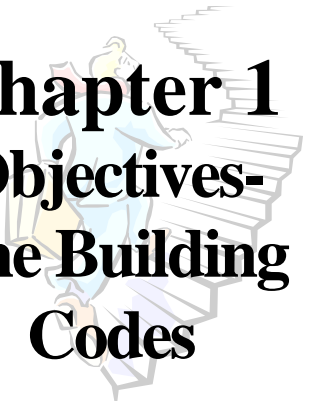


**B**efore beginning an evaluation, the “building codes” need to be determined. Objectives act as “building codes” for your evaluation — setting guidelines for what needs to be evaluated and determining the standard of success. Like building codes, AmeriCorps’ objectives are measurable and contain clear criteria for program success. The rationale for starting with program objectives is straightforward: you can be more successful if you know *what* your program is trying to do and *how* it will do it. See “Writing Outcome Objectives” in the reference section for more information.

# Chapter 1 Objectives- The Building Codes



## **Background Concept**

### **Process Objectives vs. Outcome Objectives**

#### *Process objectives*

*Outcome objectives, on the other hand, address the question “What changes occurred as a result of carrying out program activities?” The goal is to determine how much positive change has occurred as the result of the AmeriCorps activities and how meaningful that change has been. Strive for outcome objectives.*

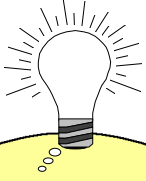


## **Objective Worksheet**

AmeriCorps’ objectives are divided into five components — the *activities* of the program, the intended *result* of those activities, how those outcomes will be *measured*, the *standards* of success for program outcomes, and the *beneficiaries* (or number served). You want anyone reading the objective to have a picture of what the AmeriCorps members will be doing and how the success of their activities will be judged. The objective worksheets in the AmeriCorps application provide a useful working document to guide the evaluation. See “Writing Outcome Objectives” in the reference section for systematic worksheets.

## Activities

In order to set measurable objectives, you should identify activities that reflect the day-to-day experience of your AmeriCorps members. Make the activity statement specific and provide an accurate picture of the members' efforts. While the members may be doing numerous activities, it is important to focus on those that are most important to the result of that objective. For example, an AmeriCorps member provides a student with tutoring in reading and conducts after-school activities. If the result relates directly to changes in the student's reading scores, then the activity statement should focus on tutoring, even though the after school-activities may contribute to the student's success as well.



**Tip: Avoid having "results" that describe process.**

A result should not read: "3,000 hours of service provided." This is not a result; it is the means (or process) by which some result is achieved.

## Desired Result

Directly relate the result (preferably one result for each objective) to the changes expected for a given level of effort and within the timeframe of the project. For example, if you are providing science tutoring to fifth-grade students for an hour per student per week, it is unreasonable to expect the result of services to be a letter grade increase in every subject area. Moreover, within the timeframe of the program, it is impossible to measure whether the tutoring will increase the likelihood that students will take advanced science courses in high school. It is important to ensure that the results focus on identifying the outcome of activities. A reasonable result might be that students will increase achievement in fifth-grade science.



example example example example example

A program that teaches using street safety techniques can give people the skill to walk safely on the streets at night in a dangerous neighborhood, as well as *knowledge* of street safety techniques. It may also change perceptions about the degree of crime in the neighborhood. However, it is unlikely that this program would produce a measurable decrease in reported neighborhood crime.

## Consider This

You may want to orient the evaluation toward demonstrating the changes in beneficiaries' lives in the broadest sense of the term (e.g., improved quality of life) rather than showing changes in a specific skill or characteristic (e.g., being able to balance a checkbook). However, do directly link your result to your program.



## Measures

Once the activity and the desired result are stated, the next step is to identify a means of measuring whether the result has been achieved.

## Background Concepts

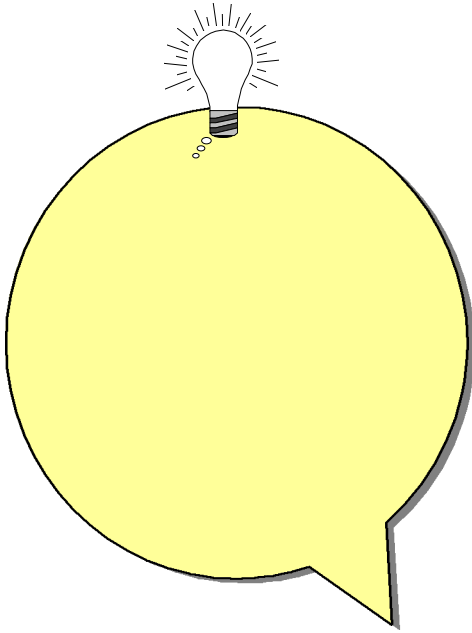
### Baseline Data

*In order to know whether your program has made a difference, you need baseline data. This kind of data makes it possible to state that a group started at a certain point of skill, knowledge, or capability (the baseline), and over the course of the program advanced to another point further along a continuum. A pre/post test is an easy way to make this comparison. Collect baseline data on a set of beneficiaries at the very beginning of your program or, in some cases, even before you start.*



