The following pages constitute steps in developing an administrative or educational support unit Assessment plan.

**STEP 1 - WRITING THE DEPARTMENT/UNIT MISSION STATEMENT**

Your mission serves as the foundation for assessment planning. The mission statement should describe the **purpose of the department/unit** as well as reflect the mission of the university. Mission statements should clearly and effectively communicate WHAT you do, for WHOM, WHY you do it, and HOW you do it. It gives the department/unit a unique identity.

**Characteristics of a Well-Define Mission Statement:**

- Brief, concise, distinctive
- Clearly identified the program’s purpose
- Clearly aligns with the mission of the division and the University
- Explicitly articulates the essential functions/activities of the program
- Clearly identifies the primary stakeholders of the program; i.e., students, faculty, parents, etc.

**Evaluating Quality of Mission Statement**

- Mission statement is clearly stated and specific to the department/unit, and
- Mission statement defines the core purpose(s) of the department/unit,

**General Format of Program Mission Statement:**

“The mission of the [insert unit name] is to [insert unit’s primary purpose] by providing [insert essential functions/activities of the program] to [stakeholders]. [Additional clarifying statements]”

**Examples of Well-Defined Program Mission Statements:**

“University Career Services, an integral part of the educational process, assists students and alumni in assessing their career possibilities, setting their personal goals and achieving their objectives toward becoming productive citizens in the global community. While assisting its clients in identifying professional employment opportunities, University Career Services also provides the university community with insights into the ever-changing world of work to help develop realistic ways to better educate tomorrow’s leaders.” (Texas Christian University)

“The primary purpose of the Office of Academic Advising is to assist students in the development and implementation of their educational plans. To this end the Office of Academic Advising subscribes to the philosophy of developmental advising; advising is a cooperative effort between advisor and student that consists not only of course planning and selection, but the development of the person as a whole. This includes the selection of career and life-long goals.” (University of La Verne)

“The Accounting Office seeks (1) to provide administrators with accurate and timely financial data to assist them in the management of the institution’s resources, and (2) to ensure that financial records are maintained in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and guidelines as established by State and Federal guidelines.”
STEP 2 - IDENTIFYING AND WRITING ADMINISTRATIVE OUTCOMES (OUTCOMES)

An **outcome is a result** for (or impact on) a customer or the institution that is a consequence of the work that you do. The outcome itself does not describe the activities that you perform nor the service or product that you provide to get the customer to that result.

Outcomes are directly related to the mission (purpose) and key functional responsibilities of the department. A department should be able to identify at least one expected outcome for each of its functional responsibilities.

Outcome statements will have two mandatory elements: the intended **beneficiary** (customers, students, institution, community) and the **gain or benefit** they receive from what you do (impact/end result).

Outcomes should be stable over a number of years, not time dependent. If it is time-dependent, you are probably writing an objective rather than an outcome.

Outcomes also need to be **measurable and actionable**. In other words, you have to be able to monitor changes in those beneficiaries, and you have to have some degree of controllable influence on the outcomes. It is also important to remember that you should be tracking and measuring things here that will actually tell you where you can improve your operations.

An outcome should lend itself to improvement, be singular and not bundled, be meaningful and not trivial, and not lead to a yes/no answer.

**Tips for writing intended or expected outcomes:**

First develop a master list of “what do we do” and then identify key services or functions. Begin the outcome statement with the beneficiary as the subject:

- **Customers have** . . .
- **Administrators are able to** . . .
- **Clients understand** . . .
- **The University enjoys** . . .
- **Customers employ** . . .
- **Students are aware of** . . .
- **The institution gains** . . .

By contrast, a goal statement nearly always uses the department as an implied subject and will typically begin with a phrase like

- **to provide** . . .
- **to establish** . . .
- **to ensure** . . .
- **to implement** . . .

Possible outcomes to measure:

- efficiency
- accuracy
- effectiveness
- client satisfaction (improve, increase)
- quality
- comprehensiveness (understand)
- compliance with standards
If you mistakenly utilize a goal statement as an outcome, you will end up assessing your goal attainment rather than the results for the customer or institution.

Example of a **Goal Statement**:  
*To provide accurate and timely reports to university administrators.*

Example of an **Outcome Statement**:  
*University Administrators have the financial information they need to make decisions effectively.*

Example of a **Goal Statement**:  
*Provide safe, clean, maintained and visually attractive buildings and grounds to be enjoyed by students, faculty and staff.*

Example of **Outcome Statements**:  
*Faculty and staff will report they feel safe while on campus.*  
*Faculty and staff will report they are satisfied with the cleanliness of campus buildings.*  
*Faculty and staff will report they are satisfied with the cleanliness of campus grounds.*  
*Faculty and staff will report they are satisfied with the maintenance in campus buildings.*  
*Faculty and staff will report they are satisfied with the visual attractiveness of the campus grounds.*

**NOTE:** do not join multiple outcomes in one statement

**Evaluating Quality of Outcomes**

- Three outcomes are provided  
- Each outcome focuses on issues pertinent and important to the department/unit, as defined in the mission statement  
- Each outcome concentrates on key areas where outcomes assessment will enable the development/unit to improve, with a focus on the end result and not the means  
- Achievement of each outcome must be measurable – the target/measure will be identified in the Method/Measure you write for each outcome (see next section)  
- Each outcome clearly articulates intended result or action

**General Format of for Writing Outcome Statements:**

[Intended audience] who [action verb 1] [program/service] will be able to [action verb 2] [intended outcome].

