INL Best Practices
Results Frameworks

Quick Reference

Problem Analysis

Programming is not a precise science; it is impossible to know what exact combination of approaches and resources will be successful. Problem analysis during the project design phase helps identify the most relevant entry points, technical approaches and activities to form the optimum solution.

A Results Framework is drafted after a problem analysis is used to shape the basic project theory. When this is achieved, the Results Framework becomes a project road map that directs planning processes.

What is a Results Framework?

It is a diagram that depicts what a program intends to achieve through a logical sequence of activities and outcomes. It illustrates the cause-and-effect relationship between the activities and the goals of the program, host country, and INL.

The results framework depicts:

The project goal: A statement that captures the project's intention to mitigate or solve a problem.

Intermediate results: Major changes that are prerequisites to the achievement of the project goal.

Sub-Intermediate results: More specific steps that may be required to achieve the intermediate result.

Activities and inputs: The investments made by a program that are intended to bring about change and achieve the goals.

Why prepare a Results Framework?

An INL program is conceived to address a problem or a complex set of problems. Achieving desired results is an incremental process, starting with small outcomes and building toward goals. A series of cause-and-effect relationships underpins what the program intends to do. Activities that aim to achieve certain milestones or benchmarks (e.g., the opening of a new police station or the training of a cadre of corrections officers) are designed to realize certain results (e.g., citizens feel safer and have greater trust in law enforcement).

The Results Framework is the backbone of the proposed program and serves as the basis for all subsequent program activities, the work plan, and performance measurement.

STEP BY STEP

Goals & Objectives

Well-written goals and objectives:

- Identify who or what is changing
- Clearly define the change
- Identify location and timeframe
- Use action verbs (e.g., decrease, increase, strengthen, improve, enhance)

1. Draft the project goal

The project goal describes a high-level result that will meaningfully contribute to the priorities identified in Mission and Bureau strategic plans. It should be informed by sectoral assessments, as well as counterpart, interagency, and local stakeholder consultations.

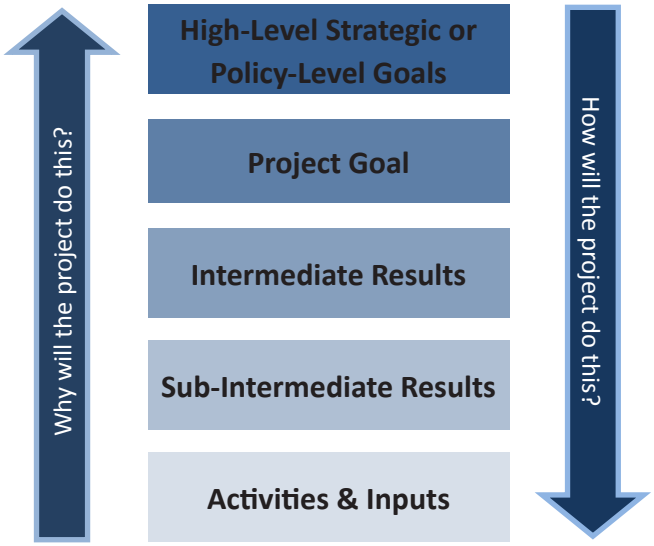
2. Analyze the problem

A grounded and well-researched problem analysis will help to fully understand the problem and identify potential solutions. A commonly used tool is the problem tree/objective tree analysis, which organizes information into a diagram that depicts problems and possible solutions.

A "starter problem" that broadly captures the need for the program becomes the "trunk" of the tree. The circumstances, structural conditions, or local beliefs and behaviors that influence, catalyze, or directly cause the starter problem are the "roots." The roots will travel deeper as you ask "Why?" at each level.

The consequences of the starter problem are its "branches." Like the roots, they become more specific as they travel from the starter problem in the trunk. Identify which effects are most relevant to INL's goals, the host country's priorities, and within INL's manageable interests.

When both roots and branches are fully developed, the final product of the exercise becomes the rough draft of the Results Framework.



3. Establish objectives for the results framework

Build the results framework in a more structured sequence of boxes connected by lines. Begin with the project goal and move downward through the lower level project results and activities (see diagram p. 4).

The goal and objectives are phrased as solutions, or "results statements." Each results statement is an objective that identifies a concrete change, is precise, and ends in the past participle of a verb such as decreased, increased, strengthened, improved, or enhanced. Ex: Case management capacity of all first instance courts increased.

Directly underneath the goal are the intermediate results, which identify major changes that are prerequisites to the achievement of the project goal. Depending on the size and scope of the project, it may be necessary to delineate sub-intermediate results, which are more specific steps that are required to achieve the intermediate result directly above. Most Results Frameworks will have three levels — activity areas, intermediate results, and a project level goal.

4. Identify assumptions and risks

Make a list of assumptions and risks, and review the cause-and-effect relationships in the draft Results Framework to see if they still hold. It is possible an assumption or risk renders the project design to be too flawed to be implemented as planned.

