

Process diagram



To show the different stages involved in a process, including details of who does what and the time or cost involved in the different stages.

A process diagram might be constructed to analyse the steps involved in accessing a certain government scheme or entitlement, making a legal claim or producing something. It can be elaborated to include many details in a process such as roles, time or costs involved at each stage. A process diagram can also be used to plan a course of action to achieve a desired result.

Steps in the process

1. Agree on the process that you want to analyse. Is it an existing process that the participants wish to understand in order to engage with or modify it, or is it a new process that the participants have the freedom to design themselves?
2. Based on your answer to the question above, decide whether it would be more helpful to start your diagram at the beginning or at the end of the process. For example it may start with a goal and work backwards to determine the steps necessary to achieve it; or to start with the current situation and work forwards.
3. Each step in the process should be written or drawn on a separate card and placed in the appropriate place on the diagram. It's important to use moveable cards so that the diagram can be altered if needed. String or tape can be used to connect the different steps in the process.
4. Decide how much detail is needed for each step. This might include the precise actions, those responsible for making them happen, times and dates,

materials needed, costs and so on. The detail can be added as you go along or at the end once the steps are all in place.

5. Review your process diagram: Are the steps correct? Are there changes that you could make to make the process more efficient, fairer or more economical?
6. Make a large copy of the process diagram for your records and for use in monitoring and evaluation.

Developing literacy and numeracy skills

Process diagrams usually require a considerable amount of writing and so are usually more appropriate for groups which have good literacy skills. The diagrams are ideal to support writing practice but not very suitable for the initial teaching of basic literacy. As well as writing the cards for the diagram itself, participants can develop literacy skills by writing sentences relating to the diagram, for example focusing on problems and solutions.

Most process diagrams will offer many options for numeracy work, for example in calculating costs and working out strategies for maximising profit.

Suggestions for use

- A **production process diagram** could be used to explore a process such as dairy production, looking at the different stages involved in the process, who does what and the time or cost involved in the different stages. See Reflect Mother Manual, p. 166-167.

Related tools

- **Flow charts** can be used to explore the relationship between and event, such as a flood or conflict, and its various causes and consequences. This can help participants to identify ways in which to break the cycle of effects at different stages.
- **Systems diagrams** can be used to explore the interdependence of different elements within a system. It may be used to demystify how a specific

government system such as social security works; how a household economy functions or how a small business or organisation works.

- If using the tool to create an action plan you could use an [action plan matrix](#) or [timeline](#) to explore and capture in more detail information about the timing of activities, roles and responsibilities, etc.
- A critical pathway, as in the image above, is a kind of process diagram that illustrates an organisation or project's theory of change - the actions and outcomes that are needed for a desired change to come about.

References

- [Reflect Mother Manual](#), ActionAid International, 1996, pp. 166.
- Reflect Communication and Power, ActionAid International, 2003, p. 1008.