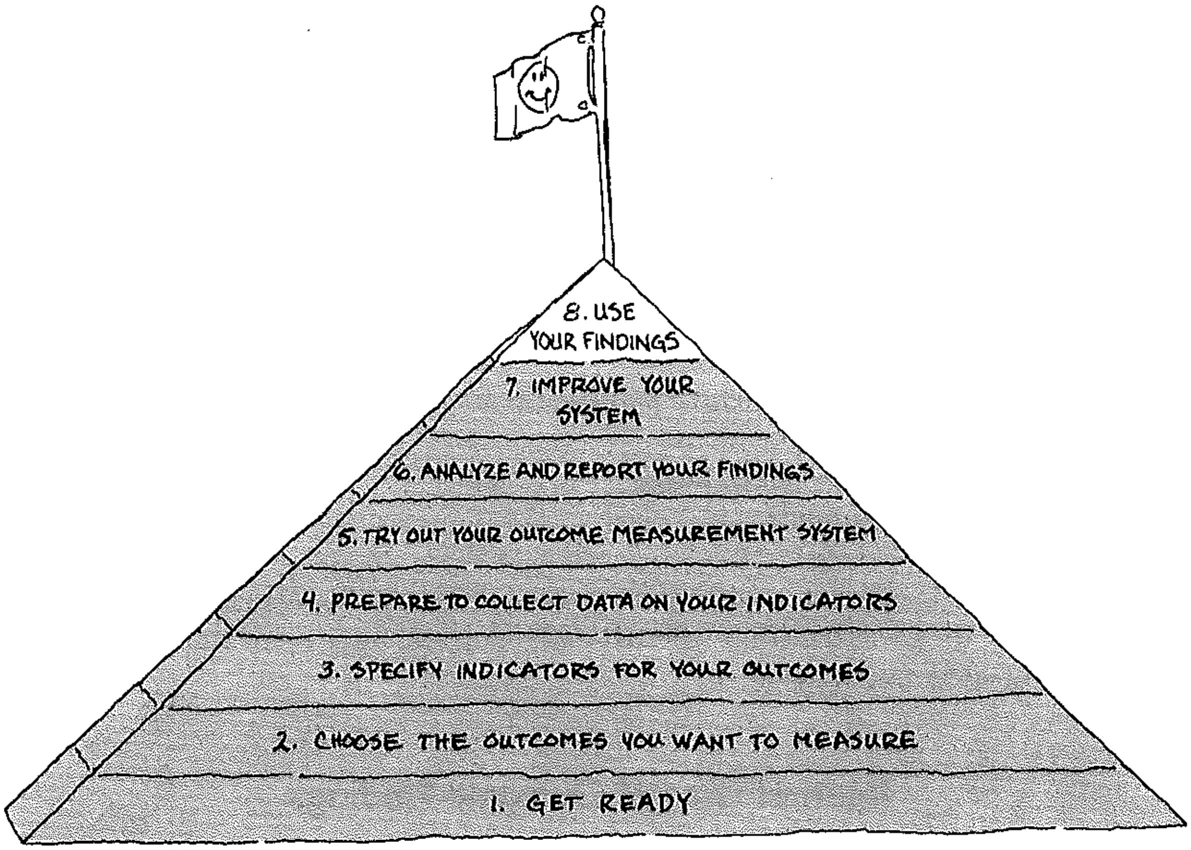
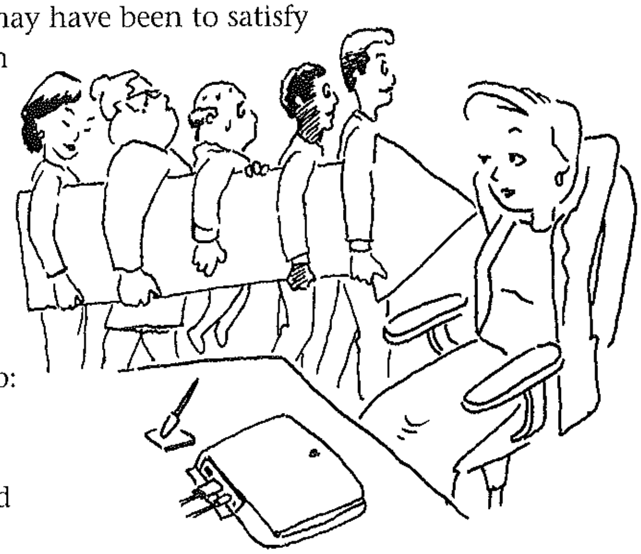
# Step 8: Use Your Findings




You have designed and implemented a system for measuring your program outcomes and have analyzed the resulting data. Now, it is time to make maximum use of your findings to improve and promote your program. Although your initial reason for implementing outcome measurement may have been to satisfy a funding requirement, outcome information has many more, and often more important, applications in program planning and management.



Some uses of outcome data are internal to your organization. The findings represent feedback on how well the program is doing—feedback that can, for example, help:

- Provide direction for staff.
- Identify staff and volunteer training and technical assistance needs.

- Point out program improvement needs and effective strategies.
- Support annual and long-range planning.
- Guide budgets and justify resource allocations.
- Suggest outcome targets.
- Focus board members' attention on programmatic issues.

