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Including Evaluation and Research in Grant Applications¹

Are you ever confused by some of the language used in grant applications? What exactly is a goal? Is this different from an objective? What is an implementation standard?

Today's brown bag presents these questions as a starting point for a discussion about including measurable outcomes within the grant applications which you generate. I use a favorite example to explain the differences between a goal, an objective, and a process standard.

We'll talk about the incorporation of **measurable** goals, objectives and standards to your grants. Here is the concern -- when writing a grant application, have you ever promised to do more than you reasonably could? Such as...

- "This program will cut costs and improve the lives of those in the community"
- "Program participants will find stable long-term employment"
- "This will stop the cycle of recidivism"
- "Families will be better off after this intervention than before".

These are really great goals; great ideas. But the problem is ...

- Can you actually achieve this?
- Is your program going to **directly** impact the promised outcome?
- Is this outcome really measurable?
 - If yes, do you have the information needed to track or measure whether or not you've achieved this outcome?
- Do you have a plan for gathering this information? How about analyzing and reporting on the information?
- What if you can't make good on your promises? What will you do?

Goals vs. Objectives – aren't they the same thing? In short, no.

GOAL

A **goal** is defined as the **overall desired outcome that your program is designed to address**

- *Goals should be realistic and feasible, measurable and measured, you should state the magnitude of expected impact, data should be available (or can be developed) to test that impact, program staff will accept the goal and be willing to work for it, and the goal should be difficult (but not impossible) and worth pursuing.*

¹ This handout was developed utilizing source materials from the 2004 Youth Strategies Grant Program Development Evaluation (PDE) Workshop, Dr. Denise Gottfredson, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

OBJECTIVE

An objective is the **short term** benchmark linked to the overall **goal** by **Action Theory**. Think about what causes the problems that your program is designed to address. What will solve the problem or bring about your goals?

The Theory of action consists of action statements

- As much as possible, correspond with evidence from tested or plausible theories
- Are actionable by this organization -- a good theory implies some intervention(s)

In thinking about formulating objective statements - You should ask yourself:

- What measurable changes in behaviors, attitudes, climate, structure, and/or policy does your theory imply you must bring about?
- What risk/protective factors will the program address?
- *Objectives should be realistic and feasible, measurable and measured, and you should specify the data source or establish a data system to determine if these objectives have been met.*

IMPLEMENTATION STANDARDS

Finally, there are **implementation standards**. Implementation standards or **process standards** seek to monitor, control and assess the implementation strength of the program and should set expectations as to the **quality, quantity and timing** of the program intervention.

For each important component of your program, implementation standards should define when the intervention is delivered, how long or how frequently it is delivered; to whom it will be delivered; who will deliver it and how it will be delivered.

- *Process standards should be based on evidence to the extent possible, observable, measured (frequency, intensity and duration), challenging yet attainable, accepted by program staff and monitoring of these standards should be part of the overall data system – part of routine day-to-day activities.*

Example: Our Boy George

Based on these definitions, help me to complete the story of George.

George has a heart attack

- *George’s _____ is to avoid another heart attack*

George goes to the doctor. His doctor knows from medical research studies (and his experience with other patients) that in order to avoid another heart attack, George should lose weight, reduce his cholesterol to a healthy level, stop smoking and exercise regularly.

- *This is an _____. Why?*

Next, while we know that George has to do these things to avoid another heart attack – but wait – just how much weight does he need to lose for this to be **effective** at avoiding the next heart attack? How much does he have to lower his cholesterol to meet the definition of “healthy level”? And what about exercise – what exactly do we mean by exercising “regularly”?

Is it possible to define these _____ in such a way as to make them measurable? Absolutely! But first we have to identify **exactly** what we are measuring. To do this, George goes to his doctor who conducts several diagnostic tests:

- He weighs George on the scale;
- They do blood work to ascertain George’s cholesterol level and the presence of nicotine
- George does a stress test on the treadmill to determine his aerobic capacity.

After the doctor gets the test results back, he and George meet to talk.

Scenario 1: _____ stated as measurable and realistic	Scenario 2: _____ ambiguous – not stated as measurable!
<p>The doctor says “George – here is the plan. I want you to come back and see me in 6 months. In that time, you need to lose 15 pounds, you need to lower your cholesterol to below 200 points and I want you to be able to run on the treadmill at 10 miles per hour for 15 minutes without gasping for breath”.</p> <p>The doctor continues: “To do this, I recommend you join Weight Watchers and follow the food plan. You should go at least once a week. You should also join a gym and exercise 3 times a week doing a combination of aerobic and weight bearing exercises. Finally, here is a prescription for the Nicotine patch for 21 days to wean you from Nicotine gradually, and a listing for a local stop smoking support group in your area”</p> <p>“Come back and see me in 6 months and we’ll see how you are doing”.</p>	<p>The doctor says “George – you really need to take off some weight, cut down your cholesterol, quit smoking and start exercising”.</p> <p>The doctor continues: “You should go on a diet, start working out and here is a prescription to get the Nicotine patch. You may also want to see if there are any support groups around your neighborhood”.</p> <p>“Come back and see me in a few months and we’ll check and see how you are doing”.</p>

Six months later, George comes back into his office to do the entire set of tests again. After the test results are back, the doctor looks them over and says:

Scenario 1: Good Outcome	Scenario 2: Not such good outcomes
George – you did great! You’ve reached all the benchmarks we talked about. Tell me how you did it!	George – I’m not sure what to say. You’ve only lost 5 pounds, your aerobic capacity indicates you were out of breath at 5 minutes, your nicotine level indicating you are still smoking and your cholesterol is sky high at over 230.
George replies – “Well Doc, I joined Weight Watchers and I went to meetings 2 times a week, and I kept track of my food to make sure that I ate well. I made sure to use all my weight watcher points every day and that really helped with feeling hungry.	George replies: “Honestly Doctor, I’m not sure what to tell you. “I planned to go to Weight Watchers regularly, and I got the number and I even joined – but I stopped going a while ago – things got busy.

Scenario 1: Good Outcome	Scenario 2: Not such good outcomes
<p>I also used the nicotine patch for 21 days as you instructed and I attended stop smoking meetings six times just to help me get past the first few months and I can't believe it - but I haven't had a cigarette since!</p> <p>In addition, I added playing basketball once a week for an hour with my friends, and I'm jogging around the track for 30 minutes at a time twice a week and lifting weights at the gym 3 days a week."</p> <p><i>In this scenario, George turned the doctor's instructions into statements that are measurable (frequency, duration, intensity), observable and challenging. This statements became</i></p> <hr/>	<p>And you know I've done a good job of cutting down on the smoking but I never had a chance to get those patches and I really don't want to sit around and hear others talk about why they want a cigarette – it will just make me want one.</p> <p>Sometimes I work out – can't say really how often – but pretty often."</p>

What is different about these scenarios?

Why do you think the first one was more successful than the second?

Why does this matter to you as you are trying to write grants for funding?

- If you don't think of your goals and objectives in terms of as measurable statements, you may promise more than is reasonable, and/or you may promise something your program does not directly impact.
- This process provides an opportunity to theorize about how and why your program works, and what kind, and to what degree, of impact you can expect to have.
- Incorporating measurable process/implementation standards that take into consideration the frequency, duration and timing of your intervention, and your plans to monitor this process through routine data collection provides the opportunity to think through the details and provides a benchmark of whether or not you met programmatic standards needed to be effective.