Measuring the Difference Volunteers Make:
A Guide to Outcome Evaluation for Volunteer Program Managers

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Forward

As volunteerism moves and changes with the issues and challenges of our time, it has become vitally important for volunteer program administrators to be able to capture and describe what the presence of volunteers means to those served and how volunteers contribute to organized mission and goals.

This publication presents a basic, practical approach to beginning a process of volunteer outcome and impact evaluation. Its purpose is to provide you, the practitioner, with the tools, understand and confidence to evaluate your program and volunteers on the difference they made in people's lives and in the greater community.

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Getting Started

Evaluation has always been an important element in the administration of effective volunteer programs. It is one of the major principles of sound volunteer program planning and administration.

As volunteer program administrators and program coordinators, we know evaluation is essential if we are to maintain and improve effective programs. But often we don't feel we have the expertise, time or resources to conduct as systematic an evaluation process as we think we should. Just thinking about the word conjures up images of complicated formulas, extensive and expensive survey procedures, and development of elaborate questionnaires.

But evaluation does not have to be scary. All it takes is organization and some familiarization with the evaluation process. This book will help you with both. Remember, the more you know about the evaluation process, the less painful it will be and the more confidently you'll be able to answer the all-important questions:

"What kind of impact have our volunteer efforts made?" and "Are we being effective?"

As your volunteer programs continue to compete for scarce dollars in a climate of fiscal restraint and societal demands for increased accountability, there is not enough money to do all the things that need to be done to solve society's health, education and welfare programs. Outcomes evaluation is a way administrators and decision-makers can measure the results of volunteer and program efforts, and demonstrate their effectiveness.

You may wonder if you need to bother with outcomes if your organization is not using outcomes planning or evaluation in any of its programs. The answer is YES—if you want to demonstrate the value of the volunteer program and the worth volunteers have to the organization and those being served. It will enhance the credibility of your program, and provide a tool for volunteer motivation and program growth and improvement.

We hope this book will assist you as you begin the evaluation process.

How It All Evolved

Before the late 1960s, most volunteer programs were funded year after year, with little or no accountability. Then, with the advent of massive federal expenditures in human service programs during the 1960s and early 1970s, accountability of human services took center stage.

Early leaders in the field of voluntary action such as Ivan H. Scheier (1971), Harriet Naylor (1974), and Brian O-Connell (1976) began to address the importance of evaluation in volunteer program administration literature. As early as 1971, Scheier encouraged volunteer program managers to conduct the best evaluation possible, nothing that, “We’ve passed our honeymoon period in which sponsors were willing to wait and hope with us. Now they want the practical implications of known results.”

For years, accountability most often was centered on how funds were spent, who received volunteer services, how many people got services, how many volunteers provided services, what activities they participated in, how many hours volunteers contributed and how many volunteers continued with the program. These indicators measured processes and implementation procedures, but they did not focus on the impact of volunteer involvement on the primary clients volunteers were serving. They were not answering questions such as what difference the program made in the lives of participants and the community—questions that policy makers, taxpayers, elected officials, agency boards and philanthropic funders were asking.

In 1992, David Osborne and Ted Gaebler published an influential and ground breaking book, *Reinventing Government*, which called attention to a shift in how we approach program management in the provision of human and social services. According to the authors, how we manage programs from the very beginning should be driven by what we want to happen as a result of our efforts. The focus is on the *purpose* of our voluntary efforts—on the desired outcomes—with less emphasis on process.

Moving into the Future

Now several important shifts in thinking and doing are at the heart of government and other human service reform efforts. These shifts, illustrated in Table 1, represent fundamental changes for the whole system. The two columns in Table 1 contrast the traditional, bureaucratic approach with a result-oriented approach. If you study those contrasts closely, you will see the magnitude of the paradigm shift envisioned for the future.

Movement from a bureaucratic approach to a results-oriented approach involves much more than gathering outcome data. It means fundamental change in how we think about volunteer interventions, how programs are managed, how practitioners interact with clients and volunteers, and how providers are held accountable.

“*Volunteer program managers must be engaged in actively identifying outcomes, measuring results based on outcomes desired and using results for program improvement*”

Table 1
Contrasting Approaches to Service Management

Bureaucratic Paradigm	Results-Oriented Paradigm
1. Service-oriented	11. Outcomes-oriented
2. Rules drive action	12. Customer/client needs drive actions
3. Top-down decision-making	13. Collaborative decision-making
4. Standardized programs/uniform models	14. Individualized programs/diverse models
5. Rigidity	15. Flexibility
6. Management by controlling, inputs	16. Management by attaining results
7. Accountability by monitoring delivery processes	17. Accountability by monitoring outcomes
8. Mandates about how to deliver services	18. Agreement on goals, discretion about how to attain them
9. Punishment for taking risks	19. Incentives to taking risks
10. Reporting on inputs, activities	20. Reporting on outcomes attained

It also means that private and public funding agencies will have to change how they fund, manage and oversee programs.

The paradigm shift will involve a change in how decisions are made, how clients and customers are involved and how programs are administered. In the new paradigm, the whole system will be oriented toward attaining the outcomes that government, organizations, and/or society as a whole are seeking. Results will be the focus at every level from interactions with individual clients to legislative debates.

If this is going to happen, people like us, who are involved with volunteer-based human service programs, must be engaged actively in identifying outcomes, owning the outcomes identified, measuring results and using the results in decision-making and program improvement. We can't just put goals, outcomes and indicators on paper. We must use results to improve programs, make management decisions and report outcomes to our audiences or "stakeholders." For every action and decision, the primary question becomes, "how will this affect results?" This kind of thinking and doing leads to effective high quality volunteer programs.

Table 2

Premises of Reinventing Government
(Osborne and Gaebler, 1992)

. What gets measured gets done.

. If you don't measure results, you can't tell success from failure.