Intended audience – students, faculty, staff, users, employees within division, employees within department, alumni, customers, administrators, clients, the university, etc…

Action verb 1 – complete, engage in, participate in  
Program/service – respond to maintenance requests, process payments in the drop box, prepare revenue forecast report, etc…

Action verb 2 – demonstrate, describe, discuss, explain, identify, list, summarize, prepare, rate, utilize, use, select, plan
Or

[Intended audience or the department] will be able to [action verb to describe what it will do, achieve or accomplish]

Examples

Facilities staff in the plumbing shop will be able to respond to maintenance requests within 24 hours of notification.

Students who use the online payment process will be able to make timely payments and not lose their scheduled courses.

University administrators have the financial information they need to make decisions effectively. Administrators who request information from the facilities inventory will receive accurate, timely, useful information.
STEP 3 - DEFINING HOW YOU WILL ASSESS PROGRESS TOWARDS THESE OUTCOMES
(METHODS AND MEASURES)

Start by taking an inventory of the kinds of tools your department/unit is already using. What information are you already collecting? What kinds of assessments are you already using or are already familiar with? Other departments on campus, such as the Office of Institutional Research, may be collecting data that you can incorporate into your methods/measures. The data collected should be representative of the whole year. You may want to collect data continuously or you may want to take “snapshots” at regular intervals. You may want to sample systematically, rather than collect data on every event/person/day. For each expected outcome, describe methods (e.g., survey) you are using or plan to use and the measurement (e.g., satisfaction) to measure how well your department/unit is actually performing in relation to the outcome.

Assessment measures can be direct (any process employed to gather data which requires subjects to display their knowledge, behavior, or thought processes) or indirect (any process employed to gather data which asks subjects to reflect upon their knowledge, behaviors, or thought processes), qualitative or quantitative, objective or subjective, and multiple measures should be used for each outcome. An assessment method and measure can be used to assess progress towards more than one outcome.

Examples of Direct Measures of Unit Effectiveness

- Human Resources – selection processes
- Plant Operations – work order response
- Physical Plant – remodeling process
- Mail Services – bulk mail distribution
- Printing Services – reduction of pre-press time
- Payroll Office – payroll distribution

Develop targets or benchmarks for each measure. Targets are specific values that you are expecting to reach (e.g., %). For example,

- 80% of users reported satisfaction with the service in the Customer Satisfaction Survey
- 100% of monthly reports (note – it would be better to identify the reports by name) are submitted by the third business day of the month
- 100% of ad hoc reports (note – it would be better to identify the reports by name) are submitted by the promised deadline
- 90% of the faculty and staff responding to the annual spring Customer Satisfaction Survey will report they feel safe on campus

Assessment methods and measures must align with the outcome:
Outcome - Hypothetical Administrative Unit will demonstrate increased timeliness in terms of processing student requests.
Assessment: Number of students served by Hypothetical Administrative Unit will be tracked for three semesters. This is an example of assessment that will not provide useful, useable information:
Assessment: A computerized log will track the date and time of each student request and the date and time that it is resolved. The time between request and resolution will be compared for two semesters. This is an example of assessment that will provide useful, useable information:
Note: The first example assessment shows that data are being collected, but not useful data. The second example assessment provides information that can be used to determine if the administrative unit is increasing its timeliness.

**Tips for developing methods and measures and for collecting data:**

Methods and measures must be set before you begin to collect data. If you easily meet your success target, you will want to raise the bar or modify the method, measure and/or the target in order to further improve your outcome.

Using the completion of a project as an assessment method is not recommended because simply completing the project does not provide any information on how to improve.

Data collection needs to become a regular activity for the department. The more you can automate or make routine, the easier it will be to incorporate into your activities. Remember, if the responsibility for data collection is purposefully assigned to a person or position, it increases the likelihood that it will occur.

