Outcomes Guidebook

A Tool for Grant Applicants

January 2017

The Schenectady FOUNDATION

Catalyst for Community Change

Outcomes Guide

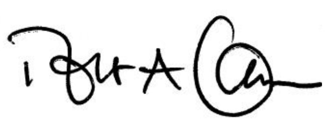
As a good steward of the contributions of our donors – people who have entrusted a generous portion of their assets to us through their estates or annual gifts – The Schenectady Foundation is continually challenged to do the very best things we can to improve the community. We strive to be careful, thoughtful and judicious in deciding where to place our financial resources.

This is a core value of the Foundation. Our ceaseless focus on making things better than they were is complicated by the fact that there are so many good things to do! There are hundreds of organizations, programs and projects in Schenectady County, and many are deserving of philanthropic support. But with limited resources – currently a little more than $1 million per year – it is both a necessity and responsibility to be highly selective about our grantees. We therefore set criteria for that selection process and earnestly work to be fair and even-handed in applying the criteria.

Of increasing importance to us are the "outcomes" that have been – or might be – achieved with our support. Our 2017 grant program will be weighted to award grants on the basis of their potential to realize measurable outcomes. We know that this is challenging – for the Foundation as well as for applicants and grantees – but we also believe that we will all benefit from the clarity of articulating what we are trying to accomplish, and how we will know if we have been successful. We also believe that the community and its residents will benefit from programs that are planned and managed toward achieving better results.

This workbook is intended as a tool to help grant applicants clarify what they are trying to achieve – from articulating the intended change – to identifying specific measurable indicators that show they are advancing toward that outcome. The Guide draws on ideas and concepts from our experience with a number of models that take a "logical" approach; i.e. logic models. If you already have a logic model that works for you, continue to use it (but before applying to the Foundation, please share your model with us). If you don't, we recommend that you use the model presented in this workbook as your starting point. The Foundation is willing to work with you to ensure that prospective grantees develop clarity as to what they are proposing to achieve with our funding.

We look forward to continuing our work with Schenectady's charitable sector to achieve the very best possible outcomes for the community and its residents.



Robert A. Carreau, executive director

Learning: What Must We Change or Do Differently to Achieve Better Results?

Outcomes work is not about justification or proving. It is about learning, improvement and change. If we do not learn from the processes we put in place and identify points where new or different interventions might improve our results, then we are not truly doing outcomes work (managing to results).

The importance of tracking what we do and how our clients respond is that it provides us with that learning opportunity. If our clients are not improving their condition in the way we'd like or expect them to, then our response shouldn't automatically be to do more of what we were doing. It also shouldn't be to lower our expectations for results.

Instead, think of what you will need to change in the management of your program to increase the likelihood that your client will realize change. Sometimes it involves eliminating or adding a management step. Sometimes it is a function of the person who is performing the step – they may be ill-suited for that particular task, or lack adequate training or resources. Perhaps it is a crucial piece of information that should be provided to the client.

The changes in management require that -- like in any management situation – you are aware of your resources and the external and internal environment. Most importantly, a good manager is always squarely focused on her clients. Keep your focus there, and adjust what you do in order to "satisfy" them.

As you use this guide to develop your Logic Model you will see that the model becomes a "map" to guide your program management decisions. You will be able to use the model to regularly assess your program, comparing the actual progress against the progress you planned. Are you on target or exceeding projections? Are you close, or way off? If you are falling short, you may need to adjust the program model, reorganize, eliminate the unnecessary, or add where you may be deficient. Take notes of what didn't seem to work, what you've learned, and brainstorm ideas on what might work better. Then try one of them out!

Managing to results in charitable sector programs is challenging. But it can be done. We believe that you use your Logic Model to guide you in evaluating and making critical decisions about your programs. It is not something you do only because a funder required it. It is something you do because you believe it is useful in your quest to improve the health and well-being of the community.

Using the Outcomes Guide

This guide is intended to steer grant applicants and grantees through the process of utilizing a Logic Model. The guide is organized as a three step process:

1. In the **"Outcomes Work Definitions"** section we provide definitions of important terms that you must understand and use consistently in order to develop your program's Logic Model;
2. In the **"Working with a Logic Model"** section we provide a template as a tool to assist you in organizing your thoughts, and developing your program Outcomes;
3. In the **"Target Practice"** section you will craft specific, measurable Outcomes Target Statements. These statements provide you with a way to gauge how your program is progressing toward the desired impact.

Toward the end of the Guide we provide examples and sample templates to help your work.

