

Shared Outcomes Framework

Attendance change - Definition guidance

Definition summary

1. The definition for attendance change is to count the number of people in your “Worshipping Community”, as defined by the Statistics for Mission returns. This should include the figure both for adults and for children.
2. Statistics for Mission currently define this by saying, “The “Worshipping Community” of a church is defined as anyone who attends that church (including Fresh Expressions of Church) regularly, for example at least once a month, or would do so if not prevented by illness, infirmity or temporary absence.
3. Many churches will already have a database or similar list of church regulars but others may need to create a list to help them accurately count who is part of their worshipping community (following the national definition) at a particular point in time.

Why?

4. Attendance change is the most commonly mentioned measure by funded projects. There are a number of reasons why it is valuable to capture.
 - Attendance demonstrates commitment to both Christ and His Church
 - We believe that the things that take place at church (prayer, scripture, praise and sacrament) are important, and therefore we long to see people in places where these happen
5. With good data on attendance change, there are a range of tools that could be developed to enable high quality planning and understanding what works. For dioceses starting a project, we will provide scenarios on the attendance change seen in similar projects over time. The better the data, the more context-specific this can be.
6. Learning can also be synthesised on which approaches are most likely to generate changes in attendance in different contexts, as is true for each of the measures in the shared outcome framework.

How?

7. The full definition in Statistics for Mission is that “The “Worshipping Community” of a church is defined as anyone who attends that church (including Fresh Expressions of Church) regularly, for example at least once a month, or would do so if not prevented by illness, infirmity or temporary absence. It includes activities such as fellowship groups and other activities that have a distinct act of worship or prayer. It also includes acts of worship not on church premises (e.g. at a community centre). We include those who:
 - come to midweek services;
 - are ill and unable to come to church;
 - are away on holiday or business;
 - have home communions;
 - are part of a regular 'Fresh Expression' of Church;
 - live in care or residential homes and would consider themselves to be full members of their church;
 - give regularly to their church;
 - lead worship (e.g. clergy).

We do not include those who

- are visitors – e.g. holidaymakers, baptism parties;
- consider their 'home' church to be another church."

8. In many contexts, while Statistics for Mission has values for Worshipping Community, churches may have not paid much attention to creating a robust figure. Churches will need support to get this right, and we recommend establishing a baseline at the start of a project after having worked with churches on consistency.

9. Churches should also complete the age profile questions from Statistics for Mission to give their age profile.

Is it realistic to have an accurate figure for Worshipping Community?

10. The best way to have an accurate figure for Worshipping Community is to keep a list of individuals who are part of the community, which is reviewed on a regular basis. This can have a toggle to stop counting those who haven't been coming for a few months. We will create a tool to help parishes who do not currently have a method they use to compile this list.

11. A list of this sort has a range of pastoral benefits – for example it highlights if someone has stopped coming to church so they can be contacted again. It can also enable conversations about the next steps in discipleship for different individuals on the list, and a reflection of the diversity of the community. Many clergy and church leaders will do this naturally or intuitively and writing down a list may feel cold or intrusive. A change in practice may be needed to prevent people slipping through the gaps of attention.

What about Average Weekly Attendance, Usual Sunday Attendance and other measures of attendance?

12. These measures of attendance are still highly valuable to collect through the Statistics for Mission and diocesan processes. These measures contribute to high quality analysis where having a basket of approaches to understanding attendance is helpful. We are asking projects to pay particular attention to collecting worshipping community as high quality data here will enable excellent analysis.

13. If a particular attendance measure is highly valued in a diocese it should become part of a diocese's measurement framework.

Why this point of a faith journey and activity that doesn't meet the threshold of being part of the Worshipping Community?

14. This is just one of a number of different measures which will capture different parts of a faith journey or discipleship pathway, such as numbers new to faith, taking part in a church's wider activities, being part of a discipleship group, individual discipleship, giving, and leadership.

What about new worshipping communities, Fresh Expressions of Church, and multiple congregations.

15. These should be included in this measure. If they are part of a parish and its Statistics for Mission return, they should be reported there. If separate (e.g. a BMO), they should submit a separate Statistics for Mission return. The national church's Data Services Team can facilitate this.

16. Ideally an individual would be counted once across the services they go to where there are Fresh Expressions of Church or multi-parish benefices. In practice this can be challenging.

17. Students should be included at the church they attend in term time, to connect with the October count.

How do larger churches gather this accurately?

18. There may be a particular challenge for larger churches in compiling an accurate figure for worshipping community. Often these churches are so large that no one person will know everyone who is part of the community. People may be spread across multiple services or locations. Some may attend because they value the anonymity a larger church provides.

19. These churches will also tend to have resources available to enable this – church management software, registration of children and young people, survey tools etc. A good list will enable better relationships – ensuring everyone is known and taken care of. We will monitor over time how larger churches are able to use this measure.

20. The Attendance change further guidance document on the Church Support Hub pages provides suggestions for how people may estimate worshipping community who are using church management apps e.g. iKnow or ChurchSuite.