. If you can't see success, you can't reward it.

. If you can't reward success, you are probably rewarding failure

- If you can't see success, you can't learn from it.
- If you can't recognize failure, you can't correct it.
- If you can demonstrate results, you can win public support.

What is Evaluation?

Let's begin by defining the term "evaluation." Evaluation places a value on something. It determines the significance or quality of program results. A proper evaluation of your volunteer program will help you and your organization make critical decisions such as which of your volunteer efforts have been effective and which might be eliminated or changed, and where you might best allocate scarce resources for the greatest impact in the future.

The practice of evaluation involves the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of programs for use by specific people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions with regard to what those programs are doing and affecting (Patton, 1987).

In the early stages of program planning, set measurable goals. Ask yourself what your organization wants to accomplish with this program, what are the important evaluation questions to ask, and how will the information be used to enhance program effectiveness at all levels in the organization.

Evaluation also should be conducted at different levels within an organization or agency. Possible levels of evaluation include:

- Volunteer efforts
- The volunteer program itself
- The program within which the volunteer program functions
- Team efforts of volunteers and paid staff

Evaluation is not the decision itself, but rather the preparation for the decision.

Evaluation is an ongoing process that should be built into the planning from the very beginning.

The result of evaluation is organizational learning.

Defining outcomes evaluation

Outcomes evaluation is the way we demonstrate the actual measurable changes that our volunteer program has brought to the community and the clients we serve. As evaluation of a program's outcome has become more important in our field, new words have entered our professional vocabulary related to evaluation.

To help you become more familiar with the terminology, here are some terms we will use throughout the book and their definitions. These terms on are being used by the National Senior Service Corps. Corporation for National Service programs in evaluation Foster Grandparent, Senior Companion, and Retired and Senior Volunteer Program impact.

Evaluation Terms

Inputs: Inputs are the resources a project applies to create or sustain a service effort. Inputs include the *number of volunteers* providing the service, *hours of service* devoted to the activity and the *financial resources* expended on the activity.

Example: *In Clark County, six RSVP volunteers* are calling parents of children who *have been absent from school, unexcused, for two or more days. The volunteers spend a* combined *average of 10 hours a week on the project.*

Accomplishments: *Accomplishments* are the next level. They are *what got done* (or what is getting done in the case of an ongoing service activity). They are the outcomes of the services volunteers provide. Accomplishments include the **number of persons helped, the amount or number of something created** (e.g., started 51 citizen patrols), **or the extent to which a program has been expanded.**

Example: In Clark County, six RSVP volunteers are calling parents of children who have been absent from school, unexcused, for two or more days. The volunteers spend a combined average of 10 hours on the project. Since implementation in *January, the volunteers have called more than 60 families.*

Impacts: Impact represent the ultimate, but also most elusive, level of data collection. Impacts are actual measurable *changes in the community and clients* that occur as a result of the service. Impacts are measures of *effectiveness.*

Example: In Clark County, six RSVP volunteers are calling parents of children who have been absent from school, unexcused, for two or more days. The volunteers spend a combined average of 10 hours a week on the project. Since implementation in January, the volunteers have called more than 60 families. *Absenteeism at the school has decreased by an average of 30 perfect since implementation, compared to the* absenteeism rate over the previous three years.

Service Stories: *Service Stories* are a subcategory of impact. Service Stories are narrative descriptions of volunteer accomplishments and the *impact* of those accomplishments *on the human beings and institutions whom they serve.* Service stories emphasize the impact of a program on an individual service recipient (not the volunteer).

Example: Tom Kline has been receiving Senior Companion assistance for four years. When Companion Beatrice Parks started visiting Tom in 1991 he was bedridden, depressed and very irritable. When Beatrice first entered the house, Tom greeted her with a cold “I don’t know you.” Soon however, Beatrice was able to break through the ice and *get Tom to sit up more and play games.*

She provided support by fixing meals and writing letters for tom. In a few weeks *she was able to get him out of bed. He started to walk around the room and was able to bathe himself for the first time in months. Now Tom has a new outlook on life and family members credit Beatrice with bringing the attitude change that has* made Tom more independent and less irritable.

Customers or Stakeholders: *Customers or Stakeholders* are those individuals and groups your organization depends upon, and therefore must satisfy, to fulfill their mission. *Primary customers* are the people who receive your services. *Supporting customers* include staff, participants, host sites, community residents, board members and funders.

"Programming for Impact: Making a Difference in American Communities" guide published by the National Senior Service Corps, Corporation for National Service, Washington D.C., 1996.

Types of Evaluation

Outcomes evaluation is based on a plan. What is to be evaluated, the criteria for measurement, the methods used, and how the results will be used are predetermined parts of an evaluation plan. Most volunteer programs are evaluated both while they are going on and after they have concluded.

When you monitor a program's process throughout its implementation, are conducting a *formative evaluation*. Is the program being carried out according to plan? Are there modifications or refinements that will improve the chances that your program will achieve its desired results? When you conduct your evaluation at the same time you are implementing your program, you can gather timely data from clients and participants, provide immediate feedback to service providers and participants, and conduct simultaneous planning for future program efforts (Fisher & Cole, 1993).

Carefully designed evaluations include both:
(i) formative and
(ii) summative assessments

Who Conducts Outcomes Evaluation?

Evaluation is not the exclusive domain of skilled consultants—it is everybody's job. Evaluation is a collaborative, ongoing activity involving people working at all levels in the volunteer organization. Partners in evaluation include:

Volunteers
Paid supervisory staff
Other paid staff not directly involved in the volunteer program's day-to-day operations
Volunteer coordinator
Outside experts
Administrative decision makers
Community representatives
Board members
Consumers of your services
Students and interns

Involving a variety of people in the evaluation process has several advantages. First, it allows them to become more familiar with the volunteer program. It also fosters a sense of belonging.

