Section 3

Performance Measurement

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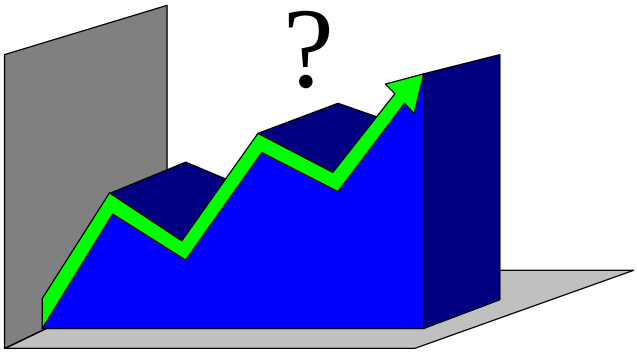
Performance Measurement: An Overview

In the long run,
men hit only what they aim at.
Henry David Thoreau, 1853

Accountability

Accountability means having responsibility to some higher authority. In a democratic society, the citizens are that higher authority. Public officials, who understand the importance of maintaining the public's trust, work to ensure that all activities and actions are consistent with the needs and demands of the citizens they are entrusted to serve.

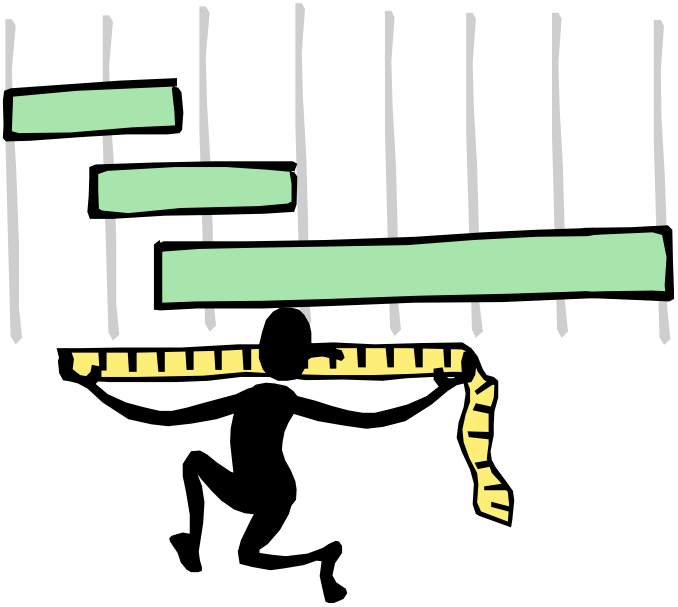


The public sector finds itself challenged to manage resources, internal processes, and services to serve the public interest and preserve the public's trust. Today the role of public accountability is encountering new and shifting demands. Growing emphasis on constituent service, quality, and responsive entrepreneurship produces more dynamic and complex circumstances for designing accountability efforts.

A comprehensive set of financial rules and regulations govern public agencies because primary attention has been on financial accountability. These procedures are designed to ensure that funds are spent properly. Traditionally, accountability for programs and services has been based on a murkier set of expectations. Recent trends emphasize managing for results or outcomes. This means clearly stating what a program or service is

expected to do and then developing a method to track or measure how well it is doing. This differs from the more prevalent practice of simply measuring how many resources go into a program or service. Information about results also helps a program or service improve.

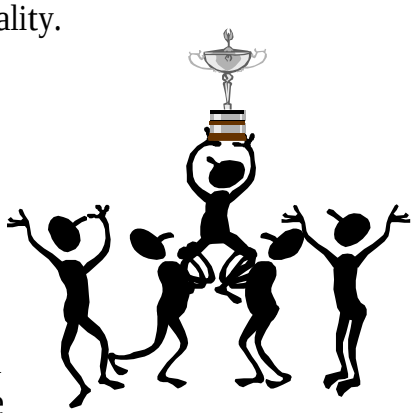
Accountability focuses attention on performance. A comprehensive system of performance measures is one way to monitor public agencies' performance. Since the 1980's, a growing pool of research, reports, and articles has advocated that the public sector create and use performance measurement systems. Advocates conclude that financial measures, generally the primary tool for assessing public agencies, are no longer enough. To fully gauge performance, measures about the products or services, which public money supports, must complement existing financial indicators.



When public entities collect and use a variety of indictors, they can better understand and gauge their performance. Some indicators may show how much was spent, how many staff were used, how many clients were served, how many services were delivered, or what the per unit cost was. While this information is useful, it indicates little about program results. For example, it doesn't seem important to know that a job-training program had large numbers graduates, if none of the graduates get jobs. So, an effective performance accountability system will have indicators that measure results as well as other aspects of program operations.

A well-constructed set of performance measures gives agency managers an important information source for management and policy decisions in areas like:

- Strategic planning.
- Program management and service quality.
- Budgeting and resource allocation.
- Contract monitoring.
- Personnel management.
- Interdepartmental collaboration
- Communication with the public.



In summary, performance measurement should not be seen as an instant cure for an agency's problems. Rather, measures, more aptly, are another variable to monitor for improving agency operations. In fact, good performance measures generally raise more questions than they provide simple answers. As long as decision-makers and managers understand the limitations as well as the benefits associated with a particular set of measures, significant improvements are possible.

Virginia's Approach

In Virginia, state level use of performance measurement has evolved. While other states introduced performance measurement into their management infrastructure with great fanfare, Virginia chose a course of more gradual usage. This cautionary approach brought steady improvements while minimizing risks.

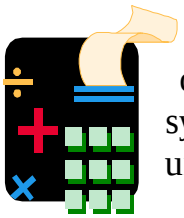
In 1990, the Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) surveyed other states about their use of performance measures. The following year, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) issued its *Review of the Executive Budget Process* and recommended that DPB pilot test performance measurement. DPB conducted the pilot project and issued a project report in December 1993. The General Assembly then asked DPB to examine the feasibility of a statewide strategic planning and performance measurement process. In late 1994, the DPB report supported creating a statewide process. Executive Memorandum 3-95 essentially put this

proposal into operation. Agencies developed and submitted three to five performance measures with their 1996-1998 budget proposals. Measures collected in 1996 along with their baselines and targets were included in 1997 budget document.

Virginia's performance measurement system is an integral part of its performance budgeting process, which links an agency's mission to the financial decisions that drive agency actions. As agencies become more accustomed to developing and using measures, the process will mature and the increased experience will boost measurement quality.

Rationale for and benefits of a system of performance measurement

Practitioners define a performance measurement process as the regular collection and reporting of data to track work produced and results achieved. A performance measurement system coordinates this process. A good performance measurement system helps an agency (program, service, section, etc.) better understand how its doing and improve its performance.



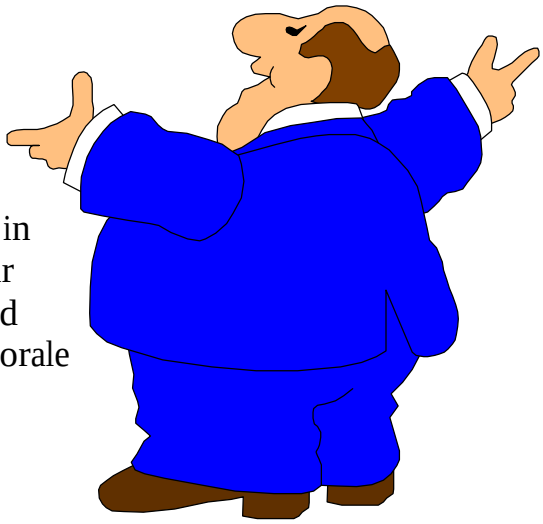
The value of a measurement system depends on the usefulness of its information. Effective systems support management and policy decisions in addition to serving as an accountability tool. To illustrate, performance measures may:

- chart progress in implementing an agency's strategic plan;
- provide feedback on constituent satisfaction and demands;
- indicate the level of achievement for an activity, function, program or subprogram;
- enhance the public's understanding of public programs;
- tie financial costs to program results; or
- assess how well the agency is meeting established standards.

Because significant resources go into developing and maintaining a performance measurement system, an agency should take the time to develop a clear set of expectations for its system. ***Mature*** performance measurement systems can:

- *enhance the quality of services*. Well-crafted measures tell staff about constituent needs and satisfaction levels. Areas for improvement can be cited and appropriate actions taken.

- *improve management practices*. Performance measures can provide an objective way to gauge performance. With effective performance measures in place, managers can operate their programs to achieve the specified results. This builds employee morale and confidence at the same time holding everyone accountable.



- *support continuous improvement*. Measures can point to problems with plans, programs, or processes. The information can be used to develop solutions.

- *aid in the budget development process*. Performance indicators bring greater clarity to the budget development process. They provide an assessment of the resources needed to support activities. They identify the level of products or services that are possible at varying funding levels.

- *make programs more understandable*. When citizens and policy makers can easily understand performance measures, these indicators explain to the public what is being done with their tax dollars. Including measures in reports that the agency distributes to citizens is useful.

- *assess policies, plans and programs*. Performance measures can show whether programs, plans, or policies are working. They can be reviewed and help decision-makers decide whether to continue, modify, or eliminate a particular policy, plan, or program.

Performance measurement can offer some significant benefits to an agency. When an agency starts to design its system, leaders may want to

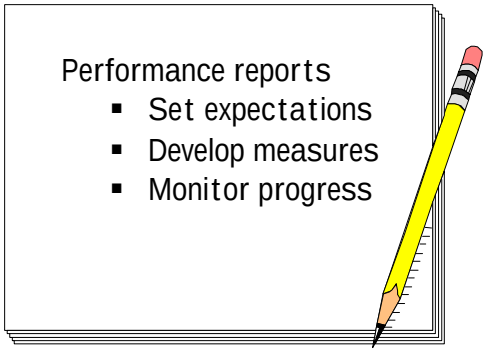
select two or three of the most important benefits the agency hopes to gain. These can become the motivating purposes for the effort. Some possible benefits include:

- Establishing clear expectations for the agency that reduce uncertainty and improve continuity;

- Enhancing information for the public, the governor, the cabinet, policy makers, legislators, and those directly affected by agency programming.

- Shifting attention from input control and oversight to results and increased emphasis on planning and management.

- Allocating resources effectively, based on critical issues that performance indicators document.



- Establishing a clear basis for future assessments of agency results.

- Creating a stronger linkage between planning, budgeting, and performance.

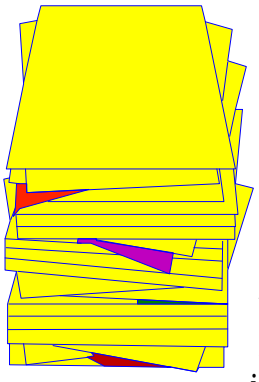
- Providing increased flexibility for agency managers, allowing them to address emerging needs and maximize resources.

- Providing a measurable basis for demonstrating how state government is responding to major issues.
- Serving as an early warning system for potential problems.

- Lending structure to the decision making process by focusing attention from the beginning on results or outcomes. (If clear directions and performance standards are not established, then planning or policy making becomes a vague, aimless exercise.)

- Concentrating agency attention on its strategic plan by monitoring progress toward long-range goals and specific objectives.

Performance measurement offers many benefits, however it does have limitations. Performance measures generally exhibit performance trends.



They show what it happening. Outcome findings may tell that program participants are not getting the intended benefits, but they will not reveal where the problem is or what will fix it. Managers must examine other pieces of information to do this. Consequently, outcome indicators are not an alternative to information on inputs, processes, and outputs, but add to them.

A more detailed, structured evaluation is required to isolate causes.

Improperly used, performance measures may even create perverse incentives (for example, services providers may ignore those most in need and concentrate on easier cases in order to keep performance levels high). Agencies should monitor service patterns and program performance in conjunction with periodic program evaluations to minimize potential problems with any group of measures.

Outcome measures track how many participants achieve intended benefits, but they are incapable of proving that the program produced the results. Program impact research, which uses control groups and sophisticated statistical methods, can isolate the program's actual effect. Although outcome measures provide a more feasible and less expensive alternative to impact research, they do limit the conclusions an agency can draw from the measurement data.

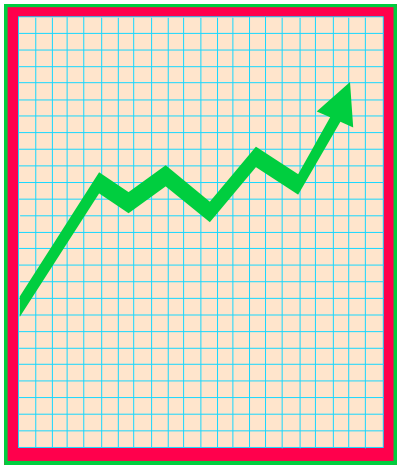
Outcome measures cannot tell the agency whether the results the program achieves are the right ones. When an agency designs the performance measurement system, designers decide what the most appropriate outcomes for a program or service are and then select indicators.

Many good reasons to develop a measurement system exist, but performance measures are no panacea. Public decision making is a highly political process. The political environment will continue to influence budgets as well as public sector management. In fact, performance measures themselves may provoke political controversy. When agencies explicitly discuss programs, activities, processes, policies, outcomes, and funding allocations, conflicts are likely. However, when management holds frank discussions in an open atmosphere, this often leads to stronger accountability and increases the probability of improved results. So even in a highly charged political environment, advances are possible.

Characteristics of successful performance measurement systems

Putting together an effective performance measures system takes time and patience. Wise implementers realize that development is an evolutionary and dynamic process. Each review of the system brings its own set of insights. Lessons learned become future improvements as agencies strive to customize measures to meet their unique needs.

The specific course of a performance measurement system will vary from agency to agency, however, successful systems exhibit several common characteristics. Among them, the system:

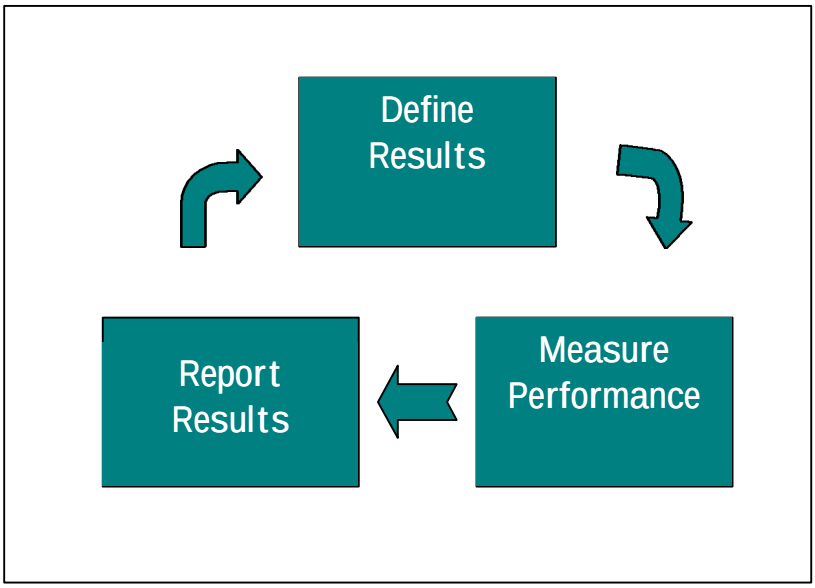


- Is built into the strategic planning process;
- Focuses on outcomes or results, not processes;
- Uses a few balanced, key indicators to measure performance;
- Generates data consistently over time;
- Includes both internal and external comparisons;
- Reports regularly and publicly;
- Informs both policy and program decisions; and,

- Promotes swift feedback to managers and front-line employees who can use the information to improve operations.

Process components

From a broad viewpoint, performance measurement consists of three components, illustrated below.



During the first phase, a designated group defines the results. They set expectations and standards for performance. After they establish the desired results, they identify possible indicators to measure performance and track movement toward the target. Lastly, program managers, agency managers, policy makers, and any other interested groups get the information produced from the measurement system. Staff use the information to improve program performance or verify expected benefits.

