



# Target Setting Checklist

## Using this checklist

The checklist is designed to help service managers and those responsible for setting and delivering performance against targets to set challenging but realistic and meaningful targets. Further supporting information is available in the accompanying guidance: [‘Target Setting – A Practical Guide’](#).

Question to ask yourself	Yes	No	D/K	Action to take	Your comments
<b><i>Is it appropriate to set a target?</i></b>					
Do you <b>have</b> to set a target? (e.g. is it a national requirement to set one)				If you really have no choice, go to the next section	
What is it you are trying to achieve?				Start with the real world outcomes.	
Can you affect the outcome, within the target timescale?				If not, is this an appropriate area for a target?	
What sort of target is it (accountability, management, self-improvement etc.)				If it is self-improvement, it is for the people delivering it to fully own it, and judge themselves against it.  The more it is about accountability, the more important it is to achieve it, but it may be less stretching.	
Is this of sufficient priority to warrant a				Within any given area of responsibility	

PMMI target setting checklist

target?				there is a limited number of targets you can focus on (but there can still be a large number overall at the front line, with a smaller number at higher levels)	
Take all the above into account ...				Decide whether to set a target or not, and what sort of target it should be.	
<b><i>Clearly define where you are now and where you want to be</i></b>					
Are there any national targets or minimum standards you could or have to take account of?				Take account of them	
Are there broader aims you need to take into account – e.g. community strategy, corporate priorities, etc.?				Take account of them	
Do you know what existing performance is? Do you have relevant and robust performance indicators?				If not, you will be ‘flying blind’. If that is not acceptable, don’t set a target, or undertake some research to establish a performance baseline	
Do you have data on trends over time?				Ditto	
<b><i>Identify measures</i></b>					
Is there a clear measure against which to set and assess the target? If not, could one be developed without disproportionate cost?				If there really is no measure, perhaps this is not a suitable topic for a target. If you really need a target, take account of the effort required to find a measure.	
Is the relevant data easily available (either currently or could it be made available without too much cost?).				If you are going to set a target ‘blind’, be aware of the consequences. Are you going to be judged by whether you meet it?	

PMMI target setting checklist

Are there existing indicators you can use to measure progress against the target? (That you are using, or are used elsewhere). Is there a ready made definition?				Use existing indicators if at all possible – they are time consuming and difficult to generate from scratch. (see <a href="http://www.local-pi-library.gov.uk/index.html">http://www.local-pi-library.gov.uk/index.html</a> )	
<b><i>Set targets in consultation with staff, Members and citizens</i></b>					
Are the people who will have to deliver and account for performance involved in setting the targets? Should anyone else be involved in setting the targets e.g. partner organisations?				If they are not already involved consider ways of including them (e.g. project groups to develop targets, focus groups, written consultation)	
Is the involvement genuine? Do they have real control over the targets set? Do they feel ownership for them?				If there is any doubt, it might be worth following this up in more detail.	
What are the expectations and aspirations of the public (direct customers, indirect beneficiaries, citizens?)				Review your consultation results. For this particular area, what is most important to different groups, and what is their current level of satisfaction?	
Are you able to project forward, taking account of factors which may influence future performance levels? Are there particular patterns to the data such as seasonal changes, regular peaks and troughs etc.?				Even if it is rough and ready rather than scientific, it's worth sitting down to think it through.	
Given your answers to the above questions, are you now in a position to set a target?				If so, propose a target, considering how aspirational and stretching it should be.	
Have you decided what form the target				Consider whether it should be about	

PMMI target setting checklist

should take?				output or outcome, volumes, percentages etc. Would it be helpful to express the target in terms of a suite or basket of measures?	
<b><i>Make sure you have an action plan to achieve the target</i></b>					
Do you know what is going to be different to enable you to reach this target? Will it be achieved by greater effort, more resources, improved organisation or process, or investment in technology?				If you have no idea how the target will be reached, is it reasonable to set it?	
Is it in the budget? What resources will be available? How much time do people have and over what period?				If resources haven't been planned to ensure the target is reached, you need to do so.	
Is it clear who will be responsible for delivering the targeted outcome?				Allocate person accountable for achieving the target.	
Is there a realistic action plan for achieving the target?				Set project plan (if appropriate).	
Is the action plan built in to other business or service planning processes?				Build into regular service plan.	
Are there good arrangements for monitoring and reporting process?				Ideally this would be part of routine management arrangements.	
Is there clarity over what will be done in response to monitoring? Are sanctions and rewards appropriate? Is failure to meet the target acceptable?				Ensure proposed responses are appropriate and that everyone is aware of them that ought to be.	
<b><i>Do some final checks</i></b>					
Is the target and associated measure:					

PMMI target setting checklist

• relevant					
• avoid perverse incentives					
• attributable					
• well-defined					
• timely					
• reliable					
• comparable					
• verifiable					
Check the proposed target against the following criteria					
S – specific. Will it be either met or not?					
M – measurable. Will you know whether or not you have achieved it?					
A – achievable.					
R – relevant					
T – time related. Is there a clear time by which it should be achieved.					
Check for perverse incentives.				If there are perverse incentives can you: Change the target Use a basket of indicators Make more use of qualitative reporting In the reporting, don't hold people to account for failure against the target.	
Have you thought through other technical issues (e.g. absolute vs				Convert percentages to absolute numbers and vice versa (if you're	

## PMMI target setting checklist

percentage changes, small numbers and the risk of distortion)?				aiming for a 5% increase, what does that actually mean?), is there a risk that a relatively small change could have a big percentage impact (e.g. you lose one of your two clients and it shows up as a 50% reduction). Generally check through for realism and common sense.	
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### Further information:

'Choosing the Right FABRIC: a framework for Performance Information', HM Treasury, Cabinet Office, National Audit Office, Audit Commission, Office for National Statistics, March 2001.

'On target: the practice of performance indicators', Audit Commission, 2000

'Acting on facts: using performance measurement to improve local authority services', IDeA and Audit Commission, 2002.

[These publications and more are available in the PMMI virtual library](#)