

PROJECT STAR TUTORIAL FOR AMERICORPS PROGRAMS

COMPLETING PERFORMANCE MEASURES IN THE WORKSHEET

TRANSCRIPT

JAMES: Welcome to this tutorial on performance measurement for AmeriCorps programs. In this tutorial, we'll explain how to complete performance measures in a worksheet. This tutorial will be helpful to new grantees and those not-so-new grantees who just want a refresher on how to complete the worksheet. This is one of two tutorials on completing performance measures in the worksheet. This tutorial goes through the layout and terms in the worksheet. In the second tutorial, we complete a worksheet example.

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.

Let's look at our agenda for today. In this tutorial, we will:

- Review the components of the AmeriCorps worksheet for performance measures
- Discuss performance measurement terms you'll need to know, including indicators, targets, and instruments.
- And we'll leave you with a list of additional resources and recommended reading.

CLAUDIA: Could we start by seeing what the worksheet looks like, so I have a better idea of what's involved?

JAMES: Sure. Here is the first page of the AmeriCorps Performance Measurement Worksheet. A copy of this worksheet is available on the webpage where you accessed this tutorial. It is a Word document, about 4 pages, including spaces to write. Let's take a look at each section.

JAMES: First, we have General Information, which includes the title you give the worksheet, the measure category, and service activity.

CLAUDIA: Yes, I remember those terms from the other tutorial on CNCS Approach to Performance Measurement. There are three measure categories: needs and service activities, participant development, and strengthening communities. And the service activity is chosen from a list of options under different issue areas that more closely describes the activity, like adult education and literacy, or computer literacy.

JAMES: Yes, good memory!

CLAUDIA: And the Needs and Activities sounds like parts of the logic model.

JAMES: Right, most of the sections in the worksheet are also in the logic model. In the Needs and Activities section, you enter information about your community need and describe your service activity.

CLAUDIA: So I can basically cut and paste this information right from my logic model?

JAMES: Yes, although you will want to be a little more descriptive so people understand your activity and why you are doing it.

JAMES: Good service activity statements answer the questions “who, what, where, when, how, how long, and over what period of time.” In the worksheet, you’ll need to write a paragraph or a few sentences on what the activity is, where it says “Briefly describe how you will achieve this result.”

CLAUDIA: Wait, I’m confused. What result? I thought we hadn’t gotten to the results yet.

JAMES: Yes, sorry. Don’t get confused by that phrasing there. What they’re really saying is: “briefly describe how you will address this need”, and below you have question prompts, which are just asking for numbers and dates. So, you will write a few sentences describing your activity and then answer the questions below, like “how many AmeriCorps members will be participating in this activity?” It’s pretty straightforward.

CLAUDIA: Okay, got it. Then where do I talk about the results?

JAMES: The next section is where you will need to enter the results on the worksheet - the output, intermediate outcome, and end outcome performance measures, beginning here with the output.

CLAUDIA: I remember those terms from doing my logic model, but what are those subheadings?

JAMES: For each performance measure result, you’ll need to identify an indicator, target and instrument. I’ll talk about those in a minute.

Here is the rest of the worksheet with the sections for the other results: intermediate outcome and end outcome. Do you remember the definitions of the three result types?

CLAUDIA: Sure. Outputs are counts of services provided, like how many children were tutored or how many volunteers were recruited, and outcomes

are changes for the people who received the services, like... improvement in children's reading ability. The end outcome is the more important outcome, and the intermediate outcome is a change that is likely to contribute to the end outcome. Is that right?

JAMES: Yes, good! If you would like a refresher on these terms, I recommend viewing the tutorial on The Logic Model and Aligned Measures.

Now, let's move on to the subheadings in the worksheet that you saw earlier. For each of your performance measures (output, intermediate outcome, and end outcome), you'll have the result statement, and then you'll also need to identify an indicator, a target, and an instrument. Sometimes we refer to these as performance measurement enhancements.