In addition, involvement increases morale among paid staff and volunteers. Remember that a powerful motivation for volunteering is to achieve worthwhile and visible results.
Seeing that their efforts make a difference in another person's life is a powerful motivation to volunteer.

Lastly, a wide range of options from a variety of vantage points often leads to a more valid evaluation (Ilsley, 1981).

Evaluation is <u>everybody's</u> job

How to Gather Evaluation Data

When measuring for outcomes, evaluation data takes two forms, quantitative or qualitative.

Qualitative Data

Quantitative data describe information in numbers. Organizations regularly keep *quantitative* data to describe the efforts of paid staff and volunteers. For example,

number of hours volunteered
number of paid staff working with volunteers and to what extent
number of clients served, rate of volunteer and staff turnover
amount of training received by paid staff and volunteers
number of dollars spent or saved as an outcome of volunteer services, among other indicators

Program budgets and expenditures tell you the amount of monetary resources used for what purposes. You can also obtain quantitative evaluation information through questionnaires and interviews that tap the insights and opinions of individuals served by the programmer who are in a position of influence (Fisher & Cole, 1993).

Some aspects of voluntary impact cannot easily be quantified. This is referred to as **qualitative** data. These include the more intangible benefits of increased staff moral, improved community relations, increased interest in programs and increased loyalty to the organization or cause. Program outcomes of increased client satisfaction, improved well-being of clients and increased community support are examples of other intangible benefits that can be measured qualitatively.

Qualitative data are contained in narrative accounts, interviews, observations and organizational reports. This information is then grouped according to subject matter and used to describe those program outcomes that are not easily quantifiable. A good evaluation uses both quantitative and *qualitative* measures to present a more complete picture of the volunteer program outcome (Fisher & Cole, 1993).

How You Get It

You can gather evaluation information through both formal and informal means. **Formal** evaluation methods include surveys, interviews, focus groups and audits of budget accounting systems. **Informal** evaluation methods involve paid staff members and volunteers talking with each other on a regular basis and discussing how things are going. Periodic contact with clients to inquire how well the service is being received and if anything could be done differently is crucial to the evaluation process. Again, both formal and informal evaluation methods provide a more holistic picture of the volunteer program.

Where You Get It

When gathering evaluation information, you have two sources of data typically available to you.

Primary data are "firsthand" information. This type of information is generated for the specific purpose of evaluation. Perhaps you might conduct a volunteer or client satisfaction survey as the best way to obtain "firsthand" evaluation data on customer satisfaction.

Secondary data sources are those reports and records that have been generated as part of regular organizational record keeping, such as budget reports or committee meeting minutes. *Secondary data* also are produced by outside sources, such as foundation funding records or annual reports of the parent agency in which the volunteer program resides. Using several sources of data will give you a more complete evaluation.

Effective Techniques to Use

When you plan your evaluation, there are a number of applicable evaluation techniques to use. Your selection of techniques or methods depends upon the type of data you need to generate and the overall design of your plan. Some evaluation techniques to consider:

Surveys – mail or telephone contact with all or a sample of volunteers or recipients of your volunteer services.

Before and after designs using questionnaires or interviews to solicit information from volunteers or organizations before and after program participation.

Data reporting – reviewing, summarizing, and/or comparing information such as numbers of volunteers, hours, money (spent or saved), number served.

Case study – describing the experience of individual or small groups of volunteers, using a combination of records, interviews and/or observations.

Consultations – using outside observers to describe the program delivery and impact, drawing on key participants' reactions or case studies.

Content or process analysis presentation and review of program content or the step-by-step flow of activities to describe program efforts.

(*Volunteerism Corporate Style, 1987)*

Challenges for Volunteer Program Managers

You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink!

This familiar adage illustrates the challenge of committing to results or outcomes.

The desired outcome, in this case, is that the horse drinks the water. The longer-term outcomes are that the horse stay healthy and work effectively. But, because we can't make the horse drink the water, we focus on the things we can control-leading the horse to water, making sure the tank is full of water, monitoring the quality of the water and keeping the horse within drinking distance of the water. In short, we focus on the processes of water delivery rather than the outcome of water drunk by the horse.

The collaborative process for identifying outcomes is aimed at dealing openly and honestly with difficulties and working together at all levels in the organization to design a workable and useful system.

Like any approach, it requires goodwill and effort to make it work.

We can control the processes. We can't control the outcomes. As a result, regulations get written specifying exactly how to lead a horse to water. Funding is based on the number of horses led to water. Preferences are given to individuals and programs that meet the qualifications for leading horses to water. Quality awards are given for improving the path to the water—and keeping the horse happy along the way. Whether the horse drinks the water sometimes gets lost in all the flurry of getting the horse to the water. Results or outcomes-oriented management will work to change that (MN Department of Human Services, 1996).

This process is not without risks and challenges. Some important outcomes may be difficult and expensive to measure. Identifying the wrong outcomes or measuring the wrong things can do real hard to clients and programs.

Given the history of bureaucratic organizations, this could all become just one more paperwork exercise **unless processes are established and commitments engendered to actually use results to improve or enhance volunteer programs.**

Nor will measuring inputs, activities, and numbers of people served disappear. There are equity concerns that require maintaining attention to certain aspects of service delivery. So gathering outcomes data activities could become just one more burden in an already overburdened system.

In short, there are pitfalls that can undermine the potential benefits of this shift in thinking. Like any approach, it requires goodwill and effort to make it work. The collaborative process for identifying outcomes is aimed at leading openly and honestly with difficulties and working together at all levels in the organization to design a workable and useful system.

A results orientation is not a panacea. It won't make an ineffective program suddenly effective. What it will do, however, is clarify the nature and degree of the ineffectiveness so that improvements can be made. The long-term result will be quality programs attaining identifiable outcomes, along with greater understanding of, more support for, and better decisions about, what we do well, and how to improve what we can do better (Pritchard, 1994).