Other uses are external. Outcome findings are a demonstration of the program's value and role in your community's human service network. By casting the findings in this light, your program can use them to:

- Recruit talented staff and volunteers.
- Promote your program to potential participants and referral sources.
- Identify partners for collaborations.
- Enhance your program's public image.
- Retain and increase funding.

The more you incorporate outcome information into ongoing management and operation activities, the more the effort invested to develop and implement your outcome measurement system will pay off.

## Internal Uses of Outcome Findings

Following are some ideas for using outcome data in program management activities.

### Provide Direction for Staff

Favorable outcome findings give staff a well-deserved boost. Problematic findings focus staff attention on service aspects or participant groups needing additional attention. As soon as outcome findings are available, they can be conveyed to staff—perhaps by disseminating copies of the outcome reports or by posting the information at convenient locations.

> "The staff is excited because they can be in touch with the area they work in as well as the entire agency. It also helps the staff work more diligently. We wouldn't have imagined we impact lives as well as we do."
>
> *Sue Malkin, Executive Director, Deaf, Hearing and Speech Center, Detroit, Michigan*

Also useful to staff are the compiled comments participants made during interviews or on questionnaires, including explanations for why they gave a negative rating to some aspect of the program and suggestions for program improvement. (Participants' identities must not be shared with staff.) These comments can help staff pinpoint problems and devise program improvement options.

Program managers can use the latest outcome report and narrative comments at "How Are We Doing?" meetings where managers and staff discuss:

- Where have we done well and why?
- Where are we not doing well and why?
- What can we do to improve results?
- Do the measurement techniques need tuning?

After improvement plans are implemented, staff can monitor later outcome reports to determine whether the results of the actions are as expected and whether more changes are needed.

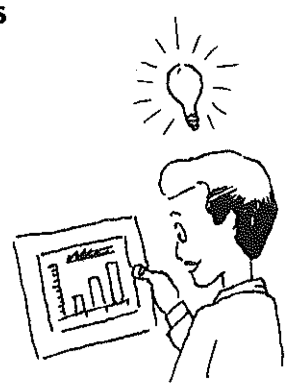
## Identify Training and Technical Assistance Needs

"At a project or program level, this has helped the staff focus and be more organized in timeliness of service delivery and data collection, and it's fueled by this outcome measurement."
*Karen Russell,*
*Public Health Nurse*
*Mentor/Project Manager,*
*Healthy Start Program,*
*Tacoma-Pierce County*
*Health Department,*
*Tacoma, Washington*

Outcome findings can indicate areas where service delivery personnel—both staff and volunteers—are having special difficulties and could benefit from focused training or technical assistance. Problem areas might include specific subjects, certain service delivery methods, or particular participant groups.

Program managers also can examine outcomes for participants served by different staff members or volunteers to help identify training and technical assistance needs for individual personnel. If undertaken, this use should be strictly internal, confidential, and constructive. Consider differing levels of difficulty among participants served by various personnel in interpreting the findings.

## Identify Program Improvement Needs and Strategies



As part of a program's continuous improvement process, information on a program's level of success in achieving the desired outcomes for its participants is a valuable resource for organizational learning. Even trial-run data can raise questions about service delivery methods, priorities, and training needs.

Outcome findings do not, however, tell the program why it is achieving at a particular level, whether that level is good or bad, or how to improve. It is up to the program—its managers, staff, and volunteer policymakers—to decide what the outcomes mean and what to do about them. This requires going beyond measuring outcomes to interpreting and evaluating them. There are many ways that a program can assess the meaning of its outcome data.

> "Outcome measurements helped us evaluate the effectiveness of a new program area and identify an important market niche. We tiptoed into a program that matched developmentally disabled children with local high school students. The feedback from this small-scale effort was overwhelming. Parents are ecstatic that their kids are having normal interaction and companionship with other kids, and we learned that it was not difficult to make these kinds of matches. The outcome measurements have proven that we have really met a need."
>
> *Joani Good, Executive Director, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Delta County, Inc., Escanaba, Michigan*

The strategies described below involve comparing outcome data for two or more groups. In examining differences between groups, it is important to distinguish between statistical significance and practical significance. Differences that are very small are not likely to be of practical importance, even if they are "statistically" significant. As a rule of thumb, differences of less than 5 percentage points seldom are meaningful for program managers or funders. Differences of 10 or more percentage points are more likely to be of practical concern; they warrant attention and further examination of their causes. Keep in mind, however, to consider the number of participants in each group. If a group has only 10 participants, then a difference of one person creates a 10 percent difference in outcome results—a difference that does not have much practical significance.

Various statistical procedures can determine the likelihood that observed differences could have occurred by chance alone. If you want this level of analysis of your data, you will need assistance from someone trained in statistics. Possibilities include a volunteer from a local college, university, or business, or a retired expert.

To learn more about where it is being effective and where it needs to improve, a program can examine its outcome findings to determine where it is having more and less success in achieving desired outcomes. It can, for example:

- **Compare outcomes for different participants.** By looking at outcome data broken out by important participant characteristics, a program can determine what characteristics seem to relate to better outcomes. This may guide program managers to target services toward specific participant groups. It also may guide program staff in finding more effective strategies for serving participants who are not experiencing the desired benefits.