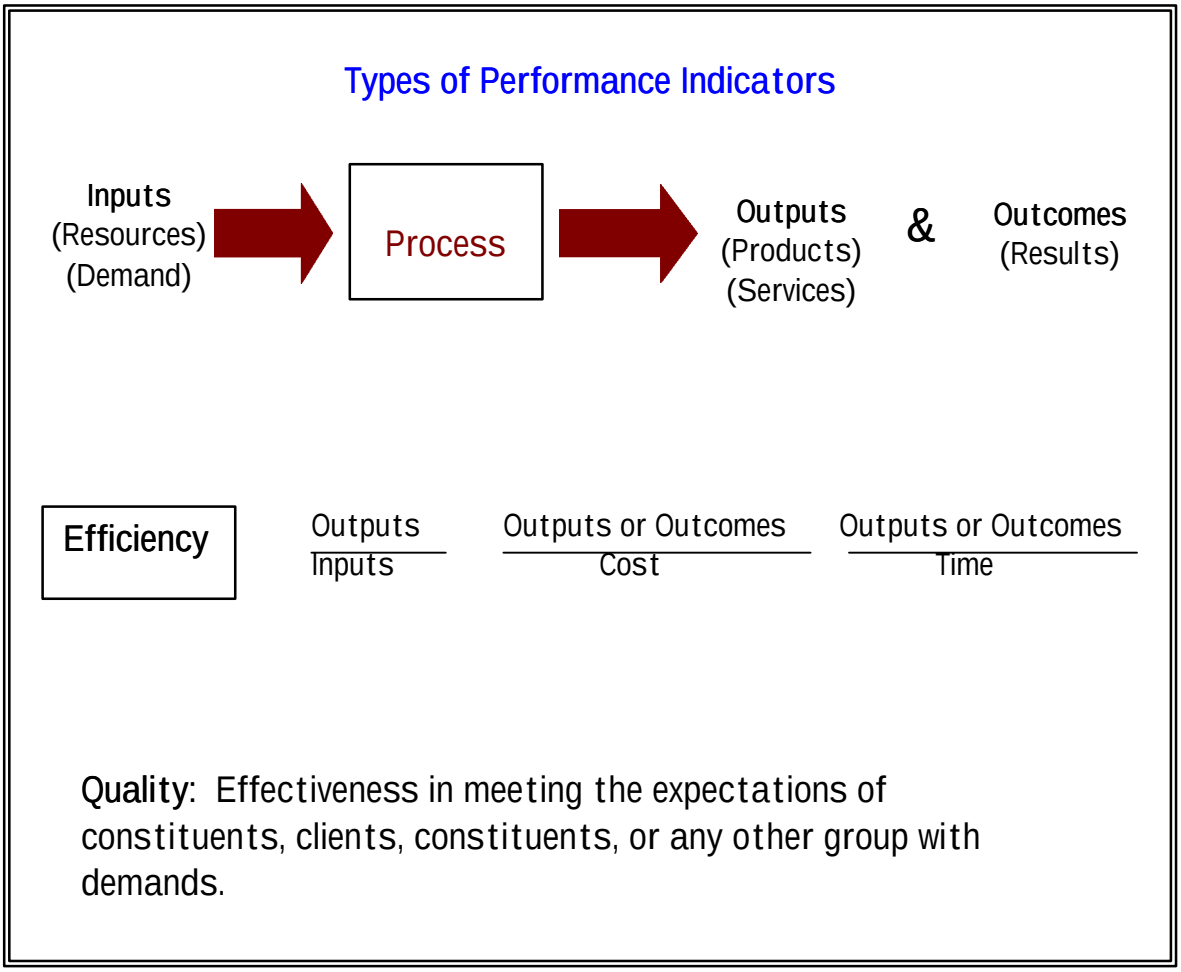
Successful organizations know where they are headed and assess their progress. A measurement system plays an important role in this. Public organizations find measurement systems most successful when they consistently apply two practices. First, they structure their measurement system to have these four characteristics:

- Measures are tied to specific objectives and show the degree to which the desired results have been achieved;
- Measurement system is limited to an essential few measures that produce useful data for decision making;
- Measures respond to multiple priorities; and
- Measures are linked to those responsible for producing the results.

Secondly, these agencies know that they must balance the concept of an "ideal" measurement system against real-world considerations, such as cost and the effort involved in data gathering and analysis. These agencies try to have data that are sufficiently complete, accurate, and consistent to be useful in decision making and can be collected using a reasonable level of resources.

Types of measures

A measurement system is designed to collect a range of information. While measuring results is important, if an agency wants to understand the "how "and "why" of those results, other types of measures are necessary. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship among various measures.



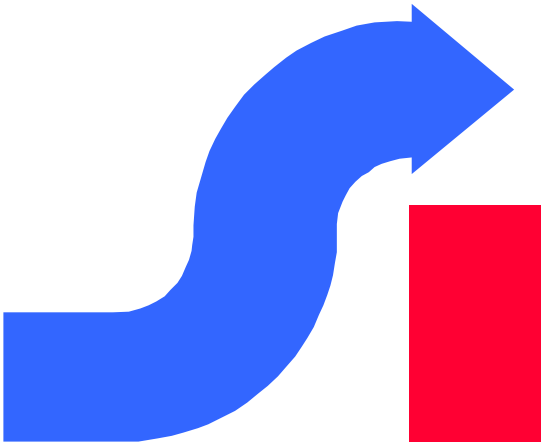
The following is a list of the types of measures used in the preceding figure and a description of each.

- *Input measures* indicating the resources invested in a process, program, or activity.
- *Output measures* indicating the amount of work produced by a process, program or activity.
- *Efficiency measures* indicating the resources used or cost per unit of output or outcome.
- *Quality measures* indicating the effectiveness of meeting expectations.
- *Outcome measures* indicating the extent to which the stated objectives are met.

Summary

Accountability for performance continues to evolve. While recent trends have increased the complexity for monitoring performance levels, especially in the public sector, the emergence of performance measurement systems offers promise. Increasing interest brings increased refinement of measurement methods and tools, desires for agreements on terminology and criteria, and more training on the use of measures. However, everyone should understand that the concept is relatively new and many issues are unresolved. Practitioners debate over whether certain events are outputs, outcomes, or some other kind of result. Others are perplexed over how to measure some outcomes and what surrogates can be used for outcomes that defy direct measurement. Tensions continue between the need for technically sound methodologies, which can be expensive and time consuming, and the staffing, funding, and workload realities that constrain nearly all public agencies. These issues will continue to be played out as measurement systems are developed and refined.

Virginia, as in many other states, has chosen to integrate strategic planning, performance measurement, and budgeting. The resulting performance budgeting process promises to help decision makers better understand the work of state government and the expected or desired results of its various programs, monitor their effectiveness in achieving those results, identify needed improvements, and make financial decisions that support these objectives. A well-constructed set of performance measures offers great promise. Unfortunately, if performance measurement is not properly implemented, supported, and used, it can potentially become simply another "flavor of the month." If that situation occurs, it will severely hinder state government's ability to meet citizens' demands for results-oriented operations.

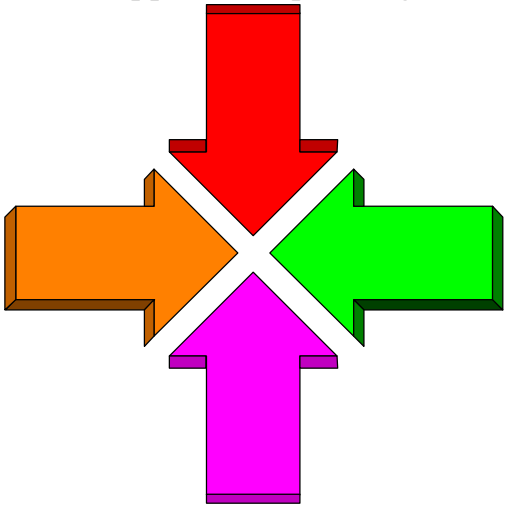


Getting Started

➲Purpose of step

Planning and implementing a performance measurement system is a daunting task. No matter what the agency's size, its number of programs, or its level of sophistication with today's technology, putting a system together is a challenge. It requires commitment, time, and resources.

The support of top management is essential. The agency director's words and actions must demonstrate the effort's importance. An agency needs to decide who is responsible for the effort, what resources are available, and how to involve agency constituents. Throughout the process, managers set an example by fully participating in any activities that relate to their responsibilities in this area.



As an agency starts to build its system, it examines various options and chooses an initial focus for the system. Some options that the agency may consider include:

- charting progress in implementing its strategic plan;
- providing feedback on constituent satisfaction and demands;
- indicating the level of achievement for an activity, policy, function, program or subprogram;
- linking financial information with program results; or
- assessing how well the organization is meeting established standards.

These, of course, are not the only choices, and agency may generate its own options. However, clearly stating the system's expected objectives serves as an important guide for the implementers.

During this step, the agency develops a plan for building the performance measurement system. The agency head may assign this to a person or a

group. The group prepares for performance measurement by going through an orientation about performance measurement processes, deciding what programs (or any other subdivision the agency uses) to do first, developing an implementation plan, and sharing the plan with key personnel and then the entire agency.

Good communications are essential. Staff at all levels of the agency should understand the plans for performance measurement. This is an important strategy for building commitment and acceptance within the agency.

➲Possible desired outcomes

- Training on performance measurement process
- Commitment from top management for performance measurement system
- Decisions about the role and purpose of performance measurement within agency management
- Selection of an oversight group to design and implement
- Preliminary design and time frame for implementing a performance measurement system
- Communication with all staff about the performance measurement process

➲Facilitation suggestions

A performance measurement system is important because it lets the agency gauge how it is doing. It plays a significant role as an accountability tool and provides useful pieces of information for both management and policy decisions. However, without top management's support a good performance measurement system is an impossibility. An agency's director, most importantly, must show in words and actions support for the process and an expectation that others should follow his/her lead.

Before an agency launches a performance measurement system, it should orient itself to the process, decide how best to proceed, and develop a plan

to implement the process. The following steps guide an agency in preparing to execute a performance measurement system:

➲ Orient top management about the mechanics of setting up a performance measurement system and obtain their commitment to do it.

Briefing management staff about a performance measurement process prepares them to make decisions and commit resources to begin the process. A briefing should broadly describe performance measurement terms, likely tasks, and possible expectations. This is an opportunity for management to ask questions and discuss any concerns. When the management team feels comfortable, it decides what the agency's initial level of commitment for performance measurement will be.

While an individual may manage a performance measurement process, most agencies prefer to establish an oversight team or work group. Groups work well because of the enormity of this task and the varied viewpoints, which group members bring to the table, are useful when looking at alternatives.

A workgroup has important responsibilities. Among them, a workgroup will:

- Decide which programs to start with
- Develop the timeline
- Identify the outcomes to measure
- Construct the steps leading to an outcome
- Identify outcome measures
- Oversee data collection

- Test the measures
- Evaluate the tests and make any changes
- Prepare agency to launch the measurement system

For the workgroup to complete these task-oriented responsibilities, it will:

- Determine the resources needed to undertake each task
- Find in-house resources that can be used
- Estimate the costs of tasks and look for ways to reduce the costs through alternatives or available outside resources

Before a management team chooses workgroup members, it should agree on a clear set of duties and expectations for the performance measurement group. As the team considers the charge it wants to give to the workgroup, it should remember that the simpler the program the easier it will be to develop measures. Conversely, as a program becomes more complicated, so does the measurement system it needs. After the team assesses all the factors, it decides its level of resource commitment for the performance measurement system and communicates this to agency staff.

Agencies with multiple programs may want to have a performance measurement workgroup for each program, especially if programs serve different people and/or have different objectives. To keep the process manageable, an agency may want to limit the initial focus to one well-defined program. As the system expands, an agency may want to consider having an oversight group to coordinate the agency's system.

➲ Designate the right mix of people

A workgroup with a good mix of people is essential. It should be small with somewhere between five and seven carefully chosen members who have a range of perspectives. Groups larger than this tend to be too unwieldy for active discussions and timely decisions.

A small workgroup is doable since it will gather input from a wide range of people. In some cases, experts may be asked to help with tasks like questionnaire design or data analysis. In others, ad hoc committees will give the workgroup insights into specific issues or programs.

Some guides for putting the workgroup together include:

- people who know about and do the day-to-day work, direct services, or first-line supervisors.
- representatives from other major functions (examples include administrative support, program evaluation, or quality monitoring.)
- a person knowledgeable about data systems and analysis who can help the workgroup understand current system capabilities, its potential, and the costs of changing, expanding, or acquiring required technology.

➲ Background Materials

Before a workgroup begins, a general orientation about performance measurement prepares members for their assignment. This training should be comprehensive and more detailed than the for the management team. A suggested list of topics include:

- Role and purpose of performance accountability
- Benefits of a performance measurement system
- Tips for Setting up a Successful Process
- Components of Measuring Performance
  - ⇨ Defining the results
  - ⇨ Determining the critical measures of success
  - ⇨ Measuring current performance
- Tracking and reporting on performance

- Types and uses of various measures of performance
- Developing and selecting appropriate measures
- Measuring current performance
- Setting up tracking systems and designing reporting procedures

Orientation should include background materials that are relevant to the workgroup's tasks. The workgroup should review and discuss these to build a common level of understanding. Useful resources may include:

- Any enabling legislation or related regulations.
- A program description and statement of objectives, organizational chart, client flow, process maps, and any other documents that describe operations.
- Constituents or clients served, the types of services provided and any trends in service utilization.
- Reports (annual, quarterly, monthly) regularly produced for any funding sources, the legislature, program managers, or others.
- Any standards that may be applicable or useful.
- Evaluations or evaluation plans.
- Any other types of data or information that will help the group understand the program.
- Information about performance measurement activities in other organizations.

➲ Decide which program(s) to begin with

Agencies with multiple programs may include all of them from the start, but most prefer to concentrate on one or two programs initially. Of course, agencies vary on what they call programs. For outcome measurement, a program is a set of related activities and outputs directed at common or closely related purposes that a meaningful portion of the agency's resources is dedicated to achieve.

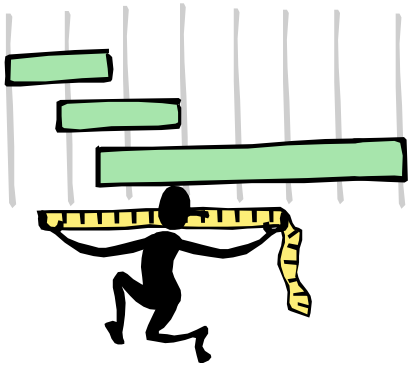
The workgroup should review what the agency does and group actions into programs consistent with the above definition. After looking at the list, the workgroup decides which to do first. The choice should maximize the likelihood of measuring the successful outcome of an important part of the agency's work. Some factors to consider in choosing a program include:

- A recognizable and reasonably defined mission and constituents;
- Comprises a substantial portion of the agency's work;
- Program personnel likely to be supportive of an outcome measurement effort; and
- Internal and external interest in a program's results.

➲ Develop a timeline for the effort

After the workgroup decides which program to develop outcome measures for, it maps out a timeline for the project. Likely steps for implementing a performance measurement system include:

- Choose and clearly define the outcomes to measure
- Specify possible indicators for the outcomes
- Collect data for the measures
- Try the outcome measurement system
- Analyze and report the findings
- Improve the measures based on the trial
- Launch full-scale implementation
- Report and use the findings



The workgroup, especially the first time, should schedule plenty of time for each step. Unseen delays are likely and the timeline should be flexible enough to accommodate them. The process should avoid being so rushed that the group overlooks important issues.

When the workgroup develops the schedule, consider the following:

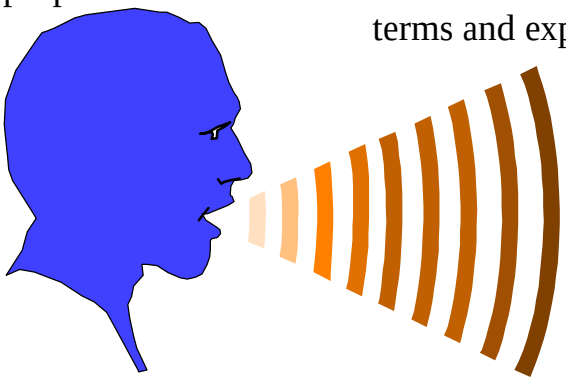
- Existing agency deadlines or events that may affect the schedule of key milestones or steps.
- The schedules of any services that are the object of the assessment.

- Length of time from the start or completion of a service before initial results can be expected.
- Central agency requirements.
- Availability of any external resources that are needed.

The initial timeline will be tentative until the management team and others in the agency can review it. More importantly, after the workgroup starts to implement the steps, it may find that it needs to revise the schedule and it should have the latitude to do this.

➲ Communicate the plan to all levels of the agency

When the preparations are complete, the workgroup has defined its purpose for the outcome measurement effort, a common understanding of terms and expectations, and a preliminary schedule for implementing the effort. It communicates this to agency personnel at all levels. Everyone who will be involved in the effort should know and understand what his/her role will be. Keeping open communication lines is essential to the health of the process. By doing this, the agency is more likely to build staff commitment for the measurement system.



➲ Sample worksheets

- Worksheet DD: Timeline for planning and implementing outcome measurement system

➲Examples

Sample timeline

Timeline for planning and implementing outcome measurement

	Month															
Steps	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Get ready	X	X														
2. Choose the outcomes we want to measure			X	X												
3. Specify indicator for our outcomes					X											
4. Prepare to collect data on our outcomes						X	X									
5. Try out our outcome measurement system								X	X	X						
6. Analyze and report our findings											X	X				
7. Improve our outcome measurement system													X			
8. Launch full-scale implementation														X		
9. Use our findings														X	X	X

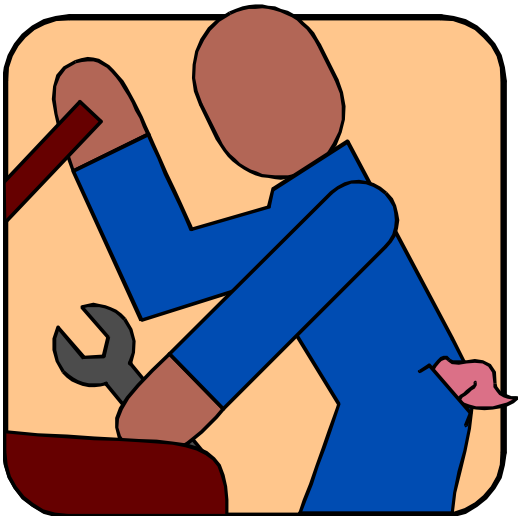
Measurement Mechanics

➲Purpose of the step

Agencies are accustomed to measuring aspects of their work. They track how much they spend, how many staff they use, how many people they see, and how many invoices they process. However, too frequently, the measurements don't tell much about the results or their quality. The value of knowing that a job-training program has a high number of graduates is certainly diminished if the agency doesn't know whether they get jobs.

A system of performance measures gives an agency information about all aspects of performance. Various measures show how many resources go into a program, how they are processed, what outputs are produced, and whether the intended results are achieved. Generally, measures are broken into the following categories:

- Input
- Output
- Outcome
- Productivity
- Efficiency
- Quality



It is crucial that the workgroup grasp the meaning of and uses for each type of measurement. This step describes the pieces that an agency uses to build its performance measurement system. The workgroup can use it for an orientation and later as a reference.