Fostering results-oriented thinking requires involvement key to overcoming and, perhaps, change in organizational leadership. Monitoring outcomes and evaluation procedures is not simply a clerical function, delegated to a low level in the organization. Part of the shift to results orientation involves moving from just administrating programs to leading programs. To manage a human service program means to produce results. Those who are good at coping with bureaucratic paperwork may not be suited for the task of producing results. This means we need to recruit and train volunteer program administrator's who know how to create systems, build coalitions, motivate volunteers, and monitor performance for effectiveness.

Typically, the primary customer of your program is the service recipient, not the volunteer

Some volunteer programs, especially those that recruit and place volunteers who may also be part of a group that often receives services, such as seniors and people with mental illness, frequently want to know if it is appropriate to measure the impact on the volunteer rather than the service recipients. If the purpose of the program is to provide a positive "work" experience for the volunteer, you want to determine if that is, in fact, what occurred. Typically, however, the primary customer of your program is the service recipient, and you should be able to determine if recipients are positively affected through the volunteer's efforts.

The reform movement is calling on outcomes-oriented leadership to "reinvent" government. We can apply this concept to organizations in the private sector as well. Throughout American society, organizations are being called into question, and accountability of effective use of funding is being demanded from everyone working in the field of human services.

How and Where Do You Fit In?

The shift to a results or outcomes orientation can pose obstacles. One key to overcoming problems is to establish an outcomes development process that involves key people working through the difficulties together. This engenders a shared commitment to actually use results and make the approach pay off.

Outcome-based evaluation and measuring for impact can be a special challenge for volunteer program manager's coordinators because of the nature of voluntary action. The relationship volunteers have to an organization and its services often puts them "outside the loop" when it comes to program planning for outcomes. The way volunteers are integrated into your organization or agency is crucial to your evaluation efforts.

As you set program goals, ask yourself how your organization views volunteers. What is their role in your organization; where do they fit in? Are they considered integral to the organization or a convenient "add on" to services provided?

"It is essential that the Volunteer Center-a conduit through which volunteers can be involved in meeting community needs-be able to demonstrate that we do serve that vital purpose to the best of our ability and resources."

Jackie Sinykin, Executive Director, The Volunteer Center, St. Paul, Minnesota

In some organizations, the volunteer program may not be directly connected to the services provided. For example, Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs (RSVP) are expected to know the impact their referred volunteers have on clients who are placed in various agencies in the community. How do you measure outcomes when volunteers are working through other human service providers who have different management systems and approach evaluation from potentially very different perspectives? In these cases, identification of outcomes may vary by organization, and different standards or criteria may be placed on the achievement of program outcomes. How then, do RSVP administrators evaluate outcomes and report their findings to their constituencies?

In this scenario, one possibly might be for the RSVP program to take the role of consultant, helping agencies incorporate outcome measures into their volunteer program. Volunteer Centers find themselves in similar situations.

When assessing volunteer involvement, there are several different formulas you can use. To provide more uniform data that is better suited for comparison, find the best methods for your situation and use it in your evaluation efforts.

Do agency heads and funders who have direct impact on your volunteer program recognize the unique role of volunteers in your agency? If evaluators can successfully show the added contributions of volunteers to program efforts, by the assignment of monetary value to their services, they may dispel the all to commonly held notion that volunteers provide little more than free unskilled labor (Fisher & Cole, 1994). To provide this data, program staff members need to keep necessary records within the organization to document volunteer contribution of time and money.

> *If evaluators can successfully show the added contributions of volunteers to program efforts, by the assignment of a monetary value to their services, then we may dispel the all too commonly held notion that volunteers provide little more than free unskilled labor*
>
> ***(Fisher & Cole, 1994)***

While it may sound a bit overwhelming there are many good reasons to begin to measure outcomes of volunteer involvement in your organization:

Your programs will be more “customer-focused.”

You will have more information with which to change, expand and or enhance your volunteer involvement.

You will have success stories to share with management, volunteers and the community.

Your work and volunteers’ efforts will be more effective.

Remember, you do not have to measure outcomes for every single role volunteers fill in your organization. Start with one area in which volunteers have the potential for direct impact and build from there.

How to Begin the Outcomes Evaluation Process

The outcomes evaluation plan helps identify both strengths and limitations.

A well-planned volunteer program leads to a well-developed outcomes evaluation plan. In the process, you will clearly express what you want to accomplish, why you want to accomplish it, what benefits will result and how you will measure and report your results. The outcomes evaluation plan helps identify both strengths and limitations. The St. Paul Foundation recommends that grant seekers develop an evaluation planning process to review their purpose, intended outcomes, and the activities to achieve those outcomes, and then select the appropriate tools and a logical process to collect the information needed.

Key questions to ask

Before you begin, ask yourself

What is the purpose of the evaluation?

What will you do with the information?

Then follow these steps:

Determine the target.

Determine the outcome.

Ask the right question.

Use the information to improve the program.

Once you have clearly identified your program's outcome objective, you need some mechanism of assessing if your program is accomplishing what it is intended to accomplish. An outcome measure can do this.

However, **if you have not yet clearly stated your outcome objective, it is not possible to measure it** (The United Way of Greater Milwaukee, 1994).

In the chart on page 16, the firm of Williams, Webb & Phillips (1993) provides a very helpful example of the differences between the older method of describing programs in terms of agency activities, and the newer, outcomes approach, which defines a program in terms of the steps or milestones that need to occur for the client (primary customer) to succeed. The program seeks funds to provide job training workshops and placement for persons currently unemployed.