Outcomes Work Definitions

There are a variety of ways that results-oriented language has been treated. Terms such as "outcome", "impact", "goal" and "objective" are often used interchangeably or without precision. Consider what could be achieved in your program, in your organization – or across our community – if our consistent use of language contributes to shared understanding, collective action and shared impact! Outcomes terminology connects our vision for the program to the things we measure in order to understand if we are making progress toward that vision. We can then gauge whether we are making a difference in the lives of our clients which is, after all, the driving force of the charitable sector. The language used here will appear in the Foundation's grant materials, and so it is important for grant applicants to understand and utilize the terms consistently.

Impact Statement: an ideal vision for the best possible end state.

Your logic model begins with the **"Impact Statement"**. You start by telling us the ***vision*** for what you want to see happen. The Impact Statement is global, aspirational, motivational, and possibly not achievable in the near future. If, for example, you were crafting an Impact Statement about community safety, it might read something like:

"Our neighborhood will be free of violent crime -- a place where residents feel safe for themselves and their children".

This is a big, dream-like statement. It may not be completely achievable in the short-term, but it is the vision that is driving your program – the ultimate intent. The Impact Statement should be strongly aligned with your organization's mission and/or vision statement.

Outcome: A change in behavior, condition or status.
As we treat the term "outcome" there are potentially three levels of outcome measures:

- **Short-term Outcomes** are typically related to ***learning***. For many programs a first step is to develop changes in awareness, knowledge, attitude, skills, opinions, aspirations, and motivations of the target audience. For example, a Short-term Outcome for an employment program might be for the participants to develop soft skills. You should be able to actually measure skill acquisition, and the number of participants acquiring a baseline skill level.
- **Intermediate Outcomes** measure something that, once short-term outcomes are achieved, has become ***actionable***. Once the employment program participants acquire a sufficient level of skill and knowledge, they are prepared to actually apply for and potentially obtain employment. Your Intermediate Outcome measures could ***indicate*** how many participants have applied for and obtained employment. Indicators for a program working with pregnant teens to achieve healthy births might include the frequency of prenatal visits, maintaining proper diet and weight, not smoking or drinking alcohol. The ultimate impact for such a program, however, might be birth weight or the absence of health problems in the baby and the mother.
- **Project End (or Long-term) Outcomes** measure what is being realized by the participants because of completion of the Intermediate Outcomes. They reflect a change in condition or status. Following the employment model example, a potential Project End Outcome could be that participants have increased their income and improved the stability of their families. Again, these are ***measurable*** changes. And, their achievement indicates that you are moving toward the vision you set forth in your Impact Statement.

Project End Outcomes – you can think of these as "Long-Term" -- are the strongest outcomes, and tend to be the most convincing to funders because they represent changes in behavior or status that are ***measurable***. But they are also critical to program managers because they tell you that your work is sustaining critical changes in the community or in your clients. Obtaining knowledge or skills may be important, necessary steps, but are less compelling if they do not lead to Intermediate or Project End Outcomes. In the employment example, a program designed to help participants acquire soft skills may have value, but not nearly the value of participants then obtaining and maintaining a job.

Note – The Schenectady Foundation understands that each organization has its particular strengths, and may do some things very well, but perhaps not others. We therefore encourage applicants to develop collaborations with other entities that can provide complementary resources that enhance the likelihood of achieving success with Project End or Long-Term Outcomes.

*"Before you start some work, always ask yourself three questions - **Why** am I doing it? **What** results might be achieved? and **Will** I be successful? Only when you think deeply and find satisfactory answers to these questions, go ahead."* -- *Chanakya*

Outputs: The activities, services, events or products of your project.
Outputs are the important things that you do in order to progress toward the Outcome. And, they are measurable – usually more easily measurable than outcomes. Examples of outputs are: Providing counseling sessions for clients; Meals served; Training or educational sessions conducted; Housing provided. An output of a community garden program might be the total weight of fruits and vegetables harvested, toward the result of reducing hunger or improving nutrition in the neighborhood.

Inputs: The resources that we need to invest in our project.
Inputs include staff, volunteers, manuals or curriculum, funding, program space or facilities, supplies, etc. We need to be thorough in assessing what the necessary inputs are to make the project successful.

Baseline: The current condition or performance of your target population.
The baseline characterizes the current status of your clients. Presumably your programs or interventions will result in an improvement over the baseline, or maybe maintain the baseline in the face of threatening environmental conditions. How much of an improvement, and what constitutes good performance are often the subject of discussion between program managers and their funders. Determining a baseline is absolutely critical to doing outcomes work. Without a baseline – even one set somewhat arbitrarily on the basis of the best possible information – it is impossible to measure a program's impact.

