

Resource: Writing Goals & Objectives

Effective, useful evaluation begins with solid goals and objectives. Carefully defining your goals and objectives up front can make your work easier in the long run and lead to more positive results in your program. Please consider the following:

GOALS

A goal refers to the overall change expected in a group or population as a result of a program. Goals describe the overriding purpose of a program and are written as concise, general statements, not immediately measurable. *Goals relate to our aspirations, purpose and vision.*

Example: To decrease HIV risk behavior among high school students.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives are the intermediate steps or milestones that need to be achieved in order to meet our goal. Objectives are written as intended outcomes; they are what you hope your target audience will know, feel, or be able to do at the conclusion of your program. *They represent the plan.*

Example: Two months after initiation of an HIV prevention project, 80% of trained peer educators will be able to conduct one-on-one interviews with program participants to assess knowledge about HIV risk behavior.

Example: Three months after the training, 75% of peer educators will begin implementation of the HIV risk-reduction curriculum in their communities.

Elements of an Objective

Key elements of an objective can best be identified by answering the following question: "Who will do how much of what by when?"

- ★ WHO: Who is your target population?
- ★ HOW MUCH: How much change do you hope to see?
- ★ WHAT: What is your intended outcome?
- ★ BY WHEN: By when will your objective be met or measured?
- ★

Example: Three months after participating in a project focused on HIV prevention, 60% of participants will be able to describe three attitudes that contribute to sexual risk behavior.

- ★ Who: Youth participants in an HIV prevention program
- ★ How much: 60% of participants
- ★ What: Describe three attitudes that contribute to sexual risk behavior
- ★ When: Three months after participating

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Characteristics of a Well Written Objective: SMARTER

Another rule of thumb for writing good objectives is to see if they are SMARTER. Once you draft an objective, check it against the following criteria to see how it stands up.

S
Specific
What exactly do you need to do, with or for whom?

Objectives should be specific and use only one action verb. Objectives with more than one verb are difficult to measure. Also, avoid verbs that may have vague meanings to describe intended outcomes (e.g., “understand” or “know”) because they are too hard to measure. Instead, use verbs that allow you to document action (e.g., “*At the end of the session, the students will list three concerns...*”). The greater the specificity, the greater the measurability.

M
Measurable
Is it measurable and can you measure it? Is there a baseline?

It is impossible to determine whether or not you met your objectives unless you can measure them. A benchmark from which to measure change can help. *For example, if you found in your evaluation that 70% of high school students believe that their age protects them from HIV infection, you might write an objective that strives to decrease that percentage to 55%.* Thus you will have an objective with a benchmark from which to measure change and one which is specific enough to be evaluated quantitatively.

A
Appropriate
Does this objective derive from your needs assessment? Is it consistent with your findings?

Your objective must be appropriate (e.g., culturally, developmentally, socially, linguistically) for your target population. To insure appropriateness, objectives should originate from the needs of your target audience and not from a preconceived agenda of program planners. Conducting a solid needs assessment (e.g., holding in-depth interviews with members of the target population) helps to ensure that your objectives will be appropriate. *For example, an objective focusing on risk factors for an elementary school population may be inappropriate for a high school population.*

R
Realistic
Can it be achieved in the timeframe that you have established? Can it be achieved with the resources available? Is there support for it to be done? Is it a priority?

Objectives must be realistic. Countless factors influence human behavior. If program planners set their sights too high on achieving changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills or behavior, they will likely fall short of reaching their objectives. While a program may have been very successful, it may not appear that way on the surface because the objectives were too ambitious.

The following is an unrealistic objective: After participating in the project, 100% of high school students will list all the ways that HIV is transmitted.

A more realistic objective could be written as follows: After participating in the project, 85% of high school students will list at least three of the four ways that HIV is transmitted, as described in the Introduction to HIV session.

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R
Relevant
Will this objective align with the needs of the participants? Will they be able to apply this learning immediately? Will this objective lead to the end goal?

Objectives must also be relevant. Will this objective lead to the end goal? Is it an objective that means something to the participants? Will they see value in achieving it?

In designing effective training, we know that participants are much more motivated to pay attention, engage and try out new concepts and ideas when what they are learning is practical and immediately applicable to their work.

It is important to provide a time frame indicating when the objective will be measured or a time by which the objective will be met. Including a time frame in your objectives helps in both the planning and the evaluation of a program.

T
Time Specific
When will this be accomplished or completed?

Example: Within two months of beginning the project, 60% of peer educators will demonstrate the capacity to write an outline for a presentation to their peers.

It is important to provide a time frame indicating when the objective will be measured or a time by which the objective will be met. Including a time frame in your objectives helps in both the planning and the evaluation of a program.

E
Extending Capabilities
The objective should stretch your own capabilities.

In designing workshop goals, it is helpful to give consideration to ways in which participation may help build the capacity of participants and their organizations; as well as your own.

Your first responsibility, of course, is to ensure that training participants are learning what they need to learn, but you should also use each training event as an opportunity to push yourself and your own abilities as a trainer.

R
Rewarding
The achievement of the objective should be rewarding to both the individual and the trainer/organization.

It is not uncommon for us to resist the idea that people are motivated by their own self-interests, but the research tells us it is true. The idea that human beings act from a place of self-interest is not new. For centuries it has been the dominant view in psychology. If you subscribe to this notion, you believe that everything we do—from the compassionate to the remarkable—we do ultimately for our own advantage or fulfillment. In some instances, the personal benefits are clear to everyone involved; in other cases, they are known only to the individual experiencing them.

So whether or not you agree with the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbs that human beings always, and only, act from their own self-interests, the bottom line is that when your training participants can see the alignment between your objectives and their interests, they are much more likely to find value in what you are offering and implement what they learn.

Finally, there is no single correct way to write a SMARTER objective, but it is helpful to think through some of the following tips:

SPECIFIC

Be concrete. Use action verbs

MEASURABLE

May be numeric or descriptive of quantity, quality or cost. How will you see evidence that the objective has been met?

ACHIEVABLE

The objective should be appropriately limited in scope (it is better to split big stretching objectives into smaller stretching objectives for clarity, especially if there are different deadlines, targets or measures) and within the participants' control and sphere of influence.

REALISTIC & RELEVANT

Measure outputs or results not activities

TIME SPECIFIC

Identify target dates, including interim milestones and plans to monitor progress

EXTENDING CAPABILITIES

Should be challenging and make a difference to established practices, ways of doing things. Does it link to the bigger picture and overall goals?

REWARDING

What's in it for the participant, as well as the organization? What motivates them to want to complete this objective? Is it something they can become passionate about and fully engaged?

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