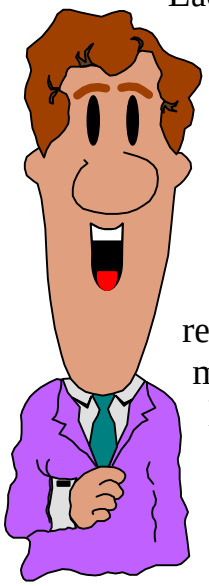
➲Possible desired outcomes

- Workgroup members understand performance measurement terms
- Workgroup can develop a program logic model

➲Facilitation suggestions

Over time, performance measures have been categorized in a variety of ways. A common breakdown, which touches most measurement types, includes:

- Input measures
- Output measures
- Outcome measures
- Productivity measures
- Efficiency measures
- Quality measures



Each measurement category contributes to an agency's understanding of how a program operates. Recent emphasis on public sector measurement systems stresses outcome, efficiency, and productivity measures because of their usefulness in guiding management and policy decisions.

The group leader (or a facilitator the group selects) reviews with members the definitions and examples of each measurement category presented below. A workgroup's level of experience and understanding dictates the amount of time used for this. The leader should aim for the group to have a common understanding of the types of measures and their role in gauging program performance. To reinforce the discussion, the leader could put the definitions and examples on flipchart paper or make large posters. These would be displayed as participants talked about each category during this session.

- Input measures identify the amount of resources invested into the program that delivers the outputs and outcome. Input measures, for example, can be used to show the total costs, the mix of resources, or amount of resources devoted to one action in relation to another. Sample input measures include:
  - Number of full-time employees
  - Number of employee hours worked
  - Total operating expenditures
  - Dollars spent on equipment
  - Cost of equipment used

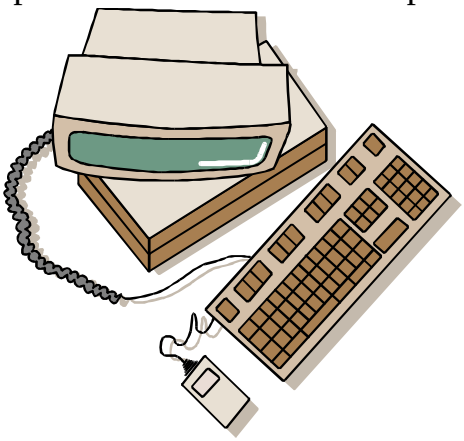
- Output measures represent the amount of products or services provided or how much work was performed. In simple terms, they describe what came out of a process and how much came out. They are limited because they give no indication about objectives being attained, the quality of the service or product, or the efficiency of the delivery of goods or services. Comparison of current output with output from previous periods can reveal variations or stability in work activity. Sample output measures are
  - Number of police reports filed
  - Number of permits issued
  - Number of water leaks repaired
  - Number of classes taught
  - Number of pavement miles resurfaced
  - Number of emergency units dispatched
  - Number of tons of garbage disposed

- Efficiency measures indicate the amount of work performed in relation to the amount of resources used. Frequently these measures are expressed as ratios to present information about the unit cost. Typically expressed as "cost per application processed" "cost per lane-mile paved" or "cost per pupil

taught," they may also be stated as "units produced per $1,000," units produced per labor hour," or "forms processed per hour." (Caution: Efficiency measures gauge how well an agency is using resources. However, the agency should not focus on efficiency to the exclusion of effectiveness. "There is nothing so foolish as to do more efficiently something that should not longer be done," caution Ted Gaebler and David Osbourne in *Reinventing Government*.") Some sample efficiency measures are

- Number of clients receiving service to number of case workers
- Cost per student enrolled in an adult education course
- Average cost per day per inmate
- Length of time to settle a complaint
- Operating cost per bus system mile
- Cost per meter repaired

Quality measures reflect the effectiveness of meeting expectations. They include reliability, accuracy, courtesy, competence, responsiveness, and completeness associated with a product or service. Deficiencies in quality are costly in terms of time devoted to rework error correction or resolution of complaints. Some sample quality measures are:



- Percentage of accuracy for information entered into a data base
- Extent of compliance with error tolerance levels established by administrative guidelines
- Costs associated with errors in licenses requiring recall or cancellation

- Productivity measures combine elements of efficiency and outcomes in a single indicator. This example illustrates:

  "unit cost of all repairs" is an efficiency measure

  "unit cost of satisfactory repairs" is a *productivity* measure

  Frequently, productivity measures are difficult to formulate. For that reason, agencies that are new to performance measurement are better off stressing outcome and efficiency measures first. When they have developed some proficiency with measurement, they may want to devise some productivity measures. Examples include:

  - Cost per properly repaired meter (i.e. total cost of all meter repairs divided by the number of meters needing no further repairs within six months)
  - Cost per employment vacancy filled successfully (i.e. successful completion of the new employee probation period)
  - Cost per mental health patient rehabilitated and released
  - Expenditure per trainee success (total training expenditure/ number of trainees placed within 3 months in jobs commensurate with their training)

- Outcome measures indicate the extent to which an activity, process, or program met the stated objectives. They assess the impact of agency actions on constituents (either individuals or groups). Outcomes represent the actual results achieved and the resulting effects.

  Human services programs may have outcomes that relate to behavior, skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, condition, status, or other attributes. They are what participants know, think, or can do; or how they behave; or what their condition is, that is different after they complete a program.

  Some sample outcome measures are:

  - Percentage reduction in auto emission
  - Reduction in the incident of fire-related deaths
  - Percentage of AFDC grants reduced due to new employment

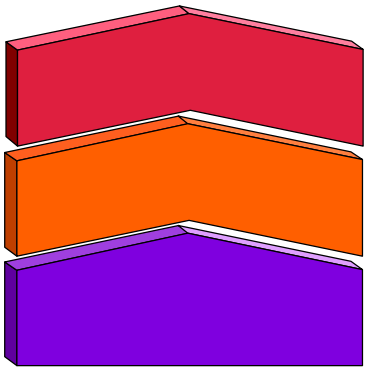
- Number of persons able to read and write after completing an adult education course
- Correctional recidivism rate
- Change in the highway death rate
- Percentage of trainees placed within 3 months in jobs commensurate with their training

The difference between outcome and output measures can be confusing. Instances exist for which the outcome and output are one in the same. However, a differentiation generally exists between the two. To demonstrate, look at these two measures for a mental health treatment program.

- Output measure: Number of patients treated and discharged from the hospital.
- Outcome measure: Number of discharged patients who are capable of living independently.

The output measure simply tells how many people went through the program. It doesn't show the effect that the program had on the people it treated. On the other hand, the outcome measure indicates the change in people's lives after completing the program. The program's objective was independent living and this measure tracks achievement.

Levels of outcomes



Another issue concerns levels of outcomes. Many programs don't have a single outcome, but rather a series of them that progressively lead to the program's ultimate outcome. While sources may differ in their terms for and the number of levels, most agree that outcome levels should be distinguished. For example, consider that a state trade office is expected to increase trade and create jobs. Because this is long-term result, the agency uses initial and intermediate outcome indicators to gauge its progress. The sample series of measures could include:

Initial outcomes: May not be an end in itself, but necessary steps toward the desired result.

- Number of firms contacted about exporting
- Number of new firms trained on how to export their products

Intermediate outcomes: Links the initial outcome to the longer-term outcome.

- Number of firms deciding to export
- Number of firms making foreign market contact

Longer-term outcome: Most removed benefits that the program can directly affect or the change or difference that the program was designed to achieve.

- Number of firms adding new export-related jobs
- Number of firms delivering a product or service to a foreign market

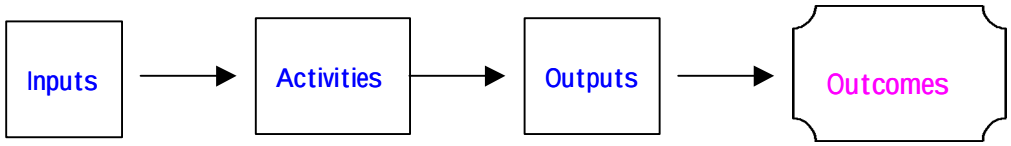
No outcomes, however, are intrinsically initial, intermediate, or long-term. An intermediate outcome for one program may be a long-term one for another. An agency must understand a program's logical sequence and identify markers that gauge progress.

Program outcome model

Public programs range from very simple to highly complex. Similar sounding programs may have significant differences operationally. To develop an effective measurement system, an agency can gain important insights from constructing a program logic model diagram. A program logic model is a description of how the program theoretically works to achieve the desired benefits. The diagram captures a series of "if-then" changes that the program intends to activate through its inputs, activities, and outputs. This model:

- furnishes a useful framework for examining outcomes;
- causes an agency to think through the steps and develop a realistic idea of what the program can accomplish; and,
- identifies the important program components that must be tracked to assess program effectiveness.

Usually, logic models are diagrammed as a series of boxes representing inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. They may be drawn either vertically or horizontally. A model shows the following relationship:



Inputs include resources dedicated to or consumed by a program. Examples are money, staff and staff time, volunteers and volunteer time, facilities, equipment, and supplies.

Activities are what a program does with the inputs to fulfill its mission. Activities include the strategies, techniques, and types of treatment that comprise a program's service methodology.

Outputs are the direct products of program activities and usually are measured in terms of the volume of work accomplished, such as the numbers of classes taught, counseling sessions held, people served, lane miles paved, and applications reviewed.

Outcomes are benefits resulting from the program activities. For a human services program, it is some change in a participant's condition; for environmental programs, changes in the environment; for transportation, changes in ways to move people and goods; and, for economic development, changes in an area's economic status. The key is to show what difference a program made or what value it added to the public's well-being.

The Metroplex Children's Agency is a multi-service neighborhood center designed to improve children's welfare in specific areas in the region. The agency offers parenting education, neighborhood organizing, and child abuse and neglect awareness programs. One method of showing the program logic models for these programs is shown on pages 125 and 126.

- Child abuse public awareness and prevention program works to prevent child abuse from recurring by identifying it in time to intervene. The program provides information about the signs of child abuse and the appropriate reporting procedures if it is suspected. It targets the community's residents as well as education and medical professionals specifically. The program does not offer any services for abused children or their parents.

- Neighborhood organizing program is directed toward creating a safe and nurturing environment for children in a neighborhood. The program helps residents organize self-directed projects to create clean, safe play areas and develop Crime Watch and Block Parent programs.

Diagrams on pages 145 and 146 illustrate the program outcome model diagrams for these programs.

Individuals or the group can use the exercise on page 142 to reinforce their grasp of the performance measurement concepts covered in this training step or they may prefer to practice with an agency program.

➲Exercise

Metroplex is a town that is starting a recycling program for its residents. Residents have asked for a curb-side program and want glass, plastics, all types of paper, aluminum, and metal included in the pick-ups. While the Town Council expects to provide financial support in the beginning for the program, it wants the program to develop into being self-sufficient. The Council has created a Recycling Unit and assigned it responsibility for designing, administering, and evaluating the program. Council also wants the program to have a set of performance measures and it wants to get periodic performance reports.

Metroplex Recycling Unit
Mission: Improve the environment for Metroplex residents by regularly providing convenient, low-cost recycling services.

Unit goals:
Provide an efficient recycling service to town residents.
Become a self-sufficient recycling center.

Program model:
Determine the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes for this program. Use this information to create a program diagram.

Performance measures:
Below are ten measures the unit has identified. Decide what type of measure each is. Add measures that might improve measurement.
___Tons of recyclables collected annually
___Tons of recyclables dropped off annually
___Number of households served
___Number of households eligible for service
___Tons collected per full-time equivalent employee
___Expenditure per household served
___Number of "missed collections" reported per year
___Percent of constituents reporting "satisfactory" ratings
___Percent of revenue generated by recyclable sales
___Change in tonnage collected at town landfill

Program Child abuse public awareness and prevention

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes		
			Initial	Intermediate	Long-term
Agency has one full-time staff member with an MSW and 10 years experience in child welfare, including research on indicators of child abuse and neglect. A volunteer advisory board representing local media, medical and education professions, and pro bono assistance from a local advertising agency support program.	Agency designs public service announcements (PSAs), brochures, posters, and presentation material on signs of child abuse and neglect and tests them for clarity, interest and acceptability.	PSAs air on radio and television Brochures distributed at community events, to school administrators, pediatricians' offices, and childcare centers. Poster placed in stores and buses. Presentation made to community civic groups, medical and school professionals' meetings by program director, agency director, and advisory Board members.	General public, educators, child care workers, and medical professionals hear or read information	Target audiences are knowledgeable of signs of child abuse and neglect and of appropriate actions to take	Target audiences identify and report suspected abuse and neglect.

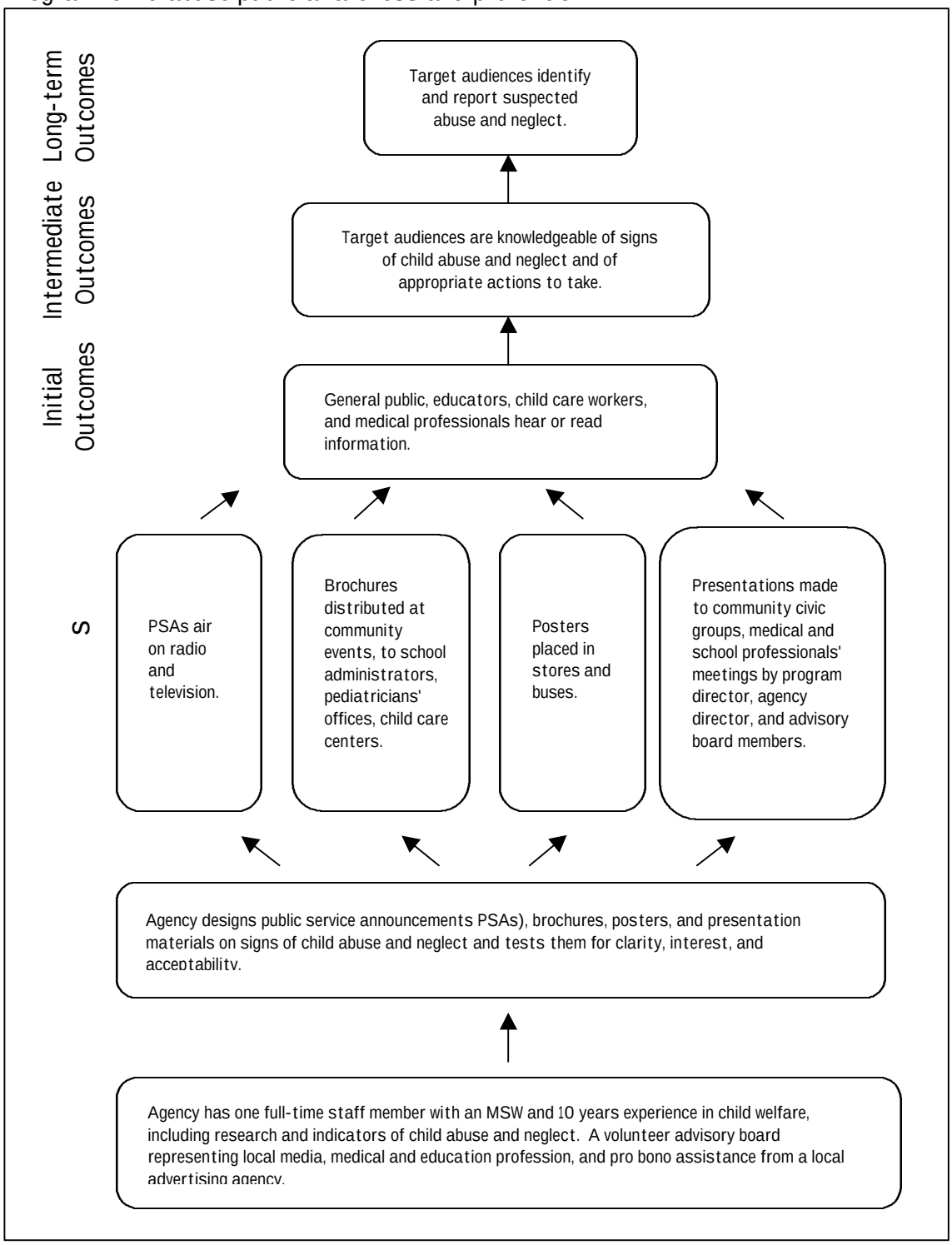
Discussion: Note that this program does not claim to reduce abuse and neglect rates in the community. In fact, since such rates are based on the number of reported cases, the rate actually may increase for a short period after this program begins. Relating one program alone to a community-level change is very risky.

