Program Outcomes and Community Outcomes: What Are the Differences?

There is frequent confusion about the difference between program outcomes and community outcomes. This issue is discussed on pages 3-4 of Connecting Program Outcomes to Community Impact (at http://online.unitedway.org/POM-CI), a report that offers guidance on using program outcome measurement to benefit a United Way’s community impact work. Below are some useful ideas from that publication.

Program vs. Community Outcomes

**Program outcomes** are benefits for program clients that result from program activities. As an example, 75 individuals are better able to manage their personal finances because of what they learned in a financial education program.

**Community outcomes** are benefits for specific groups of people in the community that come about through changes in the community itself – changes in organizations, systems, neighborhoods, and networks. The groups of people who benefit may never access a program of any kind.

A community outcome, for example, would be that 7,000 low-income working families gain and sustain assets because:
- new state tax credits encourage corporate contributions to IDAs
- employers now include child care costs in tuition reimbursement programs
- fraternal organizations and labor unions educate members on the availability of small business loans and advisors

*For more examples see Exhibit A, “Community Outcome and Community Change Examples.”*

As you can see, there are real differences between community and program outcomes. Community changes usually affect a lot more people than programs, but this number isn’t the important difference. The important difference is that programs only serve program clients, but changing a community condition has the potential to affect an entire group of people beyond program clients, and to continue having an effect for years to come.

Adding Up Your Program Outcomes

When you add up program outcomes, you get the total number of people who benefited from those programs. That does not equal a community outcome because (1) these outcomes are for program clients rather than broader groups of people in the community and (2) they result from program activities rather than fundamental changes in the community itself. If you want community outcomes, you have to change community conditions. Therefore, do not add up your program outcomes and call them community outcomes!

Community-change “Logic Models”

“Logic models” for community-change efforts are commonly called “theories of change.” Just as you can’t add up program outcomes to get community outcomes, you can’t simply put program activities together to create a theory of change. A theory of change for community-level work is a picture of the community changes that a community initiative intends to bring about to achieve a specific community outcome – i.e., a specific result for a specific group of people in the community.
Exhibit B, “High-level Theories of Change,” provides examples from four community impact initiatives in which United Ways are partners. While these diagrams may look a lot like program logic models, notice these differences:

- Their target outcomes focus on specific groups of people in the community, not on program clients.
- What would be considered “intermediate outcomes” in a program logic model are, in these models, population and community changes that need to be in place to achieve the target outcomes.
- Specific United Way-funded programs are integrated into each of these examples, playing roles that support the larger initiative, but their services are only one part of a comprehensive effort.

Summary

The following table summarizes key distinctions between program outcomes and community outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some key distinctions:</th>
<th>Program Outcomes</th>
<th>Community Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus of effort</td>
<td>Program clients</td>
<td>Specific groups of people in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Direct services for individuals</td>
<td>Changes in organizations/systems/neighborhoods/networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool to depict strategy</td>
<td>Program logic model</td>
<td>Theory of change (community-level logic model)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of a result</td>
<td>75 children in three child care centers (72%) have age-appropriate pre-literacy skills</td>
<td>4,300 children from low-income families in three school districts (63%) start kindergarten with age-appropriate pre-literacy skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Related Resources

- **Connecting Program Outcomes to Community Impact**, referenced above.
- **The Ogre Story** ([http://online.unitedway.org/Ogre](http://online.unitedway.org/Ogre)), which offers another view of the difference between the downstream work of direct services and the upstream work of changing community conditions.
- **How Program Outcome Measurement Contributes to Community Impact** ([http://online.unitedway.org/POM-CI_3page](http://online.unitedway.org/POM-CI_3page)), identifying three strategic areas and 17 specific ways that program outcome measurement advances United Ways’ community impact efforts.
- **Community Initiatives: Tracking Progress and Results** ([http://online.unitedway.org/CITracking](http://online.unitedway.org/CITracking)), a summary of ways that community-change efforts are tracking changes in community conditions and population outcomes.
Examples of Specific Groups of People in the Community

- Children from families earning less than 125% of the poverty level in three school districts
- Ninth graders who missed more than 20 days of school in eighth grade
- Single mothers with incomes below 200% of the poverty level
- Community residents needing information on human services or supports

Examples of Community Outcomes

- Children from families earning less than 125% of the poverty level in three school districts start kindergarten with age-appropriate pre-literacy skills
- Ninth graders who missed more than 20 days of school in eighth grade graduate from high school
- Single mothers with incomes below 200% of the poverty level use public and employer benefits to increase their income
- Community residents needing information on human services or supports know where to turn
Examples of Community Changes to Achieve Community Outcomes

**Target outcome**
Children from families earning less than 125% of the poverty level in three school districts start kindergarten with age-appropriate pre-literacy skills

**Supporting community changes**
- **in organizations** Grocery stores in those school districts put signs around their stores with tips on how parents can enhance early learning while shopping with children
- **in systems** The state-run visiting nurse program includes Born Learning parent tools in home visiting curriculum
- **in neighborhoods** Neighborhood businesses in those school districts display posters that show parents/caregivers ways to promote early learning
- **in personal networks** Parents use everyday moments to promote early learning through interaction with their young children

