

PROJECT STAR TUTORIAL FOR AMERICORPS PROGRAMS

CNCS APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

TRANSCRIPT

JAMES: Welcome to this beginning tutorial on performance measurement for AmeriCorps programs. In this tutorial, we'll explain the approach to performance measurement used by the Corporation for National and Community Service and give you a foundation for understanding the requirements.

This tutorial will be helpful to new grantees and those not-so-new grantees who just want a refresher on some basic terms.

We recommend you look over the supplementary materials before viewing this tutorial. These materials can be accessed and downloaded from the web page where you found this tutorial. You can also contact Project STAR at 800-548-3656, or your state commission, with any questions you have.

We will:

- Introduce performance measurement
- Review the issue areas and service categories defined by the Corporation
- Discuss the three measure categories
- Introduce performance measurement results, outputs and outcomes, and
- Recommend additional resources to help further your understanding and skills.

JAMES: Let's begin by discussing what Performance Measurement is.

CLAUDIA: How would you describe it?

JAMES: Well, Performance Measurement is a process, really, where you systematically track the amount of work done by your program and the impact of that work on beneficiaries.

CLAUDIA: So, basically, it shows people what we did and why, right?

JAMES: Yes, you could say that. More specifically, it's the process of regularly measuring the results – which we call outputs or outcomes -- that are produced by your program. It involves systematic data collection and measurement to capture progress towards meeting specific program objectives.

CLAUDIA: So, what you're saying is that performance measurement is simply an organized way of tracking and recording how close we are to meeting our goals.

JAMES: Exactly. So, why should we measure the performance of our programs? How is Performance Measurement helpful?

CLAUDIA: Well, we have to do it! It takes time and money but it's a stipulation of the grant.

JAMES: Well, true, and that's important, but besides that it's beneficial to your program in a number of ways. First, it allows you to clarify the purpose of your program. Why does a given area of your program exist? When you define the activities and results you expect, the changes your program is trying to make become clearer.

Secondly, Performance Measurement helps you clarify how you expect specific strategies (or activities) to contribute to achieving the results you want.

CLAUDIA: So, performance measurement is tied into the rationale behind my program services, in a way: it's looking at what we are trying to change and how we plan to do it.

JAMES: Exactly. It also helps you document the actual results of your program activities: What changes actually occurred for beneficiaries?

You can also share performance measurement results with stakeholders in your community and make a strong case for support.

And probably most importantly, performance measurement data can contribute to a body of knowledge that helps you make decisions about how to improve your program.

CLAUDIA: OK, I see your point. It might give me information that I find helpful *and* help us get more money!

JAMES: Right. Now let's talk about some terms you'll need to know. When you enter performance measures in the eGrants system, you'll need to choose issue areas that best describe each activity's focus. The Corporation has identified these nine issue areas.

CLAUDIA: I see they are quite general.

JAMES: Yes, they are. Next, you'll need to select a service category. For each of the nine general issue areas, there is a different subset of Service Categories. When you enter performance measures in the eGrants system, you'll need to select the service categories that describe your activities more closely. For example, this is the list of Service Categories for the Issue Area "Education." If you are working in the field of education and select "Education" as your Issue Area, this is the list of choices that will be available to you.

CLAUDIA: What if I don't find a service category that fits my education program? My program works with adults and we teach them computer skills so they can find better jobs, but we also have a few GED tutors.

JAMES: Choose the service activity that most closely fits the activity you'll be measuring. For your program, you'd probably select either "adult education and literacy" or "computer literacy." It won't always be a perfect fit. By the way, a complete list of issue areas and service categories can be found with the supplementary materials for this tutorial.

Now, let's move on to the third performance measurement category. Remember, you will be asked to select an Issue Area, a Service Category, and now a Measure Category. Measure categories refer to the activity's broader purpose.

CLAUDIA: Oh, I've heard about these. They are Needs and Service Activities, Participant Development, and Strengthening Communities. I don't know much about them, so perhaps you can explain them to me.

JAMES: Sure. Needs and Service Activities refer to the service activities your members engage in that have a direct impact on individuals or the community. The Participant Development category reflects what program staff provide for members (or "participants") that enhance their personal or professional development. And the Strengthening Communities category refers to resource-building efforts such as recruiting volunteers and building partnerships.

CLAUDIA: Can you explain the three measure categories a little more? I'm not sure I understand.

JAMES: Sure. Needs and Service Activities happen when members address community needs by providing direct services. For example, Needs and Service Activities might be things like tutoring and mentoring, delivering meals to homebound elderly, helping to build houses, or providing support to teen parents.

CLAUDIA: So individual people in the community are the beneficiaries of these direct services.

JAMES: Yes. Participant Development efforts, on the other hand, benefit the AmeriCorps members themselves. In this case, it's not what the member does in the community but what is done for the member by staff. For example, AmeriCorps members might participate in training or other activities designed to enhance their knowledge, skills and attitudes in areas like civic responsibility, leadership, or skills specific to their service, or other opportunities for personal and professional growth.

CLAUDIA: And what is strengthening communities again?

JAMES: Well, AmeriCorps members strengthen communities by involving citizens directly in serving community needs. Often this is done through outreach and recruitment of community volunteers, or training and coordinating volunteers. Members might also raise public awareness about services, or establish and support organizational networks. You can measure results for any of these categories. Results are classified as Outputs, Intermediate Outcomes, or End Outcomes. Let's talk about these result types further.

Outputs are the amount or units of service that members or volunteers have completed. Outcomes, intermediate outcomes and end outcomes, are changes that have occurred in communities or in the lives of community beneficiaries because of the service.

CLAUDIA: I really don't get the differences between these results.

