Step Two — Develop an Outcomes Assessment Plan

Outcomes assessment allows you to demonstrate the results of your project. When you make a claim in your final report, you use outcome data to support your claim. For example, if you say that your workshop increased participants' confidence in finding good health care information, you would support this claim by writing "The percentage of participants indicating they were 'confident' or 'very confident' about finding good health care information increased from 45% on the pre-session evaluation to 80% on the post-session evaluation."

The first step in writing an outcomes assessment plan is to identify *indicators* for each short-term and long-term outcome in your logic model. For example, a short-term outcome of a training class might be "participants will increase their ability to find out about their medications." In this example, ask yourself "What outward signs can be used to show how well the outcomes were achieved?" You may decide to have a quiz at the end of the training session where you give participants a list of prescription drugs and ask them to find the side effects. Their ability to answer the quiz questions correctly is an indicator that they know how to find information about their own medications. You may ask them directly in a training session evaluation if the session has improved their ability to get information about their prescription drugs. The number of affirmative responses to the survey question is an indicator. Table 3 shows some other examples of outcomes and indicators.

Table 3: Outcomes and Indicators

Outcome	Indicator
1. Participants will feel more confident about locating high quality health information on the Internet	Participants will indicate on the training evaluation form that they are more confident about locating high quality health information on the Internet
2. Diabetes patients will discuss information they found on MedlinePlus with their diabetes educator	Diabetes educator will track the number of diabetes education class participants who bring MedlinePlus information to discuss in class or at appointments
3. Teenagers will use MedlinePlus to get health information for a family member after they receive training	Teenagers will indicate in a survey that they got MedlinePlus information for family members
4. Library staff will use NLM resources more often after being trained on these resources	Library computers will show more hits to NLM resource websites after library staff has been trained

Once you have identified indicators, you now need to write outcome objectives. Outcome objectives set a target and timeframe for success of your program. A well-written objective should have the following:

- A measurable indicator to determine if the objective was accomplished,
- At least one target that sets your criterion for success, and
- A timeframe for when the objective will be accomplished

Each objective should be achievable given your time and resources and the priorities of those involved in the project. Table 4 shows outcomes objectives written for the outcomes in Table 3.

Specifying criteria for success can be a challenge. If you are fortunate, others will have conducted projects similar to yours and published their outcomes. Their work can help you set reasonable expectations for your own project. A second approach is to get feedback from stakeholders as to what they would consider an acceptable "return on investment" of time and resources. Expectations may vary based on how long your project has been in place. If you are engaged in a pilot project, small changes may be adequate because your primary goal is to initiate your project. If you are involved in expansion of a pilot project, stronger results may be expected to justify continued investment of resources. As difficult as it can be to specify targets for your results, it is an important exercise in setting goals for your project and should not be avoided. However, be careful not to set your targets too high because you may not be able to achieve them given the typical time and resource constraints faced by outreach teams.

Table 4: Outcomes and Objectives

Outcome	Objective
1. Participants will feel more confident about locating high quality health information on the Internet	One month after a training session, 50% of participants will report feeling more confident about locating high quality health information on the Internet
2. Diabetes patients will discuss information they found on MedlinePlus with their diabetes educator	Three months after the training session, 50% of diabetes patients trained to use MedlinePlus will report having a discussion with their diabetes educator about the information they found on MedlinePlus
3. Teenagers will use MedlinePlus to get health information for a family member after they receive training	50% of teenagers trained to use MedlinePlus will report getting health information from a family member within a month after training
4. More NLM resources wil be used after the library staff have been trained on these resources	There will be a 25% increase in the number of visits to NLM resource websites from the library computers six months after all library staff have completed training

Figure 2: Evaluating Findings Using Success Criteria*

Objective: At the end of a training session, 50% of participants will report feeling more confident about locating high quality health information on the Internet.		
Measurable indicator: % of participants who report feeling more confident about locating high quality health information on the Internet **Target:** 50% of participants **Timeframe:** One month after the training session		
Data Source	Evaluation Method	Data Collection Timing
Training participants	A post-training electronic survey sent to all training participants	Participants will receive the survey approximately 1 month after their training