Process Approach vs. Outcomes

Process Approach (Describes Agency Activity)

Objective: to serve 2,000 unemployed people

1. Develops a list of potential participants and mail program announcements to everyone on the list.
2. Holds information meeting for those interested and identify participants.
3. Prepare all workshop content.
4. Define potential job placement site.
5. Conduct all courses.
6. Place all workshop graduates in a job training position.
7. Provide follow-up support to people while on their jobs.

Outcomes Approach
(Describe participant interaction with programs on the way to successful results.)

Result: 50 unemployed people will get and hold a job for six months.

	Number Needed
1. Learn of program	2,000
2. Decide to enroll	400
3. Attend first session	300
4. Retain information/skills from first program	200
5. Attend all remaining sessions	100
6. Retain information/sills from al sessions	100
7. Start at job site	80
8. Perform satisfactorily on job	60
9. Stay at job for at least six months	50

Note that the outcomes approach progresses from the number of people served to the number of people who meet the outcome. This will be an adjustment for proposal writers and also for staff and volunteers who review programs. But, if it were your money, would you rather invest in supporting a program that mails out 2,000 program announcements or one that secures 50 jobs for at least six months?

Examples

To further illustrate the measurement of outcomes, here are three examples of outcome objectives, outcome measure and performance standards developed by the United Way of Greater Milwaukee:

Using multiple ways to measure outcomes will increase the validity of your measurement results.

CLIENT FOCUS

Outcome Objective: Youth who remain in the mentoring program for three months will have a positive, trusting relationship with an adult.

Outcome Measure: Assessment of the relationship at three, six, and twelve months through a questionnaire administered by the caseworker to the youth, parent and mentor.

Performance Standard: 80 percent of youth, 70 percent of mentors and 75 percent of parents will express satisfaction and say they benefited from the mentoring relationship.

VOLUNTEER FOCUS

Outcome Objective: Volunteer phone counselors will be well-trained and feel prepared to provide direction when answering calls on the hotline.

Outcome Measure: Telephone counselors' assessment of training six months after participating in the program.

Performance Standard: 70 percent of volunteers who have answered calls for at least six months will report being satisfied with the training and feeling well-prepared for the calls they take.

PROGRAM FOCUS

Outcome Objective: Programs that request volunteer support will receive qualified volunteers who are able to provide appropriate services to people with disabilities.

Outcome Measure: Program directors follow-up survey.

Performance Standard: 80 percent of the programs requesting support will report satisfaction with the quality of the volunteer and the provision of service.

Outcomes evaluation data requirements

No matter what source of type of measure you use the data for, your assessment must be **reliable, valid, and credible.** The United Way of Greater Milwaukee (2994) discusses basic data requirements, defines terms and provides examples of what measurements are reliable, valid, and credible in impact evaluation.

Reliable means that the results of using a measurement tool are consistent and relatively free of error.

Suppose your program is a camp for emotionally disturbed children and counselor observations are used to measure behavioral outcomes such as camper cooperation. If one counselor rates Susie as "2" on cooperation and another rates her a "5" the measurement results are unreliable because they are not consistent.

There is a better chance of success if there is a clear target for performance standards.

However, the reliability of the instrument can be improved. Basic ways to increase reliability are to:

- **standardize the conditions,**
- **structure the process of measurement, and**
- **add more observation or instances of measurement.**

For example, the judgments of the two counselors could be adjusted or standardized. Counselors could receive instruction and be given time to practice observing the same behaviors in the same way so that their ratings would converge. Or, ratings could be obtained from five or six staff members and all ratings could be averaged. The average measurement result would be much more reliable than any single result.

Valid indicates that particular data do measure what they purport to measure.

For example, the camp counselors may agree that Wilma is a "3" on cooperation ("cooperates about half the time"), when in reality, she cooperates most of the time (a rating of "5").

The results are reliable (consistent), but they are not valid. (Counselor judgment is not a good way to measure cooperation.)

However, there are ways to improve validity. One is to use standardized professionally developed measurement instruments. The other is to use a variety of ways to measure the same outcome. For example, the camp program could use a professionally developed observer form (one that more clearly identifies what the scale points refer to), or train the counselors to observe and record behavior more accurately. Or the camp could administer a test of cooperativeness to the children to go along with the counselor observations. Using multiple ways to measure outcomes will increase the validity of your measurement results.

Credible means that people (such as program staff and funding agencies) have confidence in your measures and believe your results to be accurate.

Reliability and validity enhance measurement credibility. The more credible your measure, the more likely people are to use your results in program management decisions, program marketing decisions and in program funding decisions.

When projecting performance standards, one consequential factor is the expected degree of difficulty in enabling or supporting a person to make a change.

But the information also has to relate to your program objective. If your objective is to increase the social integration of older adults and you measure the percentage of clients over 65 still living in their own homes, you may have valid and reliable data, but you don't have a credible measure of program success. This provides another incentive to keep in close touch with programs similar to you r own and to share resources such as reliable measurement instruments of the same or similar outcomes. Similarly if your agency is affiliated with a regional or national organization, check to see if it publishes standardized instruments for measuring outcomes.

Another way to gain credibility is to justify your performance standard.

Setting a clear performance standard

Once you have established your measure, it is important to set a performance standard. The idea behind a performance standard is simple. There is a better chance of success if there is a clear target.

A common reaction from people in social and human services is that theirs is a "soft" area in which target specificity simply is not possible. But it is possible as well as desirable to specify performance standards for virtually all programs funded by United Way. The following example is also adopted from *Outcomes Funding** (pp.116-117) and illustrates how one program set its performance standard.

