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Outcome Measurement Toolkit: A Resource for Centers for Independent Living

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A Resource for Centers for Independent Living

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CIL EVALUATION TOOLKIT

Objectives of this Toolkit

- Learn the fundamental concepts for how to measure and improve the outcomes of your CIL's programs and why they matter
- Practice decision-making to manage program outcomes

Welcome to the Centers for Independent Living (CIL) Evaluation Toolkit! This toolkit was designed to help CIL directors, administrators, and consumers learn practices for measuring, evaluating, and improving outcomes generated by your CIL's programs.

Program evaluation is a systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using data to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of programs. Importantly, it is also for continuous program improvement with the goal of providing the best possible services to your consumers.

Be realistic about the organizational policy and commitment required to conduct program evaluation. You will need to be responsible with your CIL's funds and time and thoroughly address this in your internal planning process. Starting to conduct program evaluation is a front-loaded project that can take time to develop well. If you need to address budgeting funds and time, here are your next steps to take home to your CIL:

- Understand why investing time and money in program evaluation is strategically important
- Recognize what your real costs are going to be
- If you are serious, build it into your budget and set benchmarks to maintain accountability
- Determine the best fit for roles within your CIL staff – and ensure they have the capacity to complete the work
- Make it work for your CIL. You know your program and where you want to go

GOALS OF THIS TOOLKIT

The goal of this toolkit is to help you understand program evaluation as the useful tool it is, and to help you learn about your program in ways that help you manage it, advocate for it, and measure its impact. As experts in your own programs, you are best positioned to make the decisions on what to learn about in more detail and how to measure outcomes to show the value of your work to consumers, funders, and your community.

The more curious you are about your program and want to explore its ins and outs, the better your evaluation can be. Asking questions will help you determine what you need to learn about your program, and how to best advocate for it and make necessary improvements. Just keep in mind that in evaluation all news is good news. Even discovering something is not working as well as you hoped is useful news, because you can adjust to bring your program back up to speed. And good news helps tell your program's story and land funding to support your good work.

Consider a scenario where your CIL needs to secure private funding from a foundation or company. The funder is going to want data and anecdotes that illustrate the effectiveness of your programs. How will you secure funding? By diligently tracking program data and being able to tell compelling stories about your programs. This is what the evaluation process provides: a systematic way of ensuring that you can show how your program is effectively providing services.

STEPS OF THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit contains nine steps, starting with Outcomes and Outcomes Management. We recommend scheduling one hour for each section to ensure sufficient time to understand concepts and complete practice activities.

You may wish to do this alone or with one or a few team members to focus on program evaluation. Doing it with others may require more time to go through each step, but it may be useful to complete it with your peers.

The content from each step builds on the previous step. Each step has training objectives: things you should learn and be able to apply once you have completed the step. You will have opportunities throughout the toolkit to apply what you have learned through different activities. By the final step, you should have a clear understanding of how to evaluate your program and fresh ideas of next steps to take at your CIL.

Ready? Let's get started!

STEP 1 Outcomes & Outcomes Management

STEP 2 Logic Models

STEP 3 Choosing Outcomes to Measure

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STEP 1

OUTCOMES & OUTCOMES MANAGEMENT

Orientation to Outcome Measurement

Welcome to the first step of our evaluation toolkit series. In this step, we will explore with you the fundamental concepts of evaluation. We will encourage you to describe your own programs, map your program's components, and identify what is most valuable and important about the work you do.

There is an adage about evaluation: "Measure what you value or you will only value what you measure." This means that if all you measure is the number of consumers who show up at your facility on a daily basis, then all you will care about is the number of consumers. However, if you measure why they come to your facility and what happens as a result of their working with your staff, then you will value your consumers' achievements and growing independence.

Measuring outcomes produces valuable data and evidence to help improve and refine your CIL's services, and can help you to illustrate the importance of your center's work in a variety of ways. This data can also help you to understand how your center's services can be adjusted or enhanced. By measuring and learning about your program's outcomes, you are poised to develop best practices for use within your CIL and, potentially, the CIL network. You will also be well-positioned to maintain your existing funding sources and to recruit new funders.

The first step of this toolkit will introduce the essential components of a program, which will lead toward an understanding of how to manage your programs' outcomes. By the end of Step 1, you should be able to:

- Identify why outcome measurement is valuable to CILs
- Explain the difference between inputs, activities, outputs, and desired outcomes
- Write an expected outcome
- Define outcomes management

CILs Do Tremendously Important Work

CILs provide vital services that positively impact individuals with disabilities, service providers, local communities, and overall systems. People with disabilities empower themselves by engaging with CILs to gain skills to live more independently. CILs help strengthen people with disabilities' support systems and increase the accessibility of communities. CILs also shape and improve local, state, and national disability policies and connect to community partners and funders to fulfill their missions.

Some of the things that CILs do are incredibly important for consumers, but are not as important for funders. And some of the data that interests funders means little to those receiving services. Since consumers, funders, and government entities are interested in different data, it is a good idea for CILS to know when and how to present information on their programs to a variety of people.

Every Center for Independent Living has five core services that they must provide. These are:

1. Information and referral
2. Independent living (IL) skills training
3. Peer support
4. Individual and systems advocacy
5. Transition

CILs track each of these core services, but how is success defined? It is more than collecting information, and is likely different for each CIL. It also includes continually learning about your program and making appropriate decisions based on data and feedback. The question of success extends beyond just the core services and encompasses a CIL's programming with the goal of providing the best possible services for your consumers. This is outcome management - the systematic use of outcome information to improve the effectiveness of your programs and services, and to effectively communicate their value to diverse audiences.

Telling Your CIL's Story

By actively managing and clearly measuring outcomes related to services, CILs have data and evidence to tell their stories. Too often, CILs miss the opportunity to define and share the value of their IL work by not adequately measuring and recording the outcomes of their programs. By measuring a program's outcomes, CILs learn what is working, and how it is working, in their programs.

Once you have measured your program's outcomes, you will be better able to manage your outcomes. We use the phrase "outcomes management" to describe this process. However, before we get into outcomes management, it is helpful to review the essential components of a program. A common way of thinking about a program is that it has **four essential components**: inputs, activities, outputs, and desired outcomes.

Essential Components of a Program

- **Inputs** are the resources dedicated to or used by the program. This includes money, staff and staff time, volunteers and volunteer time, facilities, and equipment; all of the materials and energy that you can put into a program.
- **Activities** are the actions the program carries out, using its inputs, to fulfill its mission. These are often expressed as "doing" words. For example: teaching a consumer budgeting skills, providing a class on self-advocacy skills, holding a training class on legislative advocacy, or learning how to use public transportation with a peer mentor.
- **Outputs** are the amount of work you have done through your program's activities. A helpful way to think about outputs is that they are **the volume of work accomplished by the program**. Notice that outputs are not what you have achieved for your participants through your program, just the amount of work you have put in. We can think of outputs in terms of numbers: the number of classes your Center taught, the number of service hours your program delivered, or the number of participants you served.
- **Desired Outcomes** are what we are focusing on in this toolkit – they are the benefits or changes for participants during or after your program's activities. You can think of these benefits or changes as the **seven magic words** when thinking about outcomes and outcome management.

Seven Magic Words for Outcomes and Outcome Management:

- New **knowledge**
- Increased **skills**
- Changed **attitudes**
- Changed **values**
- Modified **behavior**
- Improved **condition**
- Altered **status**

Distinguishing Outputs from Outcomes

Sometimes people confuse outputs with outcomes. Although they are both later stage steps in the course of a program, there is a big difference between them. If the statement is about the program, it is an output (like how hard the program is working). However, if the statement is saying something about the people you are trying to benefit, then it is an outcome. To be more specific, it is a desired outcome; the goal of your efforts.

Inputs
Resources dedicated to or consumed by the program

→

Activities
What the program does to fulfill its mission

→

Outputs
The volume of work accomplished by the program

→

Desired outcomes
Benefits or changes for participants during or after activities

Examples of these four essential components:

Staff, facilities, equipment, time

→

Classes, peer support

→

Number of people attending classes

→

People with disabilities demonstrate improved independent living skills at home

A Framework for Thinking about Outputs and Desired outcomes

Here is a simple framework for thinking about outputs and desired outcomes.

IL SERVICES AND SUPPORTS	
Output:	Number of consumers served
Desired outcome:	Consumers have skills to support their choices

This difference between outputs and outcomes is easy to see if we look at the simple example below:

NON-PROFIT IS STARTING A PROGRAM TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO STOP SMOKING.	
Output:	We will offer 10 sessions of our class with 100 participants served
Desired outcome:	Participants reduce their smoking habits by half or cease smoking

The output is what the program offered. In this case, the number of sessions to a number of participants. The outcome is what changed for participants; their results.

Distinguishing Outputs from Desired outcomes, Continued:

We can apply this way of understanding differences between outputs and desired outcomes to examples that could be encountered in Independent Living:

IL SERVICES AND SUPPORTS	
Output:	Number of consumers served
Desired outcome:	Consumers have skills to support their choices

IL SERVICES AND SUPPORTS	
Output:	Participants will attend our Legislative Advocacy class to learn how to speak to their legislators
Desired outcome:	After the training, participants use the information provided in the class to contact their legislator

Here are some more examples of desired outcomes:

- Participants report feeling more comfortable in their ability to self-advocate. (attitudes)
- Participants report that they gained new knowledge on how to contact their legislators and what to say to best impact.
- Participants report that they improved their communication skills to advocate.
- Participants report that they advocate for themselves two times a week. (behavior)
- CIL consumers obtain independent housing. (status)

Check Your Understanding

Select a core service program at your Center and write two sample Outputs and Desired Outcomes.

Output 1:

Desired Outcome 1:

Output 2:

Desired Outcome 2:

Why Outcomes Matter

Now that you know what outcomes are, here is the big question: so what? It turns out, outcomes matter a lot, and lots of people focus on them in all kinds of different sectors.

Beyond program participants, staff, and community locations, who focuses on outcomes?

- Governments at all levels, including the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)
- Accrediting bodies
- Non-profit organizations (national and local)
- Private foundations and funders
- International agencies

So, clearly, project funders and potential project funders care about outcomes. But, is looking good for funders enough reason for you to care about outcomes? Maybe not.

Of course, it's great when we can show funders the value of the work we do. What is more important than that? Doing the best job you can for the people you serve and making your CIL as effective as possible. Here is the good part, though: if you make your CIL as effective as possible by continually improving your services, then being able to demonstrate your CIL's value to funders takes care of itself. It gives you a story to tell.

Think about if the reverse is true: if you make your CIL look good to funders, do you automatically make your CIL as effective as possible? No. In fact, you may choose outcomes and ways of measuring those outcomes that are easy and look good on paper, but that won't tell you much about where you could improve your programs. The bottom line is this: do it for yourself. Do it for your effectiveness. Do it for your consumers. If you do all that, the story for funders will write itself.

Just What is "Outcomes Management?"

Outcomes management goes beyond the activity of measuring and reporting outcomes; it also takes the next step of using this outcome information, in systematic ways, to learn about and improve the effectiveness of your programs.

To increase your programs' effectiveness, you have to be able to describe what is happening. This involves the preliminary work of measuring your program performance and reporting your findings. Once you've assessed what is happening, you can then use that performance information to learn about and improve your center's services. This involves understanding why the observed outcomes are happening and how to make them better.

Outcome Management:

The systematic use of outcome information to improve the effectiveness of your programs and services and to communicate their value

Practicing Outcomes Management

Here is an opportunity to put all of this into practice. Using the attached Outcomes Management Worksheet, you will come up with four expected desired outcomes for one of the core programs at your CIL. Think about your choice and deliberately choose a program that you would like to actively evaluate throughout this toolkit. If you are reviewing the toolkit in a large group, feel free to divide into smaller workgroups to complete the worksheet activity.

Note: the worksheet at the end of this toolkit has the full contents, but a simplified version will be used in each step of the toolkit that presents one activity at a time. We will continue using this worksheet for activities through Step 5 of the toolkit.

Activity Instructions:

1. Choose one of the core programs at your CIL.
2. Write four expected desired outcomes, one in each box.
    a. Remember: target group + present tense verb + what you want to happen
    b. Which magic word applies to your outcomes?
        i. New **knowledge**?
        ii. Increased **skills**?
        iii. Changed **attitudes**?
        iv. Changed **values**?
        v. Modified **behavior**?
        vi. Improved **condition**?
        vii. Altered **status**?
3. Review your worksheet as a group. Are the expected desired outcomes clear and attainable? Is the information readily available?

As an example, consider a self-advocacy program. You know your target group – program participants. What do participants want out of the program? For example, what new knowledge does a participant need to improve their ability to advocate for themselves? If they are not connected with local resources, maybe that could be an expected desired outcome, so make it a present-tense statement: "Program participants are connected to appropriate local resources to help meet their self-advocacy goals."

Or, is a change in attitude appropriate enough that you think should be an outcome? Then put it together as a present-tense statement: "Program participants have a positive attitude that encourages them to take an active role in advocating for their desires and dreams." You know your programs, just take a moment to think about what successful outcomes you and your participants want from the programs.

