

Developing a monitoring methodology in eight steps

Focus of this chapter: Explain the process of developing a CFM methodology. That is, what needs to be decided and in what order. Introduce the eight steps for developing a methodology and explain how these steps are used to as the structure of this Guide.

Content of this chapter:

- The 8-step approach to developing a CFM methodology
- A word on terminology

The eight steps for developing a monitoring methodology, and an outline of this Guide

Setting up a project to monitor campaign finance involves a long series of decisions, which, oftentimes, are intertwined with one another. To ensure you end up with a sound methodology, it is therefore essential that you first identify the goals you wish to achieve and then take relevant decisions regarding key issues in the right order. This rule of thumb applies whether you are planning a minor add-on to an existing election observation project, or a multi-year initiative focused exclusively on campaign finance monitoring.

Over several decades of partnership with CSOs around the world on campaign finance monitoring, IFES has developed an eight-step approach to developing a CFM methodology that has been field tested by CSOs in Afghanistan, Georgia, Libya, Nepal, Nigeria, Serbia, Tunisia, Ukraine and Zimbabwe. Whatever the ultimate objective of a campaign finance monitoring exercise, it is important to establish your monitoring approach before you start. If this is not done, there is significant risk that you end up carrying out certain actions because they seem like a good idea, and you react to things as they come up, without having a coherent plan in place ahead of time. This guide is developed based on these eight steps.

The **first step** is to identify the long-term goals – that is, what role you want money to play in the electoral campaign process. The **second step** is to determine what main problems are keeping the country from reaching these long-term goals, and which ones you want the monitoring to focus on. These can include abuse of state resources, vote buying, excessive spending or over-reliance on a small number of donors.

The **third step** is to decide which outcomes of your monitoring would help address the main problems you have identified in a way that would contribute to your long-term goal(s). This can include legal change, increased awareness among voters or behavior change amongst politicians or business interests.

Deciding your long-term goals first, then identifying the campaign finance problems which need addressing, and lastly pinpointing desired outcomes makes it easier to ensure consistency in your monitoring methodology. Admittedly, the close connection between these issues means that you may often end up considering them in parallel.

Once the problems have been identified and how to solve them in the medium to long term, the **fourth step** is to decide on the monitoring approach in such a way that it contributes to addressing the identified problems, leading to the desired outcome and contributing to the long-term goals. There are a lot of things to consider in deciding on your monitoring approach, and the chapter on this step covers many areas, including how to monitor campaign spending and income, abuse of state resources, vote buying, hidden advertising, the activities of the political finance oversight institution(s) and the interplay between gender and campaign finance.

It is essential to establish what the project will cover, but also what it will not cover. Delimiting the scope and specifics of the project make up the **fifth step** in developing a monitoring methodology. In this step, you will decide which areas of the country should be covered, which parties or candidates followed, and the timespan of the monitoring. Naturally, what you can cover will depend on the available resources, but it is important that your delimitation decisions be based on your decisions regarding the preceding steps.

The **sixth step** addresses how the information coming out of the CFM project can be used to contribute to the desired outcomes and long-term goals. The output of the project may be a traditional post-election report, but it can also include Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, Instagram posts and other platforms to reach the target audience of the project.

Like all types of projects, especially those involving more than one person, project management is a critical issue. Deciding how to manage the CFM project is the **seventh step** in developing a CFM methodology, including who should do what, budgeting, communication issues and security concerns.

Just like guards need guarding, monitoring needs to be monitored. **The eighth and last step** is to decide how organizations can control the quality of CFM and protect against accusations of bias, which are a common response from political stakeholders. How to monitor and evaluate your monitoring efforts, and how to learn from the evaluation results, is therefore the eighth and ultimate step of developing a CFM methodology.

Towards the end of this guide you will find a summary of the recommendations discussed throughout the text, and some final words from people with personal experience monitoring the use of money in politics and electoral processes.

There is a *quicklist* regarding these eight steps in the appendices to this guide. This quicklist can be used by any group developing a monitoring methodology, and it includes succinct practical advice for each step. The appendices also include a list of resources to review, sample checklists as well as a list of abbreviations, a glossary and an index.