Examples of Community Changes to Achieve Community Outcomes

**Target outcome**
Ninth graders who missed more than 20 days of school in eighth grade graduate from high school

**Supporting community changes**
- **in organizations** Faith communities recruit and train mentors to help chronically truant youths increase their school performance
- **in systems** The school district tracks student absences closely and follows up with every student who drops out to offer alternative educational opportunities
- **in neighborhoods** Neighborhood businesses offer part-time employment for students who show improved school attendance and performance
- **in personal networks** Parents take an active role in increasing students’ school attendance and performance
Examples of Community Changes to Achieve Community Outcomes

**Target outcome**
Single mothers with incomes below 200% of the poverty level use public and employer benefits to increase their income

**Supporting community changes**
- **in organizations** Employers adopt opt-out policies for benefits that increase employee income
- **in systems** The state human services department requires agencies in its network to provide Earned Income Tax Credit information to all public benefit recipients
- **in neighborhoods** Neighborhood associations place information on public benefits in locations where mothers go frequently
- **in personal networks** Friends and extended family members encourage each other to use free tax-preparation services offered by community nonprofits

Examples of Community Changes to Achieve Community Outcomes

**Target outcome**
Community residents needing information on human services or supports know where to turn

**Supporting community changes**
- **in organizations** Businesses display posters with 2-1-1 information in lunch rooms and other places that employees gather informally
- **in systems** State and local human services include 2-1-1 contact information in materials given to all clients
- **in neighborhoods** Neighborhood associations connect residents to 2-1-1 to give help and obtain information
- **in personal networks** Friends and family members of residents needing information about local resources encourage them to contact 2-1-1
**There's No Room for Domestic Violence in Madison County**

**Theory of Change Highlights**

**Target Outcome**: People who experience domestic violence are not abused again.

**Population Changes**
- People in danger have places to go to be safe and get connected to further assistance.
- DV victims take action to avoid further abuse.
- Abusers do not repeat abuse.

**Community Condition Changes**
- Businesses, hospitals, & fire departments provide safe haven to DV victims.
- DV shelters help victims assess options, take action.
- LE agencies adopt “pro-arrest” policy regarding DV.
- All county LE agencies arrest alleged DV offenders.
- Law enforcement officers are trained in “pro-arrest” response to DV.
- Courts closely supervise convicted DV offenders.

**Palm Beach County Food Security Initiative**

**Theory of Change Highlights**

**Target Outcome**: Children who are eligible for the school-year free-lunch program get free lunches 5 days/week in the summer.

**Population Changes**
- Parents know about the program and know how to enroll their children.
- Parents can apply for the program easily.

**Community Condition Changes**
- Free lunches are available to eligible children in the summer.
- 2-1-1 recruits volunteers to help at lunch sites, distribute flyers in 3 languages.
- School system policy: all children in family covered for entire year by 1 application.
- County includes funds for summer lunch program in annual budget.
- Public schools open cafeterias in summer to provide lunches for eligible children.
- Community agencies & businesses make facilities available to provide lunches.
**Exhibit B: High-level Theories of Change**

**UWNYC's Food Card Access Project**

- **Target Outcome:** Eligible residents in five low-income NYC neighborhoods are enrolled in USDA Food Stamp Program (FSP).
- **Population Changes:** Eligible residents apply for program with filled-out application, documentation.
- **Community Condition Changes:**
  - Service providers, local businesses display materials & information.
  - FoodChange conducts multi-language awareness effort & provides info hotline.
  - Urban Justice Center builds CBO staff advocacy capacity.
  - City & County include funds for equipment, training, outreach materials, coordinator's salary, etc. in annual budgets.
- **Target:** Eligible residents apply for program with filled-out application, documentation.
- **Outcome:** In everyday places, potential clients encounter outreach workers who:
  -制成 client's eligibility
  - assist with forms, documentation
  - make appointments with FS Agency
- **Population Changes:**
  - Service providers, local businesses provide space for outreach workers.
  - Workers have software that estimates eligibility, fills out FS application.
- **Community Condition Changes:**
  - FS Agency and local offices alter policies/practices to reduce barriers in applying.
  - CBO in each neighborhood puts outreach workers at many sites, advocates for clients encountering barriers.
  - FoodChange conducts multi-language awareness effort & provides info hotline.
  - Seedco manages TA to increase CBOs' capacity to meet performance targets.

**Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) & Asset Growth Initiative**

- **Target Outcome:** Low-income families in Southern Arizona gain & grow financial assets.
- **Population Changes:** Low-income families gain assets through free VITA tax preparation help and EITC.
- **Community Condition Changes:**
  - Multi-sector EITC Task Force mobilizes sites to host VITA.
  - Volunteer Center supports VITA volunteer recruitment.
  - AARP Tax-Aide trains VITA volunteers.
  - City & County include funds for equipment, training, outreach materials, coordinator's salary, etc. in annual budgets.
- **Target:** Low-income families gain assets through free VITA tax preparation help and EITC.
- **Outcome:** Low-income families know about VITA services & where to get them.
- **Population Changes:**
  - Community sites provide:
    - information about the service
  - Banks/credit unions offer no-fee no-minimum accounts.
- **Community Condition Changes:**
  - Human service agencies review clients' EITC eligibility, refer as appropriate.
  - Nonprofits offer financial education.
  - Social service agencies offer IDAs.