

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

BASELINE

An organization's level of results at the beginning of an evaluation or program is considered to be its baseline.

***Example:** The baseline data indicated that the air quality was below the established government guidelines.*

BENCHMARK

An organization's desired level of results for a particular performance measure, or standard of excellence, is its benchmark. Another way of defining the term is to say that benchmarks are 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 can also 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.

***Example:** The new convention center established a new benchmark for state-of-the-art green buildings.*

CONSTRAINTS TO SUCCESS

Constraints to success are factors that limit the effectiveness of a project or an initiative. Constraints or barriers can include attitudes, lack of resources, regulations and geographic distance, among other factors. Program constraints can consist of variables under the programs or program participants' control, for example, clarity of training materials. Non-program constraints can be those barriers of which the program and/or the program's participants have very little or no control.

***Example:** The decline in the local economy served as a constraining factor in our capacity to increase individual giving.*

DATA SOURCES

Primary data are data collected directly from intake, service, administrative and financial forms, including surveys, focus groups and program data. Individual questionnaires administered to community program participants are a form of primary data collection. Secondary data are data collected by a third party and have often been published previously, such as data collected by public agencies.

***Example:** The U.S. Census, which is administered every ten years, is a popular source of secondary data.*

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE DATA

Qualitative data consist of information that is descriptive and narrative in nature. Quantitative data consist of information that is numerical and based on statistical analysis. Often several data collection methods may be used to measure various types of outcomes.

***Example of Qualitative Data:** The students were pleased to see an increase in their school's performance scores and gave each other "high fives" in the halls.*

***Example of Quantitative Data:** Washington school's 4th grade PSSA scores increased by 10%.*

DIVERSITY

Diversity refers to individual and group differences based on age, economic factors, ethnicity, geography, gender, physical ability, race, religion, and sexual orientation.

***Example:** The constituency for this particular organization could be said to be diverse representation of the community in terms of age, but was less diverse racially.*

EVALUATION

The systematic investigation of the merit or effectiveness of a program or organization.

***Example:** The evaluation determined the program to be an effective remedy to the problem.*

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Measures of success are specific, observable characteristics, accomplishments or changes that tell us whether an outcome has been achieved. They must be measurable.

***Example:** A measure of the success of the after-school program was the reduction in participants' school suspensions. Schools reported that the rate of suspensions for participants decreased by 50 percent.*

GOALS

Measurable goals are concise, clearly defined, discrete actions that are pre-established at the outset of a program or activity as desired results. They are critical major achievements that you hope to obtain. The goals are measured by a set of identifiable data that is collected over time.

***Example:** A goal for the early literacy program was to improve the reading ability of children in third grade.*

STRATEGIES

A strategy is a plan of action that is systematically undertaken to arrive at a desired outcome. A strategy provides a road map of how to get to a measurable result.

***Example:** The teachers felt that the high school mentors program was an effective strategy to introduce students to the world of work.*