- **Compare outcomes for different program units, facilities, or other organizational entities.** Breaking out outcome findings by organizational unit will show what parts of the program are achieving better outcomes. Large programs particularly are likely to experience uneven success across units.

> "We've adjusted our programs according to what the evaluation measures show has worked or not. For example, in our Girl Scouting in the School Day program, we used to focus more on arts and crafts until we readjusted the program to concentrate on what the parents and schools wanted. Now we focus on conflict resolution, activities to supplement the history curriculum, and living skills."
>
> *Nancy Berg,*
> *Executive Director,*
> *San Francisco Bay Girl Scout Council,*
> *Oakland, California*

The data table in Exhibit 8-A, which was used in Step 3 to demonstrate the value of breaking outcome data out by key factors, reflects at least two findings that could guide service-improvement efforts by this program. First, the data show that the level of success for Unit 1 is lower than that of Unit 2 for participants who came in with both difficult and less-difficult problems. This would lead the staff of Unit 1 to evaluate why its outcomes are lower, and perhaps learn from the other unit. Second, the table shows that the distribution of difficult and non-difficult cases between the two units is quite uneven, with Unit 2 serving three-quarters of the difficult cases. If this is not intentional, the program would want to examine its intake procedures to see why this pattern has occurred.

Exhibit 8-A

## Outcome Findings by Program Unit and Level of Difficulty of Participants' Problems

| | Unit | |
|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 |
| **All Participants** | | |
| Total | 500 | 500 |
| Number Helped | 300 | 235 |
| Percent Helped | 60% | 47% |
| **Non-Difficult Cases** | | |
| Total | 400 | 200 |
| Number Helped | 300 | 160 |
| Percent Helped | 75% | 80% |
| **Difficult Cases** | | |
| Total | 100 | 300 |
| Number Helped | 0 | 75 |
| Percent Helped | 0% | 25% |

> "We made several program changes as a result of the outcome measurements. For one, our pregnancy rate was higher than we wanted, so we worked with another agency to add a sex education component to the program. In the aftercare area, the data showed that kids excelled in the GED program, but they had not gone through enough life skills classes. As a result, they had not changed the behavior they were exhibiting. We decided to slow down the academic aspect of the program and infuse more concentration on life skills."
>
> *Nina Waters, Executive Director, Practical and Cultural Education (PACE) Center for Girls, Jacksonville, Florida*

- **Compare outcomes for different service delivery strategies.** Program policymakers can use outcome findings to compare the relative success of different approaches to service delivery, including variations in the type or intensity of service. This can help assess both existing variations in service and new approaches that are introduced. Exhibit 8-B describes how a program can use outcome findings to compare alternative service approaches.

A simpler strategy, but one that does not provide as strong evidence, is to introduce a new service approach across the board and compare outcome data for the new approach to data from the approach that it replaced. In either strategy, program personnel will be able to distinguish under which conditions outcomes have been higher and lower. This may lead them to place more emphasis on certain approaches or to seek further information on why the differences occurred.

Exhibit 8-B

## Comparative Findings for Two Youth Services Approaches: Team vs. Individual Activity Emphasis

(Data are for a one-year test; about 150 youth are included in each procedure.)

| Approach Used | Percent of Youth Showing Increased Verbal Skills | Percent of Youth Showing Increased Interpersonal Skills |
|---|---|---|
| Team Activities | 88% | 46% |
| Individual Activities | 92% | 28% |

**Steps for Comparing Alternative Program Approaches**

1. Identify the two practices or approaches to be compared. Perhaps one is an existing practice and the other is a new approach.
2. Choose a method for deciding which incoming youth will be served using which approach. The method should select a representative sample of the participants for each

Exhibit 8-B, cont'd

practice with approximately the same proportion of difficult participants in each of the comparison groups. Some form of random assignment is preferable. Randomization helps assure that the comparisons will be valid and greatly increases the strength of the evidence. Simple methods of random assignment include flipping a coin and using a table of random numbers. If the arrival of participants is essentially random, another method is to assign incoming participants alternatively to each of the practices.

3. As each participant enters the program, assign her or him to one of the two groups by the procedure you have just identified.
4. Record which participants are assigned to which procedures.
5. Track the outcomes for each participant in each practice over whatever period of time the program believes is necessary to indicate the outcomes of these practices fairly.
6. Tabulate the values on each outcome indicator for each of the two practices.
7. Compare the findings and make adjustments to program practices as appropriate. You may want to drop the practice that shows the poorer outcome. Alternatively, you might decide that you have not received a clear enough picture from the outcome data to make a decision, in which case you will continue the comparison for a longer time.

In the example given above, team activities show substantially better outcomes on increased interpersonal skills. Both types of activities show high levels of success related to increased verbal skills. The outcome for individual activities is slightly higher than that for team activities, but the difference falls below the 5 percent threshold for practical significance. The program might feel that the evidence from the test indicates that team activities have been more effective and put more emphasis on these in the future.