> Agency X has requested a grant of $50,000 to help deal with the problem of tee pregnancy in the inner city. In its previous proposal, the agency described how many workshops it would hold for at-risk young women, and stressed the ways it would build self-esteem as a preventive force. Having switched to outcomes, United Way responded that this was insufficient, since the proposal described the process and not outcomes or results.
>
> To respond, Agency X narrowed its focus to two junior high schools and indicated it would work with 20 at-risk young women from each school. Staff members learned that, for young women with the particular characteristics of their clients, the pregnancy rate over the last three years had been 40 perfect. They asked three people, including the guidance counselor, to independently indicate their assessment of how many of the specific women with whom they would work were likely to get pregnant within the next 18 months.
>
> In each case, the estimate was close to the 40 percent statistical profile. Agency X then indicted that it was staff's assumption that, in each school, about eight of the 20 young women who they planned to include would get pregnant without their program. The agency indicated its conviction that, as a result of its project, no more than four of these women would become pregnant.

It is important to be realistic in setting performance standards.

The most important part of this example is that a baseline of present behavior is an important place to start. It lets the program determine a reasonable level of performance in the contexts of both specific participants and probably results. At the same time, it assured United Way that the project results are actually different than what would happen without the program. (There have been programs that boast of achievements that are actually no better than what would have happened without the project.)

Note that the method for establishing a baseline does not have to be expensive or complex. While not precise, this method used two different sources of information (past statistics and personal forecasts) and indicates the performance standard as an improvement on that baseline.

When projecting performance standards, one consequential factor is the expected degree of difficulty in enabling or supporting a person to make a change.

Some people are at a "readiness threshold" and a small nudge can make change happen. Others may require extensive and expensive support just to get to the starting line.

It is important to be realistic in setting performance standards. The target should be a real stretch, but it should not be unrealistic. Be prepared to explain why the level you chose is acceptable. If the national rate of teen pregnancy for at-risk youth is 40 percent and your program claims to reduce it to 2 percent, your results may not be believable. If you claim a success rate of 95 percent in reduced alcohol abuse and other programs in the community have a 25 percent success rate, your program results may be suspect. Performance standards that are realistic improve your program's ability to achieve your outcome objectives, and a reviewer's ability to believe your results.

**Examples adapted from Outcomes Funding by Harold S. Williams, Arthur Y. Webb and William J. Phillips, The Rensselaerville Institution, Second Edition 1993, pp. 137-139.*

> *"Good volunteer program management is about using the full potential of your volunteers and being able to communicate the end result of that process."*
>
> ***Bonnie Schultz, Program Manager,***
> ***Olmsted County, Justice and Social System Volunteer Program,***
> ***Rochester, Minnesota***

Communicating Your Outcomes Evaluation Information

You know your evaluation objectives. You've gathered the relevant information. Now what do you do with it?

When you analyze outcomes data to evaluate your volunteer programs, what you are really doing is assigning value and comparing results to program costs. You are answering the question, how effectively have volunteers served their clients?

Measures that focus on objective information and behavior will likely be more valid and more reliable than those that are undefined or vague. Believability is enhanced when staff members, paid and unpaid, contribute to the development of the evaluation design, measures, and outcomes.

> *Your ultimate goal is to go one step further and describe what impact those results have on your clients and the community.*

You can increase the accuracy and believability of evaluation findings even further by using several measures to confirm and verify one another. For example, a program evaluation might assess outcomes with a client satisfaction survey that probes behavioral change, interviews with clients, and objective data that describe client behavior (Fisher & Cole, 1993). Patton (1991) asserts that programs that make a real difference yield multiple indicators of outcome—both quantitative and qualitative.

Writing Outcomes Statements

Outcomes statements describe the results of the effort that someone plans to make or efforts that someone has already made. Your ultimate goal is to go one step further and describe what impact those results have on your clients and the community.

Effective impact statements include three elements: How something was accomplished (Input); What was accomplished (Outcomes); and So what? (Impact). In order words, what is or will be the impact and the significance of the accomplishments in the community? Or, more simple, “So what?” or “What difference will it make?

Impact statements are formed when we finish the following sentences:

> *“If the volunteers hadn’t been there…”*
> *“If our project activities had not been funded…”*
> *“Because of the volunteer (tutors) who were recruited…(what will happen?”*
> *“Because of the volunteer (mentors)… (what happened? What will change?)”*

Impact is the most effective, yet often the most elusive element.

For example, the statement *“Ten volunteers will contribute 2,000 hours of service in the area of literacy in the coming year”* describes the amount of time that will be spent, where it will be spent, and how many volunteers will participate. But it doesn’t say what difference the program will make.

Better: *“Literacy tutoring by 10 volunteers will result in 10 percent of students passing their GED tests by the end of one year.”*

This tells us what difference the tutoring will make, but there are many ways to answer that question that will be equally as important or useful.

Best: the impact statement. *“Ten RSVP literacy tutors helped 19 students pass GED exams since the program began six months ago; this represents 8 percent of the students who started the program. One student already has received a promotion, which he says is directly related to his participation in the reading clinic.”*