Program Neighborhood organizing

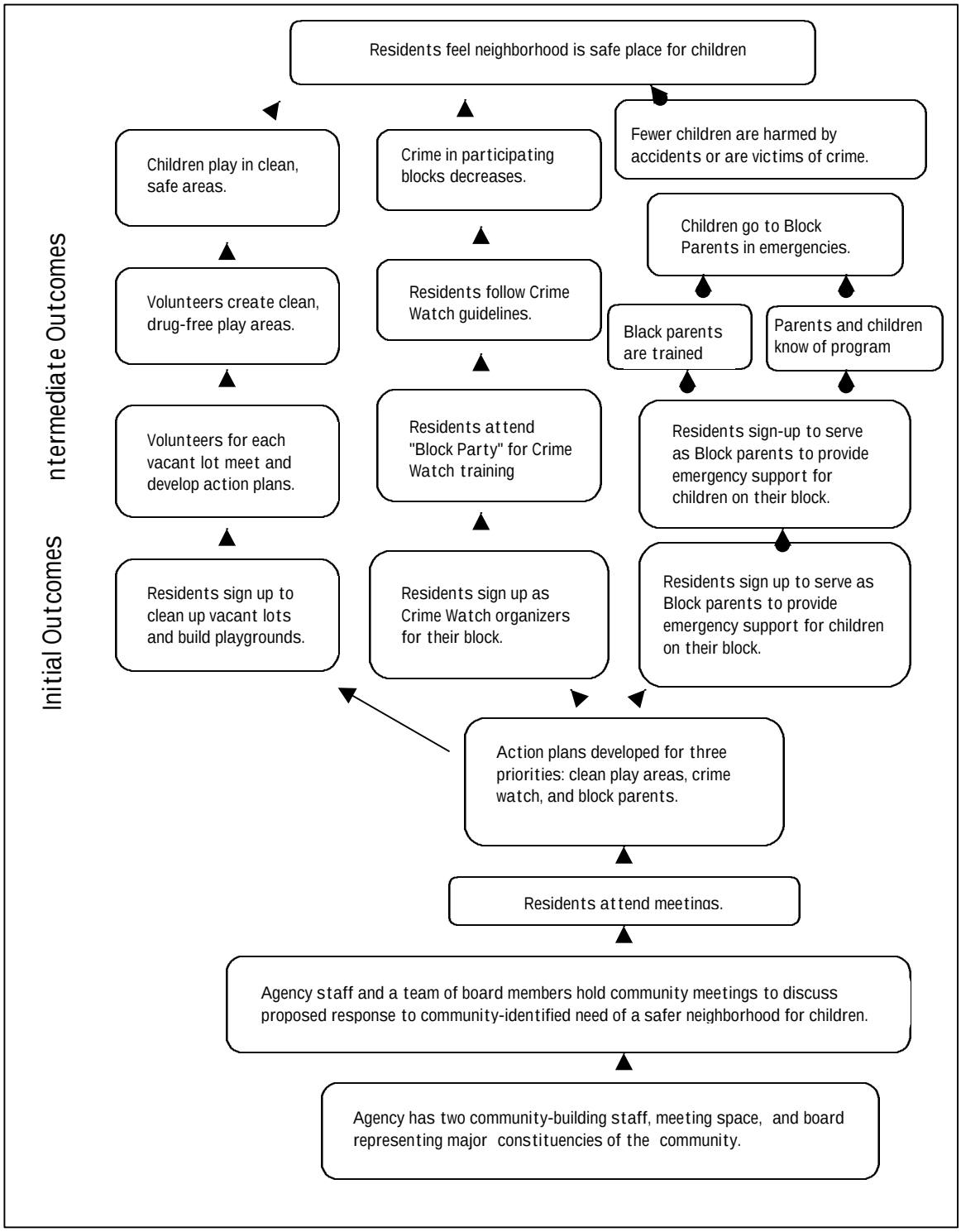
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes		
			Initial	Intermediate	Long-term
Agency has two community-building staff, meeting space, and board representing major constituencies of the community.	Agency staff and a team of board members hold community meetings to discuss proposed response to community-identified need of a safer neighborhood for children.	Residents attend meetings. Action plans develop for three priorities: Clean play areas Crime watch Block parents.	Residents sign up to clean up vacant lots and build playgrounds. Residents sign up as Crime Watch organizers.	Volunteers for each vacant lot meet and develop actions plans. Volunteers create clean, drug-free play areas. Children play in clean, safe areas. Residents attend "Block Parties" for crime watch training. Residents follow Crime Watch guidelines. Crime in participating blocks falls. Block parents trained. Parent and children know about program. Children go to Block Parents in emergencies. Fewer children harmed by accidents or crimes.	Residents feel neighborhood safer place for children.

Discussion: The initial outcomes of this program involve residents signing up. Why should this be an outcome? The target for this program is the neighborhood. By increasing citizen participation and volunteerism, t he agency benefits the neighborhood. This is the first behavior the program must influence through its organizing program that makes it an initial outcome. very risky.

Program: Child abuse public awareness and prevention



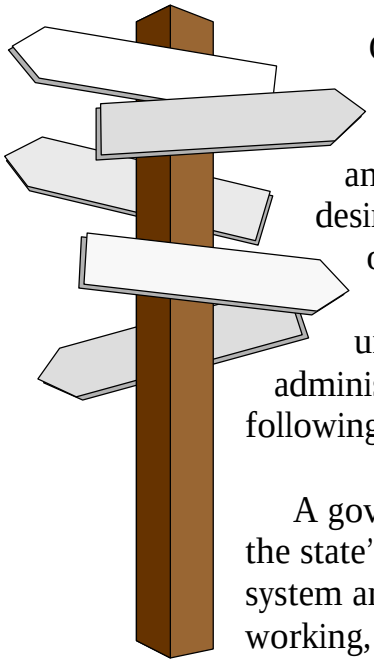
Program: Neighborhood organizing



Defining Outcomes

➲Purpose of the step

The value of performance measurement comes from its ability to *improve* performance, not simply measure it. To improve, an agency needs to know two things–where it wants its performance to be and where its performance currently is. Decisions about where an agency wants to be start when it discusses what it expects a program to do.



Clearly stating a program's expected outcome is generally not as easy as it appears. Frequently in the public sector diverse groups have differing and sometimes competing ideas about the most desirable outcome. If officials want to measure outcomes, then they must have an outcome statement that is generally accepted and understood by the program's users, funders, administrators, and evaluators. This is not simple as the following scenario illustrates.

A governor wants to change a job training program for the state's unemployed. He's trying to start a voucher system and to monitor whether this new system is working, he wants an accountability system.

The governor chooses a task force to implement his idea. The task force's first assignment is to accurately describe what the governor expects the program to do. Since the governor charged the group to measure the outcome, members know hours of instruction or number of students enrolled would not suitably describe the program results. They believed the governor wanted to see graduates employed.

Policy leader A speaks first and suggests the desired result is simply, "The person gets a job." Another member questions that. Is that really what the governor wants? What if the person previously had a job paying $12 an

hour and after training gets a job paying only $5 an hour? Is that a good outcome? They modify the statement to state, "The person gets a job paying a wage equal to or greater than the prior wage."

However, someone disagrees. What if the person get a job that pays well, but it is not related to the training? Is that what the governor wants? They change that statement again, "The person get a job paying a wage equal to or greater than the prior wage in the field for which training was provided."

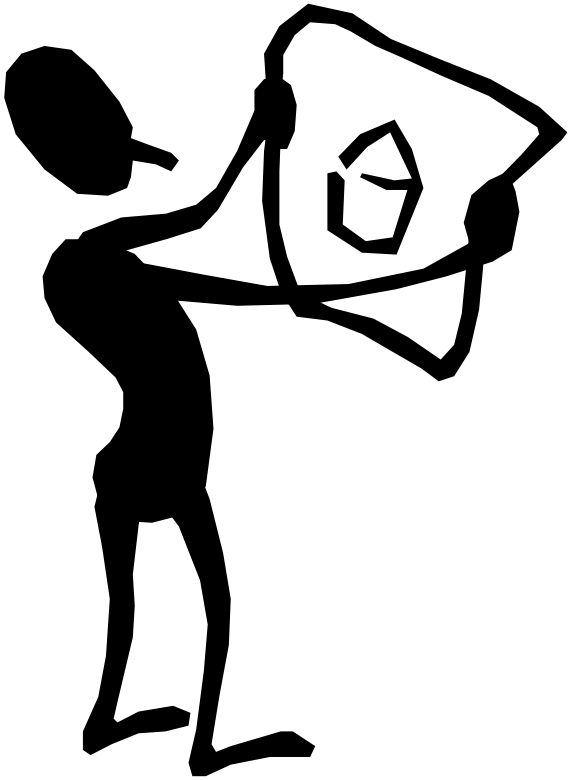
Yet another person questions the entire approach. Should the state be involved in providing specialized training and then placing people? A more realistic outcome may be to give people a basic level of general education and place them with employers who provide necessary specialized training. A possible outcome statement for this is, "The person masters a range of skills at the eleventh grade level."

While that sounds fine, someone else brings up the issue of perverse incentives. Wouldn't an outcome like that encourage a trainer to enroll people in the program who are already at the ninth or tenth grade level? Wouldn't this increase the program's likelihood of success since the training would only upgrade skills one or two grade levels? Would a program be more successful if it took someone with a fourth grade level up to the eleventh?

This story illustrates the difficulty with defining an outcome, especially in the public sector's highly political environment. Public dollars generally fund programs designed to improve the lives or conditions of the citizens. This is true whether it's for road building, schools, hospitals, penalties for criminal behavior, environmental protections, or public health. Different constituents may have very diverse and sometimes competing expectations.

Before an agency can move forward with measures, it needs a generally accepted outcome statement. Without it, an agency is hindered from compiling a meaningful set of performance indicators.

Measurement is further complicated because many programs do not have a single outcome, but a series. Each result leads to different benefits that build on previous ones. Moving through the progression participants eventually reach the ultimate outcome.



These factors underscore the challenge a workgroup faces when it drafts a program's outcome statement. Group members may gather input from a program's key constituents to learn what they expect the program to do. A clearly defined outcome statement is the most crucial task for the group. The outcomes chosen are the foundation for the program's measurement system. If they are not well conceived, then the measurements' value is reduced.

➲Possible desired outcomes

- Clearly stated results or outcomes for a program
- A general agreement among key constituents about the expected outcome
- Program logic model diagram

➲Facilitation suggestions

Since the products from this step form the foundation for outcome measurement, this effort requires careful thought. The following activities help the workgroup formulate the important outcomes to measure:

- Gather ideas from the primary constituent groups about a program's outcomes
- Construct a program logic model
- Choose the outcomes that are important to measure
- Get feedback on the model and outcomes

Gather ideas about a program's outcomes

To learn what a program is expected to do, workgroup members can use different sources to gather information, such as program descriptions, program staff, program users, and Board members. Discussions with staff at similar programs in other agencies, states, or localities are another option.

The workgroup designs this exercise to meet its needs. The ideas should helps members see, from different perspectives, the outcomes various constituents expect from a program. At the same time, the workgroup may be able to find unintended consequences that a particular outcome could induce.

Hints about what are and are not outcomes

Agencies sometimes have trouble classifying some program components as activities, outputs, or outcomes. These hints give a general guide and suggest appropriate exceptions.

Recruiting and training staff and volunteers, purchasing or upgrading equipment, and various support and maintenance activities. These are internal program operations intended to improve the quality of program inputs. The number of staff recruited, number of volunteers trained, amount of equipment purchased, etc., indicate the volume of these internal operations. However, the operations do not represent benefits or changes for the public or users, and thus *are not outcomes*.

Number of people served. This tells the volume of work accomplished. In most cases, volume of service is an output. It tells nothing about whether anyone benefited from the service and therefore is *not usually an outcome*.

In public education programs where the program aims to encourage citizens to seek a service, such as cancer screening, the fact that citizens become aware of the importance of the service and seek it out reflects a change in knowledge or attitudes and behavior resulting from the program. Thus, the number of citizens who are motivated to seek a service by a public education program is an outcome of that program.

Constituent satisfaction. Most often, whether people are satisfied or not with various aspects of a program (e.g., courteousness of staff, timeliness of follow-up) does not indicate whether the a person's condition improved because of the service or whether the person gained any benefits. Thus, constituent satisfaction *generally is not an outcome*.

In rare instances, constituent satisfaction may be part of the series of changes a participant experiences in achieving a successful outcome. For example, if an individual's willingness to continue with long-term counseling is critical to the program's success and satisfaction is a key determinant of continuation, then satisfaction may be a necessary, although not sufficient, outcome. In programs whose purpose is to meet participant's basic needs, such as food kitchens and homeless shelters, it may be nearly impossible to track participants far enough beyond the immediate delivery of service to identify outcomes beyond being fed and sheltered. In these cases, the program may have to settle for participant satisfaction as the closest approximation of an outcome it can measure.

Construct a program logic model

After the workgroup gets ideas from various sources, it sorts and organizes them. It prepares to discuss how the program is supposed to work. These discussions will identify the inputs, activities, and outputs that can produce an outcome.

To prepare for a meeting, the group leader gives members the information the group collected and a pad of sticky notes. The leader asks

them to review it and write on separate sticky sheets a single input, activity, output, or outcome. They bring the sticky notes to the meeting.

For the meeting, hang several sheets of flipchart paper on the wall. Using the Program Logic Model worksheet as a model, mark off sections on the paper for "Inputs," "Activities," "Outputs," "Initial Outcomes," "Intermediate Outcomes," and "Longer-term Outcomes." Group members post their sticky notes on the chart.

After posting the notes, the workgroup tries to describe the logical sequence that could lead to an outcome. One way to start is by attempting to write a series of "if-then" statements like these below:

- **If** stop-smoking classes teach about health hazards and effective quitting techniques (outputs), **then** smokers acquire knowledge, change their attitudes, and gain skills to stop smoking (initial outcomes). **If** smokers know smoking is harmful, want to quit, and have skill to minimize withdrawal symptoms, **then** they will quit smoking (intermediate outcome). **If** they quit smoking, **then** they will have fewer smoking-related illnesses (longer-term outcome).

- **If** employment counseling for women trying to become financially self-sufficient includes job interviewing skills (output), **then** the women will give more effective job interviews (initial outcome). **If** they give better interviews, **then** they are more likely to find jobs (intermediate outcome). **If** they find jobs, **then** they are more likely to be financially self-sufficient (longer-term outcome).

This exercise may not go quickly. Some variation in views about a program's outcomes is likely. While frustrating, making these differences visible enables an agency to build a consensus and get the key players headed in the same direction. As the workgroup constructs a program model, the following principles for identifying program outcomes may help:

Principles to use in identifying outcomes

- There is no right number of outcomes for a program. Some programs may have two outcomes while others have five.
- Programs may have more than one "outcome" track.
- In some cases, initial outcomes may be arguably closer to outputs. Putting items in categories is less important than having a logical model with appropriate outcomes.
- The more immediate the outcome, the more influence a program generally has on its achievement.
- Conversely, the longer term the outcome, the less direct influence a program has over its achievement and the more likely other, extraneous forces will intervene.
- Simply because other forces may affect an outcome does not mean that it should be excluded from a program's logic model.
- But, a program's longer-term outcomes should not go beyond the program's purpose.
- A program's outcomes should not go beyond the scope of its target audience.
- It is important to consider what unintended or possibly negative consequences a program may have.

When the workgroup talks about the elements of the program and how they logically fit together, it should check the model to see if it answers these questions:

- who or what is affected by the program,
- what the expected changes are,
- how much change is expected, and
- when it is expected.

When the workgroup feels ready, it completes Worksheet xx for the program. It is useful to share the draft program logic model with program staff and other key players for any comments.

Selecting outcomes that are important to measure

The program's logic model may have a number of outcomes. The workgroup's next task is to decide which ones are important to measure.

The group should weed out any outcomes that are duplicative, overlapping, or clearly unimportant. However, it shouldn't be tempted to eliminate initial and intermediate outcomes. They can provide important information to program managers for tracking a program's progress or spotting any problem areas.

When the workgroup narrows its list of outcomes to measure, it can use Worksheet FF to evaluate them against the following criteria:

- Is it reasonable to believe the program can influence the outcome in a non-trivial way, although it cannot control it?
- Would measurement of the outcome help identify program successes and help pinpoint and address problems or shortcomings?
- Will the program's various constituents accept this as a valid program outcome?

After looking at each outcome individually, the workgroup should assess the whole program one last time and ask:

- Do program outputs and initial, intermediate, and longer-term outcomes relate to one another logically?

- Do these relationships reflect the logic of the program—the sequence of influences and changes that program inputs, activities, and outputs are intended to set in motion?
- Do the longer-term outcomes represent meaningful benefits or changes?
- Have any potential negative outcomes been identified?

Get feedback on the program model and outcomes to measure

As a final check, the workgroup can share with key players its program model and list of outcomes to measure. The reactions that these reviewers have help the workgroup fine-tune all the model's elements and ensure a consensus about the program's conceptual foundation. The following questions can guide reviewers:

Reviewing the program logic model and outcomes

- Does the model:
  - ⇨ Include all activities and outcomes that are important?
  - ⇨ Make the appropriate connections between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes?

- Are the outcomes identified as important to measure:
  - ⇨ Relevant to the program's purpose?
  - ⇨ Outcomes for which the program should be held accountable?
- Are they important to achieve if the program is to fulfill its purpose?
- Do they represent meaningful benefits or changes for participants?
- Is it reasonable to believe the program can influence then in a non-trivial way

- Clear in defining the intended scope of the program's influence?
- Useful to program managers in efforts to identify both points of success and problems the program can correct?
- Likely to be effective in communicating the program benefits to various constituents?

➲Sample worksheets

- Worksheet EE: Program logic model
- Worksheet FF: Assessing possible outcomes

➲Examples

Example outcomes and outcome indicators for various programs[1]

Type of program	Outcome	Indicator(s)
Smoking cessation class	Participants stop smoking	Number and percent of participants who report that they have quit smoking by the end of the course Number and percent of participants who have not relapsed six months after program completion.
Information and referral program	Callers access services to which they are referred or about which they are given information	Number and percent of community agencies that report an increase in new participants who came to their agency as a result of a call to the information and referral hotline Number and percent of community agencies that indicate these referrals are appropriate
Tutorial program for 6th grade students	Students' academic performance improves	Number and percent of participants who earn better grades in the grading period following completion of the program than in the grading period immediately preceding enrollment in the program
English-as-a-second language instruction	Participants become proficient in English	Number and percent of participants who demonstrate increase in ability to read, write, and speak English by the end of the course.
Employee assistance program	Employees with drug or alcohol problems are rehabilitated and do not lose their jobs	Number and percent of program participants who are gainfully employed at the same company six months after intake

[1] Examples are of hypothetical programs and are taken from *Measuring Program Outcomes*, United Way of America.

