on demand community

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# Introduction to Outcome Thinking

## Laying the foundation for measuring impact

CRE Community Resource Exchange

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# What is "Outcome Thinking?"

Outcome Thinking is a **mindset:**

- It is a focus on **what changes or impact** your programs are having on the clients or community you serve.
- It links your program activities to the **end result** you seek.
- It is a **prerequisite** for taking an **honest look** at whether your program is having an impact.

***This material was developed by Community Resource Exchange, a not-for-profit consulting group serving community-based organizations.***


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# Contrasting mindsets

## Process-oriented

- What services do we offer?
- What is it that our agency does?
- What service needs does our agency meet?
- What public information strategies do we use?


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# Contrasting mindsets

## Process-oriented

- What services do we offer?
- What is it that our agency does?
- What service needs does our agency meet?
- What public information strategies do we use?

## Outcome-oriented

- What results do we hope to realize with our services?
- What are we trying to achieve?
- What changes in conditions or behavior are we trying to effect?
- What changes in attitude are we attempting to effect, with whom?


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# Why try to assess outcomes?

- To understand **if** your programs are making a difference
- To make course corrections, as needed
- To plan for sustained and/or greater impact
- To make your case to attract: funding, staff, leadership, clients, and media attention
- To inspire and focus your board, staff and volunteers

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# What are the steps to program assessment?

**Step 1:** Define your intended results

**Step 2:** Articulate your "theory of change" – how your program will lead to results

**Step 3:** Identify "indicators" – or observable & measurable evidence – of results with your clients

**Step 4:** Develop systems to track those measures and analyze the information

**Step 5:** Analyze the data and draw conclusions

**Step 6:** Use the information to plan, adjust program

**Step 7:** Modify the assessment system, as needed


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# What do we need to proceed?

- Shared understanding of basic terms
- Some tools or models that can guide your thinking
- A working group to tackle this
- A sequence of steps to follow

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# Outcomes: Some basic terms

- Results
- Outcomes
- Indicators
- Outputs
- Activities
- Inputs

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# Basic terms: Results

- End goals you strive to achieve in your community
- Generally greater than what your program alone can achieve

**Ask:** What change do we hope to see in the community?

What is our work contributing to, as an end goal for our community?

**Example:** Our community's children reach their full potential

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# Basic terms: Outcomes

- Changes in your participants or in your community's conditions that you expect to result from your program activities
- May be changes in knowledge, attitude, behavior, skills, or condition

**Ask:** What change or difference do we expect to make in our clients' lives?

**Example:** Improved school performance among our participants

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# Basic terms: Indicators

- Observable and measurable evidence that your outcomes are being achieved
- Specific – can be seen, heard or demonstrated

**Ask:** What will allow the clients and us to know that any change has occurred?

**Example:** Average grades are better than when entering into program for 60 percent of participants.

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# Basic terms: Outputs

- Products of your work activities, intended to lead to the desired outcomes in your clients
- Units of service or counts of activities you provide (e.g., number of tutoring sessions)

**Ask:** How do we capture the volume of work we do?

**Example:** Twice-weekly, small-group tutoring sessions for an eight-week period, for a total of 24 fourth- & fifth-graders.

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# Basic terms: Activities

- Methods, techniques or strategies for carrying out your program
- The ways you try to address the needs or problems faced by your clients

**Ask:** What do our staff/volunteers actually **do***?*

**Example:** After-school tutoring and enrichment program focused on academic skills, confidence and motivation.

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# Basic terms: Inputs

- Resources needed to carry out your program
- Includes: staff & volunteers, time/hours devoted to planning/implementing program activities, money, facilities, even participants

**Ask:** What is needed to implement our program well?

**Example:** Coordinator, two stipended tutors, counselor, sports/activities specialist, facilities, materials.

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# Tools & models that use these concepts

- **Theory of change**
  Articulates your organization's assumptions about how your program activities lead to the ultimate results you would like to see in the community at large.
- **Logic model**
  Builds upon your Theory of Change to map the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of your program, as the basis for identifying how you might assess program success.


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# Theory of change

Reflects your assumptions about how your activities will ultimately contribute to the change (community results) you are working towards.

- Links strategies to intended results
- Explains **how** and **why** the desired change is expected to come about
- Is conveyed in an outcome map