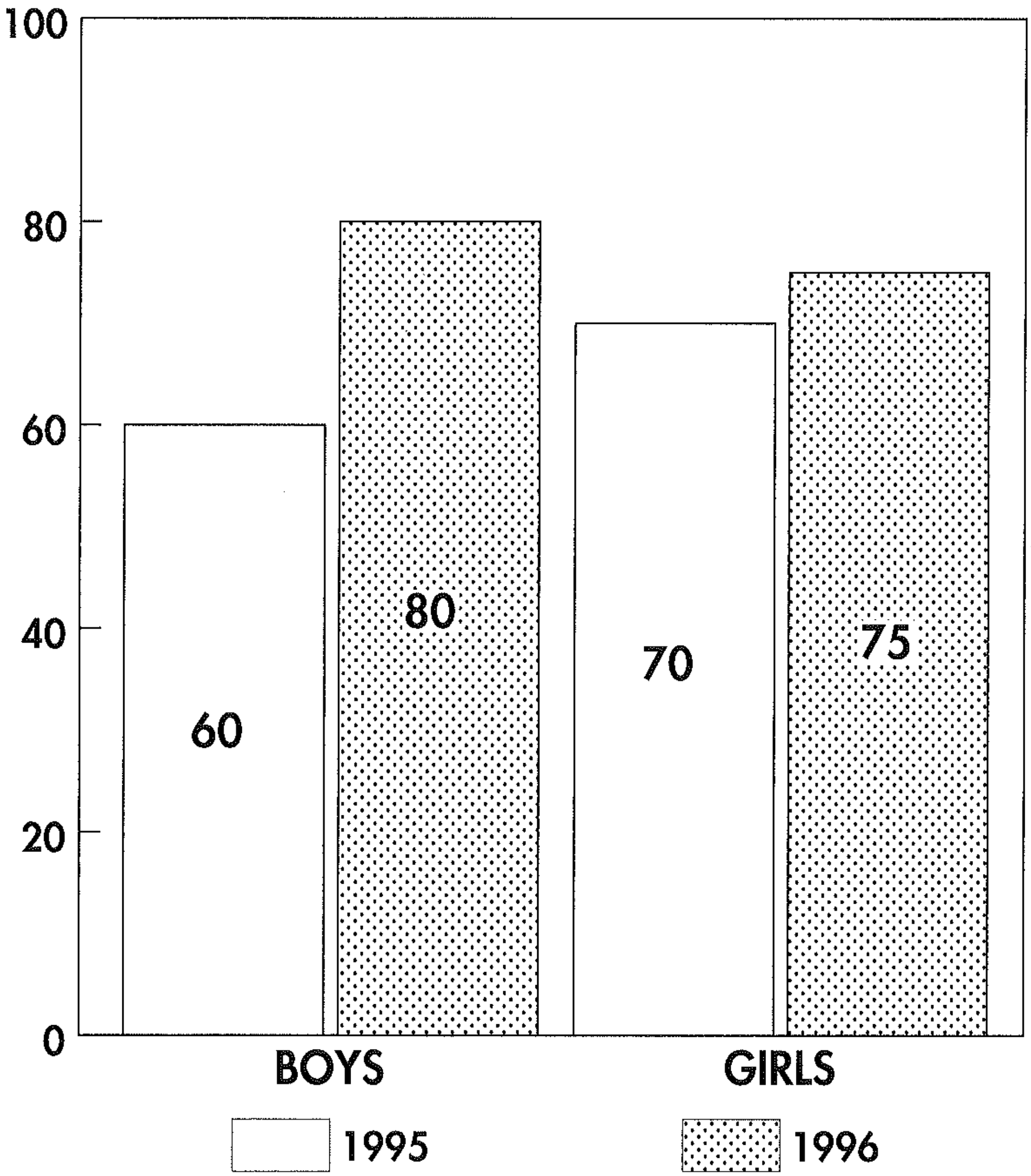
Note that outcome findings alone cannot guide program improvement choices. Other information, such as the resource requirements (cost) for each option, must be taken into account. Ultimately, decisions about program content are judgments by program officials. Outcome information better informs those decision makers before they make choices regarding which participants will be served under the new procedures and which will be served using the existing procedures.

- **Compare outcomes with those of previous years.** After a program has collected one or more rounds of outcome data, comparisons with its previous performance will be an important part of its program review and improvement activities. Exhibit 8-C, for example, compares 1996 outcome data presented earlier in Exhibit 6-E with data from the program's previous year.

  Comparisons like these show the effect of program improvement efforts on the program's outcomes. In making such comparisons, it is important to identify and track outside influences that can affect program outcomes, such as changes in the local

Exhibit 8-C

**Percent of Participants With Pre- to Post-Test Increases of Six Points or More**



economy, events that bring public attention to problems the program addresses, and variations in the program's funding levels.

> "At first we met with resistance from the staff, but now they have a greater sense of pride as they see the outcome of their work. The staff now talks about changes in the program that affect the outcome measures. They are really showing more initiative."
> *Michael Moreau, Executive Director, Kingsley House and New Orleans Day Nursery Association, New Orleans, Louisiana*

- **Compare outcomes with targets set for those outcomes.** After a program has refined its outcome measurement system and is fairly confident of the data it is collecting, it may begin to set targets for future performance and then compare its actual performance with those targets. Caveats about setting outcome targets are presented later in this step.

