

## Smart Measurement: Tools and tips for capturing results Tips from Wilder Research program evaluation workshop series

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:

- A**ffective change: feeling different about something
- B**ehavior change
- L**earning change
- E**nvironment conditions: e.g. barriers reduced,
- S**tatus 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:

- S**pecific
- M**easurable
- A**ttainable
- R**elated to your outcome
- T**ime specific

Short-term outcomes	Intermediate outcomes	Longer-term outcomes
Occur immediately or very soon after program delivery	Occur more gradually, often over weeks or months	More widespread or complex changes that may take years to occur
Most often changes in attitudes, knowledge, or skills	Most often changes in participant behavior or practices	Often changes in status, or community-level changes in economic, social, or environmental conditions

Looking again at our example of a substance abuse treatment program, an indicator of success in the short-term might be that participants attend at least 100 hours of treatment; an intermediate indicator of success might be that participants report reduced substance abuse 180 days post treatment; and a long-term indicator of success might be a decline in alcohol and drug-abuse arrests in the community.

Some web sites that provide good examples of indicators of success are:

- United Way Outcome Resource Measurement Network  
[www.liveunited.org/Outcomes/Resources/MPO/examples.cfm](http://www.liveunited.org/Outcomes/Resources/MPO/examples.cfm)
- Urban Institute Outcome Indicators project  
[www.urban.org/center/cnp/projects/outcomeindicators.cfm](http://www.urban.org/center/cnp/projects/outcomeindicators.cfm)
- NeighborWorks America Success Measures  
[www.nw.org/network/ps/successmeasures/smds.asp](http://www.nw.org/network/ps/successmeasures/smds.asp)

### *Step 3: Identify your data sources*

You may already be collecting data that you need to use for your evaluation, such as participation data and program records (your own or those of other agencies).

It is likely that you will also need to identify some additional sources of data for your evaluation.

These may include:

- Surveys/questionnaires
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Staff observation
- Community data

### *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:

- Columbia University EBP Online Resource Center Guide to Measurement Tools:  
[www.columbia.edu/cu/musher/Website/Website/EBP\\_Resources\\_Measurement.htm](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/musher/Website/Website/EBP_Resources_Measurement.htm)
- 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](http://www.unl.edu/buros/bimm/html/subburos.html)
- *The CART-Compendium of Assessment and Research Tools for Measuring Education and Youth Development Outcomes*  
<http://cart.rmcdenver.com/index.cgi?screenid=seldomain&autoid=45416>
- The Child Welfare Information Gateway Guide to Screening and Assessment tools  
[www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/assessment/family\\_assess/sources.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/assessment/family_assess/sources.cfm)

### *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.

**Wilder  
Research**

Information. Insight. Impact.

451 Lexington Parkway North  
Saint Paul, MN 55104  
651-280-2700

[www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org)



#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more evaluation tips, go to [www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org) and click on Evaluation (under Resources and tools).

MAY 2010

## 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](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*

<http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/publications/satools/sa-table1.htm>

*The Child Welfare Information Gateway*

[http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/assessment/family\\_assess/sources.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/assessment/family_assess/sources.cfm)

*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](http://www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/tools_resources/community_indicators.htm)

*The Community Toolbox*

[http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter\\_1003.htm](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.nationalservicerresources.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](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](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/musher/Website/Website/EBP_Resources_Measurement.htm)

*The Buross Institute of Mental Measurements*  
<http://www.unl.edu/buross/bimm/html/subbuross.html>

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

*National Library of Medicine directory of Federal and state health surveys*  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hsrinfo/datasites.html>

**Wilder  
Research**

Information. Insight. Impact.

451 Lexington Parkway North  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104  
651-280-2700

[www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org)



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more evaluation tips, go to [www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org) and click on Evaluation (under Resources and tools).

MAY 2010