

Moving From Talk to Action: A Summary

PHASE ONE: FINDING A STARTING POINT

Situation, Values, Vision

STEP	ACTION	QUESTION
Describe the Current Situation	Describe the current situation and the factors contributing to it.	What needs to change?
State Core Values	Identify the core values or principles that will guide the group's work.	What matters most? What are the values and assumptions that should guide our actions?
Create a Long-Term Vision	Describe how the situation ought to be in your community in regards to the issue(s) you are addressing.	What should be the long-term results of our efforts?

PHASE TWO: MAPPING THE JOURNEY

Research, Relationships, Program, Resources, Goals

STEP	ACTION	QUESTION
Research: Collect Information	Collect information about what works. What have other communities facing similar challenges done?	What works to address this issue? What are effective strategies?
Build Relationships	Determine who needs to be involved and include them in your efforts.	Who is most affected by the issue we are addressing and therefore needs a voice in the solution? What groups or individuals do we need to design and implement a solution? Who do we need to win over to the effort?
Program Development and Action Plan	Determine program strategies to implement. Define responsibilities and time frames.	Who will do what and when?
Identify Resources	Research sources of financial and other support.	What organizations provide financial support for this work?
Establish Interim Goals	Establish interim goals to track your progress.	What should we accomplish after three months? Six months? A year? How can we track our progress?

PHASE THREE: REVISING THE COURSE EN ROUTE
Celebration, Evaluation, Revision

STEP	ACTION	QUESTION
Celebrate Accomplishments	Celebrate early successes and accomplishments, such as the creation of a new partnership, the release of new information about your issue, the launch of the first stage of a project, etc.	What early successes can we celebrate to sustain and build momentum for the work?
Evaluate Program	Determine how you will measure the effectiveness of your program.	How can we measure success? What actions are we taking? What are the results of those actions?
Review and Revise Action Plan	Take a close look at your progress and revise the action plan to meet new and/or unanticipated challenges. Reflect on what you have learned so far and refine your plans to reflect this new understanding.	What changing or unexpected circumstances are having an impact on the program? How should we take advantage of new opportunities? How can we correct what is not working as planned?

Valuing Evaluation

What are our goals for comprehensive community change?

- Short-term (change in behavior)

- Intermediate (change in skills and knowledge)

- Long-term (change in the community)

How will you know if you have met your goals? What will success look like? Be specific.

- Short-term Results

- Intermediate Results

- Long-term Results

Possible Partners

Developing solutions to complex community problems demands that we come together to understand the issues behind a problem and begin to work on a plan of action using all of our community's assets. Although parents have crucial responsibilities for the care of their children, this issue concerns the entire community. Diverse partnerships among organizations and individuals are important for drawing together the resources and know-how to create positive environments for youth. Partnerships can be made up of community members, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and businesses. In most partnerships, partners contribute time, financial support, expertise, and work toward shared goals.

Partners might include the following:

- **Families** seeking safe and nurturing environments that promote the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical well-being of their children.
- **Youth** seeking to be involved in facing today's challenges that tend to be somewhat different from the challenges their parents faced.
- **Teachers, principals, and school superintendents** seeking to improve students' academic performance.
- **Local government** seeking to improve the quality of education and support working families.
- **Philanthropies** seeking new ways to support families and create environments that encourage the healthy development of children.
- **Health and human professionals** seeking support from public and private sectors to increase and improve community-based services for children.
- **Law enforcement** seeking ways to enhance community safety.
- **Community and civic organizations** seeking to provide recreational, cultural, and academic services to youth.
- **Business and industry** seeking to develop the future workforce of the region and retain employees who are parents.
- **Hospitals** seeking to improve the health of the community.
- **Universities and colleges** seeking to link research with community issues as well as to provide students with volunteer and service-learning opportunities.
- **Seniors** who want to become more involved in the community.

Program Evaluation Planning Worksheet

OUTCOME	INDICATOR(S)	DATA SOURCE	DATA COLLECTION METHOD
SHORT-TERM (Change in behavior.)			
INTERMEDIATE (Change in skills and knowledge.)			
LONG-TERM (Change in community)			

Quick Guide to Program Evaluation

People involved in community projects or programs want to know if their efforts have changed anyone's life for the better. One way to find out is to plan and implement a program evaluation that looks for benefits participants have received during and after their participation and how programs can improve their services to achieve this purpose. This guide covers the basic steps of evaluating a program.

BASIC STEPS

I **CHOOSE OUTCOMES.** Outcomes are the benefits or changes for individuals or populations during or after participating in program activities. Outcomes may relate to behavior, skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, condition, status, or other attributes. Used by permission, United Way of America, *Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach* (Alexandria, VA: United Way of America, 1996).