Exhibit 8-D is an example of findings on three outcome indicators arrayed against targets and across time periods. The findings indicate that the Child Abuse Public Awareness and Prevention Program of the Southside Children's Agency has improved its performance on two of the three indicators. However, it continues to fall short of its targets on two indicators, even after adjusting one of those targets downward.

> "The information helps social workers to be very focused in their work with the kids and the more focused they are, the more positive and more effective are the outcomes we see. It is also beneficial to us administratively to know that we are accomplishing our objectives, and the payor sees results."
> *John Steele, Executive Director, Catholic Family and Community Services, Schenectady, New York*

Breaking out the target audience by profession (e.g., educators, child care workers, medical professionals, general public) would help the program know which audiences it is being more and less successful in reaching and which are more frequently reporting suspected abuse and neglect. This would help the program know which audiences may need more focused attention or more tailored messages.

In addition to making the internal comparisons described above, a program may find it informative to seek outside sources of comparative data. These can include performance data of other agencies with similar programs, data from national surveys or other studies, and data on target populations similar to the program's participants who are not receiving services. The line graph in Exhibit 8-E shows the incidence of burglaries in the Southside Neighborhood and a nearby neighborhood before and after the Southside Children's Agency initiated its neighborhood organizing program.

Comparisons with other programs or target groups must be interpreted with care. Differences in population characteristics and resource levels are very likely to result in outcome differences that are not necessarily reflective of program quality or effectiveness.

Exhibit 8-D

## Southside Neighborhood Children's Agency
## Child Abuse Public Awareness and Prevention Program: Actual Outcomes vs. Targets

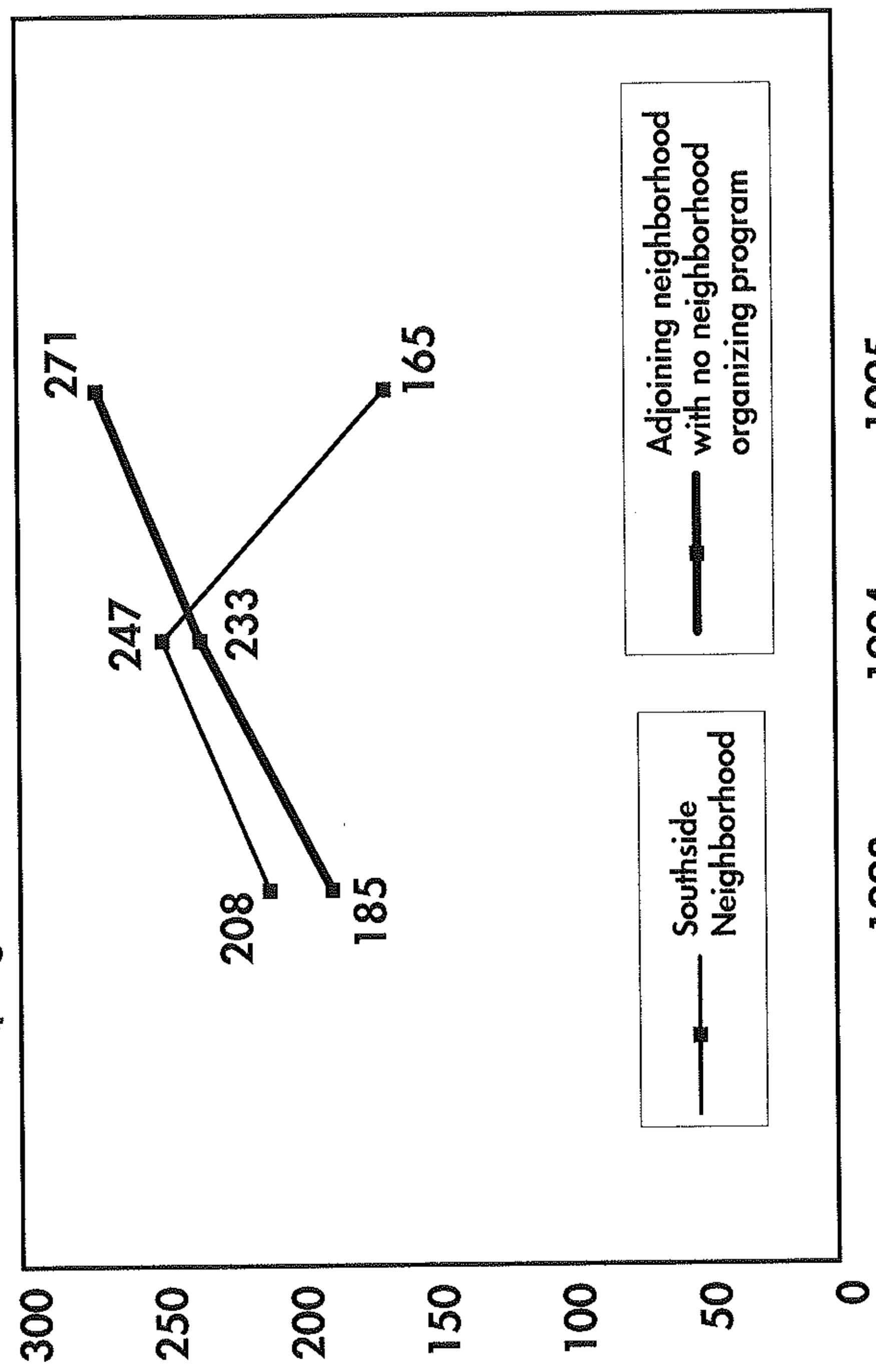
| Outcome Indicator | Last Period | | | This Period | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Target | Actual | Difference | Target | Actual | Difference |
| 1. Percent of target audiences that recall content of PSAs, brochures, posters, or presentations | 60% | 40% | -20% | 60% | 45% | -15% |
| 2. Percent of target audiences that can name 3 signs of abuse and neglect and can identify police or child protective services as appropriate contact | 40% | 30% | -10% | 35% | 40% | +5% |
| 3. Percent of target audiences that say they have made such a report since hearing or seeing information. | 20% | 10% | -10% | 15% | 10% | -5% |