CLAUDIA: Okay, I assume the result statement is just that – a simple statement of what we expect to happen.

JAMES: Right. Like “Children will receive tutoring” or “Children will increase reading skills.”

CLAUDIA: But I really don't know what I need for an indicator, target, and instrument, so let's take these one at a time, please.

JAMES: Good idea. Let's begin with the definition of indicators. An indicator is the specific information you collect to determine whether you are achieving results. An indicator should be something concrete and measurable. It's your evidence that something has occurred. Output indicators usually begin with the words “Number of...” (as in “number of volunteers recruited.”) Outcome indicators usually begin with the words “Percent of...” (as in “percent of volunteers who commit to serving for one year.”)

CLAUDIA: How about some examples? I'm not sure I get this yet.

JAMES: Sure. Let's look at a parenting skills class for new parents. Our output result will be that parents finish the classes, so our indicator, or evidence that the result occurred, is the number of parents who actually complete the class.

Our intermediate outcome is that parents increase knowledge of child development stages, so our indicator, our evidence, is the percent of parents who show they increased knowledge in these areas, for example, by passing a test on the material covered in the classes.

Our end outcome is that parents improve parenting skills, so we look at the percent of parents who demonstrate improved parenting skills – let's say we have a trained observer or caseworker who records whether this occurs.

CLAUDIA: Okay, I think I'm getting it.

JAMES: The important thing to remember is that indicators are the evidence you're looking at, so they must be concrete and measurable. Indicators are the specific information you are tracking on the change you want to occur, for outcomes, or the amount of service you are providing, for outputs.

Okay, so you know what the result statements are, and we talked about indicators as the evidence for the results. Now let's move on to Targets. Remember, for each result in your worksheet – output, intermediate outcome, and end outcome – you will need the basic result statement, an indicator, a target, and an instrument identified.

CLAUDIA: Okay, I'm ready.

JAMES: Targets describe the amount of change you anticipate achieving each year due to the efforts of your AmeriCorps members. They are based on your indicator statement. Targets are the specific, measurable amount of change that you equate with "success."

CLAUDIA: How do I write it? What do I need to include?

JAMES: Well, the output targets are fairly straightforward, because you are just counting things, usually beneficiaries or units of service, rather than measuring change. For an output target, include the number of "units" and a time frame, minimally. For example: "300 students will be tutored during the school year" is a target statement for an output. Does that seem reasonable? Is there anything else you would want to know?

CLAUDIA: Well, yes, I would want to know how much tutoring those students were going to get. From that example, I don't know if they walk in once and get 20 minutes of help with homework, or if they come regularly and get several hours every week.

JAMES: Well, some of that would be explained in the service activity section where you describe the "who, what, where, when" of your program, and the fact that the activity is called "tutoring" implies regular student-tutor contact rather than a drop-in activity. But I agree, this target statement could be more informative. In many cases, programs track the amount of service delivered beyond just the number of people served -- the dosage of service is what you were referring to. Now, it isn't always possible or advisable to do this-

CLAUDIA: Right, we run a soup kitchen, where we feed needy people who come in, no questions ask. We could tell you approximately how many people get

meals each night, but we don't take names so we don't know how often the same people might come in during any given time period.

JAMES: Right, in that case, you wouldn't be able to give an accurate "dosage" of service per person. But in this case, with a tutoring program, we can be more explicit in the output target because the program should be keeping track of how many hours of service each student gets. So let's rewrite the target and say "300 students will each receive at least 40 hours of tutoring during the school year, between October and May 2008."

CLAUDIA: That's much better.

JAMES: Let's move on to outcome targets. Outcome Targets usually contain three parts: the percent of beneficiaries who will experience change (*usually* this is stated as a percent, but sometimes it makes more sense to us just a number); how much change will occur (compared to a baseline or beginning point); and over what time period the change will occur.

CLAUDIA: And that goes for both the intermediate outcome target and the end outcome target?