Activity Worksheet

[Here is a simplified version of the Outcomes Management Worksheet. For working through this activity, use the expanded document: **Step 1 supplement: Blank Outcomes Management Worksheet** located in the appendix at the end of this toolkit]

Outcomes Management Worksheet

Program:	
Brief description of program:	

DESIRED OUTCOMES of our program	**MEASURABLE INDICATORS** for each desired outcome	**SOURCE** of information needed for each indicator	**METHOD** to gather each piece of needed outcome information
1.	**1a**		
	1b		
2.	**2a**		
	2b		
3.	**3a**		
	3b		
4.	**4a**		
	4b		

Perspectives in Outcomes Management

As you are thinking of what your program's desired outcomes may be, remember to consider potential outcomes from multiple perspectives, using multiple sources of information. We will delve more deeply into sources and methods related to outcomes management in Step 5, but for now here are some examples of the types of perspectives and sources of information you may want to consider:

- Program documents are one way to get some sources of ideas for desired outcomes.
- Program staff and volunteers may have a different perception of the desired outcomes.
- The participants themselves, or the parents or guardians of participants, may have other perceptions.
- Records of complaints are a nice way of asking yourself what are the desired outcomes (because, obviously, these are areas where your CIL didn't achieve some desired outcomes).
- If you work with a consumer who is going to eventually work with another agency, you can ask that other agency about the outcomes they think you ought to be achieving. (They may have some interesting insights for you.)
- Other programs with missions, services, or participants that are similar to yours.
- Outside observers of your program in action.

Each of these perspectives may offer valuable information for you to consider when thinking about and planning for outcomes management. Considering multiple perspectives and sources of information will also help you develop key evaluation questions to reflect these outcomes, and provide guidance on communicating about your program.

Be Deliberate and Consistent

Another tip, and one we strongly recommend, is to be deliberate and consistent in how you word your expected desired outcomes. Begin with naming the target group (who it is you are trying to create benefit for). Then identify an action, worded in the present tense, that you want to happen. For example:

EXPECTED DESIRED OUTCOME FOR A LITERACY PROGRAM	
Target group:	Adults completing the literacy program
Desired present-tense action:	Read at a sixth-grade level

SELF-ADVOCACY PROGRAM	
Target group:	Young Adults age 14-22 years old with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) in high school completing a self-advocacy course.
Desired present-tense action:	Participants report they advocated 50 percent more in their IEP meeting.

This wording may seem like a small thing. However, if you can remember and be consistent about using this formula it will help you develop strong outcomes management skills.

Review: The Value of Outcomes Management

The main reason for doing outcomes management is to increase your program's effectiveness – to make your CIL as effective as possible! The second main reason is to communicate the value of your programs by telling your program's story. When you've done the work of using outcome information to improve your programs' effectiveness, you will be well on your way to having a great story to tell!

Why Do Outcomes Management?

1. Increases your understanding of your program
2. Helps you make evidence based key decisions about your program
3. Increase your program's effectiveness
4. Tell your program's story to potential funding agencies and your community

STEP 2 LOGIC MODELS

Orientation to Logic Models

The second step of this toolkit is about Logic Models. You may know exactly what a logic model is, or you may have no idea what the phrase "logic model" means. Either way is fine. Throughout this step of the toolkit, we use CIL-specific examples to support your learning and thinking about why it is important to use logic models; as well as instruction on how to create and use them, and other considerations for developing a logic model for your organization. By the end of this step, you should be able to:

- Explain what is a logic model
- Describe the essential components of a logic model
- Illustrate the value of using logic models
- Check the logic in your own logic model

What is a Logic Model?

Although the phrase "logic model" can sound like jargon, it is a tremendously useful tool. Logic models are popular and common, so it is important to understand what they are and how to use them.

What is a Logic Model?

It is a way to show the key elements of a program and their relationship to each other, visually and all on one page.

A good way to think about logic models is to start by considering the four essential components of a program that we looked at in Step 1.

Inputs
Resources dedicated to or consumed by the program

→

Activities
What the program does to fulfill its mission

→

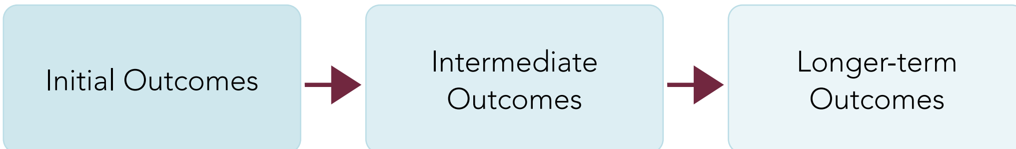
Outputs
The volume of work accomplished by the program

→

Desired outcomes
Benefits or changes for participants during or after activities

Types of Desired outcomes

Next, ask yourself: Do all outcomes happen at the same time? No, they don't. Outcomes happen gradually, over a period of time. Think about what that means. For instance, say you have eight things you'd like to have happen in your program. You wouldn't imagine that they would all happen on the same day, would you? Some happen right away. These are the Initial Outcomes, which tend to focus on increased knowledge and awareness.



These Initial Outcomes then lead to other Intermediate Outcomes, which tend to be more action-oriented. Finally, Intermediate Outcomes can lead to Longer-Term Outcomes, which are the end goals of the program. In this way, outcomes build upon and reinforce each other. It works like a chain, with different levels of outcomes happening at different times. You and your team will get to define for yourselves which meaningful changes you want for the consumers you serve, and when to stop measuring outcomes.

Example Logic Model

Inputs	Activity	Outputs	Initial Outcome	Intermediate Outcomes	Long Term Outcome
CIL staff, CIL facility, room or Zoom space, staff and Consumer's time	Consumer works with CIL staff to establish skills and supports for independent living	20 Consumers work with staff at CIL	Consumer increases knowledge and awareness of long-term supports and services (LTSS)	Consumer develops a transition plan Consumer secures housing through a voucher or other appropriate program	Consumer lives independently in the environment of their choice and achieves community involvement

The illustration above is an example of a logic model, including examples of the essential components. Let's review the logic model shown above, to understand its flow. We will continue building on this logic model in future steps with additional information on how to develop and use the components.

You can see how, in this example, inputs are listed on the left of the logic model, and then at least one activity, and outputs. Different levels of desired outcomes flow to the right from these activities and outputs as part of a process. That is why it is called a logic model: it is a model of a program that captures the program's flow towards the desired outcome. Of course, you may disagree with the steps in the process, or you may have done it differently. That is okay. This is just an example of one way to show the flow of a program's outcomes in a logic model format. If you prefer building your logic model a different way, meet with your team and explore other designs using these components.

Logic Model Options

Typically, logic models flow left-to-right, but you can also design them to flow bottom-up, present as a pyramid, or as a cycle. It is your choice what works best for you. You can also have more than one track to achieve the same long-term outcome, or multiple complementary outcomes. Or you can have open-ended outcomes, which means there may be more than one right solution depending on the consumer, or the desired outcome can be achieved in more than one way.

Think about the example we just reviewed, and how it is a way to illustrate on one page all the different elements of your program you might want to capture. Remember, as you are putting together your logic model, to think about the different levels of outcomes, and in what order you can expect them to be achieved.

Logic Model Process

A great way to think about a logic model is that it captures the **if-then** of a program. **If** we do these activities, **then** this first desired outcome will happen. **If** that happens, **then** this next desired outcome will happen. And if that happens, then another desired outcome happens. So, the **if-then** process works its way up the logic model. We saw this in our example:

- **If** we connect the consumer to CIL staff to learn about independent living, **then** they will have the knowledge about long-term supports.
- **If** they know about long-term supports, **then** they will be able to create a transition plan.
- **If** they create a transition plan, **then** they will be able to secure housing.

Finally, **if** the consumer both secures housing and acquires in-home supports, then they will be able to live independently in the community. It's the if-then thinking that captures the logic.

The Value of Using Logic Models

If you had a logic model like this for your CIL, what would you be able to do with it? You might be surprised about how useful logic models can be. Logic models can:

- **Make the program's design and theory explicit.** The logic model process can clarify aspects of your program you may only have thought about previously.
- **Ensure a shared vision within the program.** What if not everyone on your staff understood the program's logic? They wouldn't all be able to pull in the same direction, would they? If staff are on the same program, it is essential that they are all working in the same direction with a common understanding. Having a logic model ensures a shared vision inside the program.
- **Communicate the program's rationale to outsiders.** You can say to one of your funders or to a potential partner or consumer, "This is what we're about. Right here on this one piece of paper, this captures what we are about." That is a valuable thing to have and reference as an "elevator pitch" to summarize your program's efforts.
- **Orient workers to emphasize what is important in the program – and what you value about it**. You can say to your staff members, "Look, we are making sure that people get a choice to live independently and have the supports to sustain themselves. That is the essence. Sure, there may be some issues with waiting lists for housing. But, the essence of what we're about is getting people the knowledge and support they need to live on their own." It orients people to focusing on that end goal.
- **Help allocate resources properly to different activities.** Down at the bottom of a logic model, you have your program's different activities. Which ones are the most important? By looking at your desired outcomes, you can pick out which activities are the most important, and you can then allocate resources to those activities.
- **Stimulate a discussion of how to define and measure success.** They also **help you to identify which desired outcomes should be measured**. We will go over measurement more thoroughly as a next step in this toolkit, but at this point we can ask ourselves, "What do we want to achieve?"

Thinking More About Your Logic Model

When we are learning to develop logic models, it is helpful to have techniques to help guide us. The How/Why/What Else technique for outcomes helps you to think through the logic model you are working to develop. Using this technique, you start by identifying an desired outcome on a logic model. Then, you ask "How will we reach this outcome?" If the "how" is satisfactorily explained, ask yourself "Why do I think this outcome will occur?" If the "why" and the "how" make sense, then ask yourself "What else?" Is there anything you are missing? Using this model is a way to check your logic and see if what you did was logical, or if there is a place where your logic doesn't track.

To apply to our example logic model, let's think about consumers who want to live independently in the environment of their choice and achieve community involvement.

- How are we going to help them live independently? This is your opportunity to simplify the necessary steps. Look at the initial and intermediate outcomes on your logic model. Think of them as the activities needed to meet that long-term outcome. We will help by increasing their knowledge of LTSS, developing a transition plan, and securing housing. These are the outcomes from our example logic model and, when applied to this process, provide a way of checking your logic to make sure your reasoning is sound and that the steps make sense.
- Why? This is where you clarify the purpose of the desired outcome. In this case something like, because it is their right to make important decisions about their lives and have access to all of the benefits of society. Sounds logical so far.
- Any additional outcomes fall in the "what else?" category. Try rephrasing your outcome to determine if there are steps, resources, or events that need to be in place in order to achieve the outcome. Perhaps there are issues with housing that need to be addressed, either availability or finding housing that is close to public transportation. There may be external influences on when and how a consumer reaches their desired outcome.

Process Mapping

Does it seem like the still flow isn't right, that you might be missing steps between outcomes, or that you have way too much "what else" and don't know how to proceed? One option is **process mapping**. Process mapping is a way to illustrate the flow of work activities within an organization or program. Process mapping provides more details than a logic model and incorporates additional inputs, activities, outputs, and steps. It may assist your organization in operationalizing your logic model, identifying gaps, or keeping your team on the same page regarding expectations and procedures. Though valuable, the details of this problem-solving technique are beyond the scope of this toolkit. Those interested in exploring process mapping should explore additional resources, online or through local partnerships.

If you would like to explore process mapping, a good place to start are linear flow maps and swimlane diagrams. Here is a link to a brief (13 minute) video introduction to these simple types of process maps: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3mi-Y4leiM

The next question to ask yourself is this: "How far should my logic model go?" To answer that question, it comes down to evaluating the program's impact on its consumers. The logic model shows the steps leading to the ultimate outcome, which is most likely an impact on peoples' lives. You will want ask yourself if the determined level of desired outcome shows meaningful change for your consumers, and that it is a change your program can reasonably influence. This is something you will have to decide for your program as it relates to all of the steps in your logic model.

Check Your Understanding

Look at the example logic model and think about impact. The long-term desired outcome is the **consumer lives independently in the environment of their choice and achieves community involvement**. Is that an appropriate indicator of meaningful change that is within a CIL's reasonable influence? Should you lower the bar, or could you influence the consumer to reach a higher outcome?

STEP 3

CHOOSING OUTCOMES TO MEASURE

Intro and Objectives

Up until now, we've encouraged you to think about your desired outcomes in an open-ended way. First, we invited you to think about any outcomes you wanted. Then, we asked you to consider how the desired outcomes for your program fit into a logic model to make sure they fit together logically to produce a plan with a good chance of working. In these initial steps, you were thinking about the process in terms of what would be ideal, and how to plan and work towards the outcomes you want for your program. Now, we want to bring into focus some of the hard realities that will come into play when choosing and managing outcomes. This includes limitations on the time, money, and desire to measure all the outcomes you may like to measure, as well as the partnerships and strategic priorities of your CIL.

Following this step, you will be able to:

- Be confident about the outcomes you are choosing to measure
- Use your logic model to inform our choice of desired outcomes
- Articulate why the designed outcomes are important, valued, and the best to evaluate and measure
- Anticipate how evaluating the desired outcomes will improve your ability to tell your program's key narrative/story to diverse audiences
- Anticipate who to check with to support those impacted by the program or community in order to influence the outcome measures

The Choice is Yours

Choosing appropriate outcomes to measure is vital to your CIL's evaluation process, and will make the rest of the process easier by providing you a path to the information you are seeking. It will also help make the most of your limited time and resources and direct you to where you can be most effective. To prioritize your outcomes, start with the outcomes you need to measure; those your program was designed to accomplish. Think about our example logic model and the desired outcomes it illustrates:

- Initial Outcome: Consumer increases knowledge and awareness of long-term supports and services (LTSS)
- Intermediate Outcome: Consumer develops a transition plan
- Intermediate Outcome: Consumer secures housing through a voucher or other appropriate program
- Long Term Outcome: Consumer lives independently in the environment of their choice and achieves community involvement

These are the purposes of an IL program, and are an example of a great place to start your evaluation process. Once you have these outcomes that you need to measure, think about any outcomes that may meet a specific need in your community or make a particular desired impact. This can be tied to your strategic plan or not, but should be documented and discussed. Competing demands arise, so it is important to understand why you are measuring what you are measuring.

