



Defining monitoring and evaluation for your group

This tool is designed for organisations, communities or nations who are beginning to think about monitoring and evaluation, or who want to revisit how evaluation is understood within their work.

While many groups already collect information about their activities and outcomes, the language and concepts used in evaluation are often taken for granted. Terms such as evaluation, outcomes, indicators, or impact may be used frequently without a shared understanding of what they actually mean for the organisation or the community it serves.

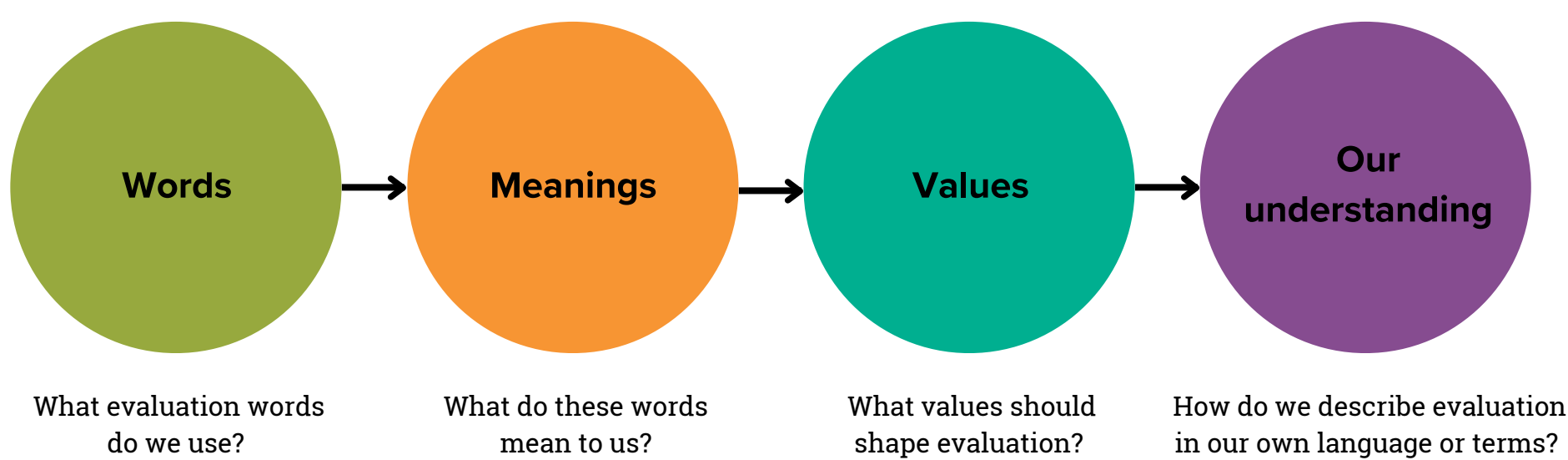
The purpose of this tool is to create space to step back and reflect on these ideas. It encourages groups to explore how evaluation can be understood in ways that are relevant to the values and priorities of community. Even organisations with established evaluation practices may find it valuable to return to the starting point and consider whether the language they use still reflects their goals and ways of working.

The tool can be done with staff, board members and community representatives, and may also involve external partners or evaluators who support your group's M&E work. By discussing evaluation together, groups can move from assumed meanings toward a shared understanding of what evaluation is for and how it should be approached.

Developing shared language helps ensure that evaluation is owned by the group rather than imposed from outside. By the end of this process, you may have developed a shared glossary or collective definition of evaluation.

At the very least, the tool is intended to start conversations about whether current understandings of evaluation are working and, if not, to explore alternative ways of describing and approaching evaluation.

The tool is structured around four key areas:

