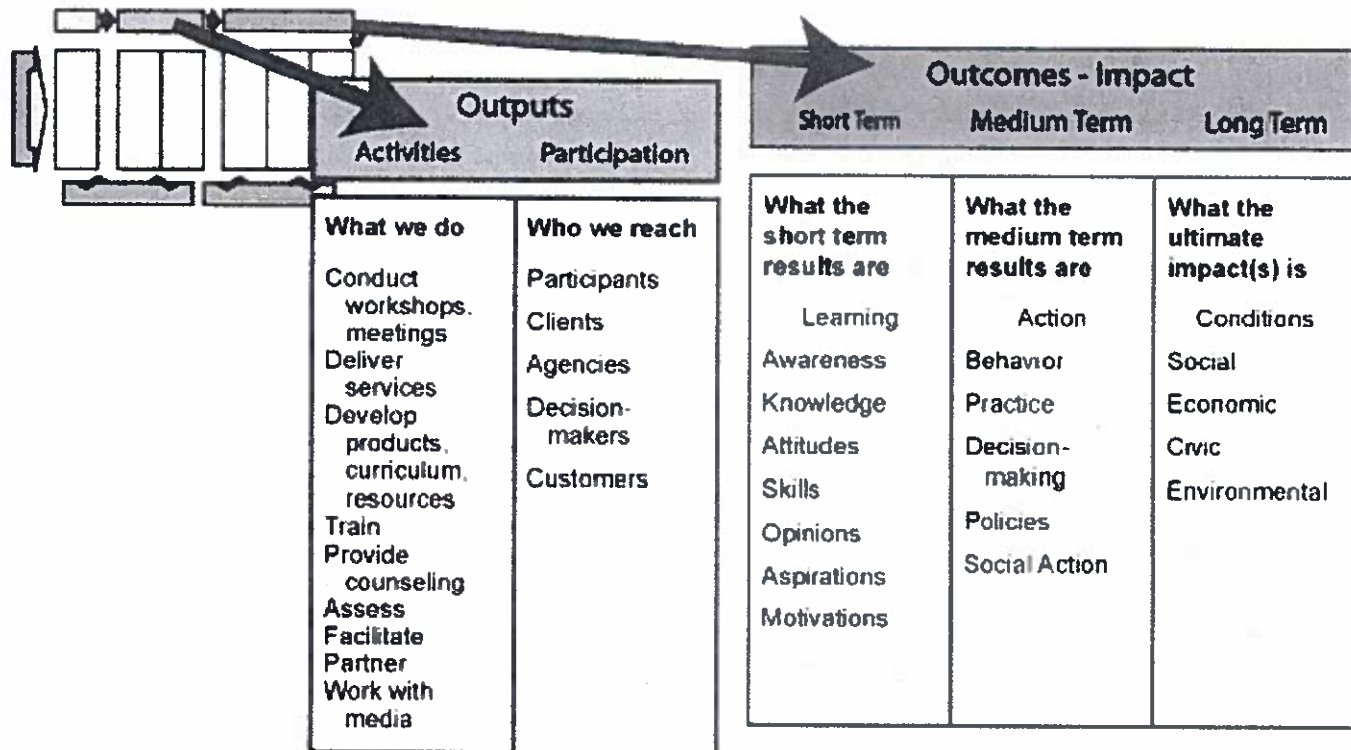


Outputs vs. Outcomes

Understanding the difference between outputs and outcomes is important. Outputs relate to "what we do." Outcomes refer to "what difference is there."



In the past, we've tended to focus on what is included in the outputs column - the "what we do and who we reach." We are anxious to tell our clients, funders and community partners what it is that we do, the services we provide, how we are unique, who we serve... We've done a good job of describing and counting our activities and the number of people who come. Now, however, we are being asked: "What difference does it make?" This is a question about OUTCOMES

Outputs are the activities, services, events, and products that reach people (individuals, groups, agencies) who participate or who are targeted.

Outputs are "what we do" or "what we offer." They include workshops, services, conferences, community surveys, facilitation, in-home counseling, etc.

These **outputs** are intended to lead to specific **outcomes**.

Outcomes are the direct results or benefits for individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations, or systems. Examples include changes in knowledge, skill development, changes in behavior, capacities or decision-making, policy development. Outcomes can be short-term, medium-term, or longer-term achievements. Outcomes may be positive, negative, neutral, intended, or unintended. Outcomes answer the question "So what?" What difference does the program make for participants, individuals, groups, families, and the community?

