and practice. • Learning and adaptive management are central objectives.	While Outcome Harvesting is strong on capturing qualitative change and contribution, it does not quantify impact or provide statistical attribution. While Outcome Harvesting is strong in capturing qualitative change and plausible contribution, it does not quantify impact or provide statistical attribution. The method can be time- and resource-intensive, especially during the outcome verification and substantiation phases. Skilled facilitation is essential to minimize bias and ensure credible, actionable findings.
Theory-based Evaluation (TBE)	Is an approach that uses an explicit Theory of Change or logic model to explain how an intervention is intended to work—then systematically tests whether and how change has happened in line with that theory. It examines	• A citizen data initiative has a reasonably clear theory of change or is willing to develop one.	TBE can be resource-intensive and requires conceptual clarity, analytic skill, and sufficient evidence to test the theory of change.

	linkages between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact, explores assumptions and contextual factors, and produces a plausible case for contribution (rather than definitive attribution). **Steps involved:** There is no single prescribed set of steps for Theory-Based Evaluation, but it generally involves the following components: • Developing or refining the initiative's Theory of Change or logic model. • Collecting evidence across the different levels of the theory (e.g., inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact) to assess whether and how changes occurred. • Analysing the links between those levels—testing key assumptions and confirming or adapting the theory of change. • (Optional) Exploring unexpected or negative changes that emerged during implementation. **Why is it suitable for citizen data?** Because it enables practitioners to articulate clearly how citizen-driven data collection, analysis and use are expected to lead to change (e.g., policy, practice, community empowerment) and then assess whether that pathway holds. It supports reflection on assumptions and the role of data-led citizen engagement across multiple actors, helping citizen data initiatives make sense of how their work contributes to longer-term change—even when change is complex and multi-layered.	• The initiative aims to understand how change occurred (how, why, under what conditions), rather than simply whether it occurred. • There is sufficient data (qualitative and/or quantitative) to trace changes along the theory. • The focus is on strengthening understanding, refining strategy, or demonstrating contribution in a system of actors.	It may not be well suited for very early-stage or purely emergent citizen data initiatives where neither outcomes nor theory of change are defined. It emphasizes plausibility over statistical attribution, which may limit its appeal for rigorous quantitative proof of impact.

Participatory Impact Assessment (PIA)	A flexible, participatory approach combining community-based tools with simple quantitative methods to assess how initiatives have affected people's lives. Developed by the Feinstein International Center, PIA engages participants as co-evaluators—using their own locally defined indicators of change to generate credible, evidence-based findings. It bridges community knowledge and formal evaluation practices, making it particularly relevant where conventional data are scarce. **Steps involved:** The original PIA model from the Feinstein International Center outlines eight stages—from defining key questions and community indicators to triangulating data and validating results. In this toolkit, these have been adapted into four practical steps (plus a pre-step) that maintain the same participatory intent while simplifying the process for citizen data initiatives: • **Pre-step:** Define purpose and stakeholders. • **Step 1:** Revisit and clarify intended impact. • **Step 2:** Review and validate evidence of change. • **Step 3:** Analyze and triangulate findings. • **Step 4:** Reflect on outcomes together. **Why is it suitable for citizen data?** Because it centers participation, local knowledge, and community ownership of evidence. It enables those who generate and use data to define what impact means in their context and to measure it using methods they trust. By combining participatory tools with simple verification	• The initiative values community perspectives and local knowledge systems. • There is limited or no baseline data. • The focus is on understanding social, cultural or livelihood impacts, including changes in empowerment, governance, or well-being that matter to communities. • Experimental or control-group designs are not feasible or appropriate.	It can be time- and resource-intensive, particularly when ensuring inclusive participation or triangulating diverse perspectives. It depends heavily on skilled facilitation to avoid bias and ensure reliable results. Because it relies on perception-based and relative measures, findings may not be statistically generalizable—but they offer rich, grounded insights into how communities experience change.

	techniques, PIA helps transform citizen-generated data into credible, actionable insights that can inform advocacy, planning, or collective learning.		
Contribution Analysis (CA)	Contribution Analysis is a methodological approach designed to explore whether and how an intervention has contributed to observed changes, rather than claiming definitive attribution. It starts with a Theory of Change, assesses evidence across the results chain, examines other influencing factors, and assembles a plausible, evidence-based narrative of contribution. **Steps involved:** 1. **Set out the attribution problem** and define the key questions to be addressed. 2. **Develop a Theory of Change** that outlines the expected causal links and key assumptions. 3. **Gather existing evidence** on outcomes and contributing factors. 4. **Assemble and assess the contribution story**, showing how the initiative may have influenced change. 5. **Seek additional evidence** to test or strengthen the contribution story. 6. **Revise and strengthen the narrative**, refining the Theory of Change as needed. While these steps are iterative rather than linear, they collectively help practitioners build a robust and transparent account of contribution grounded in both data and stakeholder perspectives. **Why is it suitable for citizen data?**	• The initiative has—or can develop— a clear Theory of Change or results framework. • Multiple actors, systems, or contextual factors shape the outcomes. • There is some reliable data (qualitative or quantitative) available. The goal is to demonstrate contribution and learning, not statistical attribution.	CA depends on having sufficient evidence and a well-articulated Theory of Change; without these, the analysis may remain speculative. It can also be time- and resource-intensive, requiring stakeholder engagement to validate findings and maintain credibility. While it produces a robust narrative of contribution, it does not quantify impact or provide causal proof.

	Because it recognizes that change often emerges through collaboration, advocacy, and systemic influence rather than linear cause-and-effect. By combining evidence from citizen data with other sources, CA helps practitioners trace plausible pathways of change—from local data collection to policy influence or community empowerment. It supports learning and reflection by revealing how citizen data contributes to broader social, environmental, or governance outcomes, even when attribution cannot be directly measured. Note: Like TBE, Contribution Analysis is grounded in a Theory of Change and explores causality. However, CA places greater emphasis on building a plausible contribution claim, using a structured, evidence-weighing process to assess how an initiative influenced observed changes. It is generally more narrow and evaluative, while TBE can be broader and more exploratory.		
Most Significant Change (MSC)	MSC is a qualitative, participatory technique that gathers stories of change from those directly involved in or affected by an initiative. Stakeholders then review and select which stories represent the "most significant" changes and reflect together on why. MSC is particularly designed for programmes where change cannot be fully predicted, indicators are difficult to set in advance, and participation is valued. **Steps involved:** There is no strict set of steps for MSC, but INTRAC outlines a commonly used process: 1. Define domains of change. 2. Decide how and when to collect stories.	• Outcomes are unpredictable or highly variable. • Indicators were not predefined or are difficult to measure. • Participation of community members or data-producers is central to the initiative. • The goal is learning, empowerment, or emergent change rather than strict accountability.	MSC focuses on narrative stories of change, but does not produce generalizable quantitative data or statistical attribution of impact. It requires skilled facilitation and enough time for story-collection, selection and feedback. Because the process often emphasizes "significant" cases, it may not fully reflect the experience of all participants or capture average outcomes.

	3. Collect significant change stories. 4. Select the most significant stories. 5. Verify the stories. 6. Feed back the results of the selection process. **Why is it suitable for citizen data?** **B**ecause it centers community- and participant-generated narratives of change—an excellent match when citizen data projects emphasize empowerment, local relevance, and inclusive evidence generation. By focusing on what those most affected consider significant, MSC helps surface impacts that may not be captured by predefined indicators or standard metrics. It fosters participatory reflection, value-laying and shared ownership of results—qualities aligned with citizen data work.		