Why You Need to Choose Among Outcomes to Measure

It would be nice to have enough time and money to measure all the outcomes we can think of, but that is unlikely to happen. So, it is important to focus on what matters the most. It is also necessary to identify where your CIL wants to be the most effective. If there is something that really matters to you at your CIL, it is important to focus your outcome management efforts there. Lastly, it's important to make sure you don't overreach in terms of time and energy. Even if you had the money to measure all of the outcomes you can brainstorm, you will just burn yourself out trying to do all of that work at once. So, it is important to choose which desired outcomes you will focus on. Because you will have to make these choices in real life, it is equally important to practice making them in this training.

By choosing outcomes to measure, you can:

- Make good use of limited time and money
- Focus attention on what matters the most
- Identify where your CIL wants to be the most effective
- Make sure what you want to measure is feasible

A strategic approach to choosing the most important outcomes

How are you going to approach this decision? Here's a hint: attempt to address three questions at the same time. Your answers to the three questions will build upon each other to help lead your CIL to the most consequential outcomes. We will unpack each of the questions to describe how you can answer them individually, which will help lead you to your most important desired outcomes.

How to Choose Which Outcomes to Measure?

Address three questions at once. Which outcomes:

- Capture the most meaningful benefits of your program?
- Would help improve the effectiveness of your program?
- Best capture the value of your program?

There are big questions to ask yourself when you are choosing outcomes. To illustrate how to answer the questions, we will look at them as they relate to a Peer Support Program. We have provided example answers, but encourage you to come up with your own. You are the experts!

Question #1: What outcomes capture the most meaningful benefits of your program?

This is essentially what your program is about; it's the focal point. What is the first thing you would say if someone asked you, "What are you trying to achieve?" You should keep the answer to that question at the forefront of your decision-making because it is critical to meeting your end goal.

What makes an desired outcome meaningful in your CIL? This is an important discussion to have with your board, managers, and staff, as well as consumers. Be sure to have the conversation with all of these parties to ensure that you can incorporate input from those with lived experience and various levels of staff. It is likely that the responses will change depending on people's roles. This is a good thing! Make note of how the response changes depending on the role of the person you are asking. This is valuable information for understanding what outcomes carry the most meaning for your center's various stakeholders.

Think of a program that your center excels in or is proud of, such as your peer support, employment, or community transition program. Consider which outcome captures the most meaningful benefits, and if those who benefit most from the outcome are whom you most want to benefit.

What outcomes do you think captures the most meaningful benefit of your Peer Support Program? Meaningful benefits for participants could include that they:

- Are comfortable talking about their disability with others
- Define their identity as a person with a disability
- Are more at ease meeting new people and making friends
- Are able to problem-solve around any barriers that may come their way
- Something else?

Question #2: What outcomes would be the most advantageous to improving the overall effectiveness of your program?

Analyze your desired outcomes and think about which outcomes would make a significant difference in the program's overall performance. In other words, identify prospective outcomes that you may be able to build upon later, perhaps making your program better in other ways. A good start is to look at outcomes that your program is designed to accomplish; these are your first priority and represent the base for any additional outcomes.

Once you have a list of potential outcomes, examine what information would help improve your program. What would tell you how to make your program even better or serve more people? You could improve your program by reducing the amount of time involved or increasing accessibility, or focusing on accessibility for minority groups. It just depends on how you think you can improve your program.

Which outcomes would best improve your Peer Support Program's effectiveness? Put on your quality-improvement hat and consider what outcomes you could use to make your program more effective. Would it be:

- Consumers achieving goals that were most important to them
- What activities most helped consumers achieve their goal(s)
- How often consumers attended peer support sessions
- If consumers attended both online and in-person sessions, whether one format was better
- If accommodations for consumers disabilities were provided and met their needs
- Anything the program should have done and didn't, or that consumers wish the program would have done differently
- Something else?

Question #3: Which outcomes best capture the value of your program?

This third question is all about what desired outcomes are best to share – which outcomes speak the loudest, particularly to the outside audiences who are interested. This is significant because we all know that while we are working to improve the effectiveness of our programs, we must also keep trying to tell a good story about what we are doing. People appreciate compelling and coherent narratives which serve to make your program memorable. Be sure to keep your audience in mind. Think about how you might communicate your program's value differently if you were speaking to different people, such as consumers or funders.

Your response to this third question could be described as one that tells others why this program exists and the great things it has done. Stories about individuals or groups achieving their independence goals or doing new things they didn't know they could do are a great example of illustrating how your program helps consumers fulfill their ambitions.

For instance, one CIL offered scuba diving as a recreation activity. This activity really captured the hearts of people unfamiliar with CILs who were wondering why CILs had recreation programs. The outcome for consumers was getting in touch with their fear, conquering it, and growing as individuals and together as a group. Taking part in an activity that many of them never considered possible gave them the confidence to tackle other goals.

Capturing the value of a program involves sharing stories and pictures to help others personally relate to the challenges and successes of the achievements of your program's participants. More money, volunteers, and donations may come your way as others understand and relate to the value of your program.

Capturing the value of your program is the most important question when considering what and how to communicate to your outside audiences. Which outcomes do you think illustrate why your Peer Support Program is important?

- How consumers feel about themselves after receiving services
- What consumers would tell others about their experience receiving this service
- Consumers helping each other discover their talents
- Consumers reaching a goal because of peer support they have received

Be Sure to Consider Different Perspectives

When thinking about these questions, you will want to consider how best to show the value of your programs to different audiences. Consumers, funders, advocates, and other partners will have different priorities and you will want to consider how to not only choose appropriate desired outcomes, but create messages that are appealing to different groups.

For example, what would best show the value of your Peer Support Program to Consumers?

- The biggest impact of peer support services for consumers
- How consumers feel about themselves after receiving services
- What consumers would tell others about their experiences in receiving these services
- What goals consumers achieved as a result of peer support services

What about for Funders? Would one of the below answers better illustrate the value of your Peer Support Program to that audience?

- A description of the difference you see in your consumer after receiving services
- An example of your services
- If they as a funder feel that you could improve services or make better use of funding
- Personal testimony from a consumer about what the program has provided them

Funders' Perspectives

To make these questions a bit trickier, keep in mind that you have different funders and may need different outcome strategies. The entities that fund for your core services likely have different priorities than those that fund your supplemental services, so you should think about how to translate value to various funders. For example:

- Core funders will likely care about your outputs as well as your outcomes, and their priorities are tied to your grants to ensure you are making good use of the funds. This is good! Because it provides you a road map for your timelines and deliverables: you know what outcomes they want and should be able to plan accordingly.
- Supplemental funders are probably looking for alignment – in missions, priorities, service populations, and/or communities. The outcomes for supplemental funders should center on that alignment. For example:
    - If a funder's purpose is to provide employment, illustrate how your Peer Support Program helps prepare consumers for jobs.
    - If a funder is a healthcare company, describe outcomes related to the improved health and wellbeing of participants in your Peer Support Program.

By tailoring your messages to your audience, you can more effectively describe your program's outcomes in ways that go beyond core funding and expand your program's appeal to more diverse funding sources. The new partnerships that develop as a result are how you continually improve your program and expand your services.

Making the Judgment Call

The problem is, the answers to these questions don't always point to the same outcomes. Or you don't have the time or money to accomplish all of your identified outcomes. You don't want to burn out yourself or your staff trying to reach unrealistic goals. **This is where making a judgment call comes in**. You make this judgment call based on variables like available resources, feasibility, validity, and overall effect.

When you have to make a judgment call on desired outcomes, ask yourself:

- Do we have what we need (staff, money, time) to achieve our identified outcomes?
- Is it within our control to influence the outcomes?
- Are the outcomes related to the "core business" of our program?
- Do you have a reliable source of information? (more on this in Step 5)
- Are there any big leaps in our outcomes that create gaps in the progression of impacts?
- Do we have what you need for our intended audience?
- Are we looking at what is truly most important?

Activity

Now that you understand the three questions you need to answer to evaluate a program, we are going to revisit our Activity Worksheet. This activity will work best as a group, but you can also complete it on your own.

On your worksheet you have the four desired outcomes you chose for your CIL program in Step 1. Look at these outcomes and consider:

1. Which captures the most meaningful benefits?
2. Which would most help improve the effectiveness of your program?
3. Which best captures the value of your program?

Now, eliminate two of the four desired outcomes. You can use whatever reasoning you feel is appropriate to decide on the best two for your CIL, but you need to be able to explain how and why you did it based on the three questions.

Analyzing Your Choice

It is crucial to make sure you are measuring what you intend to measure. Because of this, it is a good idea to review your desired outcomes to check for this congruence. Once again, you can start with those outcomes for which the programs were intended, such as: are participants in your peer support program communicating and supporting each other; are consumers in your employment program obtaining jobs; does your recreation program provide diverse, entertaining activities according to participants. Make sure your desired outcomes are correctly aligned with their purpose.

Expand your analysis from there. Prior to starting your program evaluation, engage staff and consumers, even board members, in a brainstorming session. You can also ask specific funders, if you know them and they are available. Ask them, what outcomes could we expect when we offer services, for example peer support, employment, or recreation services? Are the outcomes we identified appropriate in their views?

Use the brainstorming session to narrow down your outcomes to the top 1-2 you should expect, just like in our activity. Once you have narrowed down the desired outcomes to the top 1-2, then brainstorm questions to ask participants to determine if you are measuring the correct outcome in the best way. Ask them if, from their perspective, another way of looking at the outcomes might measure their effectiveness more accurately. The different perspectives of your brainstorming participants are to your benefit in this process.

Piloting and Deciding

Before launching your program, you will want to test or pilot your questions/evaluation tool to make sure that it is useful. Ask a group of staff and consumers unrelated to the development of the program or service to review and answer your questions. Did these test participants understand the questions? Was the survey too long or too complicated? Did you get more complete answers if the evaluation was on paper or electronic, such as through Survey Monkey? Better to find and correct the questions that don't work before you use them on your participants in the actual program.

Although there are several things to consider when formulating a desired outcome, in the end you are focusing on just a few metrics that are empirically defined and within the scope of your organization's mission. Once these are settled on, focus on them. You can always reassess later and generate new desired outcomes if it is prudent to do so. By keeping the desired outcomes simple, yet objective, there should be little or no discord about whether or not they are being met.

The point is, you are going to have to make these decisions back at your CIL. Conceptually, it is a straightforward process. The hard part is in deciding which of the possible outcomes you will choose to measure, and which you will choose not to measure.

STEP 4

MEASURABLE INDICATORS

Objectives

In the previous step we detailed how to choose appropriate outcomes to measure, and how to explain why they are important to different audiences. In Step 4 we will delve more deeply into how to choose measurable indicators for those desired outcomes. Following this step, attendees will:

- Know the difference between an desired outcome and an indicator of an outcome
- Know why indicators of desired outcome matter
- Know how to use the SMARTIE rubric to flesh out your understanding of target indicators
- Be able to identify your desired outcomes, the indicators that will enable you to measure them, and why those indicators are valuable
- Be able to identify target indicators and begin to think about how to measure them with confidence

What are measurable indicators?

Measurable indicators are the heart of the whole process of managing outcomes. Indicators are the "what's" – the different ways we measure. The central idea here is that we do not technically "measure" outcomes. Instead, we measure indicators of outcomes. **Measurable indicators are the specific items of information that signal a program's success in achieving an outcome.** They are what you actually measure and report on; they are the part that matter.

At a future step, we will cover the "how to" of identifying sources of indicators and methods for doing so. At this stage, however, we will be focusing on what measurable indicators are and why they are important.

Outcomes vs. Indicators

To illustrate the difference between desired outcomes and indicators, let's consider a group of people deciding where to go out to eat. The desired outcome is a "good" restaurant, but when choosing a restaurant, do you just look at the outside of the restaurant or do you consider all the different aspects? You probably look at the different aspects that matter to you – the things that indicate you will like the restaurant. You look at whether it has the type of food you want to eat, good service, if the restaurant's character fits your mood, etc. Since this is a group of people, you will also want to include everyone's opinion, which might involve how comfortable and welcome they feel at a particular establishment.

The same thing is true with measuring outcomes within your CIL's programs. When we are interested in good outcomes in our programs, what we are really doing is looking for are indicators of good outcomes. For our restaurant, the indicator is a group of happy diners. In reality, we cannot measure an desired outcome directly; what we can measure are indicators of desired outcomes.

Indicators Measure Success

So, if we can't directly measure an desired outcome, how do we measure an indicator of an outcome? Remember that measurable indicators signal your success. In this way, a measurable indicator defines what you mean by an desired outcome. To you, a "good" restaurant could mean a perfect steak, fast service, and lots of televisions; or it could mean authentic Italian cuisine, an extensive wine selection, and soft lighting. In either case, the indicators we care about define what we mean by successfully meeting the desired outcome.

