Montgomery County
VOLUNTEER CENTER

Making a Difference: Measuring Your Outcomes

February 4, 2014
1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
Rockville Library

Presented by Barry Seltser & Pamela Saussy

Agenda

Welcome and Introductions

Identifying Outcomes

Sequencing Outcomes Exercise

Evidence and Measurement Issues

Evaluation of session

Closing Notes:

1. Please complete your workshop evaluation (blue sheet); we appreciate your feedback.
2. Don't forget to validate your parking ticket at the library's information desk.
3. As part of your participation in this workshop, the instructors will also be available to meet individually with your nonprofit in future weeks to help you figure out how to apply the concepts and tools to the particular needs of your organization. If you are interested, please fill out a brief Project Proposal form at www.montgomeryserves.org/ Under "Nonprofits & Government" tab, select "Pro Bono Consultant Program."

This workshop has been sponsored by Montgomery County Volunteer Center and the Pro Bono Consultant Program. We are able to offer this to our registered nonprofits and agencies free of charge thanks to our Pro Bono Consultants Barry Seltser and Pam Saussy. They collaborated on the workshop design and the materials provided in your packet were developed by Barry Seltser.

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Handout # 1

Stakeholder Needs Matrix

Examples provided are merely illustrations; your organization should adapt the categories and responses to fit your situation.

Stakeholder Group	Expectations/Needs for Outcome Information	Potential Outcomes and Measures They May Need	Preferred Frequency and Method of Providing Information to Each Group
Executive Director/ Staff/Volunteers	• Evidence of accomplishment • Connection with mission of program • Feeling useful and productive	• Increased reading ability • Healthier and more self-sufficient families	Quarterly reports, ad hoc e-mail updates
Board of Directors	• Increase outcome attainment over time • Outcome evidence that appeals to funders • Inform strategic planning	• Community impact • Comparison with other similar agencies	Monthly e-mail summaries, yearly detailed data reports
Funders or Potential Funders	• Outcomes in their particular areas of interest • Demonstrates achievement of their goals	• Long term effects on families • Increased range of effects over time	Quarterly written mailed reports, yearly detailed reports, completion of funder survey
Partners in Other Organizations	• How their outcomes link with yours • How your outcomes reinforce or enable their own outcomes	• Effects of your outputs and outcomes on their own measures	Regular reports and discussions about your outcomes for their program planning
Clients	• Evidence that they and other people are benefiting • Comparison of this program with others they might have chosen	• Impacts on their particular needs	Focus group presentation of summary results
Others...			

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Handout # 2

Questions to Help Generate Outcomes

The following questions may help you identify potential outcomes. They are intended to help move you from focusing only on *outputs* (products, services, deliverables, what is provided to clients) and toward focusing on *outcomes*.

1. What would you like your program to be able to accomplish for your clients?
2. How are your clients affected or changed by what your program does for them?
3. If you are successful, what would be different in your clients' lives or in the community as a result of your activities?
4. What results are your activities designed to accomplish for your clients?
5. What would you want a client to say about the effects of your program on his/her life?
6. What makes you/your staff feel particularly good about the impact of what you do?
7. How would you describe the basic purpose of your program to someone interested in what you accomplish for your clients or the community?
8. What changes would you expect to have occurred for your clients by the end of your program? Three months after completing the program? Six months after completing the program? A year after completing the program?
9. Are there long-term impacts for the community that you hope to influence through your work?
10. What changes might a family member or close friend see in your clients as a result of your work?

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Handout #3

A Classification of Outcome Types

Note: The actual outcome measures would usually be stated in terms of the percentage of program participants who have achieved some improvement on each measure, and would require specific indicators. Examples provided, and bracketed measurement approaches, are just a few illustrations of the focus for outcomes of each type.