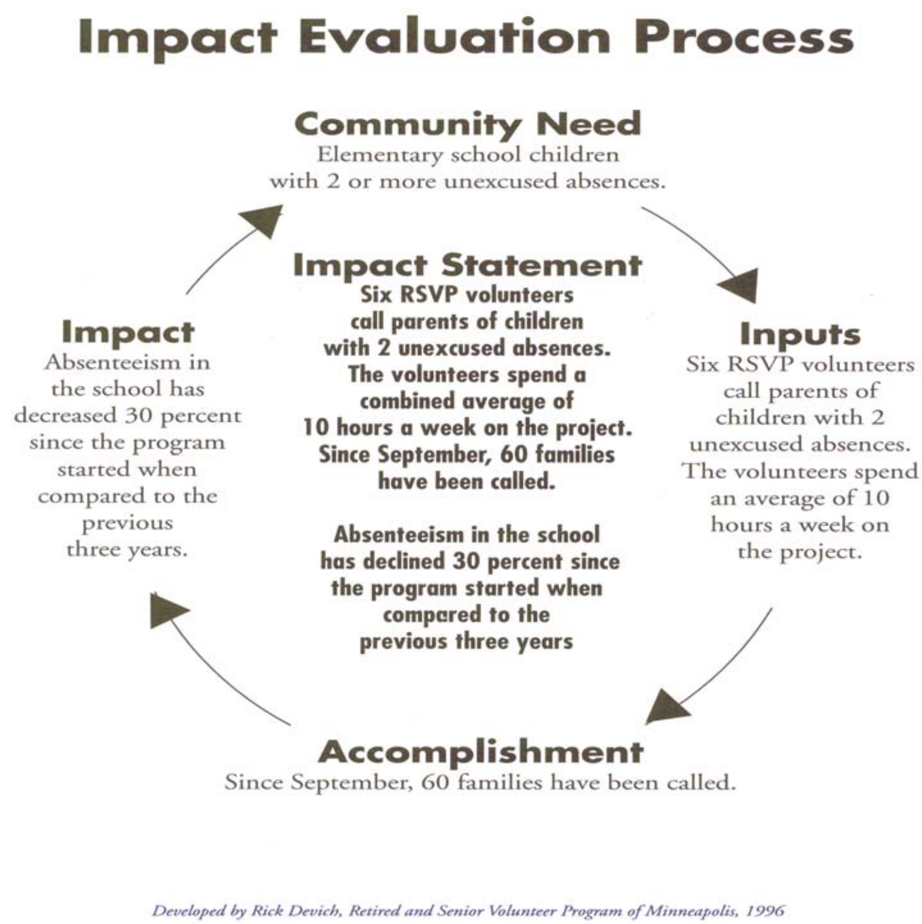
This really tells us what happened as a result of the volunteer activities. In the first statement, those volunteers might have contributed hours and hours of service, but until we know what difference that service made, we cannot answer “so what?”

Choose your grounds

Of the three elements of impact evaluation—input, accomplishments and impact—impact is the most effective, yet often the most elusive, element. Sometimes, we have to settle for describing the input and the accomplishment. Sometimes the impact is not as self-evident as we would like. In all cases, the following examples demonstrate that there are many different ways to make a strong case.

Emphasize the impact on the recipient/community as opposed to the service provider

Eighteen retired volunteers teach more than 30 pregnant teenage mothers how to perform basic child care tasks and counsel them on drug abuse, spousal abuse, health care and other topics. Follow-up studies indicated that parents who go through the program are much less likely to have low-birth-weight or stillborn babies than their peers.



"Programming for Impact: Making a Difference in American Communities" guide published by the National Senior Service Corps, Corporation for National Service, Washington, D.C., 1996.

If it weren't for the volunteers…

If it weren't for volunteer Bernie Goodwin, nearly 100 families and children in crisis situations would end their day hungry.

Dollar value to provide service if institution had the funds to pay providers (Cost/Benefit)

More than 30 frail older adults benefit from an expansion of a senior companion service in the area. These volunteer services, which are provided at no cost to the client and only $4 an hour to the taxpayer, are much less expensive than the average of $9 an hour the client would have to pay a professional in-home care giver to provide the same services.

Dollar value of service

Twenty volunteers serve with an urban area on a "Well Identification Project." The city received more than 250 "unknown status" well records from the county water district. With only a little information the volunteers located 49 wells, 17 possible wells that were not on record. The volunteers donated more than 245 hours and covered more than 650 square miles. An official from the city's public utilities department estimates the volunteers have saved the community at least $20,000, and that the city could not have afforded the project without the volunteers.

Compare results with projected results

More than 600 new Neighborhood Watch areas would not have been started in a local community, nor 700 block captains trained, had it not been for the senior volunteer corps in Bismarck, N.D. Forty volunteers coordinated the effort. The senior volunteers did in one summer what police estimate would have taken eight years.

Compare actual results with results that one would expect based on past history

A group of volunteers from a suburban community started five new citizen patrol units in 1995 involving 30 volunteers. The program was developed in conjunction with the local police department. The police department credits the program with a 30 percent drop in some areas.

Presenting evaluation findings

Now that the impact study is complete, what should you do with evaluation results? Ivan Scheier (1971) recommends we not file the report away in a drawer, but disseminate, discuss, and *do something.* We must act upon results.

We must act upon results.

It is very important to involve representatives of all groups working within the evaluation process in discussions of the results and in the consequent replanning process that may follow. Potential groups involved in the evaluation process are consumers or clients, volunteers, paid staff, administrators, board members, funders, and the community at large.

To encourage various groups to use your evaluation findings as they make program decisions, it is wise to communicate evaluation results in several formats.

Ideally, a report (written or verbal) would be designed to address the concerns and questions of each stakeholder in the volunteer program. Look at the needs of your various audiences and decide how they can best understand and use your impact data. Then choose an appropriate format.

Fisher and Cole (1993) suggest the evaluation findings should be written in a report with an **executive summary**, which can be used as a single page report when the need arises. Not all groups or individuals are interested in reading the entire evaluation report. Perhaps a "bullet" format would suffice. However, some constituencies such as a funding source or Board of Directors would require the entire evaluation report.

A typical evaluation report includes:

- *A statement of the purpose and objectives of the evaluation. The program and client outcomes measured (along with standards of measurement)*
- *A discussion of the evaluation design, data-gathering process and the data analysis*
- *Information on how, by whom, and when particular activities in the evaluation plan were performed.*
- *Results of all the measures employed and of the data analysis.*

When the data are quantitative, findings are presented in tables and figures combined with an explanatory narrative. When the data are qualitative, findings are presented in a narrative that includes quotations and descriptions of observations as illustrations (Fisher & Cole, 1993).