Baselines can be expressed both through metrics and narrative. The narrative should describe the aspects of the target population that you are working to change. Metrics provide a more specific way to understand the baseline: e.g. *Only 50% of the youths in our target population are on track to graduate on time. All clients come from households at or below the poverty level.*

If you have been managing a program for a while you may already have a data set by which you can set a baseline. Other sources for baseline data include needs assessments, research studies, census information, school performance data, City planning documents, etc. You may also use staff observations about client behavior to inform your baseline.

Outcome Target Statement: A measurable expression of Short, Intermediate or Project End outcomes.
An effective Outcome Target Statement identifies something specific you are aiming to accomplish. They must be clearly – logically – connected to the outcome that we are working toward. Targets must also be authenticated – that is, they are measurable and verifiable. The components of an Outcome Target Statement include: a description of the change (i.e. Outcome), the degree of change, the baseline, and the number of participants that will achieve the change.

An example of a target statement for an Intermediate Outcome: **John will reduce his use of alcohol by 66% (from 216 oz. per week to less than 72 oz. per week).**

Working with a Logic Model

We've defined the key terms that we will need to use with our Logic Model. We now provide a template or worksheet for you to use. Again…if you are already working with a logic model you may utilize it, but first please share it with the Foundation for our review.

When working with a logic model, you start at the end and progress "backwards". In other words, you should resist the temptation to start by explaining *what you do*, and begin instead on *what you are trying to achieve.* First thing is to articulate your **Impact Statement**. On page one of the template you are outlining your understanding of the situation and conditions which point to the importance of the project, and also potential barriers to progress:

1. Articulate your **Impact Statement** – ideal vision for the best possible end state
2. Set forth **Priorities** – an explanation of the situational and organizational rationale for this particular project
3. List your **Assumptions** – those things you take for granted in planning your project
4. Identify **External Factors** – those things that may affect your performance that are out of your control

On page two, you get down to the details of the logic model utilizing the terms we previously defined. Start by re-writing your Impact Statement (keep the vision ever-present). Then work from right to left starting with your Project End Outcomes. Keep working through your outcomes….then go to Outputs, Clients and finally the Inputs.

1. **Impact Statement** – ideal vision for the best possible end state
2. **Project End** (or Long-Term) Outcomes Statements (Behavior or Condition)
3. **Intermediate Outcomes Statements** – usually about Action
4. **Short-term Outcomes Statements** – usually about learning, knowledge, awareness or skill acquisition
5. **Outputs** – what you do; how you serve your clients; the "products" of your work
6. **Clients** – the people or community you serve and the characteristics that place them in your target population
7. **Inputs** – those resources that you require to be successful

You can also use the "Target Practice" worksheets to practice writing clearer Outcomes Target Statements for your outcomes.

"What matters is not how many worms the bird feeds its young, but how well the fledgling flies."

Project Name:

Impact Statement: A vision for the ultimate benefit that could be realized for the project

Priorities: This explains your rationale for doing this project – why is this important to do?

Assumptions: What are your basic assumptions underlying the planning of this project?

External Factors: What factors may affect the performance of the project that are "out of your control"….i.e. environmental, political, economic, funding considerations.

PROJECT NAME:

IMPACT STATEMENT:

Inputs	Clients	Outputs	Short Term Outcome Target Statements	Intermediate Outcome Target Statements	Project End Outcomes Target Statements
The resources we need to be successful	Description and characteristics of who we serve	What we do or produce	Often About Learning	Often About Actions	Changes in Behavior, Status or Condition

¤ Target Practice: Taking Aim at the Outcome

Now that you've articulated what you are trying to accomplish, it's time to set some targets. Target setting means identifying specific, measurable changes in the behavior or condition of your clients. Sometimes a program manager may wish to establish a number of targets. While this can be beneficial, it can also become cumbersome. Be careful not to take on too many targets, especially if you are new to this.

There are some basic elements to setting effective **Outcomes Target Statements**:

- ¤ The description of the Outcome – the behavior/condition you wish to change.
- ¤ The extent or degree of the change you wish to achieve.
- ¤ The baseline condition or current state of the client.
- ¤ The number of clients that will achieve the change.

