Outcome Based Objective Writing

A Presentation by

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Presenters

- Dr. Lifvendahl is an Adult Educator and Consultant.

- Practice in:
  - Outcome Based Management
  - Organizational Development
  - Assessment and Evaluation
  - Customized Curriculum Design
  - Training and Development

- Teach at: Cardinal Stritch University and National-Louis University.

- Work with clients in various fields.
Overview

- Responding to a Request for Proposal (RFP) is essentially an “act of translation”.
  - Funders seek Agencies that directly support their agenda.
  - Program and development staff may use different “professional languages” within their disciplines.
    ✓ Business terminology dominates funder preconceptions.
- Bridging these communication differences is a result of well written Outcomes.
Standard Format for Grant Writing

The basic elements of a written grant are:

- Problem Definition
- Project Design
- Measurable Outcomes and Objectives.
- Established Evaluation Protocols
- Implementation Time Line
- Conclusion
- Budget
Program Mission/Vision Statements
Drive Outcome Creation.
Outcome Defined

- An **Outcome** is defined as the change(s) in (or benefits achieved by) clients due to their participation in program activities.

- This may include but is not limited to changes in participant’s knowledge, skills, values, behavior, or condition of status.

(Ref: Donors Forum of Wisconsin)
Objectives

- Each objective should:
  - Define a clear description of expected levels of performance.
  - Define a concise sense of educational direction.
  - Target a single Program activity.
  - Utilize little professional jargon.
  - Employ action verbs. Examples include: define, describe, demonstrate, utilize, integrate, predict, prepare, attend, decrease, increase, report, etc.
Goals

- Well written Goals possess the following components:
  - Consensus based and attainable given current resources.
  - They should also have, as appropriate:
    - A measurable number or percent.
    - A date for completion.
    - Assigned responsibilities.
Process

Define the **Terminal Outcome**, then work backwards.

**Inputs**
- Does the RFP fit our Capabilities?

**Outputs**
- What Activities and Level of Participation is Required?

**Outcomes**
- What are the Short, Medium and Long Term Outcomes?

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Exercise

☐ The focus of this presentation is on **Outcome writing**.

☐ Initial Exercise:
  ■ Real World RFP (Agency Anonymous)
  ■ What follows are generalized Outcome Translation Steps.
RFP

“The organization(s) must use this grant to develop or improve an idea, approach and/or collective model that will result in specific strategies and outcome measurements that will directly contribute to (I.e. feed into a pipeline of projects working to achieve) the Initiative’s financial literacy and wealth creation objective:
To help low-income, women-headed families in the XXX Metropolitan area to obtain a base level of financial knowledge (e.g. training in:

- money management, saving/investment, credit, and income; shifting behavior patterns)

- and increase their collective wealth (e.g. through debt reduction, receiving the ETTC, IDAs, savings accounts, increased income, home ownership)

- by $40 million in the next three years.”
RFP cont’d

“Priority will be given to agencies that:

- Collaborate with other community organizations;
- Utilize proven approaches;
- Create long and short term solutions;
- Incorporate a variety of strategies;
- Engage with partners; evaluate using qualitative and quantitative measures; and
- Target poverty level women-headed families.”
Translation: **Funder Objective(s)**

- Increased knowledge of target audience in financial management.
- Increased collective wealth of target audience to equal $40M in the next three years.
- Demonstration of the Project Agency’s ability to collaborate with other agencies.
Restate Objective(s) as a Terminal Outcome

As a result of participation in this program, participants are competent at managing their financial affairs.
Key Questions (Participant)

- What is “competence”?
- What is the expected level of competence to be achieved?
- How will “competence” be measured?
Key Questions (Wealth)

☐ How is “wealth” defined?
☐ What assets and income will determine “collective wealth”?
☐ What data will be used to determine if the “collective” has achieved “wealth”?
☐ How will appropriate personal financial data be collected and vetted for accuracy?
☐ How will we evaluate if the proposed Program directly contributed to collective wealth achievement?
Key Questions *(Agency Collaboration)*

- What is the level of expected collaboration?
- How many sister/brother agency interactions determine successful collaboration?
- What criteria will substantiate correct levels of collaboration?
Further Examples

Determine how well a parent understands their child’s disability and how their understanding improves/stays the same as [the agency] works with them and their child.
Parents accurately describe their child’s disability.
Key Questions

☐ Is this an Outcome?
☐ Or is this an Indicator of change?
☐ This is an Output (if we have X then we can work toward Y).
☐ Y is the Terminal Outcome.
Examples cont’d

Determine if a parent is becoming a **better campaigner** for their special needs child.

I.e. finding suitable community resources, being pro-active about their child's care, etc.
Translation: Terminal Outcome

Parental activities lead to acquired services.
Key Questions *(Funder)*

- Define the meaning of “campaigner”.
- What is meant by “pro-active”?
  - If pro-activity involves behaviors implicit in interaction with a bureaucracy, then what are the most critical interactions commonly causing difficulties in child advocacy?
- Focus on specific interactions that lead to successful advocacy and define outcomes around them.
Important Point

- Funders must simplify language.
- Overly complex RFP’s lead to confusion, frustration and unmet Outcomes.
Examples cont’d

What are the most effective ways to measure successful outcomes from visiting art exhibitions and/or participating in art-making or art-appreciation programs?

Successes in these experiences are typically intangible in nature: increased interest in art, improved self esteem, etc.

And how do we propose to measure these outcomes through good program evaluations that don't require spending $8,000-$20,000?
Translation: **Terminal Outcome**

Museum staff seeks cost effective evaluation in determining program success.
Key Questions

- Cited intangibles (increased interest, etc.) are subjective and hard to evaluate.

  - What behavior is significant?

  - Example: *Viewing time for a show.*
    - The longer one is “viewing” could lead you to hypothesize heightened interest.
    - This is not a outcome. It is a *formative* “indicator” of interest, not a *summative* statement of increased knowledge.
Questions cont’d

Example: Enhanced art appreciation.

- Define “appreciation” and level of “enhancement”.
- Using Pre and Post Survey/Interview attendees before and after program attendance and/or participation.
- This is a better formative indicator. It is also more costly. Costs are reduced when existing staff or volunteers conduct the survey.
Questions cont’d

☐ The best indicator tracks interest in art over time.

☐ Example: Increased Membership.

- This is a **summative** indicator of long term commitment.

- Tie increased membership (desire to join and attend/participate in more like events) to a specific program or exhibit.

☐ Example: Increased sales of exhibit related merchandise.
Inherent Conflicts

☐ Development (Sales) = Seek funding.
☐ Programming (Production) = We want to do the “right” thing.
☐ Funder = Look for Agencies that give the “most bang for the buck”.
☐ Simple clear language achieves better Outcomes.
☐ Shared language decreases conflict.
Summary

Define funder expectations in the form of a “Terminal” Outcome.

- Translate RFP against Outcome.
- Confirm this Outcome with the funder.
- Logically formulate objectives, goals, staffing, budget, etc. against Outcome.

Dialogue must be maintained.