

Outcomes Measurement

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Why Outcomes?

Nonprofit success rests on a foundation of mission, vision, and assessment. Assessment is required both internally (by the governing board) and externally (by funders and the government). Assessment, or outcomes measurement, focuses on results rather than activities. The best results are those that fulfill the organization's mission and vision.

An achievable outcome has five elements:

- **Specific:** Improvement at what, by whom, or by how much?
- **Measurable:** Speed or time, cost, quality, and/or positive impact.
- **Aggressive yet achievable:** Does the expected outcome inspire?
- **Relevant:** Mission-related.
- **Time-bound:** By when?

Outcomes Planning

The best way to insure proper assessment of results is to plan outcomes before the project or program begins. A simple way to do this is to create a chart including the following categories:

- 1) The outcome or goal the organization seeks
- 2) Activities necessary to accomplish the goal
- 3) Who is responsible for managing the activity
- 4) When the activity will occur
- 5) How the results of the activity will be measured.

Outcomes Measurement Table

Outcome	Action	Responsible Party	Timeframe	Measurement Tool

This format is an excellent way to delineate goals in tandem with activities and measurement in grant applications and funding proposals. The chart also forces the organization to consider all aspects of an activity's feasibility and enhances responsible planning. This model can be used for overall strategic planning (where the organization may list many outcomes to be accomplished over one to three years) as well as for individual programs and projects.

Measurement Tools

As mentioned above, an outcome should be measurable by at least one of the following criteria:

- 1) Speed or time, which relates to service delivery
- 2) Cost, a determination of financial output
- 3) Quality, which relates to expertise and efficiency; and
- 4) Positive impact, which addresses client or audience satisfaction and education.

However, many still ask, "What are the tools we should use to measure the results of our project – especially quality or impact?" Regardless of the nonprofit organization's size or resources, there are many tools available to facilitate accurate outcomes measurement.

To Measure	Measurement Tool
Time	Calendar or clock – Keep track of time and dates.
Cost	Financial report – Measure costs against income.
Quality	Expert opinion – Duplicate press, articles, and reviews; include in report.
	Interviews – Meet with clients or participants to discuss quality; include anecdotal information in a report.
	Surveys – Survey clients, participants and administrators; quantify results.
Positive Impact	Quantify revenue, headcounts, and collaborating partners.

The Outcomes Report

Outcomes measurement has two components, measurement and interpretation. An outcomes measurement report will:

- 1) Assess results quantitatively (measurement), and
- 2) Make qualitative deductions (interpretation).

In general, the report should be succinct but complete. The report should delineate the tools used for measurement and address each activity listed in the outcomes table; it should also list any unexpected outcomes, both positive and negative. Finally, the report should interpret the measurements and results, and make recommendations for future planning and activity.