Example outcomes and outcome indicators for various programs[1]

Type of program	Outcome	Indicator(s)
Prenatal care program	Pregnant women follow the advice of the nutritionist	Number and percent of women who take recommended vitamin supplements and consume recommended amounts of calcium
Counseling for parents identified at-risk for child abuse or neglect	Risk factors decrease. No confirmed incidents of child abuse or neglect	Number and percent of participating families for whom Child Protective Services records report no confirmed child abuse or neglect during the twelve months following the program
Homemaking services	The home environment is healthy, clean, and safe Participants stay in their own home and are not referred to a nursing home	Number and percent of participants whose home environment is rated clean and safe by a trained observer Number of local nursing homes who report that applications from younger and healthier citizens are declining (indicating that person who in the past would have been referred to nursing home now stay at home longer)
Shelter and counseling for runaway youth	Family is reunited whenever possible; otherwise, youths are in stable alternative housing	Number and percent of youth who return home Number and percent of youth placed in alternative living arrangement who are in that arrangement six months later unless they have been reunified or emancipated

Selecting measures

➲Purpose of the step

Any agency faces a challenge when it chooses information to track a program's results. The principal data for this is an ***outcome measure*** (sometime referred to as indicator.) Its purpose is to help an agency know whether the program's outcome is achieved.

Measuring outcomes varies in degree of difficulty. Some are simple, such as graduating from high school or getting a job. Others are less concrete. For example, the stated outcome for a prenatal care program is a "healthy" baby. The challenge is deciding how to define "healthy" baby. One method is to select some important characteristics that also are measurable. Program staff could define "healthy" birth as a baby weighing at least 5.5 pounds, having an APGAR score of seven or more, and no visible physical abnormalities. These indicators are observable and measurable. Arguably, the program could use other measures or additional measures, but that is a decision for each agency.

However, when an agency does select measures, it should choose:

- Specific observable, measurable characteristic(s) or change(s) that will represent achievement of the outcome; and,
- Specific statistic(s) (for example, number and percent attaining an outcome) the program will calculate to summarize its level of achievement.

Using the "healthy" baby outcome to illustrate, the agency defined "healthy" with three characteristics: the baby's weight, physical appearance, and score on the APGAR test given to newborns. The statistics, the agency chose to use, were birth weight greater than 5.5 pounds, an APGAR score of 7 or higher, and no visible physical defects. Taken together these three statistics defined how the program would assess whether a baby was "healthy."

The workgroup must resist any temptation to collect data for every conceivable aspect of the program's outcome. Its task is to choose a reasonable set of measures that provide essential information about program performance. An overly burdensome quickly negates the performance measurement system's value.

While examining possible outcome measures, the workgroup should consider any factors that could positively or negatively affect an outcome. It should explore the degree of control the agency has over these factors. The influence an agency has over these factors may play an important role in deciding what to measure.

➲Possible desired outcomes

- Set of possible measures

➲Facilitation suggestions

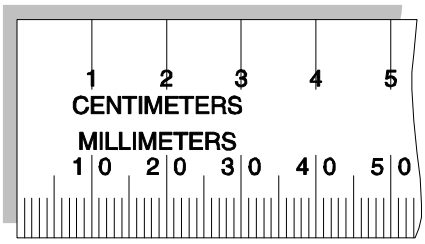
Workgroup members constructed a program model and identified outcomes to measure in the preceding step. Now, they must identify measures that will show whether an outcome is achieved.

Some outcomes are simple and direct. Measures for these will be obvious from the outcome statement. Many other outcomes, however, are more difficult to measure. Frequently, more that one measure is needed to assess the results.

Indicators, which the workgroup considers, must be observable and measurable. If they are not, then they won't be useful. Additionally, measures should be unambiguous. Terms like "substantial," "adequate," or "acceptable" are subject to interpretation and lack sufficient specificity. [*Note: During an agency's first use of outcome measures, it may not have a reasonable basis for choosing a numerical target. Rather than set a target than turns out to be*

unrealistic, the agency may want to look for "improvement" and set a numerical target after it learns what is reasonable.]

Workgroup members can begin this task by meeting with representatives of a program's most important constituents and asking them to suggest important performance indicators. Members compile the answers and bring them to a workgroup meeting.



At a workgroup meeting, the leader can use a flipchart or white board to record the group's ideas. To start, someone writes an outcome on the page. The leader then asks members to suggest indicators that could show the outcome's achievement. For some outcomes this is a challenge and will require much thought and discussion. Questions like these maybe useful:

- How do you tell that the outcome has been achieved?
- What do you expect to see when the outcome occurs?
- Can we observe and measure this?

Someone lists possible indicators on the flipchart. The group discusses each one and decides whether to include it in the measurement system. After the group agrees on which measures to use, it should review them by answering the following questions:

- Is there at least one indicator for each outcome?
- Does each measure track an important aspect of the outcome that no other measure tracks?
- Is the wording of each measure sufficiently specific? Does it tell the characteristic or change that will be counted?
- Does each measure identify the statistic(s) that will summarize program performance on the outcome? Will the statistic(s) effectively convey the level of achievement?

Workgroup members record outcomes and their indicators on Worksheet GG. In the next step, the group adds the data source and the collection method to the chart.

➲Sample worksheets

- Worksheet GG : Outcome measurement framework
- Worksheet HH: Evaluation a set of performance measures

➲Examples

Child abuse public awareness and prevention program

Outcome	Indicator (s)
General public, educators, child care workers, and medical professionals hear or read information.	Percent of target audiences that recalls content of PSAs, brochures, posters, or presentations.
Target audiences are knowledgeable of signs of child abuse and neglect and of appropriate action to take.	Percent of target audiences that can name 3 signs of abuse and neglect and can identify police or child protective services as appropriate contact.
Target audiences identify and report suspected abuse and neglect.	Percent of target audiences that say they have made such a report since hearing or seeing the information.

Neighborhood organizing (safe play area outcomes only)

Outcome	Indicator (s)
Residents sign up to clean vacant lots and build playgrounds.	Number of residents on sign-up sheets.
Volunteers for each vacant lot meet and develop action plans.	Number of action plans developed.
Volunteers create clean, drug-free play areas.	Number of vacant lots that are free of litter, have grass or other appropriate ground cover, have play equipment, and are free of drug sales and/or use.
Children play in clean, safe areas.	Number of children observed in play areas on one random, sunny day per week for 3 months after cleanup.
Residents feel neighborhood is safer place for children.	Number and percent of neighborhood residents that say neighborhood is safer for children today than it was one year ago.

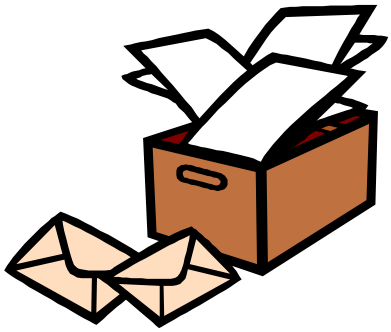
Preparing to collect data

➲Purpose of the step

After the workgroup chooses what to measure, it examines how to measure it. Most agencies have an array of collection techniques that they can explore. The workgroup evaluates the techniques in relation to the data's validity, reliability, timeliness, and collection costs while also looking for data sources. When data is not readily accessible or costs too much to collect, the workgroup will have to reconsider the measure.

Collecting data can be burdensome and added data collection duties may trouble staff. To counteract resistance, an agency should:

- Design data collection procedures that impose a minimal burden on operating personnel; and
- Avoid collecting any data that adds less to the analysis than it costs to collect.



While the workgroup looks for useful data, it can also identify any data collection that the agency should discontinue. This lets an agency redirect resources to more useful tasks.

➲Possible desired outcomes

- Method for collecting data for indicators
- A data collection instrument and procedures

➲Facilitation suggestions

The workgroup has chosen outcomes to measure and the specific information that indicates achievement of the outcomes. The final piece for

the outcome measurement framework is data collection. Specifically, the workgroup has to:

- Identify data sources for the indicators
- Design data collection methods
- Pretest data collection instrument and procedures

If the workgroup seeks expert advice from the start, it may avoid some common pitfalls of data collection. Program staff and data specialists can show group members the type of data currently available, discuss the costs of modifying data collection practices, suggest any more useful data, describe the benefits and drawbacks of various collection techniques, and offer advice about a realistic time schedule for collecting data. For situations in which an agency lacks a particular type of expertise, hiring an appropriate consultant may be beneficial. Since the quality of the data affects the indicator's value, this helps protect an agency from developing poorly designed collection strategies or instruments.

Identify data source

Choosing a data source depends on the measure. An agency has a variety of sources it can examine, such as:

Agency records–data currently being collected

- Number of participants getting the required score on a standardized test
- Number of former participants who re-enter a program after it appeared their service goals were met (recidivism)
- Number of job-training participants who got satisfactory ratings on mock interviews

Records from other agencies or programs–useful information that other agencies collect

- School grades and test scores of participants in an after-school tutoring program
- Verification from the library that adult literacy participants are using their library card

Individuals–first-hand reports from key individuals benefiting from a program or service

- Program participants' demonstration of knowledge, skills, or attitudes during and following a program
- Improvements in participants' status or condition

General public–programs designed to benefit the public in general

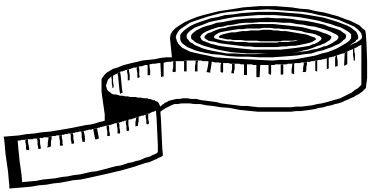
- Neighbors' perception of changes in children's after-school play habits following renovation of local playgrounds
- Parents' actions to have children immunized following a public education campaign on the topic

Trained observers–specially trained individuals who can gather information that can be measured by physical observation and rated on a scale that distinguishes variations in condition

- Condition of parks and playground, including safety conditions, amount of litter, and presence of broken glass, before and after a neighborhood improvement committee organizes a clean-up campaign.
- Level of constituent service at a licensing office following an intensive training program for front-line employees

Mechanical tests or measurements–data provided by scales, yardsticks, or other devices

- Amount of weight gained by pregnant mothers
- Growth rate of children
- Presence of controlled substance in the urine of drug abuse program participants



- Increased lung capacity among former participants of a stop-smoking program.

Data sources: advantages and disadvantages

Advantages	Disadvantages
Agency records	
Available Accessible Certainty about how data collected Procedures can be amended to collect needed information in future	Value of data depends on how carefully it was recorded Existing records seldom contain all data needed Generally do not provide post-service information
Other agency records	
Offers a different perspective on participants' experiences May provide information on outcomes achieved after service	Value of data depends on how carefully it was recorded Existing records may not contain all data needed Confidentiality issues may prevent using data Their time frame may not match Identifying users may be hard
Individuals	
Can provide first-hand view of experience or outcome during and after the program	Information can be biased by memory, interpretation, perceived pressure, fears
General public	
Can provide information when specific individuals cannot be identified Can provide information on programs that serve geographic areas or population segments rather than individuals	Often, only a small portion of the at-large group experienced the program

Trained observers Good to provide information on behavioral skills and practice Alternative to or supplement for participants' self-reports	Applies only to indicators based on physical observation Value of data depends on training and skill of observer, specificity of the rating scale Problem of inconsistent ratings if more than one observer used
Mechanical measurements Relatively objective, quantified, standardized	Findings are affected by accuracy of testing devices, training and skill of administrator

Design the data collection method

After an agency finds a data source, it then decide how to get the data. Generally, the choice of a data collection method involves trade-off between cost, response time, time required to collect the data, and some other factors.

Four typical data collection methods include:

- Review and extract data from agency records
- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Trained observers

When an agency considers a data collection method, ask questions like:

- Is the data collection method feasible and not overly expensive? Is there a less time-intensive or less expensive way to collect this information?
- Will the data gathered be useful to program managers for program improvement?
- Will data be credible to those outside the program who are likely to look at the information?

	Data collection method			
Characteristic	Review and extract	Questionnaire	Interview	Ratings by trained observers
Cost	Low	Moderate	Moderate to high, depending on how administered	Depends on availability of low-cost observers
Amount of training needed for data collectors	Some	None to some, depending on how distributed	Moderate to high, depending on collectors' previous experience and survey complexity	Moderate to high, depending on complexity, subtlety of observations
Completion time	Short, depending on amount of data needed	Moderate to long, depending on how distributed	Long	Short to moderate
Response rate	High, if records contain needed data	Depends on distribution method	Generally moderate to good	High

Design data collection instrument

Because designing instruments like questionnaires, tests, interview guides, observer ratings scales can be time-consuming, an agency should locate any instruments that others have developed and tested. The agency may be able to modify or use them.

If appropriate instruments are not available, then an agency will have to develop them. When the agency designs an instrument, it should:

- See that all information needed for the measures is collected.
- Sketch out the tables, charts, and types of findings that will be presented and verify that the instrument provides the data.

An appendix at the end of this step suggests how to construct record extraction forms, questionnaires, and trained observer rating scales.

Regardless of the data collection method used, an agency must have uniform data collection procedures and well-trained data collectors. After completing the instrument design, an agency drafts data collection procedures.

Pretest the instrument and procedures

No matter how carefully data collection instruments and procedures are developed, some problems will be discovered only when the instrument and procedures are used. Pretesting enables an agency to find and fix any difficulties.

When pretesting, an agency wants feedback on elements like:

- Wording of questions
- Content of questions
- Adequacy of response categories
- Clarity of instructions
- Layout and format of the instrument
- Length of time to administer
- Ease of data entry

Using the feedback, an agency revises the instrument and procedures.

Outcome measurement framework worksheet

Program: Neighborhood organizing

Outcome	Indicator(s) (may be more than one per outcome)	Data source	Data collection method
Residents signup to clean up vacant lots and build playgrounds.	Number of residents on sign-up sheets.	Sign-up sheets	Distribute forms to all meeting attendees asking them to indicate interest in volunteering.
Volunteers for each vacant lot meet and develop action plans.	Number of action plans developed.	Staff report	Staff and board member teams organize and observe planning meetings and document action plans.
Volunteers create clean, drug-free play areas.	Number of vacant lots that are free of litter, have grass or other appropriate ground cover, have play equipment and are free of drug sales and/or use.	Staff/volunteer observation	Apply observation checklist.

Outcome measurement framework worksheet

Program: Child abuse public awareness and prevention

Outcome	Indicator(s) (may be more than one per outcome)	Data source	Data collection method
General public, educators, child care workers, and medical professionals hear or read information.	Number and percent of target audiences that recall content of PSAs, brochures, posters, or presentations.	General public Child care workers, medical professionals, educators Presentation attendees	Community telephone survey Telephone survey to 20% of those who received materials Follow-up mail survey
Target audiences are knowledgeable of signs of child abuse and neglect and of appropriate actions to take.	Number and percent of target audiences that can name 3 signs of abuse and neglect and can identify police or child protective services as appropriate contact.	Same as above	Same as above

Implementing the Measurement System

➲Purpose of the step

After working the kinks out of data collection, an agency is ready to try out its measurement system. An agency will find it useful to pilot test any new aspect to the system before launching it. A trial may uncover issues like overlooked outcomes, inadequately defined indicators, cumbersome procedures, and analysis or reporting dilemmas. Piloting lets an agency solve problems on a small scale before it fully implements the system. Skipping a pilot may be tempting, but doing it generally will save time and aggravation later.

An agency conducts a pilot of the measurement system exactly as it expects to do it during implementation. The only difference is deciding on the scope of the pilot. Therefore, the procedures covered in this step apply to both the pilot and actual implementation.

➲Possible desired outcomes

- Test of the measurement system
- Full-scale implementation
- Ongoing monitoring of measurement system

➲Facilitation suggestions

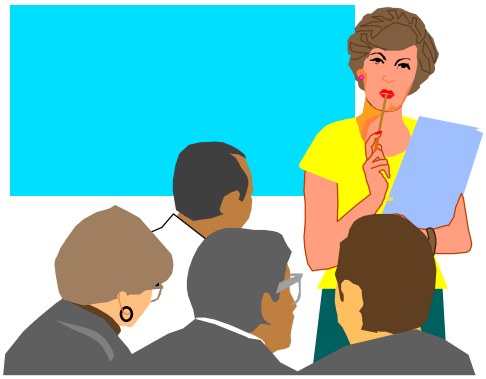
When an agency implements its performance measurement system, it may find it useful to pilot test the measures. The only difference between the pilot and actual implementation is the scale. Implementation includes the following tasks:

- Decide on the pilot strategy
- Prepare the data collectors
- Track and collect the data
- Monitor the outcome measurement process

Trial strategy

A pilot test replicates the measurement process that will be used, just on a smaller scale. Depending on the program's structure, an agency may have several options for targeting a segment of it. For instance:

- If a program has multiple sites, the pilot can be at one site
- If program staff are divided into units, then only a few units would be included
- If program is offered in classes, then choose a few of them for the trial



Prepare data collectors

Identify and train those who will collect the data. In the previous step, data collection procedures were designed. Data collectors should get practice on administering the instrument.

Track and collect outcome data

After the data collectors are trained, an agency begins the data gathering process. Implementation may be helped by:

- Assigning an individual to monitor the collection process;
- Developing procedures to monitor data collection
- Having procedures to maintain confidentiality, if needed
- Having plan to review data quality

Monitor the outcome measurement process

During the trial run, an agency should monitor the outcome measurement process itself. Not only does it want to uncover any problems, it also should be interested in the amount of time, effort, and resources the system takes. Some factors to watch include:

- Amount of time data collectors spend on each interview, record, or observation;
- Response rates on first, second, and third mailings of a survey;
- Number of people the agency can't locate;
- Refusal rates for in-person or telephone interviews;
- Planned observations that could not be completed and why;
- Data collection errors;
- Data needed for analysis that was unavailable; or
- Printing, postage, and other costs beyond staff time.

An agency may also want to use some specific strategies to capture system information such as:

- Interview forms with places for interviewers to record time started and ended for each interview;
- Answers from data collectors about a survey, record review, or observation;

- Form asking how long the survey took to complete placed in a sample of mail surveys; or
- Periodic meetings with data collectors to identify problems and suggestions.

Starting full-scale implementation

After completing the pilot and making adjustments, an agency launches its measurement system. The first task is documenting the current or baseline level of each measure. The data is collected using the same methodology that has been developed for the measure. If an agency chooses a measure that currently has no data, then it should establish the baseline when the data is available.

An agency should set a performance target for each outcome. This is a quantifiable estimate of the expected results for a given time. Targets should be challenging, yet achievable. When an agency begins measuring an outcome, it may want to wait and set a target after a couple of rounds of data collection. This helps an agency see what a reasonable is. Any targets set should be discussed with and agreed to by agency's management structure.

