Methodology for Measuring Outcomes

Resources from *Measuring Outcomes*, Strengthening Nonprofits: A Capacity Builder's Resource Library.
http://strengtheningnonprofits.org/resources/guidebooks/MeasuringOutcomes.pdf

I. Review Outputs v. Outcomes

a. **Output**: the amount of something produced by a person, machine, or industry. (Think: programs, training, and workshops)
   - # of meals served
   - # of volunteer hours served
   - # of voters registered

b. **Outcome** (Impact): a consequence (Think: knowledge transferred and behaviors changed)
   - Decreased disciplinary actions for participating students
   - Increased available income for VITA site participants
   - Increased voter participation for newly registered voters

Outcome Statement:

Type of Change	In What?	For Whom?
+, -, =	What changed?	Who benefitted?

II. Choosing which Outcomes to Measure

a. If you're already familiar with logic models, this can be another option for mapping the ripples. (See worksheet on Mapping Outcomes)

b. Alternative Model -- When developing a program, it's important to think about all of the impacts or ripples that your work will have. A helpful way to find the full breadth of your impact is an Outcome Chain. An outcome chain tracks all the steps of your impact – the depth to which you measure will be based on the depth of your services and availability of your resources. This chart below helps to walk through a chain modeled for organizations providing some type of training:

Result:	**Measured by:**	**Facilitated questions:**	**Example (for students attending afterschool tutoring)**
Reaction	Feedback	Was the client satisfied with the service?	Increased enjoyment of afterschool programming
Learning	Changes in knowledge or skill	Did the client learn from it?	Increased knowledge of study habits
Behavior	Changes in behavior	Did the client use the information?	Increased time spent studying
Result	Improvements in the organization	Did it produce return on investment for the client?	Improved grades on exams and report cards
Goal Attainment	Achievement of organizational goals	Did it benefit the community where the client was located?	Improved passing rate for local schools

To start, you'll want to choose outcomes earlier in the chain. Eventually, you'll want to track all of these outcomes.

c. Okay, these are great, but what about the BIG goals? The ones that cover "Afterschool tutoring → increased graduation rate → better communities!" Well, you have lots of options here:
    1. Measure them. These are measurable outcomes. You can create larger outcome chains and track these. Most organizations do not have sufficient resources.
    2. Borrow & narrate. After you know the full extent of your possible outcomes, find what researchers say about similar programs. Then, you can piece together different pieces of the puzzle and tell them in a narrative for your funder. For example, you can find research on how HS graduation rate is linked to income, how income is linked to family stability, and family stability is linked to community and childhood health. No one will tell your entire story. Only you can link together your research and the work of others to tell your powerful story. (We'll work on this the next two sessions!)

III. Determining Indicators

a. Terminology:
    - Goal: A broad statement of the ultimate aims of a program, generally beyond the ability of one organization to achieve on its own.
    - Outcome: The changes in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, or the community as a result of a program; the benefit for participants during or after their involvement in a program; or the impact of a program on the people it serves.
    - Indicator: The specific, measurable information that will be collected to track success of an outcome.

b. Outcomes are often too broad to measure. Indicators serve as a bridge between data collection and outcomes measurement as measurable ways to capture performance. A few questions to ask when defining indicators:
    - How can I see the change? (*Through what kind of observation?)*
    - How can I hear the change? (*Through interviews? Focus groups?)*
    - How can I read the change? (*Through surveys? In records?)*

c. Tips for Defining Indicators
    - Define outcomes to find indicators. What does increased grades mean? What do you mean by increased fund development capacity? What do you mean by reduced disciplinary actions?
    - Apply the "means that" rule. Achieving your indicator "means that" you achieved your outcome. Better GPA this year "means that" the student improved grades/performance.
    - One to Three indicators per outcome.
    - Consider feasibility. Do you have the time and resources to collect this data?

d. Checklist:
    - ☐ Are the outcomes related to the "core business" of your program?
    - ☐ Do your indicators make sense in relation to the outcomes they are intended to measure?
    - ☐ Are yoru indicators directly related to the outcome? Do they define the outcome?
    - ☐ Are your indicators specific?
    - ☐ Are you indicators measurable or observable? Can they be seen (ie, observed behavior), heard (participant interview), or read (client records)?
    - ☐ Is it reasonable that you can collect data on the indicators?
    - ☐ Is it likely within your resources to collect data?

IV. Data Collection

a. Terminology:

- Quantitative: Numerical information gathered in a structured way.
- Qualitative: Descriptive or subjective information provided in narrative terms.
- Validity: The accuracy of information collected.
- Reliability: The extent to which data collected are reproducible or repeatable.

b. Selecting the best tool

- Description of each tool

Tool	Pros	Cons
Surveys	Cheap Easy for large numbers	Low response rates Depth of information (No ability to clarify)
Interviews	Depth & complexity of data	Cost Lack of Trained proctors
Focus Groups	Lower cost Richness of Data	Inherent bias Does not generalize
Observation	Validity	Cost Lack of trained observers
Record Reviews	Cheap Efficient	Relevance of available data

- For deciding which tool fits you best, visit the "Checklist" handout.

c. Instrument Design

We simply don't have time to develop everyone's surveys today. Luckily, it's surprisingly the easy part. Here are two great resources for learning more on survey design:

1. *A Brief Guide to Questionnaire Development* http://ericae.net/ft/tamu/vpiques3.htm Covers such topics as the advantages and disadvantages of open-ended and objective questions, sample size, and questionnaire design and format.
2. *Basics of Developing Questionnaires* http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/questnrs.htm Provides a brief checklist of issues to consider when designing a questionnaire, including how the questionnaire is worded, consent and confidentiality issues, and communicating the purpose of the questionnaire.

d. Data Collection Design

Once you decide what tool to use, you must decide how and when to use the tool. Below of five common methods of collecting data:

Type of Design	Collection Frequency	Example
Post-only Measures	Data are collected once – at the end of the program, service, or activity	Level of participant knowledge on a survey after a training workshop
Pre/Post Measures	Data are collected twice – at the beginning to establish a baseline, as well as at the end of the program	Comparison of a participant's behavior before and after receiving training

Time Series	Data are collected a number of times – during an ongoing program and in follow-up	Monthly surveys of customers to track changes in monthly budget
Measures with a Comparison Group	Data are collected from two groups – one group that receive the intervention and one that does not	Comparison of shopping habits on those who completed your healthy eating coursework and those who haven't
Measures with Comparative Standard	Data are collected once – at the end of the program, service, or activity, and are compared with a standard	Comparison of this year's GPA to last year's GPA

e. Ethics & Limitations

1. Measurement will never capture the "soft outcomes" of your work – the relationships built, the conversations and trust developed.
2. Outcomes may take years or decades to materialize. You may measure proxies for these long-term changes. Either way, your organization will have some direct impacts and some more general influence on systemic changes.
3. The information you gather must be useful and accurate. You must gather data legal and with due regard for the welfare of those involved.
4. The process of gathering information must be prudent. It must not be excessively cumbersome or expensive (the guidance is to allocate 5% of a program's budget to outcome measurement.
5. You must use your findings to change and shape your programs.