Note: "-" means the actual outcome is worse than the target
"+" means the actual outcome is better than the target.

There are a few instances of standards for outcome indicators developed by a unit of government or a professional association. For example, the U.S. Department of Labor's performance measurement process for the Job Training Partnership Act includes annual calculation of national standards based on the most recent outcomes achieved by local programs. These standards address indicators such as adult employment rate 13 weeks after trainees complete the program. The Department of Labor recommends local adjustments to these standards to reflect local economic factors and participant characteristics. Another example of standards for outcomes are the targets established as part of the Healthy People 2000 effort. These examples notwithstanding, standards for outcome indicators are currently rare.

Exhibit 8-E

**Burglaries in Southside Neighborhood Before and After Implementation of Neighborhood Organizing Program (program instituted in November 1994)**



## Support Annual and Long-range Planning

> "This is definitely strategic planning fodder. It will certainly help longer term when the board has to make tough decisions."
> *Royce Van Evera, Executive Director, Law, Order & Justice Center, Schenectady, New York*

The program analysis and improvement activities described to this point feed directly into both long-range strategic plans and annual action plans. Decisions about staff and volunteer training initiatives, expansion of effective services and delivery approaches, and new service needs all will be reflected in annual and long-range plans. Outcome information also can help policymakers track ongoing problem areas and decide whether to continue efforts at improvement or to discontinue a service.

An agency's planning activities should include plans for improving its outcome measurement system and perhaps expanding the system to additional programs. Program managers and the board also can consider what additional uses they can make of outcome measurement to help the agency monitor progress on its annual and long-range objectives.

## Guide Budgets and Justify Resource Allocations

The use of outcome data in annual and long-range planning ties naturally into decisions concerning funds and other resources. Findings that suggest a need for more emphasis on a certain outcome also help justify devoting additional resources to achieving it. Findings that prompt expanding a program that is successful with one population to reach a more-difficult-to-serve population also may prompt the allocation of more dollars per participant for the expanded service.

## Suggest Outcome Targets

> "Personally, as a leader in a men's group, I am interested to have more than anecdotal information about where we're going and how we're doing. It will also have impact for programming."
> *Larry Agle, Executive Director, Family Service of the East Bay, Oakland, California*

A useful management planning tool is to ask program managers to establish targets for each outcome indicator for the upcoming reporting period. Generally, programs should not attempt this until they have analyzed at least one round of outcome data and have some basis for setting a target. Otherwise, targets are likely to be little more than guesses. In selecting targets, consider the following:

- **Outcome findings for previous reporting periods.** These usually will be a major factor in determining targets. To take account of differences among participant groups and to avoid the temptation to select participants based on the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes, set different targets for different participant groups.

- **Outcomes achieved by the most successful service unit** if the program has more than one unit that provides the same service. (This approach assumes that the most successful unit isn't dealing with an easier clientele.) For example, a program with the outcome data shown in Exhibit 8-A might select outcome levels of 80 percent and 25 percent as its next-year targets for participants entering the program with non-difficult and difficult problems, respectively. This assumes that the program believes the outcome findings are valid and these levels are reasonably achievable. A more conservative approach would be to set the targets at the average of the service units. For the program in Exhibit 8-A, this would establish targets of 77 percent and 12 percent, respectively, for participants entering with non-difficult and difficult problems.

- **Outcomes achieved by other programs**, whether in your community or elsewhere. Consider carefully how well other programs' service delivery approaches, resources, participants, and community context match your own in deciding how much to rely on their outcomes in setting targets for your program.

- **Your budget**, that is, the funds and other resources expected to be available. Reductions or increases may be a good reason for lowering or raising targets.

- **Any external influences of which you are aware that can be expected to affect future outcomes**, such as downturns or upturns in the economy.

Outcome data have proven especially effective as a tool for educating the program committee of the advisory board of **Associated Catholic Charities in New Orleans, Louisiana** about the agency's 57 programs. The information illuminates each program's progress and individual issues.

The committee reviews specified programs at each bi-monthly meeting. In advance of the meeting, members receive program summaries that include outcome data along with program mission, goals, values, and results. The outcome information provides substance for discussion and helps keep the committee focused on the actual workings of the programs. Members provide more informed feedback because they have a deeper understanding of program issues and obstacles. No longer giving blanket approvals, members now offer suggestions on measuring particular goals and provide leads on additional resources.

