



BRIEF 1.3. PROVING VALUE: HOW TO MEASURE AND COMMUNICATE THE LOCAL IMPACT OF GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

Tracking the outcomes and impact of global engagement efforts is paramount to inform strategy, address skepticism, and validate the use of resources in the long run. As these benefits are often indirect or delayed, state and local governments must strategically measure and transparently communicate outcomes, such as jobs, investments, trade opportunities, global visibility, and best practices that benefit the community's growth, safety, and prosperity. Over time, stories of impact create a mindset shift about why global engagement is not a nice-to-have but an imperative.

1. The challenge: Why measurement matters

The value of international efforts driven by local governments is not immediately visible to constituents. Directors of international affairs face legitimate questions about the return on investment from global activities. This skepticism comes from various sources—elected officials concerned about spending local resources on international initiatives, department heads competing for limited budget, and residents wondering why tax revenue supports foreign travel. Limited published evidence, inconsistent communications, and negative media coverage further obscure value.

Tracking and demonstrating value are complex tasks due to the following factors:

- **Time lag between activity and outcome:** Cultivating relationships takes time. Investments today have delayed returns and future payoffs.
- **Attribution complexity:** When multiple factors contribute to a win, demonstrating the specific role of an international initiative is difficult.
- **Indirect benefits:** Significant impact and benefits may be felt outside of the community (contribution to progress on global SDG and climate goals, enhanced city reputation) with no economic metrics.
- **Lack of data:** Limited resources for tracking and impact analysis necessitate creative approaches to gathering credible data.

Local governments must fill this gap. "[Global engagement benefits] may take some years to materialize and it can also be difficult to link directly to a specific event or interaction. Then with respect to softer outcomes around relationships and reputation, these can be even more challenging to quantify and place a value on."¹ See case study below about Scotland's comprehensive framework for measuring impact.

2. Strategic guidance for impact measurement and communication.

Measuring and communicating the impact of international engagement clarifies the value of these efforts. It inspires confidence that global engagement brings benefits. It also helps connect past effort to current gains and prioritize future initiatives.

Tailor messages to what each audience cares about. Different audiences care about different types of value. The benefits of global engagement cut across many areas, such as jobs, investment, trade, visibility, knowledge exchange and best practices. Some of these benefits may be felt directly within the community (such as new water management systems), whereas other outcomes may have indirect benefits felt globally and beyond the community (such as progress on climate goals). Tailoring messages to different audiences is important (what matters is different for citizens, businesses, and elected officials). Across audiences, the key is to connect efforts with gains and demonstrate, for instance, how a business deal stems from relationships cultivated over time through trade missions.

¹ Contribution from the Scottish Government (United Kingdom)

Conduct regular reviews and public reporting. An annual reporting process on global initiatives helps assess the strategy and strengthen internal alignment, while communicating externally to build trust and support. While tracking and measuring value can be time- and labor-intensive, this is a worthwhile investment.

"[Developing and communicating to the public an Action Plan] is important for constituents to understand how public funds are used to support local values and priorities, deliver benefit to local people, and create opportunities for community members to get involved in the city's global initiatives."²

Use a wide range of metrics. State, local, and devolved governments can find the right combination of metrics that best captures global engagement (see table 1). For instance, Scotland is developing a new process for measuring value with specific and simple metrics chosen collaboratively between analysts and the network offices, and reported quarterly (see case study below).

Table 1. Common metrics for state and local government-led international efforts

Activity Metrics (Easiest to track)	Immediate Results (Track within 3-12 months)	Medium-Term Impacts (Track within 1-3 years)	Long-Term Outcomes (Track 3+ years)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of inbound/outbound delegations and meetings International events hosted MOU/agreements signed International grants received 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media coverage value (local and international) Investment inquiries generated Business matchmaking meetings conducted Policy exchanges completed Student and professional exchanges facilitated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foreign direct investment (number of projects and/or amount) Growth in tourism economy International students Export deals facilitated Jobs created or retained through international partnerships New international air routes and transportation links Implementation of policy innovations from partner cities (and associated cost savings) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustained trade relationships Enhanced global reputation, profile, and visibility (measured through rankings, surveys) Long-term sister city or state accomplishments Climate commitments achieved through international collaboration Improved resilience and risk mitigation through international knowledge exchange Community pride and multicultural engagement

Use stories and examples to give color and depth to data points. Specificity and examples matter. For each type of benefit, a collection of stories of impact, specific examples, testimonials, and case studies can support communications. Narratives and rich stories of impact complement quantitative data and often resonate more broadly.