Following the presentation of the evaluation goals, design, measurements and findings, the report continues with:

- *An interpretation of the findings*
- *Conclusions drawn on the basis of the data presented*
- *Recommendations*

The **conclusion section** summarizes the findings as they relate to the purpose and objectives of the evaluation, in this case, with regards to outcomes or impact on clientele. Lastly, a **series of recommendations** is provided for revising the program, if necessary, to be more effective in developing future program initiatives (Fisher & Cole, 1993).

Sharing your success!

Sue Vineyard (1988) encourages us to celebrate our successes, and if a program did not work, to keep trying. "After a program has been evaluated, along with paid and non-paid staff, it's time to sketch out an overall map of achieved success along with opportunities for future growth," says Vineyard.

Vineyard advises that we announce our successes and future service outcomes in our newsletters and annual reports. We can also celebrate our successes through more informal recognition of individual, team, and corporate efforts.

Consider communicating results to larger audiences than may be your typical experience. For example, write an article for *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, or give a presentation to a professional association.

Share results with fellow volunteer organizations that seek to accomplish objectives similar to your own, with perhaps different age groups or subject matter. You can even write a news release and send it to your local or community newspaper.

A Word of Encouragement

Outcomes—and even impact—evaluation will not be intimidating if you include it in your planning and follow through on your plans. Here are some key action steps to keep in mind:

> ***Throughout your planning, stay focused on the outcome. Ask what difference the volunteer can make. Ask yourself what you want to change, or what impact you want your program to make.***
>
> ***Decide what type of data will give you what you need to know. Ask yourself how you will know if change occurs, or if volunteers have had an impact.***
>
> ***Keep it simple.***
>
> ***Celebrate and communicate your successes. If it didn't work the first time, keep trying!***

Answers to Your Questions on Outcome Evaluation

Q. This type of evaluation seems as if it would take a lot of extra staff time and expertise we probably don't have. How can we deal with that?

A. The key is making sure that gathering information about outcomes is built into your program so that it just becomes part of program delivery and improvement. How do you presently gather data and disseminate information about volunteers involved with your organization? When you establish your annual goals (i.e., target numbers of volunteers recruited and placed, number of matches made, types of activities), think about adding a few additional goals. Involve other staff members, volunteers, and current or potential clients in establishing outcome goals for the program. Then decide how you might track progress toward those outcome goals using some of the tools provided in this guidebook. You don't have to measure everything, but start small on a few key areas or goals.

Q. What if we set goals for volunteer program outcomes that aren't reached? Won't that make us look irrelevant or unsuccessful and backfire?

A. The primary reason to try establishing and measuring outcomes is that it "tests" your theories and assumptions about what volunteers can do in the lives of others needing help in some way. Knowing whether or not our assumptions are true helps us refine and improve the programs we develop to meet community needs. If also gives us a more tangible way to show others. If, over time, we still see that we aren't able to attain the outcomes desired, other factors should be considered and more major changes may be needed. Ultimately, however, it demonstrates that your organization and the volunteer program are committed to the efficient use of community resources (i.e., volunteers and budget).

Q. Volunteers are almost always use one factor in a myriad of programs, service providers and general environmental impact on clients or service recipients. How can we take credit or blame for positive or negative outcomes?

A. We all know how complex social issues and problems are today. It would be highly unlikely that anyone—whether it be a funder, organization, social agency or individual—would expect volunteers to single-handedly solve any of the tough problems being faced by individuals and families today. But if you can show that they do contribute to the solutions desired, you will be able to gain support and confidence in your program.

Appendix A-Sample Worksheets

OUTCOME WORK SHEET

Who is the recipient of the service?

What is the goal or purpose of the service?

What indicators will tell us if we have accomplished the goal?

How will we obtain information about the indicators? (Method for gathering information)

What will tell us if we have reached our goal? (Level of outcome desired; i.e. percent of clients attaining goal, etc.)

Appendix B-Sample Worksheets
Olmsted County Justice and Social System Volunteer Program (JSSVP)
Rochester, Minnesota

VOLUNTEER IMPACT APPRAISAL FORM

Complete the Need/Service column and return to JSSVP within thirty days of being assigned the case. At the beginning of a case, list each need to be addressed/service to be provided in the space below. If your case has more than three needs to be addressed, request additional forms from JSSVP. On an annual basis (based on the anniversary date of the case assignment) and/or at the end of your involvement with the case/client, complete the Impact Appraisal column. JSSVP staff will send you a new form after you have submitted a completed form if your involvement with the case/client will continue.

Circle either #1 or #2 if this form is being completed for: 1. Annual review 2. To close case

Name ________________________________ Date ______________

Volunteer ________________ Title ____________ Client ______________

Volunteer ID # (Staff Use Only) Assigned to

NEED/SERVICE	IMPACT APPRAISAL
1. Client Need : Volunteer Role:	Rate the impact you had on the client: ❑ very successful ❑ fairly successful ❑ uncertain (explain) ❑ not too successful ❑ unsuccessful
Comments on your role:	Comments on service you provided:

List the aproximate number of hours you worked with this client per month:

Jan.	Feb.	March	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.

Appendix C-Sample Worksheets
Olmsted County Justice and Social System Volunteer Program
Rochester, Minnesota

Volunteer Impact Assessment

Purpose: to measure the volunteer's assessment of his or her role in meeting the objective and to identify the volunteer's role in client outcomes.

To be completed by volunteer.

Client Name: ________________________________

Social Worker or Corrections Worker Name: ________________________

Case Objective:

Attainment Rating:
- ❑ 1 Objective attained
- ❑ 2 Progress toward objective
- ❑ 3 Objective requires revision

Comments on your role:

Case Objective:

Attainment Rating:
- ❑ 1 Objective attained
- ❑ 2 Progress toward objective
- ❑ 3 Objective requires revision

Comments on your role:

Your Name: ________________________________

Volunteer Title: ____________________ Volunteer ID#: ____________

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