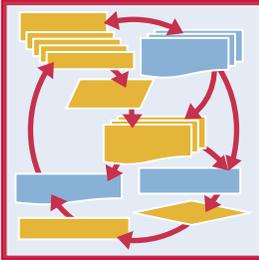


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How to build a performance improvement system in your organization

Managing outcomes and improving the performance of an organization are benefits at the heart of accreditation and, not surprisingly, activities required in the CARF standards. Found primarily in Section 1, Criterion 3 of the Business Practices Standards, these standards ask your organization to determine which outcomes—or results—are important to your stakeholders and to develop an information and outcomes management system that supports improving the performance of your organization consistent with identified objectives.

Outcomes management and performance improvement require a mindset that begins with identifying what people want out of your program—not with simply documenting what and how many services you provide. Of course, it is essential for you to know what services are provided in evaluating the outcomes.

WHAT ARE OUTCOMES?

When the CARF standards refer to outcomes, the reference is to results for the persons served. Observing outcomes is useful in the context of relating them to the targeted objectives of your organization and analyzing ways in which processes can be changed to improve future outcomes. One way to frame this important activity is by following the performance loop (see figure on next page). The performance loop is an interrelated set of organizational tasks aimed at improving performance of identified objectives. (CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

This article was written by Deborah Wilkerson, CARF's Chief Research and Education Officer. Ms. Wilkerson joined CARF in 1996 and is completing her work toward a doctorate in medical anthropology and public administration.

Was this information helpful? You are welcome to write Ms. Wilkerson at dwilkerson@carf.org with your comments.



To learn more on this subject, please consider attending a Transforming Outcomes Data into Management Information institute, cosponsored by CARF and the Health and Disability Research Institute at Boston University. Conducted twice a year (Boston in the summer and Tucson in the winter), the institute is described on CARF's web site at www.carf.org/events



WHERE DO YOU START?

Where your organization starts in the loop may be a function of how many elements are already in place. There is purposefully not a “start here” spot. Ideally, you would start from the upper left-hand corner with Mission/Planning. However, in many organizations, some pieces are already in place, and others are not. Your organization might begin by assessing its status with each element in the performance loop and identifying what you have and what you do not. For example, organizations may already have a data system in place and do not have an opportunity to design one based on only the information they need to assess progress against objectives. Or they might also have taken actions for performance improvement but lack a formal framework or data system.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Let's look at a likely flow through the performance loop. The yellow text on the accompanying figure represents some key components of the Criterion 3 standards.

PLAN AND SET YOUR OBJECTIVES. Planning is conducted within the context of the mission of your organization. The objectives—the end points of your organization's activities—should derive from the mission.

Establishing strategies for reaching the objectives involves determining which approaches you will use. Tactical planning for operations and specific projects helps implement the strategies chosen. Budgets need to be established to ensure that the resources are available to implement the tactics. Subsequent forecasting can help your organization to adjust to changes in the environment or to establish new target objectives, strategies, and tactics as your organization changes. As you can see, the planning process is cyclical.

DEFINE YOUR PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK. A performance framework can be used to lay out the particular objectives, indicators, data collection parameters, and performance targets that your organization will use to examine how well it is meeting its objectives. Because the essential element is achieving outcomes with the persons served, you could also refer to this framework as an *outcomes management system*.

The CARF standards require that an organization establish indicators in four domains:

1. **Effectiveness**—how well the programs worked and the results achieved. Outcomes for the persons served are most often represented in this domain.
2. **Efficiency**—the relationship between the outcomes and the resources used.
3. **Service access**—the organization's capacity to provide services to those who desire them.
4. **Feedback from persons served and other stakeholders**—the experiences of the persons served and others (for example, families, referrers, or payers with an interest in the mission of the organization) with the organization.