* *Table is adapted from the Institute of Museum and Library Services [8]*

Next, put together a more specific plan-of-action for evaluating each outcome. You will want to detailed your *data source, evaluation method,* and *data collection timeline* to assess your indicator. Data sources refer to the location of your information. Often, data sources are people (such as participants or observers) but they also may be records, pictures, or meeting notes. (see Appendix 2 for examples of data sources). Evaluation methods are the tools you use to collect data, such as a survey, observation, or quiz. (See Appendix 3 for examples of methods.) You also can find examples of sources and methods in *Measuring the Difference* (pages 60-63) [1] and in Booklet 3 of this series.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services provides a helpful planning tool for collecting indicator data [8]. Figure 2 is adapted from this planning tool and shows how the objectives and the evaluation plan are related.

Data only make sense in context, so you also want to think about how you will analyze your findings. There are two basic approaches. First, you can compare your outcomes against the targets you listed in your outcome objectives. For instance, if you set a goal that 80% of participants in your outreach project can find drug information by the end of your training session, then you can analyze your findings (that is, assess success) by comparing them against your target.

This analytic method has one drawback. If you do not do a pre-project assessment, you do not know how many people could find good drug information before your training session. Therefore, you cannot show how many people *improved* because of your project – they all may have been able to find good drug information prior to training. Your evidence will be more convincing if you can show change over time. To do so, you must assess the level of indicator before you start your outreach project. This is known as a *baseline assessment*. Baseline assessments are helpful anytime they can be conducted, but they are essential if your objectives are written like Objective 4 in Table 4 ("There will be a 25% increase in the number of visits to NLM resource websites from the library computers within six months after all library staff have completed training") — you must conduct a baseline assessment. In some cases, you can still get baseline data after your project is completed. For instance, web traffic reports or customer databases that are collected on an ongoing basis allow you to compare data before and after the program. However, in many situations you will lose baseline information as soon as your project begins. So be sure to review your objectives and evaluation plan to see what baseline data you must collect. Figure 3 shows an example of an evaluation plan for Objective 4 in Table 4.

Figure 3: Evaluating Findings Using Change Over Time

Objective: There will be a 25% increase in the number of visits to NLM resource websites from the library computers within six months after all library staff have completed training		
Measurable indicator: % increase in the number of visits to NLM resource websites **Target:** 25% increase **Timeframe:** Six months after library staff has been trained.		
Data Source	Evaluation Method	Data Collection Timing
Web traffic data from library computers	Pre/post training comparison of number of hits three months prior to training and number of hits three months after staff training	Total number of visits to NLM resources six months prior to staff training (baseline) and total number of visits for the six months after staff training

** Table is adapted from the Institute of Museum and Library Services [8]*

Step Three

Step Three — Develop a Pre-Project Assessment Plan

The outcome evaluation plan is designed to evaluate the results of your project. However, to plan the best strategies for accomplishing your outcomes, you will need a pre-project assessment plan.

Pre-project assessment should include the following steps:

- Revisit any community assessment data you collected before you developed your logic model;
- Investigate the assumptions in your logic model and confirm (or discover new) positive or negative influences that you might need to contend with in your project;
- Take an inventory of the resources you have and those that you must acquire to conduct your outreach project; and
- Conduct an audience analysis for the different activities in your logic model.

First, look at the community assessment data you gathered when you were looking for partners and communities for outreach projects. You may already have information about community assets and resources along with the general readiness of the community for health information outreach. After you look at the data you have already collected, determine whether you need other information for planning.

The assumptions and influences usually are assessed by interviewing stakeholders and project participants. You also may review records, such as attendance at events held at different times of the day (to see when activity is greatest) or enrollment numbers in different projects offered at the outreach sites.