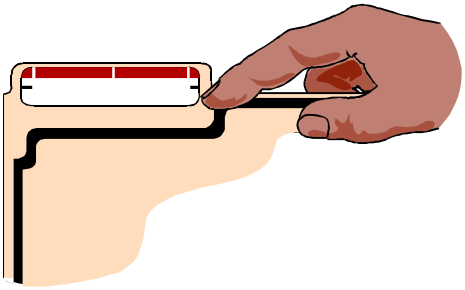
Collect data, analyze it, and report findings

1. Following the procedures refined during the pilot, an agency collects the data for its measurement system. The data is then processed either electronically or manually. To check for data entry errors, an agency can:
    - Transfer or enter all data twice and compare the two files. If this is too cumbersome, then do it for a small percentage of the data. If the spot check shows a high error rate, then all the data should be checked.

- Examine a listing of the data on a simple spreadsheet to look for obvious errors. For example, if the answer to a question should be coded with either a "1" or "2", the appearance of another number indicates an error.

- Check to see if answers to various questions make sense (logic check.)

2. Tabulate and analyze data. After correcting any errors, the data is tabulated. Statistics like the median, mean, or percentages are calculated. The measurement framework describes the types of statistics that are expected. Examine various breakdowns of the data to understand what the data is saying.



3. Report the findings. An agency should keep in mind the particular audience for each report it issues. Different recipients will have different needs. Making the reports clear and easily understandable is critical. Information may be displayed in tables and charts. Some typical methods are
   - Data tables. Tables summarize numerical data by grouping together or breaking out relevant information.
   - Bar charts. These display distributions of categorical data, such as year, sex, race, or money. Each bar shows the number or percentage in that category.
   - Pie charts. Pies illustrate the distribution of a given indicator. Each percentage is represented by a slice of the total pie; therefore, all slices must total 100 percent.
   - Maps. Maps present geographic distributions visually. The increased use of geographic information systems (GIS) will make maps to represent data much easier to produce.

4. Prepare sample reports and review them. Answer questions like:
   - Do the findings seem reasonable?
   - Are they presented clearly?
   - What questions do they raise that are not answered in the report?
   - Are explanations of problem areas and proposed remedies satisfactory?
   - What other tables or charts would be helpful?
   - Does anything seem to be missing, such as an overlooked outcome?

5. Build in a regular review process for the measurement system. To keep the process effective, an agency should examine periodically its components, such as:

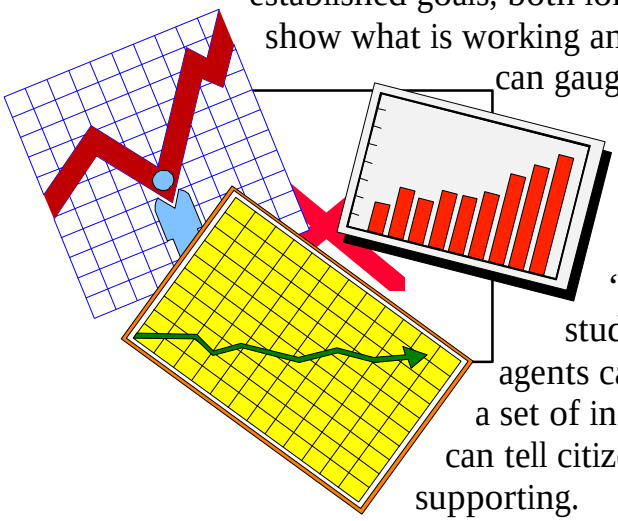
   - Number and types of measures
   - Need for additional measures, deletion of any
   - Data collection instruments
   - Training for data collectors
   - Data collection procedures
   - Data entry procedures
   - Time and cost of collecting and analyzing the data
   - Usefulness of the reports

Using Performance Measures as A Management Tool

➲Purpose of the Step

To be valuable, performance measurement must be more than a score keeping exercise. Managers and decision makers must accept, support and use performance information.

A well-designed system can support many activities like policy analysis and development, strategic and operational planning, budgeting, program management, benchmarking, contract monitoring, interdepartmental collaboration, and public reporting. Performance information can identify trouble spots in the early stages when an agency generally can choose from greater range of options. The system can monitor progress toward established goals, both long term and short range. It can show what is working and what is not. Performance data can gauge the effectiveness of policies, programs, or services. It can be used to analyze and support budget alternatives. A measurement system can identify "best practices" for a benchmarking study. Contracts with private sector agents can be monitored and enforced with a set of indicators. Performance measures can tell citizens what their tax dollars are supporting.



Different groups can use performance information in various settings. Groups include senior agency managers, program managers, legislators, budget analysts, auditors, administrators, cabinet staff, program or service constituents or constituents, and the general public. The users and their information uses are an important guide when an agency develops its performance measurement system. For example, Cabinet staff or legislators

may want aggregate information while program managers require more detailed data. An agency should tailor reports to meet the diverse needs of users.

When an agency designs its performance measurement system, using some of the following techniques can promote the information's use:

- Include primary information users in the development process.
- Ask primary decisions makers to identify the most relevant information for them.
- Report performance information in the level of detail the user needs.
- Test and validate the proposed methodology for each measure.
- Build a consensus among primary constituents on a program's purpose to alleviate any conflicting messages about the its direction.
- Devote enough time to design a well-thought-out performance measurement system so results are accurate and accepted.
- Promote the accuracy and completeness of performance information by having clear reporting guidelines.

However, as expected, an agency will experience some awkwardness when it starts using performance measures. It takes time to work through the bugs; however, the interplay between their development and use eventually leads to better measures. Continued improvement and experience help them become a valuable management and decision making tool.

➲Possible Desired Outcomes

- A basic level of understanding concerning how performance information can be used as a management tool
- A plan for how performance information will be used and who will use them
- A feedback loop flowing from the use of performance information to the development of it

➲Facilitation Suggestions

A performance information system is worthwhile only if used. An agency cannot simply assume that if the information is available, it will be used. While the information may have many applications, an agency will need a strategy to encourage its use while removing any barriers preventing use. Unfortunately, many agencies overlook this until the performance measurement system is in place. However, planning for how the information will be used should be parallel to the system's design.

Planning for use of performance information

Some issues for an agency to address when it plans its strategy to promote the use of performance information are outlined below.

➲ Design the performance measurement system to promote use.

When the workgroup designs the performance measurement system, it needs to select indicators that are relevant, appropriate, accurate, and valid. During design, consulting with managers, staff, and decision makers helps the workgroup ensure that the measures are credible and meet the users needs. Specifically, it can:

- Develop the measures collaboratively with the primary players, promoting a common understanding of what it going to be measured, how, and why. This reduces perceived threats and builds a base of support for the measures.

- Focus the measurement system on results rather than processes.
- Ask key decision makers what type of information they want and how they want it reported.
- Strike a balance in collecting measures, enough to be useful without information overload.

- Scrutinize the data sources and methodology used to calculate each measure.

- Design reports to be readily understandable by primary users.

➲ Demonstrate leadership commitment

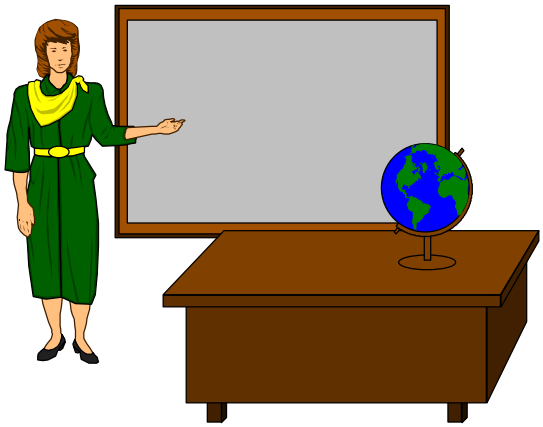
When an agency implements a performance measurement system, it may encounter skepticism from managers who already feel overburdened and dread the additional data collection chore. An agency's leadership must actively demonstrate its support for the system, include:

- Discussing performance issues at regular management meetings. Frank discussions about performance help identify ways to improve programs.
- Allocating adequate resources and time to the effort.
- Encouraging governing bodies to ask for and use performance information in its oversight role.

➲ Provide training

Simply issuing periodic performance reports does not generally produce better decisions or improve programs or services. Users need training on how to use performance measurement information. The extent of the training depends on an agency, but possibilities include training for:

- Agency staff on the mechanics and use of performance information; and,
- Agency managers and key policy makers on the benefits of performance information, how the information is developed, and ways to use it.



➲ Encourage use with incentives

A number of countries, states, and localities have incentives to motivate managers and staff to use performance information. The most common have been to:

- Simplify management rules and regulations
- Give managers greater decision-making authority over resource allocations
- Permit agencies to carry-over year-end funds
- Allow agencies to keep savings or revenues generated through sales of goods or services
- Rewarding staff for innovative ideas that improve performance

The increased emphasis on performance very likely will lead to the use of other types of incentives in the future.

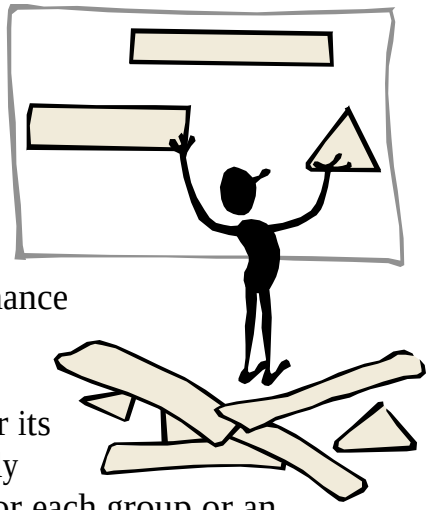
➲ Integrate performance information into management information systems

Agencies generally have management information systems. When they develop a performance measurement system, someone who knows the agency's information systems is a valuable resource. Agency leadership should see that the agency's management information systems are integrated with the performance measurement process. Typically, MIS staff can offer advice on data sources, desirable data collection procedures, the relationships of measures to one another, and reporting formats.

➲ Tailor reports to meet decision makers' needs

Regular reporting of performance information:

- Helps integrate the measurement process into agency management;
- Ensures the availability of information to support planning, budget, and other important decision making processes;
- Creates incentives for program improvement; and
- Helps build public support.



The decisions an agency makes when it develops performance reporting procedures include who needs it, how often do they need it, and what specific information do they want. Obviously, not all performance information is useful to every user. Because the needs of different audiences vary, an agency should tailor its reports accordingly. Focus on the truly important performance information for each group or an agency risks overloading and discouraging the user. Three audiences to which most agencies give information are elected officials, managers, and the public. Factors that apply to reports for these audiences are provided below.

Elected Officials

- Be selective about what is presented, focusing on the most critical issues
- Link performance information to an agency's strategic goals and mission so users have a way to judge its significance
- Include narrative explanations of good or poor performance so policy makers can better understand the data's meaning
- Ensure that reports coincide with important decision making processes
- Describe how the data was verified and validated
- Present information in a "user-friendly" format with visual aids such as graphs, charts, tables, and definitions

Managers

- Provide information on a frequent basis (first-line managers need it more often than senior level ones)
- Disaggregate data for line manager by geographic location, constituent characteristics, or other important factors

General public

- Present information at least annually
- Emphasize key trends
- Outline what the agency plans to do about poor performance
- Present in a "user-friendly" format
- Distribute the reports widely

➲ Align the human resources systems to support a "results" emphasis

When a performance information system matures and becomes well-established, an agency may consider integrating performance information into the performance appraisal process. Steps that an agency can follow to do this include:

- Communicate the agency's objectives and management strategy to employees individually
- Ensure that each employee understands the role that he or she plays in accomplishing the objectives and implementing the strategies
- Develop an action plan that details how each employee will achieve the agency's mission, goals, objectives, and strategies
- Discuss quantitative and qualitative performance expectations with each employee and agree on how performance will be measured
- Agree on areas of work outside the agency's strategic plan where individual performance will be assessed
- Establish a "professional development" plan for each employee
- Document performance throughout the year, while also providing ongoing feedback and coaching
- Conduct an informal mid-year assessment
- Reward good performance; address poor performance
- Review the personnel management system annually

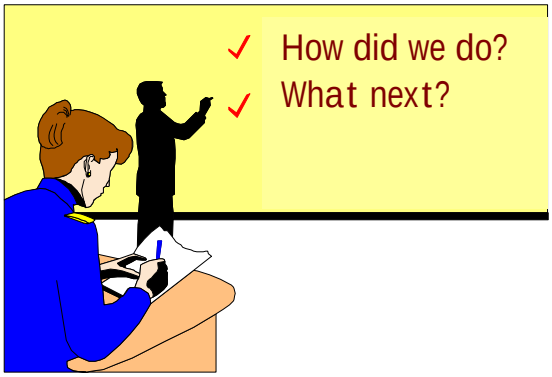
➲ Periodic review of measures to ensure their continuing usefulness

Developing a set of measures is not a one-time event. Changing conditions, needs, or knowledge can reduce the usefulness of even the best of measures. An agency should review performance measures and check with users to uncover needed changes. Reviews can explore questions like:

- Are the measures working well?
- What problems have been encountered?
- Are additional measures needed?
- Is data available?
- How do developments in the past year affect measures?
- How could reports be improved?

Uses for performance information

Performance measurement provides useful information about an agency, its programs, or its services. Measures themselves won't improve performance, but if the information they provide helps people make better decisions, then those actions can lead to better performance. An agency should take every chance to incorporate performance information into ongoing management and operation activities.



For performance information to be of greatest use, an agency should plan on how it will use the information at the same time that it develops the system. Doing this ensures that it will have information that is useful internally and externally. Internally directed data tells an agency how well a program is doing. It can, for example:

- Provide direction for staff
- Identify training or technical assistance needs
- Point out areas for improvement as well as effective strategies

- Support strategic and operational planning
- Inform the budget process and justify resource allocations
- Focus key constituent's attention on programmatic issues

Other information is more useful to external audiences. Findings about outcomes demonstrate a program's worth to the citizens or community. This information can be used to:

- Recruit talented staff and volunteers
- Promote the program to potential users
- Identify partners for collaboration
- Improve the agency's public image
- Retain and increase funding

➲ Strategic Planning

Performance measurement supports strategic planning by gauging progress toward established goals. It can show what strategies are and are not working, which will feed into the next planning cycle. The addition of performance measurement information strengthens the strategic planning by:

- examining and bolstering the fit between programs and an agency's strategic intent;
- adding structure to programs along strategic lines;
- increasing the rigor of planning;
- emphasizing the monitoring and evaluation of strategic outcomes; and,
- encouraging a more effective use of resources.

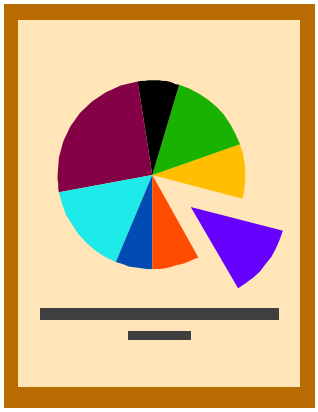
➲ Operational planning and control

Operational planning and control with its short-term planning horizon (e.g. one year) tends to use performance measures to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of program delivery rather than strategic outcomes. Measures, which staff can influence in the short-term, are the most relevant, especially those relating to work process outputs and the benefits a program gives its clients.

Client impact/benefit measures are important because they gauge whether a program makes a difference for a client. A program may have an increasing number of graduates (outputs), but if none of them find a job (outcome), then that's problematic for the program. When outcomes are not met, an agency must reexamine its program and determine why it is not benefiting its clients.

Principally operational planning and control use performance information in:

- budgeting–showing how results change with additions or reductions in resources;
- during-the-year monitoring–early warning of problems for managers to fix; and,
- year-end review–evaluating how things went and providing input into setting the future direction.



➲ Staff direction

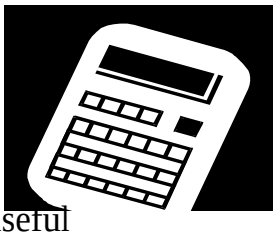
Favorable outcome findings give staff a well-deserved boost. Problematic findings focus staff attention on areas that need improvement. Program staff can use the information to develop an improvement plan and use performance information to monitor their progress.

➲ Training or technical assistance needs

Outcome information can identify areas where staff are having special difficulties and could benefit from focused training or technical assistance. Problem areas might include specific subjects or service delivery methods.

➲ Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is a formal, rigorous assessment that is conducted periodically. This type of comprehensive review is meticulously structured using an approved methodology and accepted research techniques. Performance indicators should in no way be construed as a substitute for this type of thorough analysis, however, they can provide very timely and useful information for evaluators.



The broad scope of a program evaluation makes strategic outcomes and client benefit information the most useful. However, all measures developed for program management can be of great use to evaluators because they will:

- establish a framework for analyzing the program, getting evaluations started early and fostering an evaluation mind set among mangers and staff;
- provide a time series of performance data, reducing the cost of elevation and making the findings more conclusive; and,
- help in identifying programs that need to be evaluated, because the performance measures will reveal performance problems as they develop.

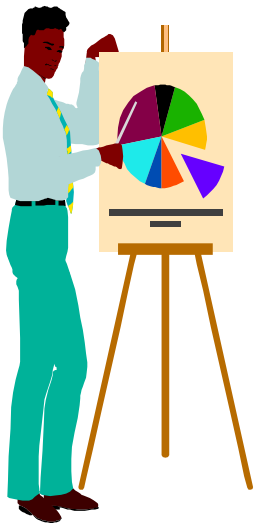
➲ Accountability to political governing bodies

Government at all levels is faced with a multitude of complex problems. It is unrealistic to expect elected officials to have detailed first hand knowledge of every public program about which they must make decisions. However, it is entirely reasonable for these officials to expect any program to readily have available the following information:

- the program's mission statement;

- clearly-written, succinct outcome statements for a program, and
- well-defined and balanced set of performance measures that show the planned and actual achievement of program results.