Indicators also show how much or how often the desired outcome is being achieved, and for whom. Often, this is expressed as a number and percentage of people who achieve the desired outcome. Here are a few more examples to illustrate the difference between desired outcomes and indicators:

- Desired Outcome: Consumers come to your CIL for help in receiving benefits
- Indicator: 10 of those 15 (66.7%) applied for benefits within 30 days from their visit
- Desired Outcome: Consumers attend a workshop at your CIL to learn to hire and supervise their own personal assistants
- Indicator: 4 of 8 attendees (50%) sign up for self-directed personal care attendants

Measurable Indicators

Specific items of information that track ("indicate") a program's success on an desired outcome. Measurable indicators:

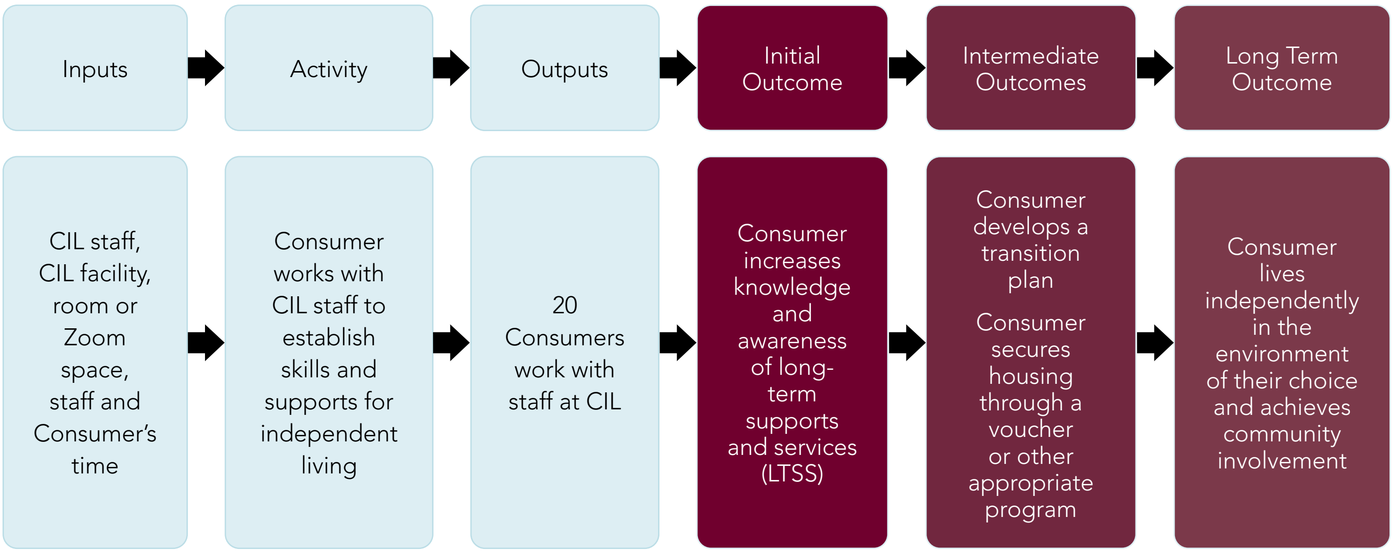
- Define exactly what you mean by the desired outcome
- Show how much the desired outcome is being achieved
- Are often expressed as the number and percent of participants who achieve the desired outcome

Adding Indicators to Outcomes

Remember from Step 1 that outcomes are the benefits for participants during or after their involvement in the program. Also remember that these outcomes produce seven types of changes or benefits. Our **Seven Magic Words**:

1. New **knowledge**
2. Increased **skills**
3. Changed **attitudes**
4. Changed **values**
5. Modified **behavior**
6. Improved **condition**
7. Altered **status**

We used these magic words to develop the desired outcomes for our logic model in Step 2. Keeping these in mind helps ensure that we are tying the outcomes with tangible benefits to participants.



Types of Indicators

If we look at the logic model from Step 2 about long-term services and supports (above), we have identified four desired outcomes. Our Initial Desired Outcome is "Consumer increases knowledge and awareness of long-term service and support options." As it is written now, we can't measure that, but we can adjust the initial outcome into a measurable indicator. First, we need to decide what an increase in knowledge and awareness looks like. One way would be to survey consumers after they work with us to see if they self-report an increase in knowledge and awareness. Another way would be to do a pre- and post-assessment, where we can chart what knowledge they have gained. Since the focus is on finding services and supports that are individualized, a survey of self-reported growth will work best for this project. When we take that into account we can create that indicator, and additional indicators for our subsequent outcomes. Below is the logic model with indicators added.

Inputs	Activity	Outputs	Initial Desired Outcome	Intermediate Desired Outcomes	Long Term Desired Outcome
CIL staff, CIL facility, room or Zoom space, staff and Consumer's time	Consumer works with CIL staff to establish skills and supports for independent living	20 Consumers work with staff at CIL	Consumer increases knowledge and awareness of long-term supports and services (LTSS)	Consumer develops a transition plan Consumer secures housing through a voucher or other appropriate program	Consumer lives independently in the environment of their choice and achieves community involvement

Indicators

Initial Desired Outcome	Intermediate Desired Outcomes	Long Term Desired Outcome
90% (45/50) of consumers work with CIL staff to establish IL skills and supports and report increased knowledge or awareness of LTSS options	75% (38/50) of consumers develop transition plans, and 70% (35/50) of consumers secure housing	70% (35/50) of Consumers live independently in the environment of their choice and achieve community involvement

Choosing and Defining Indicators

So, when we talk about measuring outcomes, we are really talking about indicators of desired outcomes.

- Desired Outcome: Benefits for participants during or after their involvement with a program
- Indicator: The specific information collected to track the program's success on an outcome

What if you have chosen bad indicators for your desired outcomes? You will be in trouble. The choice of indicators is incredibly important. Remember that these are what you report on, so choose good indicators and measure them correctly. You should choose indicators that explain the value of something beyond just a number. For example, 80% of consumers participate in a peer support program does not tell us much. Saying 80% of consumers who participated in peer support programs reported an increased quality of life better explains the value of the indicator.

A note about measurement: You might be wondering, why measure both number (45/50, etc.) and percent in the indicators you've identified. The main reason is that sometimes we measure just a few of something. For example, we might measure five of something. In this case, percentages can be misleading: three of five is 60%, but 60% can sound like a lot. So, we use both numbers and percentages to be transparent about what we measure and about what kind of success we have on a desired outcome or an indicator of a desired outcome.

Check Your Understanding

Now let's take a moment to clarify what we have learned. Below is a list of statements. Take a moment to determine which are desired outcomes and which are indicators. You will be coming up with your own desired outcomes and indicators shortly, so this is the opportunity to make sure you understand this concept before moving on.

- Established a peer support program for our consumers
- Consumers develop transportation assistance
- 80% of consumers participate in our weekly peer support program
- Increased consumer participation in public assistance programs
- 90% of consumers are enrolled in appropriate public assistance programs
- Improved our CIL's community involvement
- CIL managers attend at least one community meeting each month
- 85% of consumers have reliable transportation available when needed

SMARTIE Indicators

When you think about choosing indicators, measurability is one aspect of what makes for a good indicator. You may have seen the acronym SMART (for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely) used to describe intended desired outcomes. Some newer versions of this acronym have added an I (for Inclusive) and an E (for Equitable) to the end of this acronym, making it SMARTIE.

SMARTIE acronym:

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Timely

Inclusive

Equitable

Making your Indicators SMARTIE

So, good indicators are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely, Inclusive, and Equitable. Let's make sure we are clear about what we mean by these terms:

- **Specific:** Are we clear about exactly what we will measure? It can be helpful to ask yourself if someone who was totally unfamiliar with your CIL would be able to understand exactly what you intend to measure. That is a good test.
- **Measurable:** Can you describe the indicator in terms of changes or effects it may have? And can the necessary information be gathered within an acceptable amount of effort? In other words, would you have to knock yourself out to get this information, or is it a reasonable amount of work?
- **Achievable:** Is there high likelihood that your program's actions will lead to a successful outcome? For instance, world peace would not necessarily be a good indicator because it is probably not going to happen. On the other hand, you want something that is worth achieving, not something so easy it is meaningless.
- **Relevant:** Does the indicator capture the core essence of the desired outcome? Many items you work on as a CIL impact several different outcomes. For example, when helping someone learn to live independently you may help them create and use a home budget. This is a goal that may really help someone trying to be independent, but may not capture the core effort of moving into an independent living situation. You would need to determine what level of skills and/or supports indicate the core of successful independent living.
- **Timely:** Is the indicator likely to move enough during the designated time period to provide useful information? Finding accessible housing can take a lot of time. Depending on your timeframe, you may not be able to record that outcome. Instead, a better indicator may be if they were approved for a housing voucher within the allotted time frame.
- **Inclusive:** Does the indicator bring into the process those who may be impacted by the program and people who are traditionally marginalized, and does it do so in a way that shares power? You want to be sure that no one is brought into the process as a token representative. This includes inclusivity for people of individual, marginalized identities, as well as paying attention to the intersection of those identities, for example: race and gender.
- **Equitable:** Is the indicator fair, balanced, and impartial? This may mean seeking to address systemic injustice, inequity, or oppression, or ensuring an equal say for everyone.

Activity

Now that you have had the opportunity to clarify your understanding of the concept, it is time to develop your own indicators. You will complete this activity using the Outcomes Management Worksheet you started in Step 1 (see below).

In Step 1, you chose a program at your CIL and target desired outcomes. In Step 3, you prioritized two target outcomes. In this step, your job is to come up with **at least two** measurable indicators for each of these desired outcomes. Make them SMART, or even better make them SMARTIE, and remember that **this is what you will be measuring to determine if you have successfully achieved your outcomes**.

Outcomes Management Worksheet

Program:	
Brief description of program:	

DESIRED OUTCOMES of our program	**MEASURABLE INDICATORS** for each desired outcome	**SOURCE** of information needed for each indicator	**METHOD** to gather each piece of needed outcome information
1.	**1a**		
	1b		
2.	**2a**		
	2b		
3.	**3a**		
	3b		
4.	**4a**		
	4b		

STEP 5 SOURCES AND METHODS

Intro and Objectives

Let's review what we've covered so far. We began by making sure we know what an outcome is and why we are measuring and managing them. Then, we covered logic models and their value in understanding your program's reasoning, and how to check if your logic makes sense or needs to be reconsidered. We reviewed the need to sometimes make tough choices about which outcomes from our logic models we want to focus our efforts on measuring. Next, we discussed how we don't actually measure outcomes and that, instead, we measure indicators of outcomes.

In this step, we ask ourselves **where and how** we get the information we need in order to assess where we are in achieving our desired outcomes. The first part of this process involves identifying information sources and deciding on which methods we will use to gather the information we are interested in. After this step, you should be able to:

- Explain different types of sources and methods
- Choose a potential source that aligns with your questions
- Understand how to choose an appropriate method for a chosen source
- Recognize how indicators, sources, and methods work together

Sources

Sources are where you can find the information you need. As such, you need to be sure to align your sources with the questions you are trying to answer; a good source will inform your evaluation with appropriate metrics. There are different kinds of sources with different strengths and weaknesses. You find them in different places and should adjust how you use your various sources to gain information. The sources may be internal, contained at or within your CIL, or they might be external sources of information that are still relevant to your CIL, including observations on the physical environment. If you don't have a good internal source, then you build one, like surveys, interview protocol, or tracking benchmarks for your CIL programs.

Also keep in mind that you can have multiple sources for a single indicator. If you do use multiple sources you should choose cooperative sources that provide different but complementary information to improve your understanding, such as existing documentation combined with feedback from consumers. For example, reviewing existing documentation will help provide a baseline and highlight inconsistencies in the data, which can then be addressed in greater detail by interviewing consumers.

Where to find sources of outcome information:

- Existing documentation:
  - Written client case records
  - Documents (reports or electronic data files)
- Individuals:
  - Program participants (consumers)
  - Others who know participants (e.g., family)
  - Other people
- Physical/environmental conditions:
  - Accessibility audits
  - Consumer observation and feedback

Types of Sources

One set of sources is existing documentation. Existing documentation can be great because it is available, and possibly cheap and easy to get. Existing documentation could be written or electronic client case records and other types of documentation, such as reports or data files like consumer service records. Typically, records like this are securely stored, either in databases like MiCIL or CILSuite, or as physical files in a locked cabinet. Existing documentation is often created through the work itself. It reflects your processes and outcomes within the context of your center's activities.

If you use existing documentation, it is important to assess the types of information that are available to you at your CIL and plan appropriately. For example, if you have software with built-in report generation capabilities, you will have more immediate analytical ability than if your existing documentation is stored in boxes. Consider the sources - and resources - you have available and do what will work best for your CIL.

Another set of sources of information is individuals, such as consumers or people who know the consumers – like family members or caregivers. You may want to consider other individuals as well, if they know the consumers and could provide information about an outcome of interest. For example, if you have a youth consumer who attends a class on "Self-Advocacy in my IEP Meeting", you may interview the instructor of the class, their teacher at their school, or their parent to gather more details on the impact of the service, in addition to surveying the youth themselves on their experience and how they used their new self-advocacy skills.

There is also the physical environment. This may seem, at first, like an odd source. However, if the information you want has to do with environmental barriers or another element of the built or natural environment, you may want to consider including it. If you are looking to assess or improve accessibility at grocery stores in your community, for example, observing the physical environments of each store would be a productive source of information.

Assessing the Quality of Your Sources

For each of these different kinds of sources, there are pros and cons. For instance, existing documents may be very easy to access, but do they have the information you need? What if they have close to what you need, but don't have exactly the information you would require to measure your desired outcome? You would miss the mark by using them, because it's not an exact fit. Your challenge, as you get into choosing sources, is to balance the pros and cons of each source to make the decision that's best for your CIL.

Here is another example: you may choose individuals as your information sources. A clear pro here is that you can ask whatever questions you need to get the outcome information you want to know. But what if they once knew what happened but no longer remember it? If you're asking about something that happened in the past, it's important to consider if individuals have a clear enough memory of what happened.

When assessing your sources, be sure to keep potential bias in mind. Bias is a person's particular tendency, inclination, or opinion, especially one that is preconceived or unreasoned. Individuals are wonderful information sources, but they are also people who may have a particular set of beliefs or values that can lead them to select certain pieces of information above others. Bias can cause individuals to reach false conclusions and generate misleading information, which is the opposite of what you want. Take steps to minimize bias in your sources by considering if the individuals have a conflict of interest related to your outcome, or a perspective that might prevent them from providing you with completely accurate information. We will have additional information on bias in subsequent steps.