## Focus Volunteers' Attention on Policy and Programmatic Issues

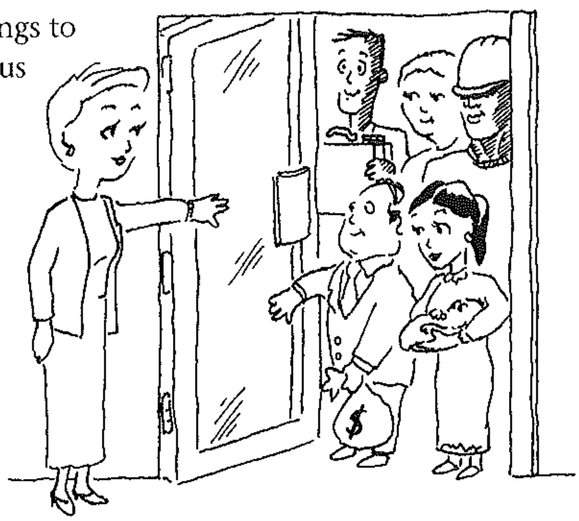
Board members and other volunteers on key committees, such as strategic planning and program evaluation, will be involved at several points in the development of a program's outcome measurement system. The process of discussing, and perhaps approving, the list of desired program outcomes will help volunteer policymakers clarify their understanding of the program's purpose and focus their attention on benefits for participants, rather than on day-to-day operations.

Outcome measurement findings give volunteer leaders explicit feedback on how well the program is doing for participants. When findings fall short of expectations, program managers can use the focus on outcomes to help volunteers weigh alternative solutions in terms of the program's goals. Many of the other issues and problems the board discusses also can be framed in terms of their relationship to desired program outcomes. In this way, program managers can help volunteer leaders direct their attention to strategic-level decisions and set coordinated policies based on a clear understanding of program aims.

> "We shared the information with our board of directors and it put them closer to the customers they serve and helps connect them. The measurements have also proven to have implications for program development. For instance, because of the feedback on our questionnaire, we expanded the hours of operation at our main center."
>
> *Marilyn Lange, Executive Director, Village Adult Day Center, Inc., Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

## External Uses of Outcome Findings

There are many ways to use outcome findings to enhance a program's interactions with its various publics. A few of these are discussed here.



### Recruit Talented Staff and Volunteers

Many potential staff will be attracted to a program that identifies and tracks desired outcomes and uses the information to improve its services. They will recognize that this program is serious about creating benefits for participants and is on the leading edge of a growing movement to increase accountability in human services.

> "The board members feel more secure in their jobs since part of their job is to advocate in the community. Now they have documentation of results."
>
> *Ellie Gersten, Director, East Valley Catholic Social Services, Mesa, Arizona*

Potential volunteers will appreciate a clear picture of what the program wants to accomplish for participants so they can determine if the program's aims match their values and priorities. Volunteers also are more likely to be drawn to a program that can describe the outcomes its participants experience than to one that describes its activities but not their results.

The inclusion of outcome information strengthens a program's staff and volunteer recruitment materials. In addition to describing good working conditions and competitive benefits, recruitment ads and brochures can include key outcome findings demonstrating that the program makes a difference for those it serves.

"Outcome measurement helped us better market our program to parents and youth. Parents of a Scout want him to develop skills for a lifetime. They want him to build self-esteem and leadership ability, and to carry out tasks in a timely manner. We have learned to say '65 percent of our Scouts learn skills that they will carry through life,' instead of '65 percent of them will earn merit badges.'"

*R. Keith Christopher,*
*Director of Support Services,*
*Boy Scouts of America,*
*New Orleans Area Council,*
*New Orleans, Louisiana*

## Promote Your Program to Potential Participants and Referral Sources

When individuals or families are searching for a service, they want a provider that will be effective in helping them meet a goal or achieve a change. Outcome findings communicate the benefits other participants have gained in a program. This tells potential participants that the program is effective in these areas and helps them decide if the program is appropriate for their needs. Once participants decide to use a particular service, the outcome information helps define what they can expect from the program so that they and program staff are working toward the same objectives.

Similarly, when staff of an information and referral service or other referral source suggest a program, they want to know that the program is a good match for the individual's needs and is likely to be effective. By sharing outcome findings with potential referral sources, a program helps clarify not only the problems it addresses, but also the solutions it seeks. It also offers reassurance that individuals referred to the program will receive services that promote results.

Among the programs offered by **Hale 'Opio Kaua'i, Inc., of Lihue, Hawai'i** is a therapeutic group home program providing behavioral management to troubled adolescents. Each resident's progress is assessed by an outcome-focused plan developed with the youth. Milestones are structured in a logical progression towards outcome goals. Residents are keenly interested in their achievements because the attainment of each successive milestone earns privileges and responsibilities in the program, and graduation occurs when the outcome goals are reached.

## Identify Partners for Collaborations

Outcome findings can help programs identify various opportunities for collaborative relationships. A program may find, for example, that it is having difficulty achieving an outcome because of a key influencing factor that is beyond the program's scope. One response is to collaborate with programs focused on that factor, making their services available to the first program's participants. For instance, a job skills training program may find that its outcomes are not reaching desired levels because participants are having trouble finding child care. The program may collaborate with a nearby child care program to make high-quality care available to children whose parents are receiving job training.