Example: An after-school, academic-enrichment program is implemented because the community is increasingly concerned about dropout rates. Possible outcomes for the program are:

- Students complete homework assignments.
- Students perform at or above grade level.
- Students' attitudes toward school work improves.

It's helpful to consider short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. There are no hard-and-fast rules for the time frame of a short-term outcome versus that of an intermediate or long-term outcome. The time frame would depend on the kind of program and the changes you are trying to achieve. The guiding questions for identifying outcomes are:

- What results do you want to occur as a result of the actions you are taking?
- What results have actually occurred?

It is helpful to think about "If/Then" relationships as you identify outcomes.

If students attend a homework assistance program after school,
then they will complete more homework assignments.

If they complete more homework assignments,
then they will learn more and perform at or above grade level.

If students improve their grades,
then their attitudes about school will improve and they will be less likely to drop out.

The following examples illustrate possible short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for an after-school program.

- Short-term (e.g., first six to twelve months that participants enter program). What are the first changes you would like to see in participants' behavior? What changes actually occur (e.g., increased interest in school, better attendance, fewer discipline problems during the school day)?
- Intermediate (e.g., twelve to twenty-four months after participants enter program). What changes would you like to see follow from the short-term outcomes? What changes actually occur (e.g., improved grades, decreases in delinquency)?
- Long-term (e.g., three to five years, or longer). What are the longest-term changes in participants your program can reasonably expect to influence? What changes actually occur (e.g., improved overall academic performance, graduation from high school)?

Tips for choosing outcomes (Source: United Way of America, *Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach*):

- Gather ideas for your program's outcomes from a variety of sources: program materials, program staff and volunteers, boards and committees, current and past participants, other organizations, and others.
- Don't ignore potential negative outcomes.
- Do not exclude outcomes that the program is already successfully achieving.



SELECT OUTCOME INDICATORS. Outcome indicators are observable and measurable. They tell you about the progress toward your outcome target or goal; that is, how much of the chosen outcome you are achieving. Try answering the question: What would you see, hear, or read that would indicate progress toward the outcome? (Source: United Way of America, *Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach*.)

You must decide:

- The specific observable, measurable characteristic or change that will represent achievement of the outcome; and
- The specific statistic(s) (e.g., number and percent attaining outcome) to summarize its level of achievement.

Example: For an after-school homework assistance program, the outcome might be that students' academic performance improves. So the outcome indicator would be the number and percent of students who earn better grades than they did in the grading period immediately preceding enrollment in the program.

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PICTURE WHAT INFORMATION YOU WILL NEED. Where can you go to find the information or data you need? That is, what are your data sources?

- For each indicator, identify what information you will need to collect to assess that indicator. Consider current program records and your observations during the program, or ask program staff and others for ideas.
- Some data sources are (Source: United Way of America, *Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach*):

Records from the program to be evaluated and other agencies that serve the same participants. Records can provide numbers and percents as well as written summaries of participant changes.

Specific individuals including program participants; their parents, teachers, spouses, and employers; and program staff. Individuals can provide data regarding knowledge, attitudes, skills, or behavior during or following a program.

Members of the general public, such as representatives from neighborhoods/communities, can provide data regarding changes in behaviors or conditions.

Trained observers who can rate behavior, facilities, environments, and other factors on a scale that identifies variations in condition.

Mechanical tests and measurements such as scales and yardsticks.

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DECIDE HOW YOU WILL COLLECT THE INFORMATION YOU NEED.

What methods will you use to collect data?

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Review of program records
- Rating by trained observers
- Instruments that other programs or agencies have developed

Pretest the methods you plan to use (e.g., have someone answer your questionnaire to see if the questions make sense).

Ask the following questions:

- What will it cost?
- Who will do it?
- How can you make the time?
- When will you collect it?
- Will the resulting data be useful to stakeholders?

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ANALYZE AND INTERPRET THE INFORMATION YOU COLLECT.

- Quantitative ways to measure involve numbers and answer who, what, where, how much.
- Qualitative ways to measure involve talking to and observing people and answer why and how.

For analyzing quantitative data with numbers or ranking, you can:

- Tabulate the data by adding up the ratings, rankings, and yes's and no's for each question.
- For ratings and rankings, consider computing a mean or average for each question.
- You could convey the range of answers. For example, twenty people ranked "1," thirty people ranked "2," and twenty people ranked "3."

For analyzing comments or data that are not numerical and are collected through interviews and focus groups, you can:

- First, read through all of the data.
- Organize comments into similar categories such as concerns, suggestions, strengths, etc.
- Next label the categories or themes (e.g., concerns, suggestions, etc).
- Attempt to identify patterns, associations, or causal relationships in the themes.

