

SMART Objectives

Also in this Tool: Meaningful Objectives



HEALTH CARE
AUTHORITY

What are SMART Objectives? What Does SMART Stand For?

Objectives concretely measure a program's successes or shortcomings, and to show how a program is translating an organization's mission, vision, and values into action. However, organizations often struggle in creating objectives that accurately measure progress toward a goal, or that are meaningful to other team members or to external partners.

Many programs are run on grant funding tied to achieving objectives, and it is important that a program can prove its success to continue funding. It is also important to know whether a program has failed, and by how much, in order to change the program to be more effective in the future.

To ensure you're effectively measuring a program's impact, draft objectives that are:

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely.

How to Write SMART Objectives

Learn more about the components of SMART objectives below by asking the questions provided.

Specific

Objectives should be well-defined, and clear to other team members and to partners with the same level of knowledge as you. Using action-oriented verbs, such as "increase" or "decrease," will make your objectives easier to measure in the end.

- Resource: Who is involved with executing this program?
- Target Population: Who is your target population?
- Action: What exactly will you do for them?
- What are the benefits of this goal?
- Where will this program be executed?

Measurable

Objectives should have a benchmark and a target, to help determine whether the objective is achieved, if it has been exceeded (and by how much), or if it hasn't been met (and by how much).

- Change: How much change is expected? In what direction?
- What data will prove this change has occurred? Where will this data come from?
- Is there a proxy measure to use if this objective cannot be directly measured, or is there another measure that would be more appropriate to use instead?

Achievable/Attainable

Objectives should be within reach for your team or program, considering available resources, knowledge, and time.

- How can this objective be accomplished?
- Given the current time frame or socio/political environment, can this objective be achieved? Should we scale it up or down?
- What resources will help us achieve this objective? What limitations or constraints stand in our way?

Hint: You can use a SWOT analysis to map out internal and external factors that might positively or negatively impact your objectives.

Relevant

Objectives need to be in line with your program's mission, vision, and goals, as well as agreed-upon by important stakeholders and partners. Objectives related to your organization's mission and guiding principles are more likely to be endorsed by organizational leadership; objectives endorsed by community partners and stakeholders will lead to a greater level of buy-in from community members and other participants.

- Will this objective lead to achieving this organization's goals?
- Does it seem worthwhile to measure this objective? Does it seem reasonable to measure this objective?

Timely

Objectives should be attainable within a specific time frame that isn't so soon as to prevent success, or so far away as to encourage procrastination.

- Time Frame: When will this objective be achieved?
- Is this time frame realistic? Should it be closer, or further in the future?

Fill In the Blanks

Use the bolded questions to directly inform your SMART objective:

[Resource] will [action] to [target population], resulting in [change] by [time frame].

Examples of SMART Objectives

Objective	SMART Objective
We'll train community members using the curriculum.	By the third year of the grant period, program staff will have trained 80% of school nurses on the selected train-the-trainer curriculum.
Participants will understand the importance of smoking cessation.	By the end of the event, 90% of participants will be able to identify at least three techniques that can lead to successful smoking cessation.
Reduce smoking rates	By 2020, the rate of smoking in the seven-county area will decrease by 25%.

Meaningful Objectives

Also in this Tool: SMART Objectives



What Makes Objectives Meaningful?

Objectives provide measurable benchmarks or milestones against which your organization can measure successes or shortcomings on the way to achieving overall goals. Objectives should make your goals clear and concrete to program staff inside your organization, as well as to external stakeholders. Objectives also help keep your overall goals realistic, by breaking goals down into manageable, measurable bites.

Many organizations find it useful (and many granting organizations require) to break down objectives into three categories:

- Process Objectives
- Impact Objectives
- Outcome Objectives

How to Write Meaningful Objectives

Process Objectives

Process Objectives document and measure the integral steps your organization will take to achieve its goal: what your program will do, and how your program will do it.

These objectives may include activities, meetings, workshops, participants, interactions, and deadlines. With enough detail, a series of process objectives can also serve as a work plan. Process outcomes help your organization track whether it's on target to carry out activities on time, on budget, and within its planned scope.

Examples of Process Objectives

- Distribute 100 handwashing brochures per day at Minnesota State Fair
- Conduct one community meeting per quarter with North Metro Alliance
- Successfully fulfill 25 technical assistance requests per month

Impact Objectives

Impact Objectives demonstrate how your program or organization has changed participants' attitudes, knowledge, or behavior in the short term. Along with outcome objectives, they show how your program benefits participants.

Impact Objectives may seem harder to write, because they are not inherently quantifiable. Despite this, they are still important in speaking to your organization's vision and mission.

Examples of Impact Objectives

- Participants will leave the Introduction to Vaccination program with changed attitudes regarding vaccination
- Participants will leave the Positive Body Image program with higher levels of self-esteem regarding their own bodies and how they fit into a world of diverse body types

Outcome Objectives

Outcome Objectives help your organization measure quantifiable progress against benchmarks and goals grounded in measurable data. Outcome objectives are extremely easy to measure—your organization has either met them, or it hasn't. They provide a great way to see where you've exceeded your goals and by how much, and where you might have fallen short of goals and by how much.

Outcome Objectives should be **SMART**: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely.

Examples of SMART Outcome Objectives

- By the third year of the grant period, program staff will have trained 80% of school nurses on the selected train-the-trainer curriculum
- By the end of the event, 90% of participants will be able to identify at least three techniques that can lead to successful smoking cessation
- By 2020, the rate of smoking in the seven-county metro area will decrease by 25%