Examples of assessment measures for administrative units include: satisfaction surveys, number of complaints, count of participants, growth in participation, average wait time, statistical reports, average service time, staff training hours, number of applications, processing time, number of users, focus groups, opinion surveys, external review, number of staff trained, attendance at events, website hits, year-to-year comparisons, etc…

**Evaluating Quality of Methods and Measures**

- Two methods and measures are provided for each outcome
- Method(s) and measure(s) selected align with the intention of the outcome
- Methods and measures address all of the following: **who** will be assessed and who is responsible, **what** will be assessed, **how** the assessment will be conducted, and **when** the assessment will take place
- Measures indicate performance targets, such as percentages and numbers
- Methods and measures can be implemented within the academic year
- Methods and measures can be implemented in a reasonably efficient manner
- Methods and measures use direct, or indirect when necessary, means of acquiring data.
STEP 4 – COMPLETE THE ASSESSMENT PLAN (RESULTS)

Once you have collected your data, you will need to compute the results (findings). This usually involves counting or aggregating the data, calculating percentages or other descriptive statistics. You may want to use tables or charts. How you compute the results and present them will depend upon how you defined your method/measure. The key activity here, though, is to compare the results to your success target. Did you meet your target or not? Remember, **you need to have a result for every method/measure you have defined.**

You have your results; you know if you met your targets or not. Now you have to determine what those results mean for your department.

- What did you find out?
- Were the criteria met?
- Why did you or did you not reach your target?
- What strengths do the results reflect about your department or operations? How can these be further strengthened?
- What strategies were successful? What strategies were not? What strategies will you employ to further improve outcomes?
- Where do the results show that additional attention is needed to correct problems or issues?

_Evaluating Quality of Results_

- Results are provided for each assessment method/measure
- Results include reflection upon and discussion of the findings amassed from the corresponding method/measure
- Results are based on reliable and valid data collection methods
- Results indicate level of achievement of performance targets
- Results provide indicators for improvement
STEP 5 – ACTION PLAN

The purpose of assessing outcomes is to provide you with meaningful information that will help you determine where modifications are needed (or wanted) to improve those outcomes and make your department (and the university) more effective. Therefore, the most important section of the assessment cycle is determining how the results will be used to improve performance, and how those actions are articulated in the Action Plan.

Each problem or issue that you noted or identified in your analysis represents a need to improve and must have an action to correct or improve performance. Every outcome for which you successfully met or exceeded your target represents an opportunity to further improve, and requires an articulated action or strategy to do so.

- What changes need to be made?
- What additional data are needed?
- What resources are needed?
- What actions do you plan to take?
- Who is responsible?
- When will it be done?

Such actions and strategies may be:
- Operational or programmatic—modifying what you do or how you do it (e.g. adding a program or improving a process)
- Organizational—modifying your organizational structure or work assignments
- Strategic—modifying your mission, functional responsibilities, or outcomes; or
- Assessment-related—modifying your indicators/measures, targets, or method of data collection

For future actions, you should note when you anticipate those actions will be taken, who will be responsible for taking the actions, and what resources will be needed. Where the criterion is met or surpassed, the department/unit may rightly conclude that no change is needed and report, "No action required." If, when the same outcome is assessed the next year, the results are repeated and the staff can insure the criterion was met, the department/unit should consider assessing a different outcome in the following cycle.

Evaluating Quality of Action Plan

- Action plans are provided for each outcome
- Action plans are based on findings reported in the results
- Action plans are feasible considering available resources and time
- Action plans appear likely to lead to continuous improvement
STEP 6 – EVIDENCE OF IMPROVEMENT

At least a year after implementing the improvement plan, the unit should be able to reflect on the impact its improvement actions have made on the quality of its services. The results of those actions will be revealed in your Findings. Data from subsequent assessments should demonstrate improvement. If that is not the case, perhaps the outcome criteria and methodology, or even the department’s/unit’s function statement need revisiting to determine whether they are appropriate to measure the effectiveness of the office.

Evaluating Quality of Evidence of Improvement

• Evidence of improvement is described
• Evidence of improvement is founded in the results
Definitions

**Direct Measures** are those designed to directly measure what a targeted subject knows or is able to do of the effective of programming or intervention. Direct measures utilize actual work products as the basis for evaluation as opposed to indicators of perception or satisfaction.

**Indirect Measures** are those designed to indirectly discern what a target subject knows or is able to do or the effect of impact of a program or intervention. Indirect measures focus on how a participant perceives their level of learning and/or their satisfaction with some aspect of the program or service.

**Methods** are tools or instruments used to gather data and to gauge progress toward achieving outcomes such as surveys.

**Objectives** are the tasks to be completed in order to achieve a goal. Objectives are specific and measurable and must be accomplished within a specified time period.
Example: By the end of 2009-2010, all units will have outcomes assessment plans in place.

**Outcomes** are something that the department/unit wants to achieve; they are desired end results for the organization or program, rather than actions. Outcomes are related to the department’s mission, and focus on the benefit to the recipient of the service.
Example: All units conduct ongoing and effective assessment of their activities and services and use the results of assessment to inform planning, decision-making and resource allocation.

**Strategies** are the means you plan to use to achieve your objectives.
Example: Develop and distribute assessment materials in hard-copy and online forms. These will include an assessment guide, plan, and report templates, examples, evaluative rubrics to provide feedback on plans and reports, online links to additional resources, etc

**References**

*Handbook for Program Assessment 2009*, Texas State University – San Marcos