

Social value benchmarking checklist

A benchmark identifies a difference. It does not explain it. Use this worksheet before comparing social value results across projects, suppliers or places, so that any difference you find is interpreted fairly.

1 Are these results comparable?

Work through each test before treating two figures as like for like.

THE TEST	YES	PARTLY / NOTE	NO
1 Same decision question Is the comparison answering one shared question, rather than mixing "largest value" with "strongest outcome for the population"?	☐	☐	☐
2 Similar population and purpose Do the projects share a comparable aim and work with related beneficiary groups facing similar barriers?	☐	☐	☐
3 Comparable place and starting point Do the areas begin from a similar position on the conditions relevant to this outcome, not just geographic proximity?	☐	☐	☐
4 Same outcome definition Does each measure mean the same thing? A job created, a person entering work and 26 weeks sustained are different outcomes.	☐	☐	☐
5 Same time period Are you comparing the same delivery period, contract year or point of follow-up for each result?	☐	☐	☐
6 Equivalent evidence Is the supporting evidence of similar strength? A higher figure on weaker evidence is not automatically stronger performance.	☐	☐	☐
7 Consistent methodology Are financial proxies, price years, deadweight, attribution, displacement and double-counting rules aligned across the figures?	☐	☐	☐

IF ANY ANSWER IS PARTLY OR NO

Record the difference before comparing. The benchmark still tells you where to look, but the figures are not yet like for like. Reconcile the methodology, or present the results with the differences shown alongside them.

What could explain the difference?

Once you have found a difference worth investigating, work through the likely explanations before drawing a conclusion. A lower headline figure does not establish poorer performance.

2 Investigate before you conclude

Note what you find against each factor.
Community voice and practitioner
knowledge matter most here.

Delivery

Was delivery genuinely stronger, or better resourced?

Local context

Did labour market, transport, deprivation or rurality affect the result?

Community priorities

Do residents identify a barrier or outcome the framework missed?

Methodology

Were different proxies, assumptions or adjustments applied?

Data quality

Is an outlier driven by missing data, or a collection problem?

Scale

Do contract value, duration or reach differ enough to matter?

Beneficiary need

Is one project working with people who face more complex barriers?

External factors

Are structural conditions outside the project's control shaping results?

What changes as a result?

Benchmarking should lead to a decision or a further question. Record what you will do.

DECISION	EVIDENCE USED	REMAINING UNCERTAINTY

A credible comparison combines consistent measures with local context, community knowledge and transparent methodology. The most useful benchmark leaves you clearer on what to investigate, what to improve and where future investment may create the greatest benefit.

GO FURTHER

Add the local starting point behind the figures with Place Explorer (place.socialvalueengine.com), and connect community voice to the decisions it shapes through HearAbouts. Read the full guide at socialvalueengine.com.