Leverage visual tools and open data platforms to increase the reach and clarity of these benefits. For instance, the [Northern Virginia Regional Commission](#) built a mapping tool based on the city of [Los Angeles](#)'s model to visualize foreign investments in the community and jobs linked to international partnerships.

² Quote from Palmerston North (New Zealand)

Insights from the Field



Scotland's measurement of international relations.³

The process that Scotland is developing allows for its international offices to report quarterly against a small number of simple metrics, chosen collaboratively between analysts and its international offices, that relate directly to objectives in business plans. Each office is provided with a business plan template, aligned with the overarching themes and priorities from Scotland's International Strategy, supporting them to draft SMART objectives. Each office then returns data on a quarterly basis using a reporting template, designed by analysts, to provide a consistent monitoring and evaluation approach. A maximum of four metrics are developed for each business plan outcome/objective—they should be quantifiable, simple, and easy to report against. The data can come from a range of sources e.g. self-reported, partner data and external sources.

Evaluation

- Consider conducting an evaluation as frequently as resources permit (e.g. every 2-3 years).
- The evaluation will make use of the monitoring data that has been gathered.
- This will be combined with qualitative methods such as interviews and case studies, allowing for a mixed-method approach that quantifies what is possible and combines this with the necessary context and more detailed qualitative insights to capture what cannot easily be counted.

Examples of quantifiable metrics (not an exhaustive list)

- Number of companies supported;
- Number of international trade opportunities identified;
- Forecast international sales as a result of team's intervention;
- Number of inward investment projects landed as a result of team's intervention;
- Number of planned total jobs; Number of planned green jobs;
- Number of jobs created/safeguarded paying real living wage;
- Planned R&D investment; Value of planned capital investment;
- Number of applications received for a project;
- Number of events with diaspora organizations;
- Number of engagements with target stakeholders;
- Number of events and engagements to enhance profile and reputation of policy/objective X;
- Number of ministerial/senior leader visits organized or supported including policy/objective X as key component;
- Number of opportunities for knowledge exchange of policy/objective X identified.



How Palmerston North measures the value of international engagement. .⁴

To communicate value effectively, our reports are framed with a strong narrative focus, linking activities to the city's broader goals—such as economic diversification, population growth, talent attraction, and global reputation. Case studies, testimonials, and strategic stories of influence and connection are used to illustrate how seemingly small engagements lay the groundwork for larger economic and diplomatic outcomes. This storytelling approach helps elected members and the public understand how international relationships mature over time, and why early-stage efforts—like hosting delegations or engaging in cultural diplomacy—are vital investments in the city's future.

Ultimately, success in global engagement is not always immediate or linear, but when measured through a balanced combination of strategic indicators, activity metrics, and narrative insights, it become possible to track progress, remain accountable, and communicate the long-term value of this work to stakeholders across Palmerston North and beyond.

³ Contribution from the Scottish Government (United Kingdom)

⁴ Contribution from Palmerston North (New Zealand)

About this Toolkit: Strategic guidance based on experiences from the field.

State and local leaders receive visiting foreign delegations, opportunities for international partnerships, and pressure to engage globally—but no clear guidance on how to do it right. This Toolkit provides that strategic guidance, building upon the insights and best practices from a group of innovative city, state, and regional government leaders from nine countries: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States

The result is a practical guide organized around the core challenges local leaders face most often. It provides strategic guidance to:

- Build an international strategy that serves community's priorities while avoiding common pitfalls (Briefs 1.1, 1.2, 1.3)
- Manage relationships that create economic opportunities and jobs (Briefs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)
- Navigate security threats and potential risks (Briefs 3.1, 3.2)
- Turn international connections into influence and resilience (Briefs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

Each brief includes specific steps and real examples from local leaders, experts, and practitioners. If you're using this Toolkit to apply an innovation locally or have questions or suggestions, [please fill out this short survey](#).