Knowledge Acquisition [survey responses before and after program; interview self-reports]

Parental knowledge of appropriate child behavior
Understanding of how to conduct a job search
How to dress or act in a job interview
Understanding or awareness of available services

Attitude Change (Standardized scales before and after program)

Self-esteem, stress, sense of belonging, autonomy
Stress level
Feeling well-prepared to engage in a particular task

Functional/Skill Improvement [Level of functioning/rapid assessment instrument standardized survey scales before and after program; interview self-reports]

Interpersonal family functioning
Preschool behavior of child; number of fights a child has in school; regular school attendance
Increased reading knowledge of English

Progress Toward Change [survey responses, usually before and after program; structured interviews]

Conducting at least 3 job interviews within 6 months after program completion
Received job training or completed school program within 6 months after program completion

Life Condition Changes [survey responses, usually before and after program; structured interviews]

Working at least 20 hours per week 6 months after program completion
Living in a stable non-shelter apartment or home 6 months after program completion
Improvement in behavior at school/incidence of undesirable behaviors
Relapse rates

Client Satisfaction [survey responses after program]

Decreased number of client complaints
Increased satisfaction on post-program client surveys
Reporting expectations met by program
Decreased waiting time for appointments reported by clients on post-program surveys

Outreach and Participation

Percent of target constituency enrolled in program
Number of new requests or referrals
Percent of target constituents denied service
Percent of constituents using multiple services

Program Efficiency [Program data systems tracking; official program records and reports]

Program follow-up calls are made routinely (due to changes in program record keeping)
No-show rate for clients is improved (due to changes in office procedures)
Increase in client attendance (due to changes in available times of program offerings)

Handout #4

A Logic Model Framework for Outcomes (Outcomes Hierarchy)

(The different levels illustrate some of the types of outcomes and outcome measures that might be involved. They are not intended to be exhaustive.)

Level 6. Improved Well-Being
(stronger, healthier, safer individuals, families, communities)

↑

Level 5. Resilience, Sustained Involvement, Self-Determination, Trust
(Increased employment, less use of food pantries, attendance at community functions)

↑

Level 4. Use of Increased Capacity
(Better planning, solving problems, working together)

↑

Level 3. Increased Capacity
(Self-esteem, skills, leadership abilities)

↑

Level 2. Increased Awareness
(Knowledge of opportunities and services, consciousness of others' needs)

↑

Level 1. Participation and Satisfaction with Program
(Increased interaction, satisfaction with program, attendance at sessions, diversity of participants)

[Adapted from "Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, 2000-2004", Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs]

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Handout # 5. Outcome Sequencing Exercise

For each of your programs, indicate what you might consider as a short-term, medium-term, and longer-term outcome. Try to be as specific as possible. Consider the way these items are logically linked to one another and to your organization's outputs.

Outputs (What is the program producing? What services are offered, how frequently, and to whom?)	Short-Term Outcomes (What results do you expect/want to occur immediately as a result of the program?)	Medium-Term Outcomes (What results would occur next?)	Longer-Term Outcomes (What are the more "ultimate" or long-term results you would expect/want?)

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Handout # 6

Measurement Challenges

This list mentions some of the most important challenges to designing an approach to evaluating outcomes, and to measuring those outcomes. If possible, try to consult with a research or evaluation specialist to help you clarify or assess these issues.

1. Response rates

   - Selective participation can lead to misleading conclusions
   - Pay particular attention to bias—do certain types of clients respond more than others?
   - Identify steps to increase response rates (e.g., shorten instruments, do pre-tests and follow-ups)
   - Consider focusing on a sample if your population is large or very hard to reach
   - Examine your response rates among different sub-populations (e.g., gender, race, age)

2. Respondents may not be accurate or completely honest

   - Memory is often faulty, and most people can't remember details or specific facts for long
   - Clients may be inclined to answer positively if they like you or the program
   - People tend to "agree" with statements, and tend to express satisfaction with what they've been doing
   - Try to find multiple sources of information to check individual perceptions or reports (e.g., ask several family members rather than just one)

3. Respondents may not understand your questions

   - Explain purpose of the study and the questions you are asking
   - Pretest your approach to achieve understanding
   - Consider rewording questions (e.g., omit jargon, use the respondent's terms)

4. It may be difficult to obtain consistent timing and context for collecting information

   - Try to select time frames which you can meet; this may mean extending follow up times
   - Identify the best places and settings for people to respond (interview location, completing a survey, holding focus groups, etc.)
   - Minimize concerns about privacy or confidentiality