Impact in this model refers to the ultimate consequence or effects of the program--for example, increased economic security, reduced rates of teen smoking, improved air quality. In our model, impact is synonymous with the long-term outcome or your goal. It is at the farthest right on the logic model graphic. Impact refers to the ultimate, longer-term changes in social, economic, civic, or environmental conditions. In common usage impact and outcomes are often used interchangeably.

http://www.uwex.edu/ces/lmcourse/interface/coop_M1_Overview.htm or

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/pdf/lmcourseall.pdf>

Another resource: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/pdf/lmguidcomplete.pdf>

Try not to confuse outcomes with outputs. Outputs are the activities we do or accomplish that help achieve outcomes. Outcomes are the results of those activities for individuals, families, groups, or communities. Look at the following examples.

Outputs - Activities	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program trains and empowers community volunteers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community volunteers have knowledge and skill to work effectively with at-risk youth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program staff teach financial management skills to low-income families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-income families are better able to manage their resources.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The camp experience provides leadership development opportunities for 4-H youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Campers, aged 12-15 years of age, learn new leadership and communication skills while at camp.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An annual conference disseminates the latest forage research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forage producers in Pasture County know current research information and use it to make informed decisions.

Outcome Statements

Often we need to write outcome statements to include in grant proposals, planning documents, and evaluation plans. Outcome statements tend to be more descriptive and specific than what is written in the logic model graphic. Not all outcomes may have an outcome statement. You may choose to focus only on the outcome(s) of interest or the longest term outcome you are accountable for and will measure.

When writing outcome statements, we typically use the following format:

Who/What (the target subject)	Change/Desired effect (action verb)	In what (expected results)	By when
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Examples

Teenage youth aged 13-17 years attending camp	improve	their leadership skills	by the end of camp
Low-income families participating in the program	increase	their use of community services	within three months after the program finishes
County management board	implements	waste management plan	within one year of program start-up

Writing good outcomes takes judgment and skill. Devoting the necessary time and effort pays off in better planning and more effective evaluation. Some people apply the SMART format when writing outcomes. SMART refers to

- Specific: concrete; who or what is expected to change
- Measurable: can see, hear, count, smell it
- Attainable: likely to be achieved
- Results-oriented: meaningful, valued results
- Timed: target date

HINTS ABOUT WHAT ARE AND ARE NOT OUTCOMES

Exhibit 1-D in the United Way of America manual on Measuring Program Outcomes (1996:19) provides a useful reference to help classify some of the more difficult components of our programs. We draw from and add to that resource in the following.

Recruiting and training staff and volunteers.

In most cases, recruitment and training refer to internal program functions intended to support or improve program activities. The number of staff and/or volunteers recruited, the number trained, the resources committed to their development, etc. indicate the volume of these internal functions. These aspects help our programs accomplish outcomes; they are not outcomes. They do not represent benefits or changes for program participants or beneficiaries.

If, however, the program is addressing a situation of low volunteer involvement in community affairs and the purpose of the program is to increase volunteering among community residents as a part of a larger community development initiative, then increased numbers of residents volunteering in community life would be an outcome.

Number or type of participants who attend; number of clients served.

This information relates to .participation. or .reach. in our logic model that are part of Outputs. It indicates the volume or extent to which we reached the target audience. It does not indicate whether the participants or clients benefited or are doing anything differently as a result of the program, so it is not an outcome.

If, however, the purpose of the program is to increase use of a service by an underserved group, then numbers using the service would be an outcome. Notice, the outcome is not numbers attending or served; the outcome is expressed as use that indicates behavioral change.

Surveys conducted; curriculum developed; research generated.

These items refer to activities we undertake and accomplish. They may be classified as .what we do.. These are Outputs. They may be essential aspects that are necessary and make it possible for a group or community to change. But, they do not represent benefits or changes in participants and so are not outcomes.

Participant satisfaction.

For our purposes in education and outreach programming, client satisfaction may be necessary but is not sufficient. A participant may be satisfied with various aspects of the program (professionalism of staff, location, facility, timeliness, responsiveness of service, etc) but this does not mean that the person learned, benefited or his/her condition improved. If a participant is pleased and satisfied with the program, it may mean that s/he will fully participate and complete a program. As such, satisfaction can be an important step along the way to outcomes. It, however, is generally not an outcome.

In some cases, we may have to settle for participant satisfaction. In programs where individuals are extremely mobile or it is difficult to track people beyond the immediate program service, satisfaction measures may be the best we can do.