A program whose outcomes show that it is less effective with particular groups of participants may collaborate with programs that specialize in serving those participants. For example, a program whose outcome levels for elderly participants are lower than for younger individuals might create a partnership with a program that serves elderly clients successfully. The partner program need not offer the same type of service. The point is that its delivery approach, its staff, or some other program feature appears to interact more effectively with older persons. Managers of the partner program may provide insights that will help the first program improve its outcomes for older participants.

A program that is achieving good outcomes in its current service area may decide to extend the reach of its services. It might accomplish this by collaborating with programs already operating in the new service area. Programs that offer complimentary services and have made outcome measurement part of their management system would be good candidates for this relationship.

A shared focus on outcomes can prompt collaborations of programs with similar missions. Collaborators may, for example, compare outcomes of alternative services and service delivery approaches. They may work jointly to extend services into underserved geographic areas or to expand the scope of existing services. They may share the cost of training, technical assistance, or specialized resources to monitor and improve service quality. Particularly where funders are requiring collaborative efforts as a condition of grant awards, collaborations that use outcome measurement to demonstrate their value may become increasingly important to not-for-profit human services.

"There is a collaboration among groups, especially in the Prevention Partnership. Now we can compare not only internally, but across programs in the Tacoma area. There is the beginning of some common data collection and common outcome measurement. Not only can we see if we're making a difference, we also know if someone else is trying to do the same thing."
*Karen Russell, Public Health Nurse Mentor/Project Manager, Healthy Start Program, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, Tacoma, Washington*

## Enhance Your Program's Public Image

Collectively, human services have fallen in credibility in the public eye. This loss of favor is expressed in many ways, but the fundamental complaint seems to be, "Too much money for too few results." Outcome findings can help programs separate themselves from this general indictment and demonstrate that they are in fact making a difference

**Vocational Guidance Services of Cleveland, Ohio** uses a simple but effective method of communicating the agency's progress to a broad variety of constituents. The agency publishes a quarterly report using a pictographic design style to summarize outcomes related to four major goals. Illustrations show, for example, the number of persons with severe disabilities who have obtained jobs and the economic benefit for the greater Cleveland community.

The agency mails the report to more than 5,000 individuals and organizations, including board, volunteers, local media, state politicians, referral sources, customers, and employers that hire disabled and disadvantaged people placed by the agency. Vocational Guidance Services, who places over 2,000 challenged people into jobs each year, believes the tool is effective because readers can understand their messages instantly. Response from recipients is uniformly positive, with unsolicited comments offered to the local media by audiences as diverse as potential volunteers and board members.

for individuals and families. Annual reports, newsletters, informational brochures, news releases, public service announcements, radio interviews, television sound bites, recognition breakfasts and dinners, and donation solicitation materials are among the vehicles programs can use to send messages about the benefits their participants are experiencing.

Public dissemination of outcome findings must be done with care. Although having 40 percent of participants achieve a desired outcome may be excellent for some types of programs, a public looking for a 90 percent success rate may regard 40 percent as a failure. Programs can provide a context for outcome findings by including comparative data, as discussed earlier in this step. Testing possible outcome-based messages on a sample of intended recipients is highly advisable.

"Effectiveness data is wonderful for communicating with funding sources and the community at large. We are able to say, 'This program works.' We use the information in speaking engagements, in flyers distributed at fairs, and in our direct-mail campaign literature. We can point to specific areas where we have made a difference. It has led to good PR, and we have seen more contributions from corporations as well as from new contributors."

*Susan Getman, Executive Director, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Salem County Inc., Salem, New Jersey*

## Retain and Increase Funding

Many human service programs are implementing outcome measurement to meet the requirements of funders. Although outcome measurement offers many other benefits for programs, its importance in funding decisions is growing as more and more funders ask for documentation of results. This is true of corporate funders, as well as private foundations and state and federal governments. Moreover, funders who do not ask for outcome information often are impressed by programs who provide it.

Programs can respond to this increased concern with accountability by including information on outcomes, measurement approaches, and findings in their funding

> "Funders are impressed. Not many nonprofits are doing outcome measurement."
> *Kay Coffin,*
> *Executive Director,*
> *Big Brothers Big Sisters of Fresno County,*
> *Fresno, California*

requests and progress reports. Caveats given above about including comparison figures in messages to the public and in Step 6 about including explanatory information in reports are important considerations in reports to funders. Programs can increase the effectiveness of their communications by using terminology matched to that of individual funders. Reports to the program's board may talk of "outcomes," for example, while reports for some funders may label the same information as "results" or "impact."

Outcome findings can strengthen the case of programs seeking funding for new services. Even if they have no outcome findings for this service, demonstrations of effectiveness in current service areas can help reassure funders that the program is a good investment. Some programs may benefit by targeting their grant-seeking efforts on funders interested in the outcomes the program measures. For funders who want to invest in community-level impact or in long-range individual change, programs can use reports from controlled, long-term studies by policy and research organizations to substantiate the link between their outcomes and the funder's larger interests.