

Evaluation Terms

WHAT IS AN OUTCOME?

An **outcome** is the result or change you would like to see take place over time in individuals, programs, or an organization, stemming directly from what the program or organization is designed to do or accomplish.

An **outcome area** is the area in which you would like to see this change occur—typically the aggregation of several outcomes.

HOW DO YOU MEASURE AN OUTCOME?

We measure outcomes by establishing indicators and benchmarks for each outcome/outcome area and then collecting the appropriate data to determine whether we are reaching the outcomes or intended results.

Indicator

An **indicator** is an agreed upon measurable piece of information that you collect or track to help you know whether you are reaching your outcomes or achieving your intended results. Often this piece of information is a proxy for an outcome. You can have one or more indicators for any given outcome.

Example: One indicator for engagement could be participation in an event. While engagement encompasses more than just attending an event, in this example it becomes the *proxy* measure for engagement.

Benchmark

Benchmarks give you a point of reference or comparison to know how well you are doing at achieving your intended results. Benchmarks can be internally established (e.g., an agreed upon set of goals the organization wants to reach or the prior year's data used as a comparison point) or they can be external comparisons (e.g., another organization's results or county statistics). Time intervals can also provide benchmarks.

Example: 50% of parents who complete training join their child's school site leadership team within a year.

Data Collection

Once you agree on outcomes, indicators and benchmarks, you need to determine appropriate data collection tools. Examples of tools include interviews, surveys, focus groups, tracking forms, and secondary data (e.g., data from existing county records or other studies).

OTHER

Annual objectives are short-term milestones that help guide performance toward outcomes. Objectives should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely).

Outputs are the activities of an organization or program (i.e., the things an organization does or produces while executing its strategies to achieve its intended outcomes). Some outputs can serve as indicators and are tracked to monitor changes over time (e.g., number and types of professional development sessions).