



## OUTCOMES BASED EVALUATION (OBE) GLOSSARY

**Activities:** What a program does with its inputs—the services it provides—to fulfill its mission. Activities include the strategies, techniques, and types of treatment that comprise the program's service methodology. For instance, securing facilities and equipment for training are program activities, as are offering workshops and responding to questions from students learning how to use electronic information sources.

**Benchmarks:** Performance data that are used for comparative purposes. A program can use its own data as a baseline benchmark against which to compare future performance. It also can use data from another program as a benchmark. In the latter case, the other program often is chosen because it is exemplary and its data are used as a target to strive for, rather than as a baseline.

**Community Status Reports:** Provide information about key social, health, economic, or environmental conditions in a community; they can present a compelling snapshot of a community's status. Community status reports are commonly called *report cards or community indicator reports*. Two widely recognized community status report projects are Oregon Benchmarks and Minnesota Milestones.

**Data:** Specific information or facts that are collected. A data item is usually a discrete or single measure. Examples of data items might include age, date of entry into program, or reading level. Sources of data may include case records, attendance records, referrals, assessments, interviews, and the like. For instance, teacher surveys may be used as a data source to find out if teachers have become more comfortable with using online resources. Teacher records may be used as a data source to find out if students are meeting state standards in a specific subject.

**Evaluation:** A method or methods of measuring the level of success of a project based on the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative information. Evaluations should answer the questions “so what?” or “what difference did the project make?” Evaluation is a systematic inquiry to inform decision-making, judgments and learning. Systematic implies that the evaluation is a thoughtful process of asking critical questions, collecting appropriate information, and then analyzing and interpreting the information for a specific use and purpose. *The two most commonly used types of evaluation are formative evaluation and summative evaluation.* A *formative evaluation (also known as ‘process evaluation’)* is designed and used to improve a project – it is an assessment of ongoing project activities, begins at the project's start and continues for the life of the project. A *summative evaluation (also known as outcome evaluation, impact evaluation, and product evaluation)* is designed to present conclusions about the merit or worth of a project and recommendations about whether it should be retained, altered, or eliminated. A *participatory or collaborative evaluation (also known as stakeholder evaluation)* is an evaluation organized as a team project in which the evaluator and

representatives of one or more stakeholder groups work collaboratively together in developing the evaluation plan, conducting the evaluation, or disseminating and using the results.

**Focus Group:** A small panel of persons (7-10) selected for their knowledge or perspective on a topic of interest that is convened to discuss the topic with the assistance of a facilitator. The discussion is usually recorded and used to identify important themes or to construct descriptive summaries of views and experiences on the focal topic.

**Goal / Target:** A general statement that describes the project's broad overall intent.

**Impact:** The ultimate social, economic, and/or environmental effects or consequences of the activity. Impacts tend to be more comprehensive and longer-term achievements. They may be positive, negative and/or neutral. For example, in a program designed to assist elementary students in meeting state reading standards, an impact might be an increase in third grade reading scores.

**Indicator:** An indicator is an expression of what is/will be measured or described; evidence which signals achievements, what you wish to measure. An indicator answers the question, "how will I know it?" Indicators are observable and measurable behaviors or conditions applied to the target audience. The-#- and-%-of individuals who demonstrate some phenomenon that represents the condition you are trying to achieve as a result of your program. For instance, if your outcome is that children enjoy reading, one indicator might be the-#-and-%-of children who read for fun at least 4 times a week. The number and percent of program participants who demonstrate these behaviors then is an indicator of how well the program is doing with respect to the outcome.

**Influencers:** More often called stakeholders, these are the individuals, agencies, funding sources, competitors, community groups, and professional affiliations that influence the type and nature of services you offer, as well as who is served, the desired outcomes, and how the results of your services are communicated to others. Examples include: target audience, administration, board, and funders (like Washington State Library).

**Inputs:** Inputs include resources dedicated to or consumed by the program. Examples are money, staff and staff time, volunteers and volunteer time, facilities, equipment, and supplies. For instance, inputs for a parent education class include the hours of staff time spent designing and delivering the program. Inputs also include constraints on the program, such as laws, regulations, and requirements for receipt of funding. Resources include investments made by an organization, the community, governmental unit, staff, volunteers, collaborative members, and/or participants.

**Logic Model:** A logic model is a systematic and visual way to present and share an understanding of the relationships among the resources available to operate a project, the activities planned, and the anticipated changes or results. A logic model can help you correlate your planned work (resources, inputs, and activities) with your intended results (outcomes and impact). A logic model describes the links between planning goals, objectives, and key audiences and helps you assess whether what you are doing is what you had planned to do in order to achieve your desired results.