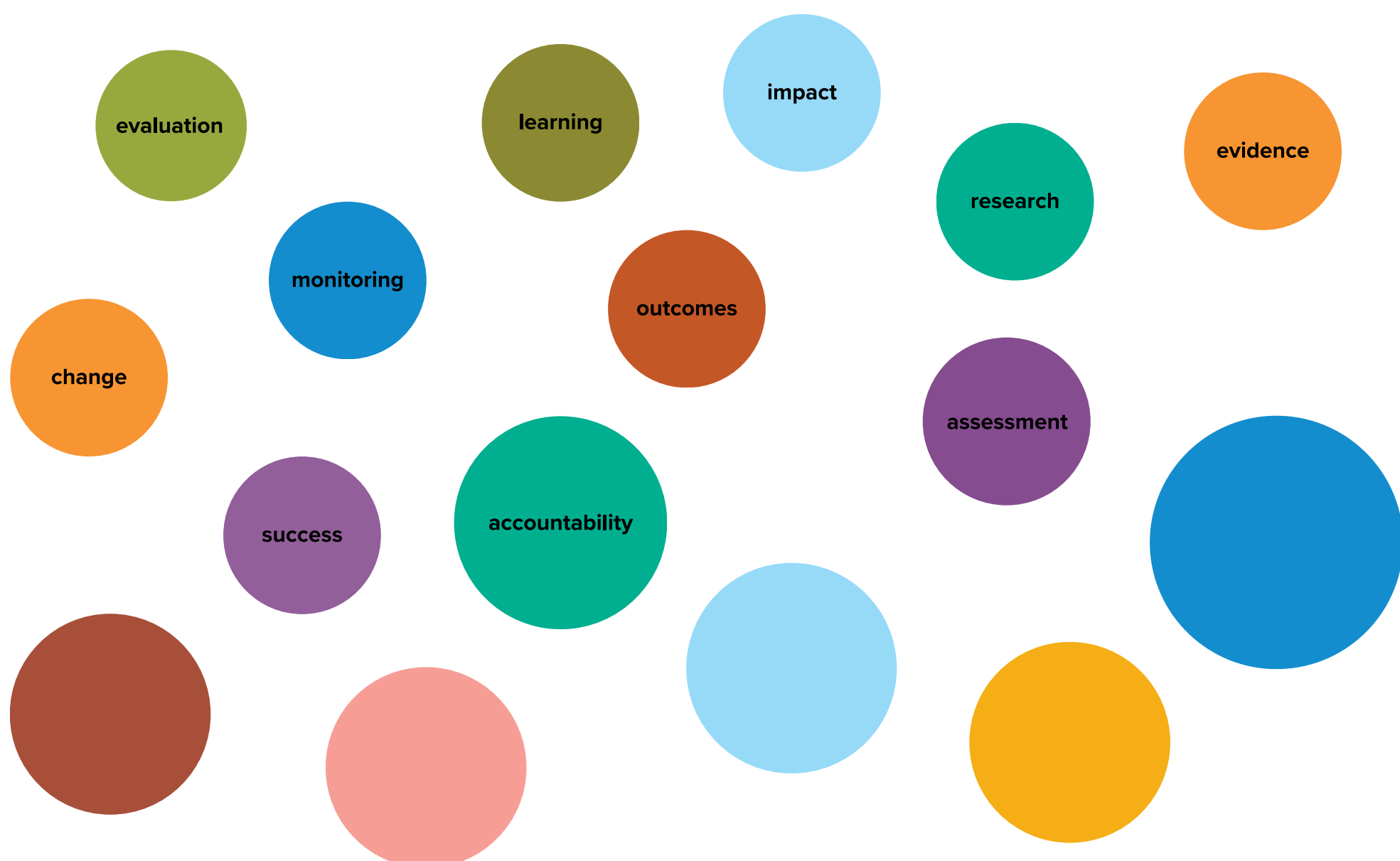




Words

This section invites your group to explore the words commonly used in monitoring and evaluation and what they mean in the context of your work.

Here is a list of words commonly associated with M&E:



You can add, remove or modify these words based on what resonates with your group.

For each word, your group can discuss or write down:

What the word means to them (how they interpret it).

Any feelings associated with it (for example, does it feel useful? Is it clear? Confusing? Uncomfortable?)

Where have they encountered it or heard it used (in your work? In other organisations? In your community?)



Meanings

Once your group has explored words used in M&E, this section will help you define more clearly what those words mean in your context.

Have a group discussion and ask:

- Where do our meanings overlap?
- Where do they differ?
- Which definitions feel closest to our work?

You might discover that:

- some words feel too technical or abstract.
- some words feel imposed by funders or outsiders.
- some words feel more authentic.
- some words align (or do not align) with Indigenous approaches to M&E.

Use the template below to write down how your group interprets each M&E term in your own language or terms.

There is an example to get you started, but you can edit it to make it your own.

Word	Our meaning
Evaluation	Reflecting together to learn what works.
Monitoring	Checking how things are going.
Impact	Long-term difference in our community.
Evidence	Stories, experiences and other data showing change.



Values

Evaluation is not just about collecting information. Approaches to M&E will also be shaped by the values that guide your work. This section invites your group to explore which values are most important in how you approach monitoring and evaluation.

Ask your group:

What values should guide how we evaluate?

Some examples might include

- community voice
- care
- transparency
- learning
- accountability
- self-determination

Once you have identified key values, discuss:

How do we want these values to influence the way we talk about evaluation?

How might they affect what we choose to measure? Or, how we collect and use information?

Examples:

- If care is a value, evaluation may focus on stories, relationships and experiences, not just numbers.
- If self-determination is a value, your evaluation may prioritise the perspectives and priorities of community members in shaping what is measured and how it is interpreted.
- If transparency is a value, evaluation may involve sharing methods, findings and challenges beyond your group or community.

Then, think about ways your group might centre these values in your M&E work:

- in the language you use.
- in the methods and tools you choose.
- in the way results are shared and acted on.



Our understanding

After exploring words, meanings and values, your group can create a shared definition of evaluation. This helps everyone have a common understanding of what evaluation is for and how it should be approached in your context.

It could be something as simple as:

- For our group, evaluation is how we notice change in our work, understand its impact and use that knowledge to grow.
- Evaluation means we reflect together on our work, understand what is changing and learn how to improve.

Your definition might be longer. It might include a story, or use a metaphor that resonates with your work.

Throughout this Toolkit topic, you will find many examples of how other Indigenous groups define and implement evaluation.