JAMES: Okay, outputs are counts of the amount of services delivered, or work completed, or products created by members or volunteers. Examples of outputs include: community volunteers recruited, children tutored, neighborhood cleanup projects completed, or disaster preparedness presentations conducted.

CLAUDIA: Oh, so measuring outputs is literally counting people, or some kind of unit of service. For my adult education computer program, I would track the people who completed the ten-week course; is that an output?

JAMES: Yes. Outputs answer the question, "How much service did we do?" Outputs do not answer the question, "What changed as a result of our service?" Outcomes, on the other hand, answer the question, "what changed? What difference did our service make?" Outcomes look at the impact of services on beneficiaries – the people who receive the service.

The Code of Federal Regulations identifies two types of outcomes for performance measurement: intermediate outcomes and end outcomes. All results – outputs, intermediate outcomes, and end outcomes-- should be measured annually.

CLAUDIA: Two types of outcomes now? I just barely got the difference between outputs and outcomes.

JAMES: Well, let's look at end outcomes first. I think that will be easier. End outcomes answer the question "What difference did we make?" End outcomes reflect a significant change for the people you're serving, and ideally, end outcomes are responding to an important need in your community.

CLAUDIA: In our community, unemployment is a major issue because people don't have the job skills they need. My adult education program is trying to help

by offering computer classes, among other things. If we track the number of people who went through our program and found a job soon afterward, would that be an appropriate end outcome?

JAMES: Yes. That is a great example. That end outcome addresses a need in the community.

Now let's look at intermediate outcomes. Intermediate outcomes also demonstrate a change that occurred in communities or individuals you served, but do not represent the final result you hope to achieve.

CLAUDIA: Wait: would I be measuring intermediate outcomes in the middle of the year, and end outcomes at the end of the year?

JAMES: You might, but that's not what we mean by intermediate outcomes. The difference between intermediate outcomes and end outcomes isn't when they are measured. For example, you might need to measure an intermediate outcome and an end outcome both at the beginning and the end of the year to see if a change occurred.

CLAUDIA: What?!

JAMES: Think of intermediate outcomes as preconditions for more significant changes, or the end outcomes. For example, if your final result is to improve student academic performance, then the intermediate outcomes might be improved attitudes towards school or reduced truancy. These are likely preconditions for the final result you want: improved academic performance. Positive results for intermediate outcomes are usually a sign that your program is on track to achieve its end outcomes.

CLAUDIA: Okay, that makes sense. But how about a few more examples, so I'm completely clear on the difference between intermediate outcomes and end outcomes?

JAMES: Okay. Let's look again at an example of a needs and service activity: an afterschool literacy program for kids. An intermediate outcome might be that children improve their attitudes toward reading...they have fun reading, they enjoy it, so they are motivated to practice reading. The end outcome could be that these children increase their reading skills.

CLAUDIA: So in this example, the need or problem is that some kids are having trouble with reading. They're falling behind.

JAMES: Exactly.

CLAUDIA: But wait a minute now. In my experience, when kids improve their reading ability, then they enjoy reading and improve their attitudes. I mean, who decides what's an intermediate outcome and what's an end outcome?

JAMES: That's a good question. You as the program director have to decide which outcome is a likely precondition, or an intermediate outcome, and which outcome is the more significant for the beneficiary, or the end outcome.

CLAUDIA: Well, okay... can we look at a few more examples?

JAMES: Sure. Let's look at an example of participant development. In this one, let's say AmeriCorps members complete a course in citizenship and civic engagement. They learn how to design mini-service projects, hold meetings, and talk to decision makers.

CLAUDIA: Okay, so an intermediate outcome might be that members learn new strategies for civic engagement.

JAMES: Yes. And an end outcome might be that members increase their commitment to civic engagement; for example, they go on to take a leading role in community service projects beyond their AmeriCorps service.

Let's look at one more. In this strengthening communities example, AmeriCorps members recruit and train new mentors to work with middle school youth. In this case, the problem we are addressing is a high turnover of mentors which is affecting the quality of the mentoring services.

CLAUDIA: So an intermediate outcome might be that the mentors have a positive volunteering experience; they think the training is helpful, they feel they have the kind of ongoing support they need, that kind of thing.

JAMES: Yes. And an end outcome could be that the mentors maintain their commitment by volunteering for another six months at the program.

CLAUDIA: So, to recap: intermediate outcomes and end outcomes represent changes for the people we serve. End outcomes are the more significant changes. End outcomes are more likely to occur if intermediate outcomes have happened.

JAMES: Right. Now you know some basic performance measurement terms.

CLAUDIA: What comes next?

JAMES: Well, as you may have guessed, there's still more to learn about performance measurement. Here are some good resources to save in your list of web browser shortcuts, or to print out to have handy:

- Guidance and guidelines from the Corporation for managing grants and projects can be found online at www.americorps.gov.
- Look for information under the heading "For Organizations" and "Manage Current Grants and Projects."
- The AmeriCorps Program Applicant Performance Measurement Toolkit is available online. Just go to www.nationalservice.gov/resources and enter the search term "performance measurement toolkit". Click on the link that says AmeriCorps Program Applicant Performance Measurement Toolkit.
- And check back on the tutorial webpage because we'll be adding more periodically. Project STAR also has many helpful resources available online, including a few sample performance measurement worksheets. Go to www.nationalservice.gov/resources and search: project star.

CLAUDIA: What if I want to talk to a real person?

JAMES: No problem. If you have questions on performance measurement, you can contact your state commission, or contact Project STAR by phone at 800-548-3656, or email us at star@jbsinternational.com. Remember: Project STAR's assistance is free to CNCS grantees.

CLAUDIA: Well, thanks for your help.

JAMES: My pleasure. Now if you want to test your skills, hang around and take a simple quiz! It will let you know if you answered the questions correctly...and if not, it will give you the correct answer! Good Luck!"