The key to choosing sources is to brainstorm multiple potential sources and then choose the best source for your unique situation. Once you make your choice, be deliberate about using language that is appropriate and meaningful to the individuals serving as your information sources. This will help maintain confidence that the information these individuals provide is credible and as close to true as possible. For example, many people with brain injuries have difficulty with Likert scales, so that would not be a good choice for gaining information from those individuals and should be discussed in the vetting process.

Pros and Cons of Potential Sources

Making the decision about which source is best for your situation might seem tricky. How do you choose the best source of information, given that each source has pros and cons? In the first section, we provided the scenario of a youth consumer who attends a class on "Self-Advocacy in my IEP Meeting". In this scenario, additional potential sources of information to gather more details on the impact of the service were interviews with the instructor of the class, the youth's teacher at school, or their parent. Let's take a look at the possible pros and cons of interviewing these potential sources:

Instructor of the class

- Pro: they may have observations of the student's responses and participation while they are actually in the class to use as direct feedback.
- Con: they may not have made those observations, or could have unreasonable expectations of students' IEP responses or participation.

Youth's teacher at school

- Pro: this teacher is present for the student's IEP meeting and can directly observe the outcome and provide direct examples.
- Con: they might have a biased perspective of students who have required IEP goals.

Youth's parent

- Pro: the parent can observe the student in the home setting and likely better understand the youth's thoughts and perspectives in that setting, such as if they struggle with their homework from the self-advocacy class.
- Con: the parent's expectations of their child may be too demanding or too low.

Methods

Methods are how you get from sources the information you need about your outcomes and impacts.

Now that you know where you might find information about your desired outcomes, you need to figure out how to get it from that source. An important point here is that it is a common mistake to blend these two things, sources and methods, together. Keep in mind that they are two completely separate decisions to make. If you keep that in mind, it will help you make good decisions and make efficient use of the time you put into outcomes management.

Methods are how you get the information you need. Just like you did with sources, you will need to make decisions about which methods you use to obtain information. Some methods you might choose include reviewing case records or other documents, designing data tracking benchmarks, or asking people to complete a survey or participate in an interview. You might also observe the source you are interested in by directly watching it. Or, you could conduct a test if you were interested in what someone knew or learned.

When determining your methods, it would benefit you to keep in mind the storage capacity of your CIL. We will discuss storing information in more detail in Step 7, but be sure to think about if your ability to store information is in line with how you are collecting it. For example, if you are reviewing case records, do you have appropriate software for tracking the information or enough physical space to store hard copies of the records? If you are using data tracking benchmarks, do you have the staff to store and analyze the data? Or if you are interviewing people, are you able to store electronic recordings of the interviews? However you are collecting the information, also think about your capacity for maintaining it.

Types of Methods

There are other things you might want to measure, like the width of doorways or other accessibility concerns. For example, the information you want to know about may be curb cuts on streets. You could look at a report as your source and see what curb cuts the city has put in. Or, you could interview an individual whose job it was to put in the curb cuts. Or, you could just go out on the streets. In this way, the street itself, the physical environment, is the source you would use. You could just go out and look and make tallies to record what you found. Depending on your questions, you should feel free to use different methods to answer them in the way that provides you with the most valuable information.

The one type of method we **do not recommend** for outcomes management is focus groups. Why? Because focus groups are effective for brainstorming and having a group of people build off of one another's ideas to stimulate each other's thinking. This allows the group to come up with things that the individual group members wouldn't have come up with on their own. However, this is the exact opposite of what we want when we are doing outcomes management work. What we want is to know each individual's preferred outcome – just theirs, without them influencing each other – and to be able to measure those outcomes, and then to sum up all of this information into an overall measure of success.

Types of Methods:

- Case record review
- Document review
- Data tracking benchmarks
- Survey
- Interview
- Observation
- Testing
- Mechanical measurement

(Focus groups are not recommended because they stimulate a process of working off of one another's ideas and influencing one another)

Choosing Methods

Every one of these methods we are recommending has pros and cons. Surveys, for instance, are cheap to distribute. But, they can be difficult for a variety of people with disabilities, and there are no guarantees that people will complete them and return them to you. Interviews can provide a lot of information, but people may not want to talk to you, and you may need an interpreter for Deaf consumers. Data tracking benchmarks are great at comparing your program's performance to see how you are doing across time, but you might not have benchmarking tools in place. The same key that we recommended using when coming up with sources works here: Brainstorm more than one method, and then choose the method that is best - most valuable - for your situation.

Describing Methods

When choosing your methods, it is also important to consider if the information you want to know is best described through **quantitative** or **qualitative** methods.

Scenario	Quantitative	Qualitative
CIL hosts a Legislative Advocacy Training Class	Ask participants to complete an after-class survey rating their level of improved knowledge on a scale from 1 to 10.	Ask participants to write in their own words one example of where they might use the new skills.
Consumer receives travel training for using public transportation	Ask participants to complete an after-class survey rating their level of confidence in choosing a bus route to travel from their home to the center.	Ask participants to write in their own words their confidence level in using public transportation.

Quantitative vs. Qualitative Methods

Quantitative methods involve numbers and distinct measures. These include things like surveys where people choose from pre-set options. This can look like yes/no or multiple-choice questions, or a ranking/ evaluative scale of 1 – 10. In any of these examples, you will end up with information that can be stated as numbers. For example, you might find that 80% of consumers self-reported an increased level of confidence in using public transportation to travel from their home to the center. You could also ask these same questions in an in-person interview. The point is, quantitative methods of gathering information allow you to understand responses in terms of numbers or percentages. Because they require defined options, quantitative methods are most useful for gathering information when you already have a good sense of the range of answers that people give.

Qualitative methods, on the other hand, are more about narratives, observations, and non-numerical data. These include things like open-ended questions to gain insights. These questions could be asked in-person or on a survey, but in either case, they allow the person responding to describe their experience, thoughts, or feelings, in their own words. These types of responses can take more time to analyze, but they also allow for a greater range of expression beyond the pre-set categories used in quantitative information gathering. For this reason, qualitative methods are most useful when you want to explore a topic and are uncertain what people's experiences of that topic are like. They are also useful when you want to dig deeper into a topic and can complement quantitative data gathering when employed thoughtfully.

Sources and Methods Working Together

Here is an example of adding a source and a method:

- **CIL Activity:** Consumers receive travel training to gain confidence in using public transportation.
- **Outcome:** Consumers are comfortable regularly using public transportation to travel from their home to the center after travel training.
- **Indicator:** 80 percent of consumers that receive travel training self-report that they increased their level of confidence in using public transportation to travel from their home to the center.
- **Source:** After two weeks of the travel training, the consumer is able to write down and report two routes and times that they could take round trip from their home to the center using public transportation.
- **Method:** Written or verbal consumer report to staff.

So, you can see that both the source and the method need to flow directly from the indicator. The indicator needs a source, and the source needs a method.

Check Your Understanding

Identify one of the five core services to use as an example, then provide an example scenario and identify Outcome, Indicator, Source, and Method.

Activity

Now it’s your turn! We will use the Outcomes Management Worksheet that you stared working on in Step 1. You have already chosen two desired outcomes. And, for each of these outcomes, you have already chosen two measurable indicators. What you haven’t decided on yet is a source and a method for getting the information you need for each indicator.

Your assignment now is to work with your teammates to choose a source and a method for each indicator of the two desired outcomes you settled on. Remember:

- To think about the question you want to answer and how to best match it up with your data source and method.
- The key is to brainstorm multiple possibilities for each source and for each method, rather than quickly jumping to the first, obvious, option for each.
- You may very well choose the obvious option in the end. In some cases, you may know of a best practice that seems to be the obvious choice, but going with easy or habitual answers may limit you from exploring and finding better sources or methods.
- By forcing yourself to brainstorm a bigger list of options, you may find something else that turns out to be even better and brings in different or useful information. You won’t discover these things if you don’t make yourself think of them.

This whole process flows from the outcome. Ask yourself, “How, exactly, am I defining that outcome?” and “What, exactly, do I mean by that outcome?” Only when you have clearly answered those questions should you consider how to get the information you need. Make sure you have a clear understanding of what piece(s) of information are required before you think about the sources or the methods you will use to gather that information.

While brainstorming with your team, identify not only a variety of options, but also what is most valuable about each and how they contribute to your understanding of your key evaluation questions. For example, you might value the data produced by one option. For another, you might value the process of involving consumers. In addition to what you find valuable about each option, consider its weaknesses. Then, decide upon the best source and method to use for each measurable indicator of each desired outcome.

Outcomes Management Worksheet

Program:	
Brief description of program:	

DESIRED OUTCOMES of our program	**MEASURABLE INDICATORS** for each desired outcome	**SOURCE** of information needed for each indicator	**METHOD** to gather each piece of needed outcome information
1.	**1a**		
	1b		
2.	**2a**		
	2b		
3.	**3a**		
	3b		
4.	**4a**		
	4b		

STEP 6

GATHERING OUTCOME INFORMATION

Recap and Objectives

At this point, because of what we have already covered, you know that outcomes are benefits or changes for participants during or after activities. You have determined what measurable indicators of outcomes you plan to assess, and you also know how to choose appropriate sources and methods to get the information you need for your measurable indicators.

Now, you are ready to put your new knowledge to use in gathering the outcome information you need! By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Explain the two primary ways of gathering outcome information
- Determine what type of information on your outcome you should gather
- Decide who to ask for the information
- Choose when and how to gather outcome information

Types of Outcome Information

As we covered in Step 5, your sources of information include existing documentation, individuals, and physical/environmental conditions. You can gather outcome information from each of these sources by collecting either new information or existing documentation. For outcome evaluation, you will typically gather new information from your consumers (including consumers and I&R callers), and the existing documentation you gather will be from your CIL's management information system, case notes, and other data tracking systems such as Excel spreadsheets. Of course, existing documentation does not mean that you won't potentially find new facts.

A CIL management information system has built-in functionality to keep track of consumer demographics, goals, services provided, and any relevant case notes. If you don't have CIL-specific software and are using spreadsheets or other tracking mechanisms, you are likely tracking similar information. Gathering existing documentation from your existing system may enable you to find some interesting and at times alarming data. For example, is your CIL doing a better job with a specific gender? With older or younger people? With certain races or ethnicities? With certain disabilities? That information is already in your management information system. The services consumers have received, how long consumers have been involved in programs, that is all in there ready to be gathered.

New information should advance your understanding of your existing documentation. Think of gathering new information as your opportunity to dive more deeply into the questions that arose from your existing documentation. New information may come from your tracking systems, but likely it will be from individuals or purposeful observations of physical or environmental conditions. As discussed in Step 5, consumers, members of support teams, and other stakeholders are best positioned to provide details on the impact of services; and the physical environment can offer important perspective on considerations affecting your outcomes.

What to Gather

You are likely already gathering outcome information required by a grant funder or for state compliance. This information has been determined for you, but don't stop at the minimum. Expanding your outcome information can help increase your funding by better explaining your program's positive effects on consumers. You just need to deliberately gather information on your outcomes.

Let's begin with new information, for example gathered from consumers or I&R callers. What questions will you ask them? Clearly, we can inquire about results. You can think of outcomes as measurable markers of attitudes, actions, condition, or status (some of the seven magic words we discussed in Step 1) and structure your questions to reflect those markers.

Also, ask your consumers or I&R callers for more details and explanations regarding their experiences with these topics. These details and explanations can enrich the baseline data you collect. Of course, you must be selective in your requests! It's easy to ask for too much information and then get stuck attempting to use it all. Ask for only what you need and can use.

Asking for New Information

What information should we ask from consumers or I&R callers?

- Outcome information (the seven magic words for measurable indicators):
  1. Knowledge
  2. Skills
  3. Attitudes
  4. Values
  5. Behaviors
  6. Condition
  7. Status
- Details and explanations
- Be selective! Ask only for what you need

Who to Ask

Whom do you ask next? It seems simple enough: just ask consumers for information, right? Choosing who to ask may be more difficult than it seems. It depends on the outcome you are trying to address, as well as the unique characteristics of individuals that may or may not make them productive sources of accurate information. How about consumers who have only been with your center for three weeks? What if someone quit after a month of work? Will questioning these consumers get the desired results?

Another consideration is if you ever need to ask members of the support team like parents or caregivers. IL philosophy prioritizes working directly with the consumer, even if it means figuring out ways to help them communicate. If you do have no option but to speak with members of the support teams, be sure to confirm the information with the consumer to ensure its accuracy.

Who to Ask for New Information

- Consumers themselves
  - Consider how to handle short-timers or dropouts
  - Important to ask individuals, not groups
- Members of their support teams
  - Parents?
  - Caregivers?
- Key = Who has the information you need?

How Many to Ask

Overall, be sure to keep in mind that to gather the information you need, you must first decide who has the most direct and first-hand information on the outcome in question and can best address any concerns that arose from the existing documentation. Remember you'll be asking individuals for this information, not groups. Determine whether you need to speak with all of your consumers or just a sample that is most affected or appropriate for your questions. You also may have a large number of consumers, making it impractical to contact everyone. When attempting to contact them all, additional time and money are required. As a result, it may be prudent to survey only a random sample of consumers, as long as they can provide you the new information you require.