Description of Change

Setting a target for change implies some comparison of the current behavior to the expected behavior of your clients. Reduction or elimination of negative or destructive behaviors is often the change sought by human services programs (e.g. drug use or abuse, teen pregnancy, school drop outs, delinquency, crime, etc.). However, it is usually more helpful to attempt to couch the changes in terms of increasing positive behavior.

The Baseline Condition (Clients)

You need to articulate your clients' current condition. Obviously, each of the people you work with in a program may be at a different point in terms of the seriousness of their condition. You should look at the overall status of the population with whom you work. In determining the baseline you need to use the best available information: pre and post tests, prior program experience, research findings, etc. If you have limited experience with the program you will simply need to make your best educated assessment.

The Degree of Change

In this section you need to consider what would constitute an acceptable degree of customer behavior change from the baseline. For example, would it be sufficient for a home visitor program for frail elderly adults to keep clients living at home for an additional 3 months? 6 months? 1 year? Like determining the baseline, the degree of change requires you to draw on the best available data, which in some cases may be your experience and personal observations. It is also possible to access information about the success levels of similar programs. If half of the clients in the home visitor program tends to remain in their home for less than a year, you might set your sights on enhancing the program so that the new target is 18 months.

<u>The Number Achieving the Change</u>
The final element in the target is identifying the number of people who will be part of your program. You must ascertain the number of participants that you will track. You will also need to determine the number of people who will achieve the target. Here again, your experience with the program is critical to developing these numbers. If this is your first time measuring in this way, you will need to make your best educated guess at how many people you will be able to help reach the target. Do not set your number too low, or too high. As the saying goes, the targeted number should represent what you think you can ***"achieve with a reach"*** – a stretch target.

Below is a worksheet to help you practice crafting Outcomes Target Statements, utilizing all the components we've just presented.

¤ *Outcomes Target Statement Worksheet*

It's time for some **Target Practice**. Working from the **Outcomes Statements** you developed earlier, construct a target (or two). Remember that the targets are specific measurable changes you are trying to achieve for your clients. You will need to work on each specific element: 1) the Change; 2) the Baseline; 3) the Level of Change; 4) the Number to be Tracked, and who experience the Change.

¤ Outcomes Target Practice:

Of the ________________________ ____

(total # of clients you are tracking) (description of clients)

who ____ ,

(the Baseline)

_________________________________ will

(# of clients who will achieve the Change)

____ .

(Description of the Outcome/Change)

Use the additional sample Target Practice forms to continue working and refining your targets.

¤ *Outcomes Target Statement Example:*

We have provided the example below to show you one way that Outcomes Target Statements can be crafted. Of course, the nature of your program will tend to modify this somewhat, but this gives you an idea of how it might look if you were developing a program to improve the on-time graduation of high school students.

Impact Statement: *"All students in our high school will graduate on time, and be committed to a post-graduation life plan."*

"Project On-Time" contributes to the Impact Statement by engaging students who are most at risk of not graduating on time in enriched remedial, academic, personal planning and organization activities that increase the likelihood that they will move back on track and develop knowledge and skills they need to apply themselves constructively post-graduation.

Project End Outcome Statement (change in status or condition)

Of the 75 **High School Juniors** who **have committed to a graduation plan**, **70**
(# of clients) (description of clients) (the Baseline) (# achieving Outcome)

will **graduate on time as seniors** and **50 will have completed a post-graduation plan.**
(Description of the Outcome) (Optional Outcome #2)

Intermediate Outcome Statement (action)

Of the 80 **High School Juniors** who **have completed program orientation and testing**, 75
(# of clients) (description of clients) (the Baseline) (# achieving Outcome)

will **develop and commit to a graduation plan with their guidance counselor that is acknowledged by parents/guardians and a mentor.**
(Description of the Outcome/Change)

Short-Term Outcome Statement (learning)

Of the 100 **High School Juniors** who **are currently not on track to graduate on time**, 80
(# of clients) (description of clients) (the Baseline) (# achieving Outcome)

will **adequately complete the program orientation class and demonstrate proficiency on the "Work Smart" Study Skills Test.**
(Description of the Outcome/Change)

¤ Outcomes Target Practice:

Of the ________________________ ____

(total # of clients you are tracking) (description of clients)

who ____ ,

(the Baseline)

_________________________________ will

(# of clients who will achieve the Change)

____ .

(Description of the Outcome/Change)

¤ Outcomes Target Practice:

Of the ________________________ ____

(total # of clients you are tracking) (description of clients)

who ____ ,

(the Baseline)

_________________________________ will

(# of clients who will achieve the Change)

____ .

(Description of the Outcome/Change)