**Methods:** Statements describing how project objectives will be accomplished.

**Objectives:** Specific statements identifying what will be achieved during the life of the project. Each objective must be directly related to the project goal and will, ideally, be expressed in measurable terms. For example, an objective of a goal to increase collaboration between public library and school staff could be to host monthly meetings of both groups for 9 months.

**Outcome evaluation:** The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) defines outcomes as benefits to people: specifically, achievements or changes in skill, knowledge, attitude, behavior, condition, or life status for program participants (“teachers will know how public libraries contribute to their learning activities,” “participant literacy will improve”). Any project intended to create these kinds of benefits has outcome goals/targets. **Outcomes based evaluation,** “OBE,” is the measurement of results. It identifies observations that can credibly demonstrate change or desirable conditions (“increased quality of work in the annual science fair,” “interest in family history,” “ability to use information effectively”). It systematically collects information about these indicators, and uses that information to show the extent to which a program achieved its goals. Outcome measurement differs in some ways from traditional methods of evaluating and reporting the many activities of museums and libraries, but IMLS believes grantees will find that it helps communicate the value and quality of their work to many audiences beyond IMLS.

**Outcome goals/targets:** Numerical objectives for a program's level of achievement on its outcomes. After a program has had experience with measuring outcomes, it can use its findings to set targets for the number and percent of participants expected to achieve desired outcomes in the next reporting period. It also can set targets for the amount of change it expects participants to experience.

**Outcomes:** **Outcomes** are benefits or changes for individuals or populations during or after participating in program activities. They are influenced by a program's outputs. Outcomes may relate to behavior, skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, condition, or other attributes. They are what participants know, think, or can do; or how they behave; or what their condition is, that is different following the program. For example, in a program to tutor students in math and science, outputs--what the service produces--include the number of live tutoring sessions and the number of students helped. The desired outcomes--the changes sought in participants' behavior or status--can include their growing interest in math and science, improved quality of homework completed, and improved test scores. Outcomes-benefits to the target population-might include increased feelings of accomplishment and pride. An indicator of how well this program is succeeding on this outcome could be the number and percent of participants who list a science or math career as of potential interest to them at the end of the program than they did at the beginning of the program. A target might be that 40 percent of participants score at least a C on math or science tests after completing the tutoring program. Examples of outcomes can include greater knowledge of information resources, improved reading skills, and more effective responses to requests for information from colleagues. For a particular program, there can also be various levels of outcomes, with initial outcomes leading to longer-term ones. For example, a youth in a tutoring program who receives one-to-one encouragement to improve academic

performance may attend school more regularly, which can lead to getting better grades, which can lead to graduating. Outcomes answer the question “so what?” – What difference has the program activity made in people’s lives? Whose lives? Outcomes may be intended or unintended; positive or negative. Outcomes fall along a continuum from immediate to intermediate to final outcomes, often synonymous with impact.

**Outputs:** Outputs are the direct products of program activities and usually are measured in terms of the volume of work accomplished—for example, the numbers of classes taught, counseling sessions conducted, educational materials distributed, and participants served. Another term for "outputs" is "units of service." A program's outputs should produce desired outcomes for the program's participants. Outputs have little inherent value in themselves. They are important because they are intended to lead to a desired benefit for participants or target populations. If given enough resources, managers can control output levels. In a parent education class, for example, the number of classes held and the number of parents served are outputs.

**Qualitative data:** Qualitative data is gathered through open-ended answers to interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and narrative observations of events, and can be categorized to answer the evaluation questions. It is based on values, not numerical data. For example, comments from seniors about a new collection of college and career resources might be categorized as one of the following: “helpful with career planning,” “entertaining reading,” or “does not have what was wanted.” This information is primarily descriptive and interpretative, and may or may not lend itself to quantitative treatment. For example, a public library staff member’s impression about the usefulness of a school-hosted event is qualitative data.

**Quantitative Data:** In general, quantitative data are used to measure the extent of something that is reported numerically, for example the number or percentage of people who gave each answer on a questionnaire; or the number of new library cards issued, the increase in interlibrary loan requests processed, or the number of database searches conducted. Common techniques for gathering quantitative data are questionnaires, tests, user counts, and existing databases. For example, improvement in a child’s reading level as measured by a reading test.

**Stakeholders:** Individuals, groups, or organizations having a significant interest in how well as program functions, for instance those with decision-making authority over it, funders and sponsors, administrators and personnel, and clients or intended beneficiaries. Stakeholders are also called influencers.