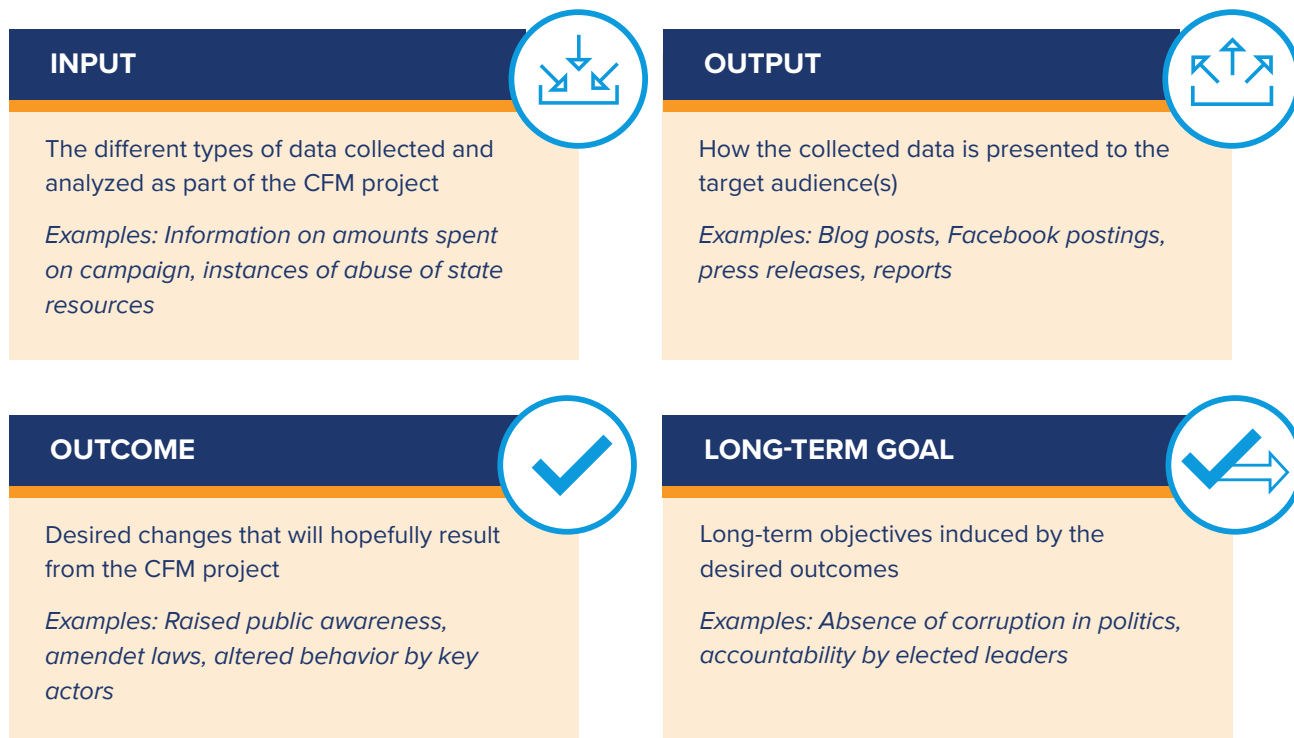
FIGURE 4. EIGHT STEPS TO DEVELOPING A CFM METHODOLOGY



A word on terminology

The terminology involved in these discussions can be a little confusing. Figure 5 is intended to bring some clarity to the matter. *Inputs* are the different types of data points collected as part of the CFM project. These data points can include information on spending collected by Field Monitors, ties between politicians and business interests uncovered by investigative journalists or survey results which measure people's attitude to vote buying. By *output* we mean how these data points and information (the inputs) are practically used. For example, to raise public awareness via a final report or social media campaign, or to conduct an evidence-based lobbying or advocacy campaign to persuade parliament to make necessary legal changes.

FIGURE 5. INPUT, OUTPUT, OUTCOME, GOAL – ON TERMINOLOGY



Outcomes are the desired changes that we hope to see as a result of both the inputs and outputs of a CFM project. The outcomes should be measurable so that it is possible to measure the success of the project, though desired outcomes may not come to be immediately. In the real world, changes to legislation may take several years. What is more, this timeframe is sometimes desirable in that it ensures protection of the Rule of Law and that the legal changes are indeed the right ones. At least in some cases, it may be reasonable to aim for the desired outcomes happening before the next round of the type of elections being monitored (presidential, parliamentary and so on). Even if it may take time before an outcome is achieved, they should be monitorable and should be defined as such.

It may take even longer to reach the *goal or goals* of the CFM project, which are the long-term objectives based on a series of outcomes. Where we have seen changes regarding a corrupting role of money in politics it has often taken decades, and the same frequently goes for larger scale increases in transparency. Because of this long timeframe, the goals should mainly be used to guide the CFM methodology, not to measure the project's success. It may also be exceedingly difficult to measure goals.