Asking Everyone Isn't Always Better:

- We may have a lot of consumers
- It costs more to ask everyone
- It takes more time to get results
- Asking everyone puts a small burden on everyone

How to Choose

If you do ask only a sample of consumers, then **how do you pick which ones to ask?** You want to get the information you need to evaluate your outcomes, but don't want to be biased in your selection. In research, selection bias is when a study group is different than the population of interest. It's really the same when you are gathering information: you want to avoid outside factors and choose the individuals that can provide the right information for what you want to know. For example, you don't want to just pick the 12 people you have worked with most recently, or the 15 who have been most successful. Or, if you are looking at consumer outcomes, you don't want to pick people who are not generally representative of your consumers. You also want to avoid choosing a sample that makes you look good, because if you do that it doesn't really help you accurately know how you are doing.

To avoid bias in choosing consumers, the best way is to use random selection. There are simple ways to do this. Here is an easy three-step example:

1. Make a numbered list of your consumers, in any order you want.
2. Go to www.random.org/sequences, a website that will randomly mix up your list of numbers. Enter the total number of consumers on your list into the Largest Value box and click Get Sequence.
3. Start at the top number of your generated sequence and work your way down, asking as many consumers as you need.

Choosing how many consumers to ask is another question. This can get complicated, depending on what you want to know. For example, do you want to know general outcomes for everyone, overall? Or, do you want to know about particular outcomes for a specific cohort of people? Sometimes, you will need to get expert statistical help. A possible circumstance for this may be when attempting to assess multiple impacts across a wide variety of demographic cohorts, who may have received services in different ways by different personnel. Each "slice and dice" may necessitate a distinct statistical assessment. You may have staff members with the skills and capacity to complete such analysis, or you may need to find outside help from one of your community partners.

When to Gather

You will also need to decide **when** to ask consumers about the information you are interested in. The simple answer is **whenever it is best for your consumers**. However, a more nuanced view is that this timing is your decision based on the outcome you want to know about, and what you have learned from your existing documentation. One option is to choose the timing that is most convenient for your CIL. This could be at a specific time of year, as workload allows. Another choice is to ask at a certain time during your work with a consumer, particularly if you have questions about one specific component of an outcome.

For instance, you may want to ask outcome questions while a consumer is receiving services. Asking questions during this phase can be a way to assess if the program is "on track" or if short-term expectations are being realized. Of course, one can make the assessment at the time of program exit, or a short period of time after the consumer has exited the program. Doing this may allow you to ascertain impacts that can only be realized after a certain period of time has passed. However, be mindful that if too much time passes after they have exited the program it may be difficult to locate them, and their recall memory might not be as clear. Respect your consumers and respect your own timeline when making this decision.

How to Ask

You will also want to think about **the ways you go about asking** consumers for outcome information, particularly new information. Options include quantitative and qualitative methods of gathering information, which we reviewed in Step 5. The way you ask your questions will determine the kind of planning you need to do for gathering this information. For instance, if you decide to send out a survey, you will need to think about how you will deliver the survey (through the mail, email, or a link to an online survey platform?). You may decide that conducting interviews is the best way to gather the information you want. There are a lot of ethical and accessibility considerations when planning to conduct interviews and surveys.

For example, the parties gathering the data should be fair and disinterested (unbiased) so that those providing the data are free to voice their opinions.

People should be able to access the information collection process, meaning that all consumers can access, understand, and complete the survey, interview, etc. This level of accessibility will, of course, vary. However, if the level of accessibility favors one group above another, the information is less valid and useful to you. Since there is unlikely to be a one-size-fits-all solution, this is when cultural competence comes into play. Are we able to successfully interact with particular groups, given the languages they speak, or given their specific disabilities, and so on? The Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA) has compiled a number of resources that one can peruse in regard to this: https://crea.education.illinois.edu/media/publications.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We also suggest that you keep the replies private or, better yet, anonymous. (There is a significant distinction between these terms: when responses are confidential, we know who provided them but cannot reveal their identity; when answers are anonymous, we have no idea who provided them.) Throughout the process, it is essential that you are respectful of the personal details that are provided. Always explain how you will use the information you are obtaining.

The maintenance of confidential and privileged information should be continually safeguarded through annual HIPAA training and required privacy and protection trainings from your department of rehabilitation or equivalent. In short, set the highest standard of respect regarding the information being provided to you. You would expect the same if the roles were reversed.

Strive for direct consumer feedback rather than indirect input from someone who represents them such as a member of the support team; but recognize that this may not always be achievable, thus don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. If staff is filling in the information, be sure to select staff who did not directly work with the consumers. Sometimes a well-trained volunteer or intern can play a role here. Confirm the information with the consumer whenever possible.

Important Points about Surveys and Interviews

- What type of questions do we want? (open-ended, multiple choice, etc.)
- Where would the survey or interview take place? (in-person, phone, email, online platform)
- Who would conduct it? (staff, volunteers, consumers)
- Is it anonymous? If not, how best to handle informed consent?
- What are ways to support consumers ability to participate in the interview? (memory, language)
- What is the level of consumer willingness? (barriers could include fear, privacy concerns)
- How much effort is required of consumers?
- How much time are consumers willing to spend?

Additional Points Specific to Interviews

- How would you train the interviewers?

Survey vs. Interview Considerations, Other Options

This is a long list of things to think through when gathering information. Remember, each of these issues can be solved. You just have to think them through.

Obviously if you are going to survey a cohort of people who are blind there needs to be consideration of providing the survey instrument in braille. However, not all people who are blind can read braille, so one may need to explore other accessibility options such as an ASL interpreter or other AT. Other individuals may speak a different language from your own or may be deaf. In these instances, an appropriate interpreter should be on hand.

Beyond surveys and interviews, you may gather new information using a variety of systems. If you find that your current information collection system doesn't capture what you need, what can you do to capture it? You might add to your existing system, or create a new one to track the desired data. For example, you might add new categories in case notes for additional information. Consider what you are trying to find out to achieve a positive outcome and plan accordingly using all of the tools at your disposal.

Recording Information

How will you record the information you have gathered? You have talked to consumers. You have pulled information out of the management information system or tracking spreadsheets. Now, you need to put this information into some kind of form. We strongly suggest you get both the numbers (the quantitative information) and the words (the qualitative information). Think of words as the stories behind the numbers.

Regardless of the source and the methods you choose, using some sort of form for recording information is essential. This could be a document review form, a survey, a tracking spreadsheet, an observation checklist, or notes from an interview.

Finally, field-test everything. Once you've figured out your plan you may think you've nailed it. However, it is all too easy to overlook something. All of your plans should be field tested. (We will get into this more in Step 9.)

Items to test out:

- Identifying each specific source
- Obtaining permission to gather information
- Gathering the information
- Recording the information
- Transferring the information into a computer (if not already on a computer system)
- Analyzing the information
- What else?

Check Your Understanding

When gathering outcome information, be sure to ask a few key questions. No matter what source or method you use, your process should be able to address these four things. Check that your information gathering format is:

1. As free of bias as possible
2. Focused on what information you actually need
3. A fair representation of who or what you need
4. Usable by people with a wide variety of disabilities

STEP 7

STORING OUTCOME INFORMATION

Recap and Objectives

We have now covered how to choose outcomes and measurable indicators, and detailed how to find appropriate sources and methods for gathering information on your outcomes. What do you do once you have this outcome information? You store it for later use, of course. After this section, you should be able to:

- Determine how to store different types of outcome information
- Understand why keeping an archival record of information is important
- Explain the importance of security and confidentiality of information
- Tell the difference between qualitative or quantitative information and consider when to use each

Why Storage Matters

Moving on from gathering outcome information, the next step is storing this information. The purpose of storing any information is easy retrieval. It is also part of your CIL's business practice. However, it's about more than boxing up sheets of paper or saving data files.

You have gone through the hard work to identify and define your outcomes, indicators, sources, and methods. There are important considerations to address in determining how to best store your data to ensure it remains secure, valid, and accurate. It isn't just about storage, after all. It is also about preservation of data, continued validity, and a record of your work that you can use for internal planning decisions, securing funding, or continuous quality improvement.

How to Store Information

Does it matter how your data is stored? Yes! First, you don't want to lose any of your data. You must also keep the information private. That is what you promised your sources. Ultimately, you want to store the data well so you can analyze it, or potentially compare it to other information later. That means preserving it in a format you can use after it is retrieved and making sure you can access it. When storing any kind of data, you should:

- Assign responsibilities
- Determine access conditions
- Specify what data you want to preserve, and how
- Manage versions and copies of your data accurately
- Develop a consistent structure for names and folders
- Use standard file formats (doc, pdf, xls/csv)
- Maintain confidentiality

Current best practices within CILs for storing outcome information include using software systems such as CIL Suite to collect information and setting permissions for who can access the information (for example, managers or administrators). It is important to consider who has access to this outcome data and who is responsible for maintaining the data, in the present and the future. You should be acutely aware of who can access any data and ensure a chain of responsibility to avoid a situation where administrators do not know the information exists or how to access it.

Organization

It is a vital practice that when information is retrieved, it is the same as when it was originally recorded. Consider it a backup of your collected data to protect against human errors, power outages, hardware failure, or other possible contingencies. Always leave the original source data in its pristine state so you have a secure archive. This means data manipulation, data analysis, etc. should only occur on copies of the original source data, not on the original source data itself. It follows that the original source data must be securely stored lest it become corrupted.

One way to facilitate this is to have all original source data saved in a digital format rendered as "read-only" so it doesn't get inadvertently changed. The way you collect the information will influence how you store it. For example, if you collect information using paper forms, you should store the hard copies in a secure double-locked location. Or, you could convert the paper copies for electronic storage in an appropriately secure, password-protected system, either cloud or computer-based. On the other hand, you could gather information in an electronic format to begin with. For example, you could have someone sitting at a computer and typing in the responses as they are given. Or you could put your whole survey online and have the person respond electronically.

What Options Do You Have for Storing Information?

- Paper forms
  - Store as hard copies in a secure double-locked location
  - Convert paper forms for secure electronic storage (using a scanner, or entering information by hand into a database or spreadsheet)
- Electronic software systems
  - Software produced specifically for CILs (CIL Suite, Mi-CIL, and others)
  - Google Workspace (secure, can be used for Social Security Programs)
  - Microsoft Office 365 (includes document protection options, software package, and cloud storage)
  - Cloud Storage Services: Microsoft OneDrive, Google Drive, Dropbox, iCloud, Nextcloud, etc.
  - Google Forms and Microsoft Forms (good for surveys in which demographic data is not collected)
  - Online survey software, such as Survey Monkey or Survey Gizmo
  - ILRU resource: https://www.ilru.org/resources-gathering-analyzing-and-utilizing-data

Paper vs. Electronic Storage

There are pros and cons to each method of storing information. For example, paper forms can be useful:

- With consumers with IDD: The interviewer can write things down on paper during the interview
- With consumers with mental health issues who would have a negative reaction to having their information in the cloud or on the web
- During a consumer's initial intake
- When you want people to fill out a form at an in-person event
- As an accommodation
- As an alternative data source like a picture, collage, or poster used in an exercise or activity
- For satisfaction surveys that are sent out in the mail
- For reaching people who are harder to get in touch with
- For older generations of people who are not comfortable using technology

There are also benefits to having information entered directly into a computer program. These benefits include:

- Potentially reduced cost (no printing fees, no staff time for interviewing)
- Avoiding having to dedicate space to storing hard copies
- Avoiding the extra work of converting information for electronic storage
- Reducing the potential for errors when converting qualitative responses or when transferring the information from paper to electronic form
- Legally binding electronic forms are included with many computer programs
- Meeting the expectation of the CIL to keep client records up to date as best as possible

If you make the switch from paper forms to software and/or electronic storage, be sure to include ample time for this process at the start of your implementation period. It is not only about archiving your records, but an opportunity to examine your data for issues such as incomplete documentation, missing signatures, etc. It will serve you well in the long run to put in the time early.

Accuracy

Regardless if you choose paper or electronic ways of gathering and storing outcome information, you will need to do so in ways that reduce bias and errors. One way you can protect against bias and errors is with staff training on these topics. Training can take the form of recorded videos, written instructions, or 1:1 staff support during onboarding. And you may need to revisit the training if you notice errors or bias coming into play.

Be sure to set clear expectations for all staff. For example, lay out parameters for when you may omit responses to a specific question or from a certain source. Also, make sure that the person giving the survey does not bias the responses. For example, the instructor of a class should not be present when consumers are completing surveys about their satisfaction with the class; and if possible, the consumers should be anonymous (remember, this is where consumer IDs can be handy).

It is best to pilot any surveys to get feedback before sending them out broadly. That way, you will have the chance to catch and correct any errors or biased questions. When you are piloting a survey, make sure you get feedback from a broad demographic range of consumers. Also, be attentive to how long your surveys are. If a survey is too long, a person may become fatigued and pay less attention to answering questions well. As you receive information back from consumers and I&R callers, make sure to regularly review the responses to identify any gaps (questions left unanswered or that consumers didn't seem to understand).

Example: Modifying a Question to Reduce Errors

In designing their consumer satisfaction survey, a CIL tried to keep the survey to one page (around ten questions). One of the questions read, "Please select all of the services you receive from this CIL." However, they realized that the way this question was written was not very effective because consumers didn't know what service categories the CIL was tracking in its data system. As a result, they modified the question to read, "What did you come to this CIL for?" The response was left open ended, which allowed consumers to describe their reasons using their own words. This approach required a next step, in which CIL staff determined which of their categories the response fit into. Using this strategy, the CIL was able to more accurately assess the services used by consumers.

Security and Confidentiality

Any time you are storing information on individuals, you need to protect yourself by considering how to maintain the security and confidentially of your records. We discussed confidentiality in the previous step and that you must always explain how you will use the information you gather. That includes how you store it, so give it thought, as the importance of security and confidentiality cannot be overstated. HIPAA standards have been in place since 1996 and you must think carefully about what information you store and how, particularly with consumer information.