### Qualitative vs. Quantitative Measurement

*Measurement data can be either qualitative or quantitative. Choices between the two types of data are largely dependent on the type of questions the evaluation is addressing and the resources available. Qualitative data comes in the form of words, either in written or verbal format, and can be collected through observation, interviews, open-ended survey questions, and document analysis. Qualitative data commonly answers questions such as "Why has there been a change?" or addresses the nature of a change. It is often time-consuming to analyze qualitative data. Without careful planning for data collection, analysis, and use, qualitative data can become overwhelming. Quantitative data refers to information that can be assigned a numerical value and can be collected through surveys, tests, and counts. Quantitative*

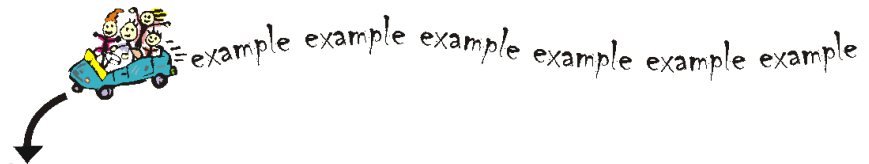


*data provides a count of occurrences or answers questions such as “To what extent has a change taken place?” Analysis of quantitative data can range from a simple count of items to complex statistical tests. (For more information, see the Data Analysis section in this chapter and “Data Analysis” in the reference section.)*

**Triangulation**

*It is often preferable to identify and use more than one measure or source. This is called triangulation.*

There is a wide range of data collection methodologies from which to choose. (For more information, see the “Instrument Development” and “Writing Outcome Objectives” packets in the reference section.) The choice depends on a number of factors, such as the type of data needed, the availability of data from other sources, and the resources (human and financial) available for data collection. It is important to check the feasibility of using each instrument that you might consider.



Detailed data on attitudes about health education from children in grades six through eight may be best collected through interviews with a sample from that group. However, to find out how common those attitudes are in a particular school, the program could survey all of the students. You can use cases from the interviews to back up the findings of the survey. You can also use survey findings to confirm the similarity of the ideas expressed in the interviews.

Resource availability limits the use of multiple methods for evaluation. Each priority area chapter discusses the methods commonly used by AmeriCorps programs.

**Consider This**

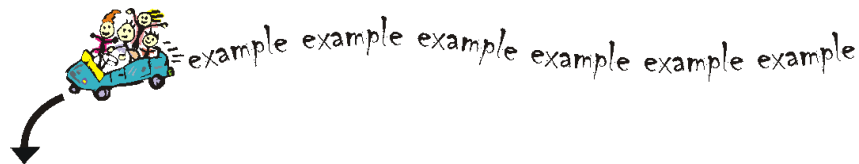


It is not always possible to collect the data early on. In some cases, program staff may not have access to the beneficiaries at the beginning of program activities; or in the rush to get the program underway, the need to collect data may be overlooked. The lack of baseline data is most serious when an instrument, such as

standardized tests, requires a lot of time to identify changes. If baseline data are unavailable or not collected at the very beginning of program activities, use existing information to support your conclusions. The omission of pre-service baseline data is less serious when the evaluation is relying upon logs, program-based assessments, or supervisor ratings. These types of tools are more sensitive to short-term changes due to their narrow focus on specific activities. Obtain baseline data of this type after the service has started.

## Standards

AmeriCorps programs must establish *what will change* (results), as well as *how much change* is expected (standards). It is best to identify a standard for each measure listed. Standards represent the minimum level of change you would like to produce in order to claim success. It is up to your program to determine a standard of success given your expectations and your experience with program activities in the community. Standards can be set based on the number of individuals you expect to affect and the degree to which these individuals will show changes or accomplishments. It is also helpful to state the period in which this change will take place.



**Standard:** 80 percent of the individuals receiving services will indicate that they have increased their knowledge of health problems as a result of the service.

**Standard:** 40 percent of the participants will score above 80 percent on the skill test.

## Beneficiaries

The last component of an AmeriCorps objective is a statement describing the number of individuals who will benefit from your program (for example, 125 urban, low-income, elementary school children). After the primary beneficiaries, list individuals who benefit indirectly (for instance, the residents of a community who live near a park but do not use the park as much as the children from the nearby school).

# What Will Change?