JAMES: Yes, that's correct. Let's look at an example of an outcome target for our tutoring program. Let's say it's the end outcome target, in this case. "65 percent of tutored students will increase their grade level in reading by at least one grade level by the end of the school year." That statement gives you the percent of student that will show change (65%); the amount of change that will occur (at least one grade level) and the time period the change will occur (by the end of the school year, or over the school year).

CLAUDIA: Okay, I follow that. But how can you tell where to set your target? Why wouldn't 100% of the students improve?

JAMES: Well, is it likely that every student would improve to the standard we set for the amount of change – one full grade level? Also, 100% is not giving you any room for error – things happen that are beyond the control of your program, so give yourself a little breathing room.

CLAUDIA: Okay, I'm all for that, but it seems like the target is still just a guess of how much success we'll have.

JAMES: Well, it's an educated guess, based on your knowledge of your program service, your resources, the people you serve, and data you may have collected in the past.

Okay, you know about result statements, and we've talked about indicators and targets. The last enhancement is the instrument, or measurement tool.

You will need to identify an instrument for each result in your worksheet: output, intermediate outcome, and end outcome. But before we jump into instruments, let's take a minute and consider the data source.

CLAUDIA: What do you mean by "data source?"

JAMES: The data source addresses the question: "Who will provide the information?" and "Where will the information come from?" The data source provides the observable evidence you need to measure results. The data source is the person or organization that provides you with information to measure indicators, like a teacher, parent, county health department, or an agency director. There might be existing data, like agency records, reports, statistics – that kind of thing. Or the program might need to generate its own data, like tracking volunteer hours or surveying clients, or asking members to keep a log.

CLAUDIA: So the data source depends on what you are trying to measure.

JAMES: Right. With the tutoring program, we wanted to see if kids' increased their reading grade level.

CLAUDIA: So the data source would be whoever can give us that information – I guess the school, although there are probably confidentiality issues.

JAMES: And that is exactly the kind of thing you want to find out early on, while you're developing performance measures in your worksheet or even earlier. Don't wait until you need the data to find out if it's available.

Now let's get back to the instrument. An instrument is the specific document or form used to collect information from the data source. Some examples of instruments are "ABC Afterschool Attendance Roster", or "Tutoring Program Student Satisfaction Questionnaire", or "Client Interview Form." In the worksheet, you should put in the name of the instrument you're going to use, like "ABC Tutoring Program Teacher Questionnaire" and how you're going to collect it.

CLAUDIA: And where do I get the instruments I need?

JAMES: Well, it depends on what you need to measure. You can adapt existing instruments or develop your own. Check first to see if the information you need is already being collected in a form that you can use. If not, ask around. How are similar programs tracking this information? Project STAR can also help you identify or develop your own instruments.

CLAUDIA: Is there a way I can use the same instrument to measure more than one result?

JAMES: Again, that depends on what you are measuring and who your data source will be. If the data source for each of the results is the same, and the timing of when you need the data works out, it may be possible to measure more than one result with the same instrument.

Let me give you a list of some additional resources to help you develop your performance measures. You can find application instructions, guidance and guidelines from the Corporation at www.americorps.gov. And of course, there's still more to learn about performance measurement, especially around instruments and data collection. Don't wait until the last minute to think about how you'll actually get the data. If you haven't already, I strongly recommend you download and read "The AmeriCorps Program Applicant Performance Measurement Toolkit" before you develop your performance measures. You can find the toolkit at www.nationalservice.gov/resources. Just enter the search term "performance measurement toolkit", and click on the link that says "AmeriCorps Program Applicant Performance Measurement Toolkit."

Project STAR has many other helpful resources available online, including sample performance measurement worksheets. Go to www.nationalservice.gov/resources and search "project star."

CLAUDIA: And who should I call if I have questions?

JAMES: 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, thank you for your help.

JAMES: You're welcome!