Goals, Objectives & Outcomes

Most often as part of a full grant proposal, and sometimes even in Letters of Inquiry, foundations ask for you to state your organizational goals and objectives, in addition to your mission, and to outline the specific objectives and outcomes anticipated by the proposed project. Foundations today are much more objective and outcome focused – they want to know what will occur as a result of the project, and how you will know the project is successful. While most non-profit organizations have an established mission statement that summarizes who the organization is and what it does, for whom and where, we have found that many non-profits often have a more difficult time coming up with specific, measurable goals and objectives, for the organization as a whole and/or for a specific project. To assist you in developing your organizational or program goals and objectives, we have identified the key differences between a goal, an objective, and an outcome, and have provided a few different examples of each.

What is a goal?

A goal is a broad statement that answers the question, "What does your organization hope to accomplish?" Goals are general, conceptual, and abstract. When describing your organizational or program/project goals, it helps to use "visionary" words such as create, develop, expand, increase, offer, promote, provide, serve, and strengthen.

Examples:

"The goal of our program is to provide students with the skills they need to become tomorrow's leaders."

"The goal of this project is to develop a comprehensive staff development and training program."

"The shelter's goal is to offer a safety net for women who are homeless and to help mitigate the factors that contribute to homelessness."

What is an objective?

An objective is much narrower in focus and answers the question, "How will your organization accomplish its goals?", or "What steps do you intend to take to accomplish your goal?" It is often stated starting with the word "To". In contrast to your organizational or program/project goals, objectives are tangible, specific, concrete, and - most importantly - measurable. When developing specific objectives for your organization or program/project, it is important to be realistic – make sure that what you are proposing to do is achievable in a specified time period and that you will be able to demonstrate whether or not it was achieved.

Examples:

"To serve 300 students in Fiscal Year 2010."

"We will develop an effective training manual, methods, and materials for paid instructors and volunteers."

"90% of shelter guests will receive one-on-one case management services."

What is an outcome?

An outcome is the actual result or consequence that will occur through the achievement of the objectives. It is almost always quantifiable and measurable. Again, it is important to be realistic when anticipating outcomes, but it is also important to plan them high enough that a funder will want to support them.

Examples:

"60% of participants will be placed in employment"

"85% of clients will successfully complete their individualized program"

"at least 20 students will advance one grade level"

Most foundations require a report at the end of the grant period, and they will look for you to provide a comparison of your stated objectives and anticipated outcomes with what was actually achieved. This speaks to the need for you to have effective data collection and program oversight in place to ensure the ability to accurately monitor and report actual outcomes.

While we will gladly help you develop the right wording that will grab a reviewer's attention, only you can decide the specifics regarding what you want to accomplish, and how you (and your funders) will know whether or not you have achieved your goals and objectives.