



# Introduction to Outcome Thinking

**Laying the foundation for measuring impact**

# What is outcome thinking?

Outcome Thinking is a mindset:

- It is a focus on **what changes or impact** your programs are having in 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.

# 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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## 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?

# 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
- ▶

# 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

# 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



# Outcomes: Some basic terms

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



# 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

# 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

# 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

# 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

# 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

# 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

# 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**

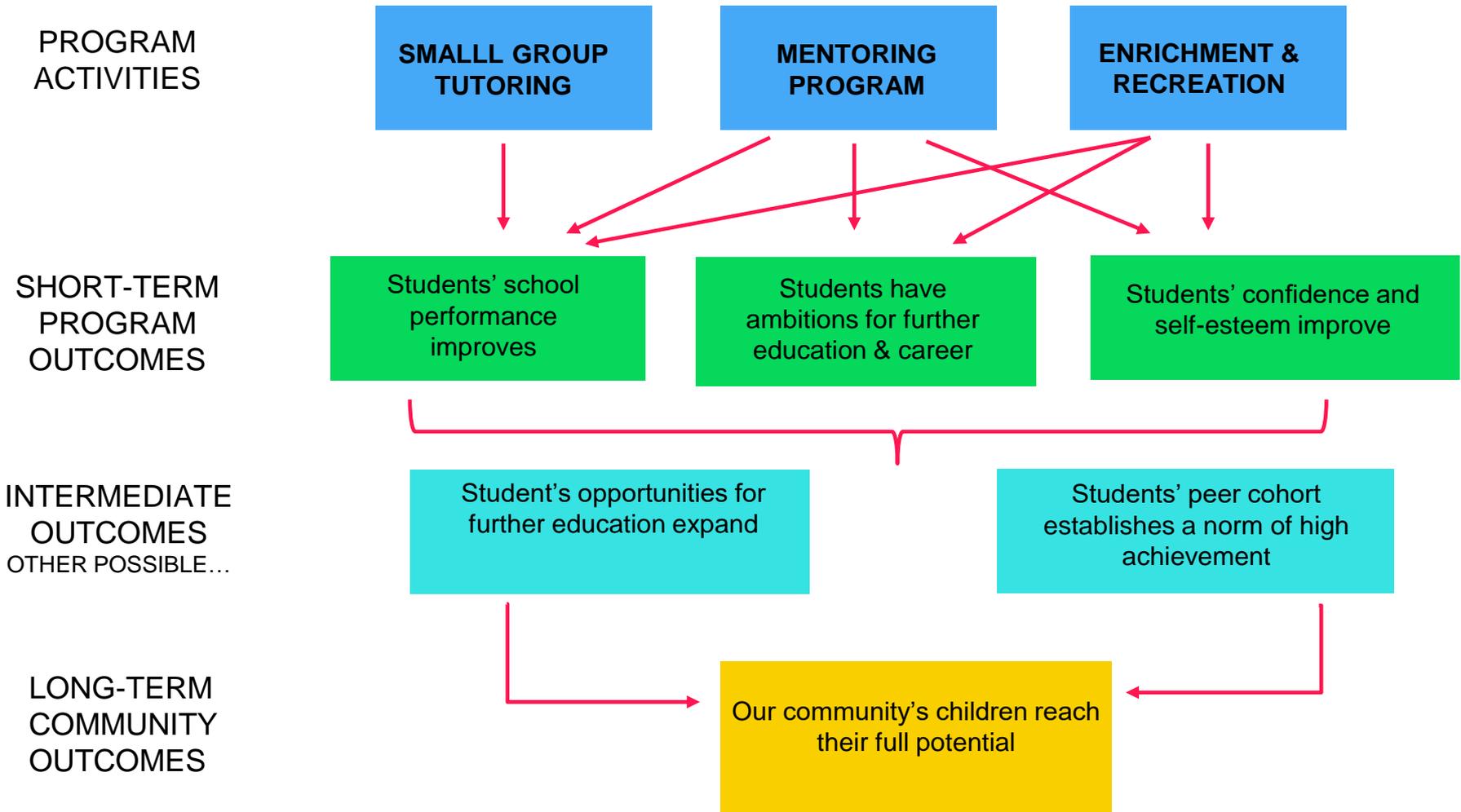
Builds upon your Theory of Change to map the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of your program, as the basis for identifying how you might assess program success

# 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

# Sample Outcome Map





# 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

# Logic Model Format

INPUTS (RESOURCES)	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	INDICATORS	RESULTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinator</li> <li>• Two Stipended tutors</li> <li>• Part-time counselor</li> <li>• Sports/activities specialist</li> <li>• Study &amp; sports facilities</li> <li>• Innovative material</li> </ul>	<p>After-school programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tutoring</li> <li>• Enrichment program: culture, arts, environment</li> <li>• Sports &amp; recreation program</li> <li>• Mentoring program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 28 students in twice-weekly peer &amp; small-group tutoring sessions for an 8-week period, 4 times per year</li> <li>• Six half-day cultural enrichment trips with 28 students</li> <li>• 4-team sports leagues with 12-game seasons</li> <li>• 28 mentor matches sustained for 30 weeks min.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students' school performance improves</li> <li>• Students have ambitions for further education &amp; career</li> <li>• Students' confidence and self-esteem improve</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report cards show half- to full grade improvements in core subjects</li> <li>• Test scores increase by 10 percent</li> <li>• Students identify 10-15- year aspirations</li> <li>• Teachers report student behavior is improved</li> </ul>	<p>Participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have dreams of academic and career achievement</li> <li>• Pursue academic and community achievement</li> <li>• Perform well in higher education and careers</li> </ul>

# 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?



# 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



# 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.



# 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

# 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