5. Clients can easily be influenced to respond in certain desirable ways

   - Train people who administer surveys or conduct interviews
   - Be explicit in instructions that you want the person's honest views and reports
   - Avoid body language or verbal cues that can bias the respondent
   - Avoid asking leading questions

6. Trade-offs between asking "open-ended" and "closed-ended" questions

- Open ended questions yield longer and more in-depth responses in the respondent's own words
- Closed-ended questions yield shorter responses in categories you can control
- Select the appropriate wording depending on how you want to use the information
- Consider combining the two types (e.g., ask a closed-ended question first, following up with an open-ended probe for more details, an explanation, or an example)

7. Your respondents may not represent other groups of potential clients.

- Be careful before generalizing your results
- Consider the characteristics of people who may be more likely to be in your program
- Think about both your selection/recruitment processes, and the selection decisions the client makes in coming to you

8. Time of collecting information may bias the results

- Consider whether certain times of year, seasons, times of the day, etc., may lead to particular types of responses
- Try to adjust your collection to compensate for such factors

9. People often tend to improve or learn more on their own over time

- Without a control or comparison group, you don't know whether your program is responsible for any changes in client knowledge, attitude, behavior, or life situation
- Consider other events that may have influenced your respondents
- Be particularly careful about this problem with children

10. "Extreme" responses tend over time to become more "normal"

- This tendency (often referred to as "regression to the mean") can undermine conclusions about improvement
- Try to collect information at several different points in time, rather than only once or twice
- Examine the data before drawing conclusions

11. "Drop outs" can distort the results of any outcome study

- Counting only people who complete a program usually results in higher reported improvement rates, since higher functioning clients may tend to be the ones who complete the program
- Carefully track people who enter your program, and try to measure all of them
- Don't simply report the results for people who complete the program, without considering drop-outs

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Handout #7

Tips for Collecting Information

- Pretest any instruments or approaches
    - If possible, pretest with someone who would be a potential respondent
- Consider long-term cost and time before selecting a method
- Follow appropriate consent rules (providing information is almost always optional)
- Maintain confidentiality of the information, and explain how you'll do this to the respondent
- Adapt your collection approaches for short, medium, and longer-term outcome measures
- Keep data collection instruments as short and focused as possible—gather what you need, not everything you'd like to know
- Consult with outside experts, if possible, with experience in your selected collection methods
- Pay particular attention to wording of questions (see Handout #8)

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Handout # 8. Indicator Assessment Instrument

For each indicator/collection method, rate each of the criteria on a 1 to 5 scale (1 = very weak, 5 = very strong), using your best judgment and knowledge.

Indicator	Collection Method	Relevant to Desired Outcome	Attributable to Program Activities	Feasible to Collect Information	Useful for stakeholders and program	Accurate and valid measures

Indicator	Collection Method	Relevant to Desired Outcome	Attributable to Program Activities	Feasible to Collect Information	Useful for stakeholders and program	Accurate and valid measures

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Handout 9. A Few Resources on Outcomes and Evaluation

(February 4, 2014)

Here are a few suggestions of some websites and books you might find useful:

Websites (these provide some helpful discussions of outcome evaluation and some good examples of outcome measures)

www.urban.org/center/cnp/projects/outcomeindicators.cfm (Urban Institute)

www.cdc.gov/features/understandingevidence (Center for Disease Control)

www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/index.html (University of Wisconsin)

www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/resources/quicktipsubject.html#retro (U. of Wisconsin)

http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310776_KeySteps.pdf (Urban Institute)

Books (the first three are basic overviews, and the fourth is an excellent more advanced set of essays)

Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry, Real World Evaluation, 2nd edition (Sage, 2006).

Elaine Morley, Elisa Vinson, and Harry P. Hatry, Outcome Measurement in nonprofit organizations: current practices and recommendations (Urban Institute, Independent Sector, 2001).

Colin Robson, Small-Scale Evaluation (Sage, 2000).

Wholey, Hatry, and Newcomer (editors), Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation, 2nd edition (Jossey-Bass, 2004).

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