➲ Resource allocation

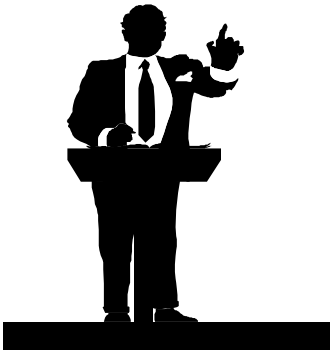


An effective performance information system will bring added rationality and increased analysis to the resource allocation process. However, resource allocation in the public sector will never be entirely rational. No common denominators exist for comparing alternative investments. In addition, the size of the discretionary budget is relatively small. A significant portion of public budgets is predetermined even before the allocation process gets underway. Therefore, budget allocation becomes an intensely competitive process among noncomparable demands scrambling for a very limited pool of funds.

All too often, government agencies plead their case for increased funding in operational terms (i.e., more money is needed to do more work). This argument is of little assistance to the elected officials making resource allocation decisions. These officials are acutely aware of the ever-increasing amount of work that could be done, if the resources were available. While money allocated to a program will be expended on work process outputs, elected officials are more persuaded with information concerning the expected delivery of benefits to the clients or the difference that the program will make to the community. Stating funding requests in these terms provides decision-makers with a results-oriented business plan that can be used to monitor progress and achieve success. This results-oriented information enables elected officials to justify a given decision to their constituents.

➲ Communicating with the public

The public wants to know how public programs perform. Performance information helps allay the public's cynicism about government programs' performance. When programs perform well, they boost the public's confidence.



Since citizens provide the funding for government programs, they need to know if a program is fulfilling its purpose. Just as elected officials, citizens are most interested in the outcomes of public programs. They want to know how a program affects their lives and the quality of life for society. Agencies should widely distribute performance reports to the public so citizens will know how well they are being served.

➲ Staff meetings on performance information

Meeting with staff at the end of a reporting period offers the opportunity for everyone to examine and discuss the information. The groups should look at the following issues:

- Where have we done well? Why?
- Are there any aspects to our performance that we could share with other units?
- Where are we not doing so well? Why?
- What can be done to improve these results?

At the end of these discussions, the group should make plans to develop a specific plan on how it will implement the identified improvements. This plan should be reviewed to see if the desired results were achieved following these improvements.

➲Sample worksheets

Worksheet II: Using performance information: a checklist

Section 4

Tools

- ☑ Brainstorming guidelines
- ☑ Snow card technique
- ☑ Organizational highs and lows
- ☑ Conducting focus groups
- ☑ Data extraction forms
- ☑ Questionnaires
- ☑ Trained observer ratings

Brainstorming Guidelines

1. Agree to participate in a brainstorming exercise.

2. Do not criticize or evaluate any of the ideas that are put forward; they are simply placed before the group and recorded.

3. Be open to hearing some wild ideas in the spontaneity that evolves when the group suspends judgment. Practical considerations are not important now.

4. Emphasize that the quantity of ideas counts, not their quality. All ideas should be expressed, and no participant should screen out any. A great number of ideas increases the group's likelihood of discovering good ones.

5. Build on the ideas of other group members when possible. Pool your creativity. Everyone should be free to build onto ideas and to make interesting amalgams from the various suggestions.

6. Focus on a *single* problem or issue. Don't skip around to various problems or try to brainstorm answers to a complex, multi-faceted problem.

7. Foster a congenial, relaxed, cooperative atmosphere.

8. Make sure that all members, no matter how shy and reluctant to contribute, get their ideas heard.

9. Record *all* ideas.

Snow Card Technique

The "snow card" technique is a group exercise that combines aspects of brainstorming with a synthesizing process. The brainstorming portion generates a long list of possible answers to a particular question. During synthesizing, broad themes or categories are identified. Members are given white cards—"snow cards"—that may be made of anything. Group members write answers on these cards and they are then stuck on the wall, grouped into common themes. This produces several "snowballs" for the team to analyze.

Steps for this technique

1. Select a facilitator.

2. Put together the group that will be using the technique. The most effective size for the group is between five and nine people. Smaller subgroups may be created if a large group is involved.

3. Seat members of the group around a table and near the wall where the cards will be displayed.

4. Facilitator gives the group a single question to answer. (The technique should only address one distinct question at a time. For issues with several components (e.g. analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTs), a separate question must be used for each component.

5. Each participant writes down as many ideas as possible on the participant's worksheet.

6. Each person then determines the five to seven best answers from the individual's list. One answer is legibly written on a single card. Be sure that they writing is large enough to be seen by other group members when posted on the wall.

7. The facilitator collects all the cards. (If anonymity is an issue shuffle the cards.) The cards are posted on the wall. Cards with similar themes are grouped together. The group comes up with a tentative title for each grouping.

8. Place tentative titles over each group. Put the titles on separate sheets of colored paper in order to distinguish them from the group.

9. After all items are on the wall, the group refines the groupings. Items may be moved, new groups formed, items eliminated, subgroups created out of larger groups, etc. The members play with the cards and groups until the group feels that the themes and items make the most sense.

10. Group members discuss, compare, and contrast the results.

11. A group consensus regarding the relative priority associated with the categories and the items within them should be reached. One method to determine the priorities is to give each member colored dots and allow them to place the dots next to the most important items in each category. The same technique can be used to order the categories.

12. All information on the wall is recorded at the end of the exercise. It can be placed in spreadsheet form or whatever form the group chooses. All members receive the results of each exercise.

Organizational Highs and Lows Exercise

Looking forward and backward can help an agency understand its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. When an agency sees where it's been over the last five years, for example, it is easier for it to imagine where it can go. The exercise is outlined below.

1. Use a room with a large wall. A room with a wall-size whiteboard is ideal. Otherwise, cover the wall with flipchart paper, so the exercise results can be saved.

2. Divide the wall into top and bottom portions. Drawing a line or using masking tape can do this.

3. At the right-hand end of the line, write the current year. At the left-hand end, write a date that is as far *back* as you wish the strategic planning team to eventually look *forward*.

4. Group members individually and silently brainstorm, on a sheet of scratch paper, all of the agency's "highs" and "lows" they can recall within the agreed upon time. These might include changes in leadership, management strategies, innovations that worked or didn't, and so on. Participants date each item and label it as a high or a low.

5. Participants transcribe their highs and lows onto half sheets of paper, one high or low per sheet. Once this is done, a piece of tape or some sticky putty is put on the sheet.

6. Participants then stick their cards to the wall at the appropriate place on the time line. The height of each card above or below the line indicates just how high or low the item was.

6. The group finds themes common to the highs, to the lows, and to both.

7. The group analyzes the data and themes using these questions:
   - What opportunities have we had? Which have we taken advantage of, which were we unable to take advantage of, and which have we ignored?
   - What threats have we had to deal with? Which have handled successfully, which unsuccessfully, and which have we ignored?
   - What strengths have relied upon to deal with threats and take advantage of opportunities? What have we ignored?
   - What weaknesses have had in dealing with threats and opportunities? What have we done about them?

8. Identify patterns in the way strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and themes have interrelated over the relevant agency history. In particular, identify what the agency's strategies have been in practice--what has actually happened as opposed to what might be voice in official pronouncements.

9. The group moves the time line forward an equivalent distance and discusses what the previous analyses imply for the future. In particular, have the group speculate about future opportunities, threats, strengths, weaknesses the agency may face and how they can be addressed. What themes, patterns, and strategies form the past would the group like to see projected into the future? Which would the group like not to see projected? What new themes would the group like to see?

Conducting focus groups

1. **Invite approximately 8-12 participants to participate in each focus group. Consider offering an incentive for participation.**

   Group members can be chosen from lists of current and former participants. The main criterion is that they have had experience with the program. If program participants are in age, race/ethnicity, income, or other characteristics, the full range of your participant should be represented. Note, however, that conversations may be freer if each group is relatively homogeneous. If your program serves entire families, conduct separate focus groups with adults and young people.

2. **Schedule the meeting for a maximum of two hours. Hold it in a comfortable, accessible location. Soft drinks and snacks are helpful.**

3. **Select an experienced focus group facilitator for the session.**

   The purpose and conduct of focus groups are different from those of task-oriented meetings. Choose a facilitator who know and is experienced with the differences. Do not select as a facilitator a staff person who works with any of the focus group embers. This could inhibit an open haring of participants' views.

4. **After introductions and overview of the session's purpose, the facilitator asks the participants open-ended questions to elicit their views on the benefits the program provides--what changes participants want, expect or have experienced. Pose the question in several ways, such as:**
   - **What did you expect to change for you because of being in the program?**

- If the program really helps you, how will you be better off?
- Are there things you don't like about the program?

The facilitator encourages each participant to express his or her views on these questions. The facilitator's job is to establish an open, non-threatening environment and obtain input from each participant. To do this, the facilitator accepts anything participants say and does not attempt to explain the program, correct misconceptions participants may have, or gain agreement or consensus among group members.

5. Someone, such as a member of the workgroup, serves as recorder. Soon after the session, the reporter and the facilitator summarize what was said.

   Note that focus groups are purely qualitative in their method. The summary does not attempt to quantify how many persons expressed various views or seemed to share the same position.

Record Extraction Forms

Programs use record extraction forms to collect information from their own written records or those of other agencies. This technical assistance tool discusses how to develop the form itself and then describes issues that data collection procedures should address.

Instrument Development

An agency needs to copy ("extract") information from its or another program's records that will be used to measure outcomes. Information to extract includes:

- Data related to the outcome indicator(s).
- Data on factors that may influence participant outcomes (for instance, age, sex, race, length of time in program, date of program completion, level of problem severity at intake).
- Data needed to link the record with other data about the participant, if applicable (for instance, the social security number or case number).

When the program records are computerized, the agency can extract the required information electronically. However, if they are not, the agency needs a record extraction form that provides a place to record each data item from each record of interest. Exhibit 1 is a sample record extraction form for youths enrolled in a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) program.

With data from the form, the program can measure:

- The number of youth who completed the program (all those who passed the GED exam the first or second time).

- The percent of youth who completed the program (the number of youths who obtained a GED divided by the number who entered the program).

Example of a Record Extraction Form

Identification number:	___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___	
Date of birth:	___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___	
Sex	___ 1 Male	___ 2 Female
Race or ethnicity (circle one)	1. African-American 2. White, non-Hispanic 3. Black, non-Hispanic 4. Hispanic	5. Asian, Pacific islander 6. American Indian 7. Other
Intake date:	___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___	
GED pre-test score:	___ ___ ___	
Date of first GED exam:	___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___	
Results of first exam:	___ ___ ___	Not applicable; youth dropped out before exam.
Date of second GED exam:	___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___	
Results of second exam:	___ ___ ___	Not applicable; youth dropped out or completed with first exam.

Exhibit 1

The program can break out the outcome data by sex, age, race, or ethnicity, and, for those who passed the GED exam, by the length of time from the date the youth first entered the program to the date of the

successful exam. The data also allow the program to look at the relationship between the entry level score (the level of difficulty) and the outcome. Did more of the youth with lower pretest GED scores leave the program prematurely? Did it take longer for students with lower pretest scores to obtain a GED? If so, how much longer?

Not all data extracted from records will be quantitative (numerical) or easily categorized. However, qualitative types of data may be very useful. For example, case records may include case notes on participant progress. A procedure can be created whereby certain statements or phrases in the case records can be categorized to represent certain categories of outcomes. For example, a mentoring program could develop a procedure that categorizes youth-and-mentor matches as "positive," "problematic," or "unclear," based on notes in the case file on the mentors' comments. When using such qualitative ratings, it is good to have a second rater review a sample of the case records to ensure that the judgments are clear and consistent.

Procedural issues specific to record extraction

Besides insuring consistency among raters when extracting qualitative data, an agency faces other procedural records extraction concerns when it reviews other agencies' records. Any procedures for extracting data from another program's records need to accommodate their requirements. Talk with staff from that program about data access issues. Topics to discuss include:

- Are there any restrictions on the information they will release? If the agency depended on getting they cannot release, the agency must go back to its outcome measurement framework to identify an alternative source, or perhaps to modify the indicator or even the outcome it will measure.

- Do the definitions of key terms coincide for both agencies? If not, the agency must know their terms or data categories for the information it wants.

- Are their records computerized? If so, what are the procedures for obtaining an electronic file with the needed information? You may want to develop an interagency agreement with another program regarding sharing of confidential data.

- If the extraction must be done manually, who will be allowed to review the records and copy the information? It may be that a member of their staff will have to do this. Or perhaps a member of your staff can have access, but not a volunteer or student intern.

- What information is available to confirm that someone in their records with the same name as your participant is in fact the same person?

Questionnaires

Questionnaires are the most common data collection instrument. Programs can use them to gain data from participants, staff, and others who know and work with participants, or other key constituents. Questionnaires can collect information from citizens or target populations that a program serves on a general, rather than a one-by-one, basis.

Instrument development

When agency staff construct a questionnaire, some critical issues should not be overlooked. One is content—the information the questionnaire tries to obtain. This includes how questions are worded and the questionnaire's style and format.

Content

Developers refer to the outcome measurement framework to identify the specific data they need to collect. This will include information on one or more outcomes and possibly factors likely to influence the outcomes. Questions might ask about:

- Constituents' needs, expectations, knowledge, attitudes, self-perception, skill level behavior, life situation, status, experiences in a program, and results of those experiences. Questions on these topics can be asked of participants themselves and of others in a position to comment, such as family members, counselors, and employers.

- The amount and type of service received. Although agency records may contain this information, it can be helpful to get it from users or specific target groups. Others' perceptions may provide beneficial information to management and it eliminates programs' need to link two different sources of information.

- Why respondents gave particular answers or ratings. Especially, ask them to explain poor ratings. But remember that questions requiring more than a check mark or a few words to answer take more time to collect and more time to analyze.

- Demographic and other information, such as age, sex, income, race/ethnicity, and location, needed to break out the outcome findings.

Some respondents don't like answering some demographic questions. To increase the likelihood of them answering the other questions, put demographic questions at the end of the form and explain briefly why the data are needed.

Besides reporting on outcomes, program users often are asked to provide information and feedback on aspects of the quality of the program which may effect achieving outcomes. These can include:

- Awareness of program services
- Service timeliness
- Convenience/accessibility of location
- Convenience/accessibility of hours
- Ratings for specific service characteristics
- Suggestions for improvement
- Condition of facilities
- Accuracy of help
- Ease of reaching someone to talk to
- Pleasantness or friendliness of staff
- Overall satisfaction

Questionnaires may ask constituents about their needs and about what additional help they would like, in essence help with needs assessment. While this may not be directly related to outcome

Survey Questions on Family Counseling

1. Since you started at the agency, has there been any change for better or worse in the way the members of your family get along with each other? Would you say you now get along:

_____ Much better
_____ Somewhat better
_____ The same
_____ Somewhat worse*
_____ Much worse*

* Please explain

_____

2. How do you feel the service provided by the agency influenced the changes you have reported?

_____ Helped a great deal
_____ Helped somewhat
_____ Made no difference
_____ Made things somewhat worse*
_____ Made things much worse*

*Please explain:

_____

3. How satisfied were you with the way you and your counselor got along with each other?

_____ Very satisfied
_____ Somewhat satisfied
_____ No particular feelings either way
_____ Somewhat dissatisfied*
_____ Very dissatisfied*

Please tell us why you felt this way:_____

_____

_____

Exhibit 2

measurement, it is a side benefit of surveying constituents. Be careful, however, not to lengthen a questionnaire so much that it discourages participants from responding.

Exhibit 2 illustrates questions that can be included in participant questionnaires. These questions are from questionnaires that the Family Service Association of America used to assess the outcomes of family counseling services.

The first question provides information on an *outcome indicator:* number and percent of participants who report improved outcomes after receiving services. The second question illustrates that participant surveys also can be used to obtain information on the participant's perception of the extent to which the services *affected the outcomes* that the participant reports. A program can combine the data from responses to the first and second questions to calculate an additional outcome indicator: number and percent of participants that indicate improved outcomes *and* report that the services they received contributed to that improvement. Outcome information generally does not tell *why* the outcomes occurred, however, adding questions like this will collect some information on the "whys."

The third question provides information on one aspect of service that may affect whether the outcome occurred: satisfaction with the participant's counselor.

Note that if participants give unfavorable ratings in response to a question, they are asked to explain "why." Summaries of participants' responses should be made available to program personnel, keeping individual responses anonymous. Such information can show how the program can be improved, especially if participants point to the same issue repeatedly.

Surveyors also may ask "why" of those who give favorable ratings. This would be particularly useful for programs where the specific service activity varies among participants, such as mentoring programs or historical attractions.

Wording

Questions must be presented clearly, unambiguously, and neutrally. Surprisingly, using biased or unclear wording is easy to do. For instance, questions that give four response categories, of which three are favorable and one is unfavorable, bias the response in a favorable direction. The question, *"When* do you experience this event?" may mean "at what time" or "under what circumstances." Be specific.

Most questions should ask respondents to check or circle the appropriate response from a fixed set of answers (i.e., *fixed-choice* questions), rather than asking them to compose an answer (i.e., *open-ended* questions). A self-administered questionnaire might include two or three open-ended questions. Interviews can include a few more. In either case, open-ended questions are harder to analyze. They also take longer to complete. This may discourage respondents from finishing the survey, although it also may encourage responses from people who have strong reactions about the program. Exhibit 3 gives examples of fixed-choice response sets.

To write effective questions:

- Keep each question short. Use simple sentence structures.
- Use basic vocabulary.
- Ask only one question in each question. For example, "In disciplining your child, do you state the rule clearly and explain the consequences of breaking the rule?" is two questions.