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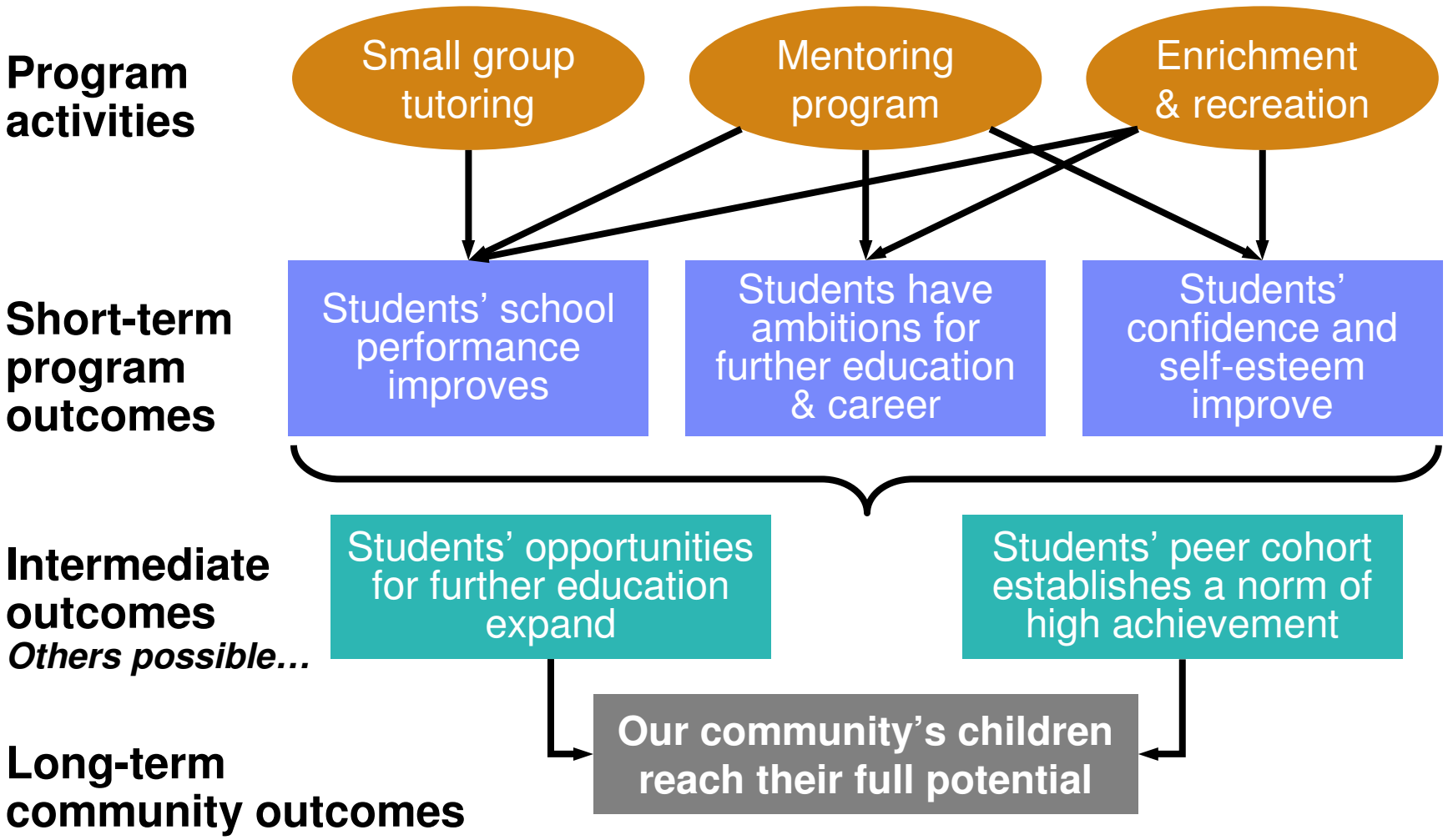
# Sample outcome map





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# Logic model

Articulates the elements of your program – from inputs through to results – and the relationship between them.

- Graphic representation that shows logical relationships between inputs, outputs and outcomes
- Can be extended to include indicators for an evaluation plan


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# Logic model format

| Inputs (resources) | Activities | Outputs | Outcomes | Indicators | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coordinator<br>Two stipended tutors<br>Part-time counselor<br>Sports/activities specialist<br>Study & sports facilities<br>Innovative materials | After-school programs:<br>▪ Tutoring<br>▪ Enrichment program: culture, arts, environment<br>▪ Sports & recreation program<br>▪ Mentoring program | 28 students in twice-weekly peer & small-group tutoring sessions for an 8-week period, 4 times per year<br>Six half-day cultural enrichment trips with 28 students<br>4-team sports leagues with 12-game seasons<br>28 mentor matches sustained for 30 weeks min. | Students' school performance improves<br>Students have ambitions for further education & career<br>Students' confidence and self-esteem improve | Report cards show half- to full-grade improvement in core subjects<br>Test scores increase by 10 percent<br>Students identify 10-15-year aspirations<br>Teachers report student behavior is improved | Participants:<br>▪ Have dreams of academic and career achievement<br>▪ Pursue academic and community achievement<br>▪ Perform well in higher education and careers |


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# Does this make sense for us?

- What would be gained by trying to define our theory of change or logic model?
- How important is it to us…
  - to measure change in our clients?
  - to assess our effectiveness?
- What are we willing to invest in this effort?
- What would make that investment worthwhile?

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# How do we get started?

1. Choose a program to focus on.

2. Form a working group.

3. Map out an approach and work schedule.

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# Choosing a program to assess

- A “program” is a set of related activities that all contribute to a common end purpose.
- Choose a program that has a defined purpose and client base.
- Choose a program in which program leaders and staff are ready & willing to engage in self-reflection.

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# Forming a working group

- Include members who understand the agency and know the program well.
- Include representatives of key functions
  - development/fundraising
  - agency & program leadership
  - possibly the board and/or volunteers
- Keep the group small (5-7, max.).
- Confirm that members have available time.


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# Mapping out an approach and working schedule

**Agree on:**

- What materials would be useful to review (proposals, program reports, data on clients & community, etc.) for background information.
- A meeting schedule: bi-weekly, day/times, date of the first meeting.
- How the working group will operate and how to handle/assign key roles: group convener, facilitator, scribe, communications with staff and board.

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