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FOLLOW THROUGH BY REPORTING THE EVALUATION RESULTS TO

STAKEHOLDERS. Include a one-page summary of findings and recommendations.

Give the *purpose* of the report: tell what type of evaluation was conducted; what decisions are being made as the result of the evaluation, who is making those decisions, etc.

Example: The Mainstreet Neighbors organization is conducting an outcomes-based evaluation to assess the impact of an after-school program on the developmental needs of children in grades six to eight.

- Describe the **background and history** of the project/program or community organization that implements the project/program. This could include program goals, outcomes, activities, staffing. Example: This project is a joint effort among Mainstreet Middle School, community businesses, and health and human service agencies to provide safe and positive environments to students in the after-school hours. We hope that students participating in the program will improve

their school attendance and their academic performance. We hope that participants will be less likely to use drugs and alcohol, less likely to engage in delinquent behavior, and less likely to be sexually active than their peers who are not in an after-school program.

- State the overall **evaluation goals** or what questions are being answered by the evaluation.
- Describe the **methodology**: What types of data were collected, how were they collected, how were they analyzed, and any limits of the evaluation.
- State the **conclusions**: Tell what you conclude from the evaluation.
- Make **recommendations** concerning the decisions that must be made about the program/project as a result of the evaluation. How can we improve our actions?
- Include any **supporting material** as Appendices (Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.). Examples are data tables, case studies, data collection instruments, testimonials, and the evaluation plan itself. Use visuals such as different kinds of graphs and charts, maps, and photos.



USE THE FINDINGS. (Source: United Way of America, *Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach*). Use findings of evaluation internally to improve the program and externally to promote the program.

Internal Uses:

- Provide direction for staff
 - What are we doing well and why? What are we not doing well? What can we do to improve results?
- Identify staff and volunteer training needs
- Identify program needs and strategies
 - Compare outcomes for different participant groups to find more effective strategies for serving those who are not experiencing desired benefits.
 - Compare outcomes for different program approaches: Do students learn more working in teams or individually?
 - For an existing program, compare outcomes with previous years. Track outside influences that affected the program: economy, funding, public events that bring attention to problems the program addresses.
- Guide budgets
 - Spend more on outcomes that need improvement.

External Uses:

- Recruit talented staff and volunteers
 - Staff and volunteers will be attracted to a program that can describe its activities and its results. A clear picture of the program will help them decide if it matches their own values and goals. Include key findings in brochures and recruitment ads.
- Stimulate partnerships
 - A shared focus on outcomes can prompt partnerships with similar programs. Partners may compare outcomes of alternative services and how they deliver services to participants; they may share costs of training and resources. Some funders require partnering as a condition for funding.
- Enhance program's public image
 - Use outcomes to show program's worth to the community.
- Retain and increase funding
 - Funders ask for documentation of program results. Outcome findings can strengthen the case of programs seeking funding for new services. Programs may benefit by targeting their grant-seeking efforts on funders interested in the outcomes the program measures.

Overview of Methods to Collect Information

The following table provides an overview of the major methods used for collecting data during evaluations.

METHOD	OVERALL PURPOSE	ADVANTAGES	CHALLENGES
Questionnaire, surveys, checklists	When you need to quickly or easily get lots of information from people in a nonthreatening way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can complete anonymously • inexpensive to administer • easy to compare and analyze • administer to many people • can get lots of data • many sample questionnaires already exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • might not get careful feedback • wording can bias client's responses • are impersonal • in surveys, may need sampling expert • doesn't get full story
Interviews	When you want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get full range and depth of information • can develop relationship with client • can be flexible with client 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be costly • interviewer can bias client's responses • can be time-consuming • can be hard to analyze and compare
Documentation review	When you want impressions of how program operates without interrupting the program; is from review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get comprehensive and historical information • doesn't interrupt program or client's routine in program • information already exists • few biases about information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • often takes much time • information may be incomplete • need to be quite clear about what you're looking for • not flexible means to get data; data restricted to what already exists

Module Eight • Group Handout #6

METHOD	OVERALL PURPOSE	ADVANTAGES	CHALLENGES
Observation	When you want to gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • views operations of a program as they are actually occurring • can adapt to events as they occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be difficult to interpret observed behaviors • can be complex to categorize observations • can influence behaviors of program participants • can be expensive
Case studies	When you want to fully understand or depict client's experiences in a program, and conduct comprehensive examination through cross comparison of cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fully depicts client's experience in program input, process, and results • powerful means to portray program to outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually quite time-consuming to collect, organize, and describe • represents depth of information, rather than breadth