

Defining & Measuring Outcomes

Outcome vs. Impact

Outcomes measure the change that has occurred as a result of a program. Outcomes should be logically time-sequenced, from progress expected within a few months of participation in the program, to markers of change at the middle of your program, to changes expected by the end of the program and, if possible to measure, beyond.

Impacts are the broader changes that occur within the community, organization, society, or environment as a result of program outcomes. These results are usually considered in long term

Outcomes ARE:

- Changes in behavior or condition that reflect a positive impact to the community
Note: outcomes generally begin with a verb like increase, expand, or improve.
- Specific and measurable - tracking data to monitor outcomes is practical, necessary and timely.
- Meaningful - achieving an outcome indicates fulfillment of purpose and program toward long-term impact

Outcomes are NOT:

- Activities or processes (hosting an event is an activity, increasing awareness is an outcome)
- Immeasurable long-term change

When looking at how to evaluate outcomes from your tree planting project, consider the following:

What has improved or changed?

- How much CO2 emissions will be averted?
- How much GHG is reduced?

What difference did it make?

- What was learned from this project?
- Are these trees better able to withstand severe weather?
- Did you leverage more money with the grant dollars so you could plant more trees or make further improvements?

How does it help residents or stakeholders?

- Less likely to damage homes if new trees are more storm resistant?
- Provide shade?
- Did people learn about disaster resistant trees?

Why Measure Outcomes?

All organizations need to know how their programs and initiatives are performing, and the best way to accomplish that is to use an outcomes framework that sets targets and measures progress toward achieving them. Outcomes define what you want a program or service to accomplish. As a capacity building organization, your intended outcomes focus on the impacts or changes that the community experiences as a result of your help.

Outcome measurement has become one of the most important activities that affiliates should undertake. There are several compelling reasons to measure outcomes:

1. Measuring the effectiveness of a program.

How do you know if a program was effective? If a program was not effective, would you want to know so that it could be improved? We need to know whether or not programs are effective, just as the communities we serve need to know if their services are achieving the desired results. Ask yourself these questions:

- What has improved or changed?
- What difference did it make?
- How does it help residents or stakeholders?

2. Identifying effective practices.

With the information you collect, you can determine which activities to continue and build upon. Some practices might be modified and replicated for other programs or initiatives based on your results.

3. Identifying practices that need improvement.

Some activities may need to be slightly tweaked or overhauled altogether in order to improve the effectiveness of your program.

4. Proving your value to existing and potential funders.

The climate for funding affiliates and capacity building has undergone some radical transformations in the last few decades. Funders are aware of the need to document the success of programs.

5. Getting clarity and consensus around the purpose of your program.

Everyone in your organization, from board members to service staff to volunteers, should understand what is going on in your program and what it is intended to achieve. Outcome measurement helps to clarify your understanding of your program.

Steps to Evaluate Outcomes Measurement:

Defining Objectives – Before you can look at the outcomes you have to first analyze your goals and objectives. Your organization needs to make sure that the missions of its programs are clearly defined and that for each program you know how you will be measuring its success.

Data Collection – Once you know what questions you are trying to answer, then you can focus on what data you will need in order to answer them. Making sure you have the right system set



up for collecting this data and making sure that any other staff members or volunteers who will be inputting data understand the larger picture is also an important step in this process.

Data Analysis – After you know what data you need; you must figure out what to do with it. This is where you attempt to take the information you collect in step two and apply it to the objectives you set in step one.

Data Evaluation – Last but not least, you can't just decide how to measure outcomes of a program and then walk away. Outcomes management systems need to be evaluated regularly, generally on an annual basis to make sure they are still serving the needs of both the organization, community and any funders on the particular program or project.