Keeping information confidential means as few people as possible get to see any personally identifying information, and they only share the information with approved parties and through appropriate channels. For this reason, another best practice is the use of consumer IDs to hide personally identifiable information. In addition to maintaining confidentiality, IDs can also be helpful for minimizing potential bias when the information is analyzed.

One advantage of using a cloud-based information storage service is that a credible cloud service will be accredited and insured in respect to data integrity. Therefore, their equipment will be up to date, their security will be top notch, and necessary redundancies put in place in the event something catastrophic happens. If you choose a quality cloud service, they will take care of securing your information for you.

Qualitative vs. Quantitative Information

Another consideration is how to store quantitative information (numbers) versus how to store qualitative information (words). In some cases, you may want to convert the qualitative information into quantitative. It depends on how you want to showcase your program's effectiveness or tell your story.

For example, if you were asked to convert feedback from an instructor rating scale questionnaire into a composite score for each instructor, you would want to calculate scores from all feedback and store numerical values. This would provide easy retrieval and allow you to graphically display the results for easy interpretation.

What if the questionnaires used open-ended questions? How you want to store the information will depend on your evaluation questions and what you want to do with the information. Quality feedback from consumers in their own words is an exceedingly powerful storytelling tool and may be most effective as text or audio. Many organizations use consumer quotes in their annual reports, PR materials, and to add a human component to charts and graphs of progress.

Qualitative data is complicated and time-consuming to analyze. A feasible, useful way of collecting qualitative information is through consumers' interviews, testimonials, and success stories, which can be used to leverage quantitative data in your reports and publicity materials. For example, we had a 50% success rate of transitioning consumers out of a nursing home; and include 3-4 stories from consumers that were part of the transition.

However, you might also want to take the time to analyze the responses for common ideas to apply to improving your program's effectiveness. This would entail breaking down the qualitative feedback for presentation using a process called coding, which involves looking for commonalities in a set of responses and assigning categories to different segments of text.

There are many uses for both quantitative and qualitative data, from basic compliance to long-term strategic planning. We will have more information on the uses of this data in Step 8. For now, know that you will need to consider what you want to count as data and what questions you will use to inform the program evaluation, and store accordingly for your program.

Discussion

Let's take a moment to discuss situations where you might choose paper forms or electronic forms. Look at the methods of information gathering below and think about how you should be storing each type of information. For each example, work with a small group and think about if paper or electronic storage would work best for your CIL and why.

- Info Gathering Method
  - Survey of consumers working with CIL staff
  - Strategic Planning feedback from all staff at your CIL
  - Consumer records
  - Interviews with consumers living independently
  - Collecting feedback from a program team working on a grant together
- What factors might change your decision?
  - Cost of printing or software
  - Accessibility
  - Security
  - Familiarity/comfort with technology
  - Physical storage space
  - Capacity to print and organize the forms
  - What else?

STEP 8

ANALYZING OUTCOME INFORMATION

Recap and Intro

Let's check where you currently stand. You were just looking at outcome information that you have stored at your CIL. It might be hard copies or electronic versions, but you have thought about how best to store information securely for your records and future use. You have also started thinking about qualitative and quantitative information: how and when you want to store words and numbers.

But what are you going to do with all that information? Just storing it doesn't help your CIL. Remember that the goal is still achieving your outcomes. You need to analyze the data and learn from it to identify where are your strengths and areas for improvement. It is by analyzing your outcome information that you may be able to create opportunities for growth in your programs and at your CIL. By the end of this section you should be able to:

- Explain why and how to "clean" information
- Describe your overall performance and what might influence your indicators
- Analyze open-ended questions
- Determine what additional analysis could help you achieve your outcomes

How to Get Started

You might be a little intimidated by the idea of analyzing data. You may not have taken a lot of research courses. Or, you may be well versed in conducting data analysis. In either case, it is important to have a sense of how to analyze outcome information because this is an important part of the big picture of outcomes management.

You don't need to be a trained researcher to examine the data you have collected. This step will provide you with useful, simplified guidelines and practices to get you started analyzing your data. You are already familiar with your programs and have gone through the previous steps, so you have the skills to look more closely at your outcome information.

Of course, keep in mind that if you really want to dig into data analysis, you may need to bring someone in to help you with the process. That is okay! But right now, start with three simple steps to get started with analyzing outcome information.

1. Clean the raw information
2. Run the numbers
3. Analyze open-ended questions

Cleaning the Raw Information

Step 1: "Clean" the Raw Information

- Look at the answers question-by-question
  - Were any answers to questions odd?
  - Do any questions need to be thrown out?
- Look at the answers consumer-by-consumer
  - How many gave inconsistent answers?
  - Do any clients need to be omitted?
  - Do any specific questions from specific clients need to be omitted?

The first step is to clean the raw information. This step is often overlooked, but it is an important step that will make your analysis of the information better. Raw information is data that has not been processed for use. It is your source data, unorganized, unanalyzed, and unformatted. Cleaning the raw information is the process of ensuring that your data is valid, consistent, and usable.

Before you begin cleaning the data, remember to save a copy of your raw information. You want to keep this as-is so you can reference it in the future. When you have done this step, you are ready to begin cleaning a separate copy of the data. You do this by removing data that does not belong in your data set, such as incorrect or duplicate data.

Think of it as making sure you are comparing apples to apples. You will want to remove duplicates and irrelevant observations that will otherwise disrupt your analysis. Start by looking at the answers in your dataset question-by-question. If you have your answers stored digitally, you should use Excel or your CIL's preferred software to aid you in this analysis; the built-in functionality will make this a more efficient process. Ask yourself or your preferred software package if any answers to the questions were odd or didn't make sense. If so, also ask yourself if the answers make little enough sense to throw out those questions.

Examples of Cleaning Raw Information

For example, when performing satisfaction surveys, you are interested in what the consumer thinks about your services; not a parent, caregiver, or another person that may have their own view of aspects of the consumer's life. When determining what your consumers think of your services, you will likely want to omit surveys completed by someone other than the consumer, regardless of if the ratings were positive or negative, unless you can confirm that the consumer provided the answers.

Another example: on a past consumer satisfaction survey, CIL program staff asked consumers to select from a list of services they had received through that CIL. The problem was that the list was really long and the terms were the service categories the CIL uses for grant reporting such as "youth transition services" and "information and referral." The CIL staff found that many people didn't answer the questions or they just selected random answers. In response to this confusion, the question was rephrased to ask, "What did you need help with when you first came to the center?" This helped ensure that consumers understood the question, and the CIL received the information it needed.

Cleaning Raw Information Scenarios

As another technique, look at the answers consumer-by-consumer. How many consumers gave inconsistent answers? For example, if a consumer responds "No" to a question about if they would work with this center again, but then includes comments about how much they like working with the center, this seems inconsistent. The consumer may have misinterpreted the question to be something more like "Do you need to work with this center again?" and, since they were already satisfied, they responded "No." The opposite is also true: if a consumer says they want to continue working with your CIL, then provides very negative responses, this is an example of bad data that you should not use. The point is, if questions seem inconsistent or contradictory, you should explore the reason why.

You will have to decide how to handle scenarios like this. In these cases, best practice would be to omit the problematic question or some (perhaps all) of that consumer's responses. If you do not, you risk jeopardizing the validity of your survey information. By keeping inaccurate responses, your analysis will also be inaccurate. You want to be careful about combing through and selecting individual answers to keep and those to omit – this is a clear path towards bias, either by selecting only positive answers or otherwise reflecting an individual's priorities instead of the consumer's perspective. Cleaning the data is about accurate information and maintaining consistency for comparative purposes.

Running the Numbers

Step 2: Run the Numbers

- For each indicator:
  - First, describe your overall performance on each outcome
  - Then, see what affects the outcome (gender, ethnicity, disability, etc.)
- Graphics are especially useful

The second step is to run the numbers. To do this, you will describe your overall performance for each indicator. Then, you will look at what affects the outcome. For instance, a consumer's gender, ethnicity, or disability could influence their outcomes. Keep in mind that graphics are helpful when looking at this information and provide a simple way to illustrate numbers. Technical skills with software like Excel are handy for this, as that program provides easy analysis and conversion to charts and graphs.

Run the Numbers Example

An example: if you look at the logic model from Step 2, you have two intermediate outcomes, "Consumer develops a transition plan" and "Consumer secures housing through a voucher or other appropriate program."

Inputs	Activity	Outputs	Initial Outcome	Intermediate Outcomes	Long Term Outcome
Independent Living Specialist (ILS), CIL facility, room or Zoom space, ILS and Consumer's time	Consumer works with ILS to establish skills and supports for independent living	20 Consumers work with ILS at CIL	Consumer increases knowledge and awareness of long-term supports and services (LTSS)	Consumer develops a transition plan Consumer secures housing through a voucher or other appropriate program	Consumer lives independently in the environment of their choice and achieves community involvement

When you look closer at what could influence your outcomes, you may find that people with non-physical disabilities are finding housing much more easily; and that people with physical disabilities, especially when they affect mobility, are having a much harder time finding accessible housing or getting the necessary assistive technology (AT). This is delaying the process of achieving your outcomes.

So, you may want to break out the type of disability as it relates to these outcomes, because although the metrics may say that you are helping a good amount of people, they are all from a limited disability pool. By breaking out disability type, you improve your understanding of your outcomes and position yourself better to impact a broader base of consumers.

Paths of Information

This is all pretty straightforward stuff, but it can lead you to interesting insights or open some paths for you to follow that you might not think about if you don't approach this process systematically. These paths can provide you with some useful information. Here is an example of additional paths that may arise:

- 85% of your youth in transition complete their homework regularly. When you look more closely you find that the vast majority of the 15% that are not completing their homework are also not attending school regularly. That adds up, and should prompt you to dig further.
- How about their mentors? If you continue digging, maybe you find that certain mentors are more effective at encouraging youth to complete their homework, but that other mentors are better at getting the youth to attend school. That's interesting, and gives you something to build on. Maybe you partner mentors – one who is effective at helping youth complete homework and one who is effective at getting youth to attend school – to work together to improve both homework and attendance for all youth.
- What about their parents? Dig a little deeper to see which parents are attending parent/teacher conferences. Let's say you find that 75% of youth whose parents attend parent/teacher conferences are achieving passing grades, but only 25% if the parents don't attend. This shows a connection between parent involvement and achieving passing grades, which is something identifiable that you can work on with parents.

That is what running the numbers does. It can be simple, or it can be as complex as you want it to be. Trust your instincts. If something looks like it doesn't fit or is telling you something, dig a little deeper to see what you find out.

Analyzing Open-ended Questions

Step 3: Analyze Open-ended Questions

- A way to summarize words
- Often called content analysis
- Can be done manually or using computer software
- Adds a deeper understanding to what you have learned by running the numbers

Finally, you can analyze the open-ended questions you used. This type of analysis is often called "content analysis." This process helps effectively tie your analysis to your questions by leading you to themes in your qualitative data. Identifying and reviewing the themes helps you build your story and understand why these themes are important to your original questions. You can use basic or specialized computer software for content analysis, but it is also straightforward to do manually with pen and paper. If you have the technical skills, Excel can be a suitable program for analysis, and there are ample options for data analytics software dependent on your budget, skill level, and objectives.

Analyzing open-ended questions gives you the inside story of what is going on. It provides context for the numbers (the quantitative data). It makes things personal. This personalization is great because it is valued by funders and because it allows for a broader inquiry than the quantitative questions – it allows people to speak to their experiences in ways that you might not have thought to ask. These are all benefits of qualitative analysis.

The downside of qualitative analysis is that it can be complex to do, and can also allow for the introduction of bias. So, you want to make sure that you approach this part of the analysis with the same level of attention you bring to the numbers part. You need to ask good questions to provide you with the information you want to know, you need to pilot those questions, and you need train staff to work together to understand and minimize bias. You may have the skills to do this work. Or, you may need to bring someone in to do it.

If you are conducting the analysis yourself, avoiding bias and conflicts of interest will be of vital importance. It can be hard to objectively evaluate your own program, so utilizing peer review scenarios can be helpful. For example, the Transition Program Manager evaluating the Information and Referral Program and vice versa. This is not only an opportunity for staff to learn more about other programs, but provides a new set of eyes from within your CIL to look at your programs' effectiveness.

Additional Analysis

These first three steps are the basic, necessary steps to use when analyzing outcome information. Keep in mind that additional steps may be needed to gain clarity and confidence in your analysis. For example, what if after completing the three basic steps you notice that your data set seems incomplete. It could be that you didn't get the information you needed to address your identified outcome areas. Or it may seem like the questions you asked didn't lead to a relevant, actionable place.

If you think there are variables or connections that you are missing, or that your data isn't delivering what you planned, you may want to add two additional steps to increase your understanding of the overall information: 1) incorporating demographic information into your analysis and 2) synthesizing quantitative and qualitative information.

Again, this additional analysis may be possible utilizing the staff at your CIL or you may need to look into outside resources. If you have appropriate software and a staff member who has both the technical skills and the capacity to do the work, it may be worthwhile to make the most of your team. However, be careful of overburdening individual staff members. Data analysis projects are an ideal opportunity to partner with outside resources such as students, independent contractors, or volunteers. It is likely that there are people in your community with this skillset who would be able to provide improved, objective analysis to help aid you in your evaluation process.

If you are interested in conducting more in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis as part of your evaluation, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has resources that provide steps to consider. You can review the pdf for quantitative analysis here: https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief20.pdf. And you can review the pdf for qualitative analysis here: https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief19.pdf

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's resource, "Selecting an Evaluation Consultant" has good tips for identifying and hiring a qualified consultant. View the pdf here:
https://www.cdc.gov/ healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief1.pdf.