5. Test the logic

Test the cause-and-effect relationships depicted in your draft Results Framework to ensure it demonstrates the "how and the why" of a project:

- Reading from the bottom-up should show why the project is will do specific activities and achieve each result.
- Reading from the top-down should show how each result will be attained.

As you design and implement the program, periodically assess the Results Framework to see if its logic still holds in face of the realities, obstacles, and constraints that arise.

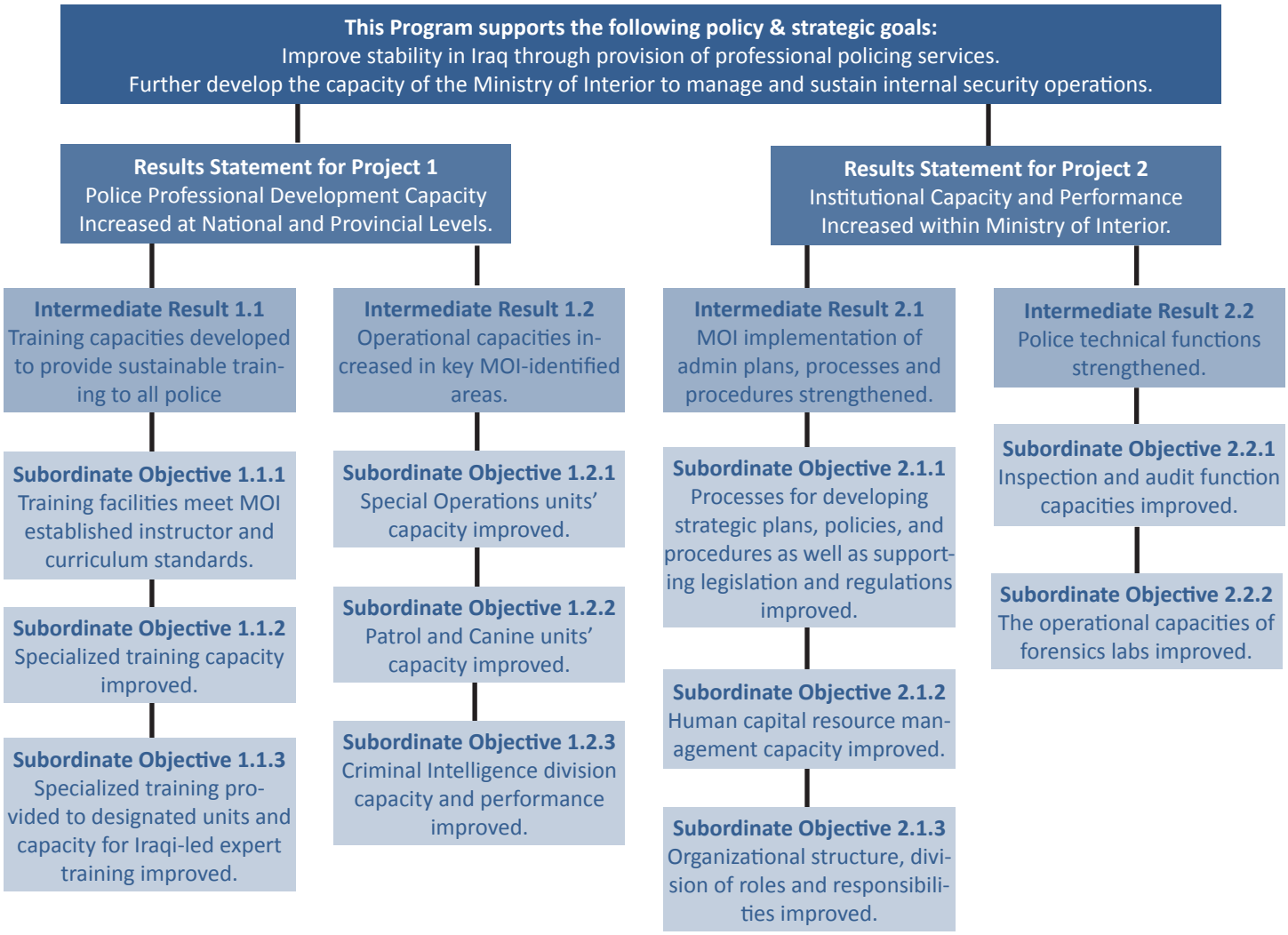
Results Statements

Results statements are the brief and well-defined articulations of project objectives, and should be:

- Specific
- Objective
- Measurable
- Relevant
- Realistic
- Attributable
- Uni-dimensional (not a combination of results)
- Expressed in the past tense.

Focus the result on the participants and their actions; "Decision-writing skills of first instance court judges improved" is better than "Judicial writing improved."

Example Draft Results Framework for an INL Police Program in Iraq



A signal difference in our approach going forward will be a strong focus on results. We will judge our performance, reward our people, and plan our budgets based not on dollars spent but on outcomes achieved.

For More Information

See the INL Knowledgebase and read the Results Framework Manual.