

Tips for Writing SMART Objectives

Goals vs. Objectives

Good plans have goals and objectives. Setting goals and objectives correctly will help your plan to be successful. However, understanding the differences between a goal and an objective can be confusing.

Goals:

Goals are broad, brief statements of intent that provide focus or vision for planning. Goals are warm and fuzzy. They are non-specific, non-measurable, and usually cannot be attained. Below is an example of a program goal.

The goal of this project is for the WIC participants to look forward to their WIC visit and to feel like the time they spend at WIC is worthwhile.

Objectives:

Objectives are like the stepping stones towards the achievement of our goals. They are meant to be realistic targets for the program or project. Objectives are written in an active tense and use strong verbs like plan, write, conduct, produce, etc. rather than learn, understand, feel. Objectives can help you focus your program on what matters. They will always answer the following question:

WHO is going to do WHAT, WHEN, WHY (what does it demonstrate), and TO WHAT STANDARD?

Some examples of objectives are below.

- *By October 31, 2010 the APL will observe, analyze and report the average amount of time clients currently wait for WIC services.*
- *By November 15, 2010 the WIC staff will survey clients to determine the acceptable time for their WIC appointment and suggested activities to make wait time more acceptable.*
- *By December 31, 2010, the APL will train at least 15 WIC staff members on the WIC Platinum Principles.*
- *By December 31, 2010, the WIC staff members will vote to select three things they will do to reduce participant waiting time.*
- *By February 1, 2011 at least one activity for children and one activity for adults will be available in the WIC waiting area.*
- *By April 1, 2011, there will be a 25% decrease in the average participant wait time in clinic.*

SMART Objectives

SMART refers to the acronym that describes the key characteristics of meaningful objectives. SMART stands for:

- **Specific:** concrete, detailed, well defined
- **Measureable:** numbers, quantity, comparison
- **Achievable:** feasible, actionable
- **Realistic:** considering resources
- **Time-Bound:** a defined time line

Specific – *What exactly are we going to do, with or for whom?*

Specific means that the objective is concrete, detailed, focused and well defined. The outcome is stated in numbers, percentages, or frequency. Objectives should communicate what you would like to see happen. To help set specific objectives it helps to ask the following questions:

- What exactly are we going to do, with or for whom?
- What strategies will be used?
- Is the objective described with action verbs?
- Is it clear who is involved?
- Is it clear where this will happen?
- Is it clear what will happen?
- Is the outcome clear?
- Will this objective lead to the desired results?

Measurable – *Is it measurable and can we measure it?*

This means that the objective can be measured and the measurement source is identified. All activities should be measurable at some level. To determine if your objective is measurable, ask questions such as:

- How much? How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?
- How will I know that the change has occurred?
- Can these measurements be obtained?

Achievable – *With a reasonable amount of effort and application can the objective be achieved??*

The objective or expectation of what will be accomplished must be realistic given the time period, resources allocated, etc.

- Can we get it done in the proposed timeframe?
- Do I understand the limitations and constraints?
- Has anyone else done this successfully?
- Is this possible?

Realistic – *Can you realistically achieve the objectives with the resources you have?*

To be realistic, it must represent an objective toward which you are both willing and able to work. Objectives that are achievable, may not be realistic, however, realistic does not mean easy. Your objective is probably realistic if you truly believe that it can be accomplished.

- Have you accomplished anything similar in the past?
- What conditions would have to exist to accomplish this objective.
- Can we do this with the resources we have?
- Do you need to revisit priorities to make this happen?

Time-framed – *When will this objective be accomplished?*

This means stating clearly when the objective will be achieved. Deadlines create the all-important sense of urgency.

- When will this objective be accomplished?
- Is there a stated deadline?

To develop SMART Objectives that will help you reach your goal fill in the blanks below:

By / / _____
(When?) (Who? What? Include a number you can measure.)

will have _____
(How? Why? Remember to specify results.)