Your human service program is meant to make a positive difference in the lives of people in your community, or perhaps to improve your community as a whole. But how can you measure your success?

If your program or initiative creates something tangible it can be fairly easy. For example, for Heading Home 2010, a state plan to end long-term homelessness, achieving a goal to create 4,000 additional housing units with support services by 2010 equals success.

However, if your nonprofit’s goal is to measure changes in people, it can seem more daunting. This tip sheet outlines five steps to guide you.

**Step 1: Define the changes you expect**

Start by choosing your outcomes — changes you can reasonably expect as a result of your services. These can be short-term, intermediate, and long-term. There are a number of types of changes to consider; using the acronym ABLES is an easy way to remember them:

Affective change: feeling different about something
Behavior change
Learning change
Environment conditions: e.g. barriers reduced,
Status change

You will want to identify changes that can logically be expected to result from your activities, are within the program’s sphere of influence, and are generally accepted as valid by various stakeholders of the program. You should also phrase each outcome in terms of measuring change.

For example, a substance abuse treatment program may have a short-term outcome that users participate in treatment, an intermediate outcome that participants abstain from or reduce substance use, and a long-term outcome that users remain drug-free, and/or that there is overall reduced substance use in the community.

Changes in attitudes and knowledge typically precede changes in behavior, although not always.

**Step 2: Select your indicators**

Indicators (measures) are your “markers of success.” They are the observable characteristics or signs of change that let you know you’ve achieved your target outcome(s). They should be:

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Related to your outcome
Time specific

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short-term outcomes</th>
<th>Intermediate outcomes</th>
<th>Longer-term outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occur immediately or very soon after program delivery</td>
<td>Occur more gradually, often over weeks or months</td>
<td>More widespread or complex changes that may take years to occur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most often changes in attitudes, knowledge, or skills</td>
<td>Most often changes in participant behavior or practices</td>
<td>Often changes in status, or community-level changes in economic, social, or environmental conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 4: Identify your methods and tools

Before developing your own data collection materials, look for existing tools such as free, published questionnaires or surveys. Using materials that were developed by someone with specific expertise in test development can save you money and time, and will help ensure you get quality data. It also allows you to compare your results to similar programs. Good resources include:

- Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute Screening & Assessment Instruments Database: http://lib.adai.washington.edu/instruments/
- The Buros Institute of Mental Measurements www.unl.edu/buros/bimm/html/subburos.html

Step 5: Develop a data collection plan

Match your data collection strategies to each outcome and indicator that you want to measure. Clearly identify your data sources, the time frame for data collection and the person who is responsible for gathering the information. Carefully consider the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and the needs of your program, before making your plan.

For more evaluation tips, go to www.wilderresearch.org and click on Evaluation (under Resources and tools).
Online resources for sample surveys, focus group guidelines, and other evaluation instruments

Out-of-School Programs and Mentoring Programs

Harvard Out-of-School-Time Outcomes Database
http://www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time/ost-database-bibliography

The U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center
http://www.edmentoring.org/online_res6.html

National Mentoring Center
http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/650

Youth and Family Services Programs

Compendium of Assessment and Research Tools for Measuring Education and Youth Development Outcomes (CART).
http://cart.rmcdenver.com/index.cgi?screenid=seldomain&autoid=45416

National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth

The Child Welfare Information Gateway

Friends National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention
http://www.friendsnrc.org/outcome/toolkit/annot.htm

Community Organizing and Civic Engagement Programs

The Center for Civic Partnerships
http://www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/tools_resources/community_indicators.htm

The Community Toolbox
http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter_1003.htm

Americorps, VISTA, Senior Corps, and Service Learning Programs

Corporation for National and Community Service Resource Center
http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/learns/program-performance

Older Adult Services

Iowa Geriatric Education Center
http://www.healthcare.uiowa.edu/igec/tools/Default.asp

National Palliative Care Research Center
http://www.npcrc.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=376172

continued
Substance abuse mental health programs

The University of Washington’s Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute
http://lib.adai.washington.edu/instruments/

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America Evaluation Primer
http://www.cadca.org/resources/detail/evaluation-primer

Comorbidity and Addictions Center (CAC) Measures Collection, George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University
http://gwbweb.wustl.edu/cac/resources/measures/collections.htm

National Center for PTSD - Department of Veteran Affairs
http://www ptsd.va.gov/professional/pages/assessments/assessment.asp

Psychosocial Measures for Asian American Populations
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ssw/projects/pmap/

Misc. prevention and health promotion programs

Cancer Prevention Research Center (CPRC), University of Rhode Island
http://www.uri.edu/research/cprc/measures.htm

Center for AIDS Prevention Studies Instruments
http://www.caps.ucsf.edu/tools/surveys/

Center for HIV Identification, Prevention and Treatment Services (CHIPTS) Instrument Bank Directory
http://chipts.ucla.edu/assessment/index.asp

Interdisciplinary Measurement Tools and Resources

Columbia University EBP Online Resource Center
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/musher/Website/Website/EBP_Resources_Measurement.htm

The Buros Institute of Mental Measurements
http://www.unl.edu/buros/bimm/html/subburos.html

International Personality Item Pool (IPIP)
http://ipip.ori.org/ipip/index.htm

National Library of Medicine directory of Federal and state health surveys

FOR MORE INFORMATION
For more evaluation tips, go to www.wilderresearch.org and click on Evaluation (under Resources and tools).
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