- Think carefully about words and phrases that may have double meanings. This is especially true if the question writer is of a different age, ethnic or cultural background, or educational level, or is from a different part of the country than the respondents.

- Make sure nothing in the question, including the response choices, suggests a "right" answer.

- Be specific about time frames. For instance, say "within the past three months" or "since March 1" instead of "recently."

- Make response categories as specific as possible. Choices like "excellent; good; fair; poor" and "frequently; infrequently; rarely" are subject to wide interpretation. An alternative frequency scale might be "every day, once a month, fewer than 12 times a year." An alternative qualitative scale might be "have used the skill already; haven't used it but am confident I can; not sure I understand how to do this; don't understand how to do this."

- Read questions aloud. This practice will pinpoint some awkward phrases and unclear meanings.

- Have someone experienced in questionnaire development review the questionnaire before it is finalized.

Format and style

After designers write the questions, they arrange and format the questionnaire. It should be made clear and easy to answer. Here are some suggestions on format and style, especially for self-administered questionnaires:

- Group related questions together. Start with the least-personal and most obviously relevant set of questions.

- Be sure instructions are short and explicit.

- If a questionnaire must use *skip patterns* (e.g., if respondents answer "no" to a question about whether they have children and you want them to skip the next three questions because they concern children), be sure the instructions are easy to follow. Consider using arrows to lead visually to the appropriate next question. As an alternative to skipping questions, consider adding a "not applicable" response. For example, in the three questions about children, add a response category that says "not applicable; no children."

- Make the questionnaire easy to read. Use a clear typeface. Leave plenty of "white space." Use left justification only. If interviewers or respondents are older persons, use a larger typeface.

- If using colored paper, pick a color that photocopies well and is easy on the eyes.

- If large numbers of persons with limited English proficiency will be respondents, translate the questionnaire into their native language. Then, test the accuracy of the translation by having a second person translate the foreign-language version back into English to see if the questions still say the same thing.

Examples of fixed-choice response sets

Question type	Examples
Yes or No	Have you used this new skill in the past week? ☐Yes ☐No
Agree/disagree scale	How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The public service announcements about the effect of second-hand smoke gave a very powerful argument against smoking around small children." ☐ Strongly agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly disagree
Frequency scale	How often do you read to your child? ☐ At least once a week ☐ Once a month or so ☐ At least twice a week ☐ Never
	Last week how many evenings did you read a bedtime story to your child (ren)? ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ None
	What percentage of your income do you put into a savings account? ☐ None ☐ 6 to 10 percent ☐ 1 to 5 percent ☐ More than 10 percent
Comparative response scale	Compared to other programs that your child (ren) takes part in, how important is the after-school tutoring program? ☐ Very important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Unimportant
Identification response	Below is a list of services provided by our program. Please check the ones your child participated in since the beginning of the year: ☐ After-school program ☐ Sports program ☐ Tutoring program ☐ Summer camp

Adapted from: *Research Techniques for Program Planning* by Irwin Epstein and Tony Tripodi. Columbia University Press, 1977.

Exhibit 3

Procedural issues specific to questionnaires

When staff collect data with questionnaires, they should consider the following procedural issues:

Administration

The primary methods of administering questionnaires are interviews and self-administration. Generally, self-administered questionnaires are either given to respondents at a program site or mailed to their homes. Interviews generally are administered either by telephone or in person. In-person interviews can be conducted at the respondent's home, at a program site, or at another accessible facility. In selecting a method, designers can consider these options:

Mail. Mail surveys usually are inexpensive; however, they require special procedures to obtain acceptable response rates. Mailed questionnaires need to be short and simple. They are not useful for respondents with low levels of literacy. For those with difficulty understanding English, the questionnaire can be translated into other languages. Note that many communities with non-English speaking residents have a diverse ethnic make-up and translation into only one additional language may not suffice. Getting adequate response rates can be a major problem with mailed questionnaires. They require multiple mailings and possibly telephone follow-ups, to encourage a response or to conduct a phone interview. Later in this section are further suggestions on improving response rates.

Telephone. Telephone surveys are a less expensive alternative than in-person interviews and can get good response rates. However, they require considerable interviewer time, and interviewers need training to conduct telephone interviews. If the agency has staff or volunteers that have time to do telephone interviews, this option may be a very good one. Note, however, that to avoid biasing the answers and to ensure treating participants ethically, the

interviewers should not be the same persons that provided services to the participants. If a substantial percentage of program participants do not have a telephone, then clearly this is not a good data collection mode for the program.

Surveys focused on low-income populations do need to seek responses from adequate numbers of those populations. One possibility is to conduct a telephone survey and then conduct in-person interviews in those neighborhoods known to have few telephones. If substantial numbers of persons speaking limited English are expected, bilingual interviewers will be needed.

In person at the person's home. Generally, this is quite expensive and not likely to be feasible for regular data collection. However, it is sometimes the best option for elderly homebound participants and other special populations. For instance, if you are interested in obtaining information about experiences with attendant care provided to elderly persons and persons with disabilities, you might consider in-home interviews with a sample of attendant-care recipients.

In person at the agency or other readily accessible facility. Usually, this is quite inexpensive but not useful for obtaining post-service information unless the participant is coming for other services (for instance, parents who have completed a parenting class but still need to see their case worker on a regular basis). The survey can be administered through an interview or by asking the respondent to check off the answers to a written questionnaire.

Combinations of the above. For example, a meals-on-wheels program could have drivers distribute post card questionnaires to new recipients, then use interns or volunteers to tabulate responses and do telephone follow-up with recipients who do not respond.

Response rates, accuracy of responses, and cost are key concerns when selecting a method of administration. Choosing a method involves trade-offs among these concerns. Exhibit 4 provides a summary comparison of the various methods of questionnaire administration.

Most programs will find that mailing questionnaires will be the most practical approach because of its low cost. Programs that undertake second mailings and possibly telephone reminders to achieve return rates of 50 percent or more should achieve sufficiently accurate data for outcome measurement. However, if a program has a cadre of staff, volunteers, or students it can depend on to undertake regular telephone interviews at a low cost to the program, telephone interviewing would be the preferred method.

For programs that are seeking data on outcomes which occur early in the service delivery process or immediately thereafter, and/or where the program does not obtain the names or addresses of participants, then in-person administration at the location where the service is delivered probably would be the appropriate method of questionnaire administration. For example, this method might be appropriate to obtain data on the knowledge gained in a parenting education workshop or skills obtained in a CPR course.

In circumstances where a program can reach participants only in their own environment, in-person interviewing may be necessary. For example, to reach homeless individuals who do not come into shelters, a program providing homeless services might need to attempt interviews on the street. Another example is that some participants may be home-bound, without a telephone, and unlikely to be able to respond to a mailed questionnaire. At-home interviews might then be the only option for interviewing those participants.

	Method of questionnaire administration			
Characteristic	Mail	Telephone	In person at home	In person at facility
Response rate	Low/Medium	High	High	High
Amount of information obtainable	Low	Medium	High	Medium
Ability to obtain post-service information	High	High	High	Low
Speed in getting responses	Slow	Fast	Medium	Fast
Cost	Low	Medium	High	Low/Medium

Exhibit 3

Voluntary completion

Answering questionnaires, regardless of how they are administered, must be voluntary. Persons asked to respond have the right to refuse and must not be pressured to respond. Agencies need to be certain that declining to answer in no way penalizes people in receiving future services. Further, people should be told explicitly that choosing not to respond will not affect their eligibility for services.

Participant confidentiality

Depending on the type of program you operate, the fact that the participant obtained services from your program may be confidential. One cannot, for example, call someone's home and leave a message asking the person to call her or his former substance abuse or mental health counselor. For programs in which this is an issue, telephone interviewers must be sure to reach the participant directly; mail questionnaires probably are not appropriate. For other programs, such as child care or youth development, confidentiality may be less of an issue.

Anonymity

If anyone is interviewed in person, his/her response must be kept confidential, but individuals are not anonymous because the interviewers

know who they are. This generally applies to telephone interviews as well. Mail questionnaires, however, can be returned without an identifying name or code, and thus be anonymous. The key advantage to anonymity is that respondents may be more honest with their responses.

Some disadvantages do exist. One is that the responses cannot be linked with data from other records. Therefore, all information that is needed about date of service or entry into a program, type and amount of services received, and other outcomes needs to be asked on the questionnaire. Another disadvantage is that an agency cannot follow up with non-respondents because it has no way of knowing who has responded and who hasn't. This means either a lower response rate or increased costs because a second mailing needs to go to all respondents.

A third disadvantage of anonymous questionnaires is that there is no way of linking data that are collected from people at multiple points to track changes over time. Programs sometimes try to overcome this problem by having participants put a personal code, such as their mother's maiden name, on each questionnaire they complete. The effectiveness of such strategies depends on each person's code being unique and on individuals' memory of the code they used on previous questionnaires.

Times for contacting potential interview respondents

Decisions about days and times that potential respondents are contacted for interviews depend largely on the characteristics of the respondents. Elderly and retired individuals may be called during daytime hours. Employed persons who work day shifts are best contacted in the evening. Avoid religious holidays and those days respondents celebrate as the Sabbath. Set time limits on when contacts may be made on other days (e.g., not before 10:00 a.m., during the dinner hour, or after 9:00 p.m.).

Response rate

The smaller the response rate, the greater the possibility that the sample is not representative of the population from whom the agency seeks responses. Whatever administration method an agency uses, as long as the respondent selection method provides a representative sample, try to get completed questionnaires from at least 50 percent of those from whom responses are sought. (The federal government seeks a 75 percent rate for federal surveys, but such a target is likely to be too costly in many instances.) With mail surveys, second and third mailings or telephone reminders to non-respondents usually will be needed to obtain response rates high enough to provide reliable information. For telephone surveys, multiple calls at various times of the week are likely to be needed to reach respondents. Exhibit S gives tips for increasing response rates on mail surveys.

Costs

Here are some ideas for saving costs on questionnaire administration.

- Use already-available questionnaires.
- Use volunteer technical consultants to help design the questionnaire and procedures. Some otherwise well-paid consultants will accept a lower rate (or provide free time) when working with government agencies. Although technical help may cost more initially, it is likely to save you the cost of collecting unreliable, unusable, or insufficient data.
- Use mail surveys (but plan on doing second and even third mailings to obtain an adequate response rate).
- If a program has several hundred participants, survey a sample rather than everyone.
- Use volunteers to conduct interviews. Ask for help from a local university or college.

Tips for Improving Mail Survey Response Rates

- Establish a procedure to inform new participants about the survey process and encourage them to respond when they are surveyed later.
- Make questionnaire as short and easy to use as possible.
- Respondents are more likely to complete and return questionnaires that look attractive and simple. Go for a professional, polished look – even if you produce the questionnaire in-house. Use a printer or high-quality copier and good-quality paper. Check for spots, blurs, and crooked copies. If using colored paper, pick a color that is easy on the eyes Avoid expensive-looking paper, two-color printing, or other features that may give the impressions you "wasted" money on production. If the questionnaire is to be completed by children, make it as much fun as possible to do.
- To the extent possible, avoid surveying during vacation and holiday seasons.
- Use an advance post card to notify participants that they will be receiving a mailed questionnaire shortly.
- Include a carefully worded transmittal letter signed by an agency official, such as the executive director or board chair, or a notable community figure encouraging response. Emphasize the agency's need for the information to improve future services. Explain that each question is important. Guarantee that responses are confidential and will not be attributed to individuals in any way.
- If possible, personalize the letter and address it to a specific individual.
- Consider offering inexpensive incentives for responding, such as certificates for a fast-food store drink.
- Enclose postage paid, pre-addressed return envelope with the questionnaire at each mailing.
- Send post card reminders that thank those who already have responded and encourage others to complete and return the questionnaire.
- Re-mail the questionnaire if the response rate is too low.

Exhibit 4

Trained Observer Ratings

One of the values of trained observer ratings is that they are more objective than self-reports and can be more consistent than casual observations. Achieving a high degree of accuracy and reliability in observation ratings depends on having clearly defined rating categories used by carefully trained observers. The more observers that are involved, the more critical the rating scales are.

Instrument Development

Rating systems used by trained observers include:

Written descriptions. This is the most basic type of rating system. It relies solely on written descriptions of each grade in the rating scale. These descriptions must be specific about what behaviors or characteristics merit each rating. This is necessary so that different raters give approximately the same rating for a particular condition. Exhibit 6 provides an abbreviated example of written guidelines for the condition of a playground connected to a child care program in an inner-city neighborhood.

Photographic rating systems. These systems use pre-selected photos to represent the various grades on the rating scale. Photographic scales are one of the most useful forms of rating systems. They have been used to assess the cleanliness of streets, the condition of parks and playgrounds, and external housing conditions.

Other visual scales. Drawings, sketches, video clips, or other visual alternatives to photographs can be used to depict each grade on a rating scale.

Procedural Issues Specific to Trained Observer Ratings

Achieving a high degree of accuracy and reliability in observation ratings depends on having:

Clearly defined rating categories.

Adequate training and supervision of the observers and the process.

A procedure for checking the quality of the ratings periodically. The goal is for different observers, perhaps at various times, to give the same ratings to comparable conditions.

Observers can be program agency personnel, college or graduate school students, volunteers, or community members. More technical ratings will require persons with more professional training. Avoid having staff or volunteers observe persons or places with whom they work.

Sample Rating Scale for Trained Observer Rating of a Playground for Preschool Children

Rating 1: **Clean.** The area is completely, or almost completely, clean; up to two pieces of paper litter are permitted. None of the litter is broken glass, drug paraphernalia, or other dangerous materials.

Rating 2: **Moderately clean.** The area is largely clean; a few pieces of isolated litter are observable. None of the litter is broken glass, drug paraphernalia, or other dangerous materials.

Rating 3: **Heavily littered.** Scattered litter in several areas and/or blown all along the fence. However, none of the litter is broken glass, drug paraphernalia, or other dangerous materials.

Rating 4: **Dangerously littered.** The litter includes broken glass, drug paraphernalia, or other dangerous materials. The area therefore is not safe for children to use.

Exhibit 6

Training of observers is important. For behavioral ratings, videotaped examples of various levels of the behavior often are effective. Training should include opportunities to practice applying the rating scales and then compare and discuss the ratings with other observers.

Establish procedures for supervising observers, recording the data they collect, and transcribing and processing the data. Also establish procedures for systematically checking the ratings to assure quality control and reliability of the process. For example, the supervisor might check a small sample of the ratings done by each observer.

Section 5

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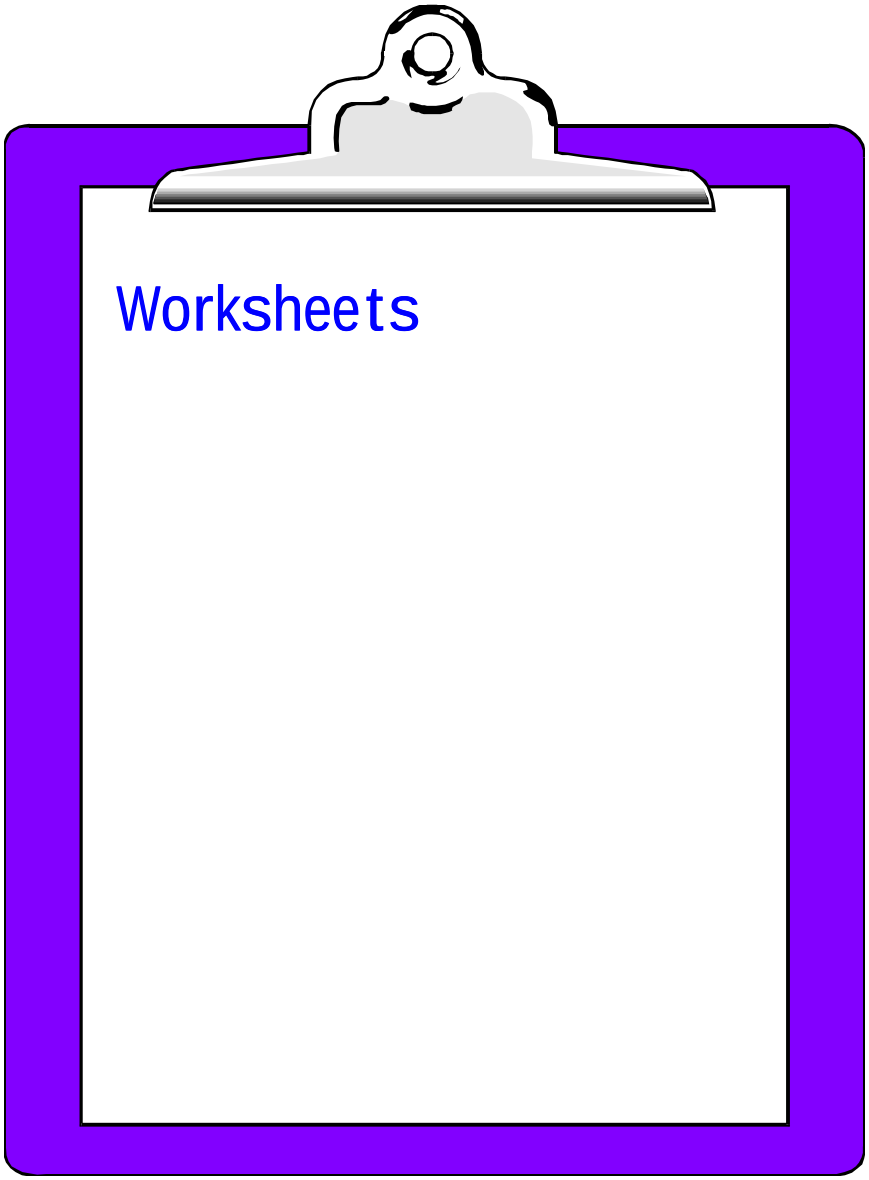
Section 6