

IDENTIFYING AND WRITING ABOUT PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Nearly all proposals will include a statement of the objectives you plan to achieve with the grant funds as well as the activities that you will undertake in support of the program objectives. It is often difficult to distinguish between objectives and activities when writing your proposal, and funding agencies will frequently add to the confusion by using unique terminology. Below is a general overview of how to differentiate between objectives and activities as well as some tips for writing about your objectives and activities.

Please note that this is general information and may not reflect the specific requirements of a particular funding source. If you have any question about how these terms are used by a funding source you are considering or how you should present your objectives and activities to the funder, do not hesitate to contact your OGR staff liaison.

OBJECTIVE: A CHANGE IN CONDITION

An objective (sometimes called an “outcome” or “outcome objective”) describes a change in condition—an increase in a positive phenomenon or a decrease in a negative one. The objectives should tell proposal reviewers what will change as a result of your initiative.

EXAMPLES:

- Increase by 30% the number of recent immigrant clients who demonstrate functional English literacy within one year of their intake assessment.
- Increase by 10% the number of homeless clients who maintain employment for at least six months.
- Increase by 4 the number of companies who participate in the *Working Together* child-care program.
- Increase by 25% the number of parents who participate in reading program activities with their child at least 9 times during the project period.

As you are writing objectives, make sure that the “action word” denotes a change in condition rather than an activity. If you find that your objectives include words like “provide,” “establish,” “support,” “hold,” etc, you need to re-think—those are probably activities rather than objectives.

TIPS FOR WRITING OBJECTIVES

- **Aim High, but Be Realistic**

An important thing to remember when defining objectives is that you want to aim high while also being realistic about what is possible within the grant period with the resources that you will have and with the baseline from which you are starting. You want to include ambitious objectives to show reviewers that the changes that will occur if they award the grant make it a worthy investment. However, it is critical that the objectives are realistic because the funder will hold you accountable for accomplishing the objectives if you receive an award.

• Answer the Questions

A good objective should tell the reader WHAT you are going to change, HOW MUCH it will change, and WHEN it will change. The test for a strong objective is that it contains within itself the answer to the questions—how will we evaluate this? How will we know when the objective has been accomplished?

- Examples of poor objective:
 - Improve reading skills among Cooperville Elementary School students.
 - Implement a literacy program at Cooperville Elementary School.

- Example of strong objectives:
 - Increase by 10% each year the number of Cooperville Elementary School students who demonstrate that they are reading at or above grade level on the XYZ standardized assessment.
 - Increase by 278 the number of Cooperville Elementary School students who have extended literacy learning opportunities by implementing a literacy program.

ACTIVITY: AN ACTION YOU WILL TAKE

An activity indicates an action you are going to take. You may provide, establish, serve, etc. It is something that you are going to DO in order to accomplish the project objectives.

EXAMPLES:

- Implement accelerated functional ESL coursework to help adult immigrants gain basic skills.
- Pair each homeless client placed in employment with a retention mentor to support good work habits and job retention.
- Develop a multi-media recruitment campaign to increase business participation in the *Working Together* child-care program.
- Establish an incentive program to increase regular parental participation in reading program activities.

METHODS / ACTIVITIES / WORK PLAN

Most funders will ask applicants to include a section in their proposal where the action plan for the project is discussed in detail. Funders may have different requirements as to what they require in this section which is often called “Work Plan,” “Approach,” “Project Activities,” etc. This section is where you describe in detail what you are going to spend time and money doing to achieve the objectives. Reviewers will typically request the following kinds of information:

- What you will do—how you will spend their money?
- What activities you have planned to achieve the objectives?
- What steps you will take and when?
- Who will be responsible for activities?

In addition, many funders ask for additional information like a timeline, an explanation of the staffing structure, a description of the applicant's existing resources and facilities that will be used for the program, a

description of any partners in the endeavor, details about the planned activities, etc.

ACTIVITIES: THE PILLARS OF PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The activities that you propose to undertake to alleviate / resolve the problem should flow naturally from the causes of the problem that you identified and from the objectives that you develop.

For example, say your overarching goal is to enhance literacy skills among young children in your community. You have documented a problem—that children have poor literacy skills and you have determined that a lack of parental involvement in literacy development is one of the causes of the problem. So, one of your objectives is to increase regular parental involvement in literacy activities.

The kinds of activities you might develop to support that objective are as follows: Establish an incentive program to increase regular parental participation in reading program activities; Implement recruitment / marketing for parental involvement; provide staff training to implement parent-involvement modules, etc. Those activities obviously support the objective.

What you would NOT want to include are seemingly random activities like purchase new office equipment, etc.

TIPS FOR WRITING ABOUT PROJECT METHODS / ACTIVITIES

- Be **SPECIFIC**

Your methods section should supply sufficient detail so that someone else could take over and run the program using only the narrative. If you are vague, reviewers are likely to conclude that you aren't knowledgeable about what it takes to implement a successful project. This section should not only describe a clear and convincing plan for operating the project, but should also build your credibility among reviewers by showing that you have carefully thought through project implementation and that you are aware of the activities required for a successful project

- Be **REASONABLE**

As with the objectives, it is important to show that you are ambitious in what you plan to accomplish during the project period. However, it is equally important to be reasonable and realistic in what activities you can accomplish with the time and resources you have available. Experienced reviewers can generally tell when an applicant is outlining a work plan that is unreasonable, and they will not score the proposal favorably.

- Provide **ALL** the Required Information

Often, funders will ask that applicants include specific information (e.g., a timeline, a project milestone chart, etc.). Sometimes funders will ask for information in the proposal that may seem extraneous or repetitive. It is critical that you provide all the information requested so that reviewers can get a full picture of your proposed project. Keep in mind that reviewers will typically be reviewing your proposal and comparing it with a standardized scoring sheet (the evaluation criteria). If information that they need for the scoring sheet is not included in the proposal, reviewers will not be able to score the proposal as highly as others they are reviewing.