Writing Good Goals

This brief is about writing good 5-year program goals. This brief includes a comparison between the overall program goal and 5-year program goals, how to write good 5-year goals, a 5-year goals checklist, and examples of good 5-year goals.

Overall Program Goal Versus Five-Year Program Goals

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) funded partners use two types of goals: an overall program goal and 5-year program goals. The overall program goal is the mission or purpose of the program, often expressed in terms of morbidity and mortality and is included in the 5-year logic model. For example, an overall program goal would be to decrease incidence and prevalence of HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and teen pregnancy among school-aged youth. In contrast, a 5-year program goal is a broad statement of program purpose that describes the expected long-term effects of your program and is included in the workplan. For example, a 5-year program goal would be to strengthen HIV/STI/ teen pregnancy prevention education within the context of coordinated school health education. Typically, you will have one overall program goal and several 5-year program goals. This brief focuses on writing good 5-year program goals. See the Logic Model Resources below for more information on overall program goals.

Writing Good Five-Year Goals

Well written goals help to establish the overall direction for and focus of a program, define the scope of what the program should achieve, and

serve as the foundation for developing program strategies and objectives. Strategies are the means or broad approach by which a program will achieve its goals. Objectives are statements that describe program results to be achieved and how they will be achieved. Both strategies and objectives should align with 5-year program goals.

There are two specific steps to writing a good goal:
1) Specify an expected program effect in reducing a health problem; and
2) Identify the target population to be affected.

The following are characteristics of a good goal:

- **Declarative statement—** provides a complete sentence that describes a program outcome.
- **Jargon-free—** uses language that most people in the field outside your own agency are likely to understand.
- **Short** — uses few words to make a statement.
- **Concise—**- gets the complete idea of your goal across as simply and briefly as possible leaving out unnecessary detail.
- **Easily understood** — uses language that is clear and for which there is a clear rationale.
- **Positive terms—** frames the outcomes in positive terms or in terms of a decrease in health risk behaviors or health outcomes. Avoids the use of double negatives.
- **Framework for strategies and objectives—** provides a framework so that the strategies and objectives are stepping stones to make progress to achieve the goals.

Five-Year Goals Checklist

Criteria to assess goals	Yes	No
1. Does it specify an expected program effect in reducing a health problem?		
2. Is a target population identified?		
3. Is it a declarative statement?		
4. Is it free of jargon?		
5. Is it short?		
6. Is it concise?		
7. Is it easily understood?		
8. Is it stated in positive terms?		
9. Does it provide a framework for strategies and objectives?		

Five-Year Goal Examples

Unclear Goal 1: To decrease risk of chronic diseases among youth within our area schools by increasing the number of schools and school districts that implement effective policies, environmental change, and educational approaches to address Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Tobacco (PANT) by increasing the number of schools and districts that implement coordinated school health (CSH) programs.

This is not a good goal because it not *concise*. It can be simplified to—

Improved Goal 1: Increase implementation of effective physical activity, nutrition, and tobacco-use prevention (PANT) efforts in schools and school districts within a coordinated school health (CSH) framework.

Unclear Goal 2: Increase the HIV/AIDS prevention capacity of the local school district.

This is not a good goal because it does not *specify an expected program effect in reducing a health problem*.

Improved Goal 2: Increase the capacity of the local school district to **reduce students' sexual risk behaviors**.

Resources

Good Goals and Smart Objectives Resources
Brief 3: Goals and Objectives Checklist and *Tutorial 3: Writing Good Goals and Smart Objectives.* Available at http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/evaluation/resources.htm

Logic Model Resources
Logic Models 1: The Basics Tutorial; and *Logic Models 2: Constructing a Logic Model Tutorial.* Available at http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/evaluation/resources.htm

Strategic Planning Resources
Strategic Planning Kit for School Health Programs and *Brief 5: Integrating the Strategic Plan, Logic Model, and Workplan.* Available at http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/evaluation/resources.htm