Introduction to Outcome Thinking

Laying the foundation for measuring impact
What is “Outcome Thinking?”

Outcome Thinking is a mindset:

- It is a focus on what changes or impact your programs are having on the clients or community you serve.
- It links your program activities to the end result you seek.
- It is a prerequisite for taking an honest look at whether your program is having an impact.

This material was developed by Community Resource Exchange, a not-for-profit consulting group serving community-based organizations.
Contrasting mindsets

**Process-oriented**

- What services do we offer?
- What is it that our agency does?
- What service needs does our agency meet?
- What public information strategies do we use?
Contrasting mindsets

**Process-oriented**
- What services do we offer?
- What is it that our agency does?
- What service needs does our agency meet?
- What public information strategies do we use?

**Outcome-oriented**
- What results do we hope to realize with our services?
- What are we trying to achieve?
- What changes in conditions or behavior are we trying to effect?
- What changes in attitude are we attempting to effect, with whom?
Why try to assess outcomes?

- To understand if your programs are making a difference
- To make course corrections, as needed
- To plan for sustained and/or greater impact
- To make your case to attract: funding, staff, leadership, clients, and media attention
- To inspire and focus your board, staff and volunteers
What are the steps to program assessment?

**Step 1:** Define your intended results

**Step 2:** Articulate your “theory of change” – how your program will lead to results

**Step 3:** Identify “indicators” – or observable & measurable evidence – of results with your clients

**Step 4:** Develop systems to track those measures and analyze the information

**Step 5:** Analyze the data and draw conclusions

**Step 6:** Use the information to plan, adjust program

**Step 7:** Modify the assessment system, as needed
What do we need to proceed?

- Shared understanding of basic terms
- Some tools or models that can guide your thinking
- A working group to tackle this
- A sequence of steps to follow
Outcomes: Some basic terms

- Results
- Outcomes
- Indicators
- Outputs
- Activities
- Inputs
Basic terms: Results

- End goals you strive to achieve in your community
- Generally greater than what your program alone can achieve

**Ask:** What change do we hope to see in the community?
What is our work contributing to, as an end goal for our community?

**Example:** Our community’s children reach their full potential
Basic terms: Outcomes

- Changes in your participants or in your community’s conditions that you expect to result from your program activities
- May be changes in knowledge, attitude, behavior, skills, or condition

Ask: What change or difference do we expect to make in our clients’ lives?

Example: Improved school performance among our participants
Basic terms: Indicators

- Observable and measurable evidence that your outcomes are being achieved
- Specific – can be seen, heard or demonstrated

**Ask:** What will allow the clients and us to know that any change has occurred?

**Example:** Average grades are better than when entering into program for 60 percent of participants.
Basic terms: Outputs

- Products of your work activities, intended to lead to the desired outcomes in your clients
- Units of service or counts of activities you provide (e.g., number of tutoring sessions)

**Ask:** How do we capture the volume of work we do?

**Example:** Twice-weekly, small-group tutoring sessions for an eight-week period, for a total of 24 fourth- & fifth-graders.
Basic terms: Activities

- Methods, techniques or strategies for carrying out your program
- The ways you try to address the needs or problems faced by your clients

**Ask:** What do our staff/volunteers actually do?

**Example:** After-school tutoring and enrichment program focused on academic skills, confidence and motivation.
Basic terms: Inputs

- Resources needed to carry out your program
- Includes: staff & volunteers, time/hours devoted to planning/implementing program activities, money, facilities, even participants

**Ask:** What is needed to implement our program well?

**Example:** Coordinator, two stipended tutors, counselor, sports/activities specialist, facilities, materials.
Tools & models that use these concepts

- **Theory of change**
  Articulates your organization’s assumptions about how your program activities lead to the ultimate results you would like to see in the community at large.

- **Logic model**
  Builds upon your Theory of Change to map the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of your program, as the basis for identifying how you might assess program success.
Theory of change

Reflects your assumptions about how your activities will ultimately contribute to the change (community results) you are working towards.

– Links strategies to intended results
– Explains how and why the desired change is expected to come about
– Is conveyed in an outcome map
Sample outcome map

Program activities

Small group tutoring
Mentoring program
Enrichment & recreation

Short-term program outcomes

Students’ school performance improves
Students have ambitions for further education & career
Students’ confidence and self-esteem improve

Intermediate outcomes

Students’ opportunities for further education expand
Students’ peer cohort establishes a norm of high achievement

Long-term community outcomes

Our community’s children reach their full potential
Logic model

Articulates the elements of your program – from inputs through to results – and the relationship between them.

- Graphic representation that shows logical relationships between inputs, outputs and outcomes
- Can be extended to include indicators for an evaluation plan
## Logic model format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs (resources)</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>After-school programs:</td>
<td>28 students in twice-weekly peer &amp; small-group tutoring sessions for an 8-week period, 4 times per year</td>
<td>Students’ school performance improves</td>
<td>Report cards show half- to full-grade improvement in core subjects</td>
<td>Participants:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tutoring</td>
<td>Six half-day cultural enrichment trips with 28 students</td>
<td>Students have ambitions for further education &amp; career</td>
<td>Test scores increase by 10 percent</td>
<td>- Have dreams of academic and career achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Enrichment program: culture, arts, environment</td>
<td>4-team sports leagues with 12-game seasons</td>
<td>Students’ confidence and self-esteem improve</td>
<td>Students identify 10-15-year aspirations</td>
<td>- Pursue academic and community achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sports &amp; recreation program</td>
<td>28 mentor matches sustained for 30 weeks min.</td>
<td>Teachers report student behavior is improved</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Perform well in higher education and careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Mentoring program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator Two stipended tutors</td>
<td>Tutoring Enrichment program: culture, arts, environment Sports &amp; recreation program Mentoring program</td>
<td>28 students in twice-weekly peer &amp; small-group tutoring sessions for an 8-week period, 4 times per year Six half-day cultural enrichment trips with 28 students 4-team sports leagues with 12-game seasons 28 mentor matches sustained for 30 weeks min.</td>
<td>Students’ school performance improves Students have ambitions for further education &amp; career Students’ confidence and self-esteem improve</td>
<td>Report cards show half- to full-grade improvement in core subjects Test scores increase by 10 percent Students identify 10-15-year aspirations Teachers report student behavior is improved</td>
<td>Participants:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time counselor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Have dreams of academic and career achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports/activities specialist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Pursue academic and community achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study &amp; sports facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Perform well in higher education and careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative materials</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Introduction to Outcomes Thinking
Does this make sense for us?

- What would be gained by trying to define our theory of change or logic model?
- How important is it to us...
  - to measure change in our clients?
  - to assess our effectiveness?
- What are we willing to invest in this effort?
- What would make that investment worthwhile?
How do we get started?

1. Choose a program to focus on.

2. Form a working group.

3. Map out an approach and work schedule.
Choosing a program to assess

- A “program” is a set of related activities that all contribute to a common end purpose.
- Choose a program that has a defined purpose and client base.
- Choose a program in which program leaders and staff are ready & willing to engage in self-reflection.
Forming a working group

- Include members who understand the agency and know the program well.
- Include representatives of key functions
  - development/fundraising
  - agency & program leadership
  - possibly the board and/or volunteers
- Keep the group small (5-7, max.).
- Confirm that members have available time.
Mapping out an approach and working schedule

Agree on:

- What materials would be useful to review (proposals, program reports, data on clients & community, etc.) for background information.

- A meeting schedule: bi-weekly, day/times, date of the first meeting.

- How the working group will operate and how to handle/assign key roles: group convener, facilitator, scribe, communications with staff and board.