**A tool to estimate the Social Return on Investment of new trails**

**56 Degree Insight for Outdoor Recreation NI**

**Introduction**

This note describes a relatively simple approach which can be used to obtain an estimate of the value of the social return on investment of new trails which have been developed for outdoor recreation and in use for at least a year.

The approach focuses on the return on investment from a path user’s perspective (i.e. the benefits obtained by those who walk, wheel, cycle or ride on the route) and has already been piloted at 3 multi-use trails in Northern Ireland (Darkley Forest, Ballynahinch Rugby Trail and Bunkers Hill).

The approach aims to provide an overall social return on investment by considering benefits relating to physical health, wellbeing, environment and education/ learning. Further information on the measures used, rationale for approach and results from the pilot sites are available from Outdoor Recreation NI.

**Accompanying resources to use**

The attached questionnaire and Excel analysis template should be used when undertaking this approach. These are available below:

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**Data inputs required**

1. **Estimates of total visits to trail –** an accurate estimate of the total number of visits taken to the trail over a 12 month period is required. This can normally be collected using automatic counters installed on the route or, if this is not possible, manual counts can be undertaken on a selection of days and ‘grossed up’ to produce an estimate of total visits over a 12 month period.

If you are using automatic counter data it is important to take steps to avoid any double counting (e.g. users counted both on entrance and exit). Conducting some manual calibration counts on a selection of days makes it possible to identify any over or under counting by equipment to allow for a calibration factor to be applied.

**The estimate of total visits for a 12 month period should be input in row a of the data input template.**

1. **Total investment in trail –** to allow for the return on investment to be calculated, an accurate estimate of the build cost for the trail is required. This should cover the whole financial cost of the trail development (e.g. land purchased, constructions to opening).

**The estimate of the total build cost should be input in row w of the data input template.**

Data

1. **Survey data –**  measures of frequency of use, activities undertaken, duration and intensity of activity and claimed positive outcomes from usage are all obtained from a survey of sample of trail users. The attached questionnaire has been produced to collect this data and some other information which can be useful in understanding the benefits of the trail.

A range of survey approaches can be used to reach trail users with the aim of reaching as many as possible and seeking a representative spread of different types of users (e.g. demographics, users of different times of day, days of week). Potential methods to use include distribution of paper questionnaires at trail heads and/or sharing a link to an online version of the questionnaire via local community groups, websites, social media pages.

Ideally at least 100 questionnaires should be completed but if this is not possible analysis is possible with a smaller number of completions but in this situation results should be considered as indicative only.

**Required survey results should be input in rows b,d,g,h,I,j,m,o and q of the data input template.**

1. **Financial proxy data** – as part of the development and piloting of this approach financial proxy values were sourced to give ‘per hour’ prices for activities seen to provide equivalent levels of positive outcomes to those which could be gained from trail usage. These were categorised into the 4 key areas of interest – physical activity, wellbeing, environmental and learning.

These proxy values are pre-populated within the attached Excel template and it is valid to use these in future analyses for other trails. However, as an option, it may be desirable to seek alternative more local values or, in time, to update these values to reflect price changes since 2021.

**If updated survey results should be input in rows s to v of the data input template.**

**Notes on analysis**

The attached Excel template contains a data input template tab with cells to be populated by the user highlighted in yellow. Details on the source of this data and additional notes are also included for reference.

While most of the data to be input is straightforward, two of the results require some slightly more involved analysis of the raw survey data using Excel, as follows:

* **Percentage of users meeting CMO level physical target at all – (this value is input in the row labelled i)** :

To obtain this percentage the survey data should be filtered to allow a count of those respondents who meet the conditions which mean they can be considered to be meeting CMO targets in their life in general i.e. they either:

* + Undertake 150 mins+ physical activity per week (Q17) at moderate level (Q18) **OR**
  + Undertake 75 mins+ physical activity per week (Q17) at vigorous level (Q18).
* **Percentage of users undertaking CMO target physical activity at trail – (this value is input in the row labelled j):**   
  To obtain this percentage the survey data should be filtered using Excel to allow a count of those respondents who meet the conditions which mean they can be considered to be meeting CMO targets through path usage i.e. they:
  + Took part in any of the activities at Q4 **AND EITHER**
  + Undertake moderate level activity (Q3) for at least 150 minutes per week on trail (Q4 x average visits per week from Q1) **OR**
  + Undertake vigourous level activity (Q13) for at least 150 minutes per week on trail (Q4 x average visits per week from Q1)

**Outputs**

Once data is input to the template, the SROI results will be automatically generated in the Results tab of the Excel template. Note that this provides a range of results covering 5, 10 and 25 year periods.

While these ratios are the key figure to use in report of the estimated social return from the trail, it is also useful to add more qualitative context in reporting. This may be obtained from other analysis and presentation of the survey findings and follow up qualitative interviews/ vox pops with users (the questionnaire includes a final question to collect details of users interested in taking part).