Option: Incorporate Demographic Information

Often, looking more in-depth is the key to using analysis for managing outcomes. This process of breaking down information into a more detailed level is called disaggregation, and it can tell you new and different things about your data. So, let's ask ourselves how people in different locations are finding housing.

You can start to do something with the information you have: program participation information, housing vouchers, etc. You can start to figure out why those different results might be happening, but you might decide that you need to dig deeper to find something really valuable or interesting. Maybe you decide to break up the data by county, by city, or by rural vs. urban. Or maybe you look at demographics of the consumers involved.

For example, if you break out housing data by rural vs. urban, you might find a significant difference in how quickly consumers are finding housing. Or maybe you find that one county seems to be more effective at helping consumers secure housing, but that a neighboring county regularly has less success. Expanding your analysis can yield this information, which then behooves you to find out how the county's practices differ.

As another example, what if you break down the information by gender? Let's say our original data shows that 75% of consumers secure a housing voucher. But when we add gender we find that it is just 60% of men and 90% of women. That is unusual, and worth analyzing to figure out why it is happening.

Challenges as Opportunities

There are myriad ways you can look at your data. It is up to you and your team to take ownership in determining what the outcome information is hinting at, and what changes you should make in response. The key is continually attending to outcomes you find notable and asking questions to make sure that the information you are gathering is useful.

One other thing to keep in mind: sometimes, people worry that the data they collect will show that their CIL doesn't perform as well as they want it to. Remember, collecting and analyzing this information does not result in punitive consequences. Rather, it creates opportunities for growth. By having a clear view of where your CIL is excelling and where it has room for improvement, you will be better able to provide your consumers with valuable services that support their best possible outcomes.

Practice:

Now you have the opportunity to conduct various analyses yourself using a quantitative data set, and come up with your own qualitative questions to fill in the gaps.

1. Generate a dataset for your CIL. You can use an existing data set or, if you have CIL software, you can run a new report for analysis
2. Work with your group to examine the data:
    a. Clean the information, if needed
    b. Examine the data
    c. Run the numbers by looking at outcomes that may affect your variables
    d. Determine what questions you would ask to help improve your understanding and the usefulness of your data

What did you learn? What questions do you still have?

STEP 9

USING OUTCOME INFORMATION

Planning for Use

Let's say you have completed your analyses and you understand the information you collected, what it means, and why it is valuable. Great! Now what?

The last step is to use your information to communicate with others what it all means, why it matters, and to whom. This means moving from outcome measurement to outcome management. All the work you have done to get to this point enables you to use your outcome information. However, it is important to think up front about how you will use it. This step of the process doesn't happen automatically. You need to plan for it.

When you are analyzing your data, start an outline to keep track of to whom each outcome is useful or valuable, why, and what you think you could change if you shared your outcome data appropriately. This is tremendously important – the whole point of doing this process is so you can use the outcome information you collect!

As you go through this process, know that it is going to take some courage on your part to make outcome management happen within your center. It will take courage and working with your staff and convincing them and your board of the importance of doing this work. It will probably take hard work to make decisions about what you want to report. Because of the great value of this work in reporting a wide variety of information to constituents, funders, and other interested parties, you will also need to be thoughtful. Remember, these tools are not to be used to compare centers to one another, but instead to use the process to demonstrate the value of independent living and improving service outcomes. By the end of Step 9, you should be able to:

- Explain how to use outcome information within and outside of your CIL
- Justify the PR value of outcome information
- Apply the four steps for using outcome information
- Start evaluating your CIL programs!

The Purpose of Outcomes

Remember that outcomes management goes beyond just measuring the outcomes that exist. It encourages a program to systematically use that performance information to learn about its services and to improve them. We want to understand why things are happening and how to make them better. We do this to increase our effectiveness and to tell our stories. We can't always affect what is happening, but we can affect how we respond to it, and try to make things better in the future.

You don't have to re-invent the wheel to generate better outcomes. We encourage you to really assess your resources and to create a local learning community with peers in your state. CILs already share information with each other in a variety of ways including:

- State associations with quarterly "all CILs meetings" to share data and resources with each other
- National or state conferences where CILs' programs, services, and best practices are presented, such as APRIL and NCIL

How to Use Outcome Information

Two Ways to Use Outcome Information:

1. Outside Your CIL (for PR value)
2. Inside your CIL (for program improvement)

There are two ways to use outcome information: outside your CIL and inside your CIL. Using this information outside your CIL is for public relations (PR) value. This is how you show off the difference you are making in consumers' lives, which may encourage others to seek out your services, and may also lead to new funding opportunities. Having diverse funding sources is good business, and is an effective means of advocating for your consumers to a broader audience. You may find additional grant opportunities or strategic business partnerships by showing your CIL's value in your community.

Your outcomes are what may reveal potential alignment with businesses or funders. If you can use your outcomes to illustrate a win-win situation with a business based on your mutual needs, this may lead to partnership, sponsorship, or increased employment for your CIL and consumers. This is a different way to think about development work for CILs, but one that is increasingly necessary. Grants often require non-federal matching funds, and any new initiatives will likely require new funding. It is through outcomes measurement that you demonstrate the value of your work and make these connections.

Using this information within your CIL is for the purpose of improving your programs. This is where you follow the data to better understand your programs and make any necessary changes. Both ways of using outcome information are necessary and valuable.

Benefits of Using Outcome Information Outside Your CIL (for PR value):

- Show value of services for many different audiences
- Maintain or increase your funding
- Recruit talented staff or volunteers
- Promote your CIL to potential clients and referral sources
- Encourage other agencies to collaborate

Benefits of Using Outcome Information Inside Your CIL (for program improvement):

- Understand the effectiveness of your work
- Find ways to be even more effective
- Identify and adjust priorities
- Help staff focus on what is most important or valuable
- Identify training needs
- Support both short and long-range planning

Steps for Using Outcome Information

People may have more practice with using outcome information outside their CIL than using it inside their CIL. It might take the form of measuring progress on key outcomes for compliance with regulatory entities, or to share with your board of directors or community partners. It can also look like reporting required outcomes to funders, such as grant reports. It is fine to start with these ways of using outcome information.

However, don't stop there.

To make sure the outcome information you collected is of the most value, make sure that you move on to outcomes management inside your CIL. You can think of outcomes management as a step-by-step process for using outcome information. **Using these four steps is how you move from outcome measurement to outcome management.**

- **Step 1: Understand why you produced these outcomes**
- **Step 2: Identify ways to improve your outcomes**
- **Step 3: Decide which changes to implement, or what changes are possible**
- **Step 4: Implement changes to the program**

Step 1: Understand Why You Produced These Outcomes

The first thing to know is that this is done by people, not computers. This part is where people in your CIL have to ask questions to figure out why the outcome is what it is. It is not a matter of analyzing the data in a different way.

A great way to start this process is by holding "How are we doing?" meetings with staff. Be sure to include staff at all levels of the organization to hear perspectives from various positions in IL. During these meetings, ensure that each voice is equal. Communicate that you value honest discussion, and act like it.

Another good approach is to hold focus groups with clients. In a previous step, we discussed that focus groups are not a good way to collect outcome information when you want independent feedback from individuals, because you don't want people influencing each other's responses. However, at this stage we are brainstorming ideas and that is what focus groups are really good for. In focus groups, participants stimulate one another's thinking and help to generate more ideas.

You might use either approach to ask what it means if, for example, 72% of I&R callers reported that they got the information they needed, and what that means for the 28% who didn't get what they needed. You could ask at a staff meeting or of your focus group, "Why do you think that might be?" or "What do we think may be the problem?" You should use these groups to brainstorm ideas to understand why the outcome is the way it is.

Step 2: Identify Ways to Improve Your Outcomes

In this step, you will generate some possibilities for creating positive changes in your program. To do this, you want to look inside the findings for hints about what are the biggest barriers to your program being more successful. To do this well, make sure you brainstorm with a diverse group of people. You can use focus groups with clients for this purpose also. Ask the focus groups, "How do you think we ought to change the program to be more effective?" This process verges on organization development, so also it is an ideal opportunity to learn from other CILs and agencies about what methods they have successfully used to improve their programs.

Step 3: Decide Which Changes to Implement or What Changes are Possible

Once you have a good list of ideas, you will probably see that your CIL does not have the resources to try every idea that was generated. It becomes a question of the capacity and feasibility of your ideas; more about what you can do than everything you want to do. So, you need to figure out which of those changes you can, will, and should make.

To do so, explore all reasonable options through careful discussion. Be satisfied with "ratcheting up" outcomes to take small steps– incremental improvement is good! You don't need to triple your success overnight! You can make one improvement for now, just to start moving the needle, knowing that you can always improve more in the future. In deciding which idea or ideas to focus on, determine if there is general agreement that something is worth trying.

You might decide to focus on changes to improve your program's effectiveness. Or, you may want to improve its efficiency. For example, is your intake process efficient, or is it so overwrought with paperwork and questions that people are selecting themselves out of the program? Work to determine what is possible, and decide which change is the most valuable. These may or may not be the biggest changes, but the most useful ones to your CIL.

Step 4: Implement these changes to your program

At this point, you are ready to put your changes into action. To do so, you will need to be clear about:

- **What** needs to be different
- **When** the changes need to happen
- **Who** needs to do something differently

You will also need to identify and allocate any resources needed. As the process gets underway, you will need to monitor it to make sure the desired changes are occurring, see how quickly/efficiently they are occurring, and ensure that there are no unforeseen complications.

To reiterate, if you are doing these four steps you are doing outcomes management. If your process stops before you get to these four steps, then you are only measuring outcomes, not managing them. This may seem straightforward. However, organizations frequently stop before they get to the end goal of managing outcomes.

Example:

In the following example scenario, you are reviewing the results of your outcome measures survey and discover your center is placing 60% of your institutionalized consumers into the community. Below are examples of actions to take for each step to move from outcomes measurement to outcomes management.

- Using Step 1: To understand why you produced these outcomes, staff would want to review and document the top two reasons why the 60% of consumers were placed and the top two reasons why the 40% percent of consumers were not placed (e.g. high level of care, lack of affordable or accessible housing).
- Using Step 2: To identify ways to improve your outcomes, staff would want to review and document the top two reasons or resources that support the 40% of consumers who were not placed, in order to improve their placement opportunities.
- Using Step 3: To decide which changes to implement, or what changes are possible, staff would want to review possible improvements suggested in their focus group and select changes or activities most likely to improve outcomes for the greatest number of consumers, or those consumers specifically affected by an identified outcome.
- Using Step 4: To implement changes to the program, staff would put into action their plans for change. For example, reaching out to the local Housing Authority to advocate for more Section 8 voucher distribution.

How would you use this information? Would your steps be different? Do you feel like you would need to ratchet up outcomes for incremental change?

Practice:

Now you have the opportunity to examine potential changes in outcomes. For this exercise you will need a copy of your CIL's latest annual report. If you do not have access to your own, The Independence Center in Colorado Springs has generously made theirs available for use in this exercise.

Use the four steps to outcome management to examine your annual report. Work with your group through each step and pay attention to the everyone's different perspectives. Here are a few questions to ask when looking at your report:

- Does your annual report include both outputs and outcomes?
  - Outputs show the volume of your work, which is important.
  - Outcomes show the positive effects of your work, which is also important.
  - Does your annual report link your outputs and outcomes? If not, how could it?
- What do you see as your strengths and weaknesses according to the data?
- Are there things that you would like to see changed in terms of your outcomes?
- Can you fix it all or will you need to prioritize one initial thing?
- What would you do to achieve your outcomes? Are there outcomes you might choose to work on with another center?
- How would you put your changes into action?

What questions do you still have after going through this process?

Last Thoughts

As described in Step 1 and throughout this training, there are two purposes of going through this evaluation process: increasing your program's effectiveness, and telling your program's story. This work is also an opportunity to improve the evaluation process itself. When your evaluation team receives feedback from consumers, staff, or stakeholders, you make the most of this opportunity when you integrate this feedback into your evaluation process.

For example, a consumer at your CIL reports that a video shown in their class did not have full audio description. In response, the staff makes a list of all videos regularly used in trainings and has them fully audio described. The CIL manager creates a policy for staff that only videos that are fully audio described can be shown in CIL classes. The manager also creates an internal procedure for staff to submit new videos for audio description to help ensure that there is an avenue to prepare and incorporate new training materials.

In the example, the CIL increased its effectiveness by not only responding to a consumer's feedback, but improving the process to prevent a similar oversight in the future. This action improves the efficiency of the center's process, and also adds to the program's story, because consumers and staff will take note of the response and share it with others. Your attention to the evaluation process and your outcomes makes your CIL more effective and more valuable to consumers. As you conclude this training, we invite you to reflect on a final thought: your story is how you demonstrate your value.

Evaluation is a complex undertaking and one that takes time; it can also be hugely beneficial to your CIL!

At the end of the evaluation process, you and your team will have accomplished a lot! Your work will set the stage for making meaningful improvements to your CIL's effectiveness and your ability to showcase your good work! You may also have the opportunity to collaborate with other CILs in ways that are beneficial to everyone involved. There is a good chance that, by doing this work, you will also improve your ability to envision a path toward even better outcomes than your CIL was already producing!

Outcomes Management Worksheet

Program:	
Brief description of program:	

DESIRED OUTCOMES of our program	**MEASURABLE INDICATORS** for each desired outcome	**SOURCE** of information needed for each indicator	**METHOD** to gather each piece of needed outcome information
1.	**1a**		
	1b		
2.	**2a**		
	2b		
3.	**3a**		
	3b		
4.	**4a**		
	4b		