

Administration for Children and Families (ACF) vision statement (which ACF calls a mission statement) include the following: “Families and individuals empowered to increase their own economic independence and productivity; strong, healthy, supportive communities that have a positive impact on the quality of life and the development of children” (Administration for Children and Families, n.d.).

● GETTING SPECIFIC: PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

With some common vision in hand, the process can move to the next stage of specificity: program goals and objectives. We first discussed program goals and objectives generally in Chapter 2. We extend that discussion here and in the context of creating an evaluation plan.

Goals are one step more specific than vision. They express general purposes for specific programs. For example, a community program may have as its vision a community where parents are closer to their children. A goal in that program might be to teach the concept and use of languages of love to program participants. An objective is the most specific level of intent. For a program such as the one described, the objective might be that every parent who takes part in the program will be able to name three languages of love and identify the one or combination that best helps him or her connect with each child in the family.

Objectives are the place where our thinking must get most clear and specific. It is an unusual person who finds the writing of objectives to be fun. The creation of objectives requires very careful thinking yet allows us to design and assess more effective programs.

Maybe the process is made more unpleasant when we require that objectives fit some preestablished pattern. The objectives only exist to make program delivery and evaluation more in alignment with the program goals and ultimate program vision.

A good objective is clearly tied to the goal, should be specific enough to be measured, and usually describes some action or knowledge that a participant would gain by participation in the program. Some objectives specify an exact level of performance: “Participants will report involvement in daily renewal rituals (yoga, exercise, or meditation) for at least 15 minutes per day at least 4 days per week.” Such exactness is important for programs that have both well-developed programs and well-developed measures.

Another dimension to objectives is the time span of effects. The more immediate effects of programs are called outcomes. The long-term effects are called impacts. For example, an outcome objective might be that couples

involved in a program commit to set aside time every week for enjoyable activities together. The impact might be that participants report feeling closer to their partners 1 year after the completion of the program.

AN EXAMPLE OF AN EVALUATION FRAMEWORK ● IN PARENTING EDUCATION

One example of the development of program goals and objectives is in the area of parenting. The Cooperative Extension System has been interested in supporting parenting education for many years. In 1994, four Extension specialists (Smith et al., 1994) worked together to create the National Extension Parent Education Model (NEPEM), which defined six categories of vital parenting behavior. The document also included sample objectives. But there was still a substantial distance between coming up with objectives and having an effective evaluation system.

It was not until 2002 that a group of Extension leaders attempted to develop more detail as part of the Evaluation and Accountability Systems for Extension (EASE). A group of specialists took the six categories from NEPEM and developed both objectives and measures. While a comprehensive evaluation system would provide many objectives related to each critical parenting practice and each objective could have many different evaluation questions, the evaluation questions in this example are suggestive of an evaluation framework in three areas of the national parenting model.

Table 3.1 shows some representative impacts, objectives, and evaluation items. There are dozens of meaningful objectives that might be written in each vital area of parenting. For each objective, many different items could be written to evaluate the accomplishment of the objectives.

Matching the Parts

Some of these objectives and some of the evaluations items will not be suitable for some audiences. That is a vital point. The objectives must match the program mission. The evaluation items must match the objectives. And the objectives must be suitable for the specific audience in reading level and appropriateness of the target behavior.

Of course there is another vital match: The program with all its instructional activities should match the objectives and the evaluation. If a program sets its objectives to build stress techniques but instead teaches car repair and, for evaluation, measures height and weight of participants, the

TABLE 3.1 **Examples of Parenting Impacts, Goals, Objectives, and Evaluation Items**

Impact: Parents will provide appropriate nurturance and guidance to their children and youth, resulting in positive development and achievement.

Impact A (NEPEM *Care for Self* dimension): Parents will become more effective in caring for self.

Goal A: Parents report they are managing personal and family stress (more) effectively.

Objective A1. Parents will increase their awareness of exercise as a means of dealing with stress.

Sample measurement item:	Never		Always		
<i>I exercise to lower stress.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Objective A2. Parents will develop awareness of their need to take time out and to get control of their own feelings.

Sample measurement item:	Never		Always		
<i>When I get upset with my child, I take a minute to calm down before I deal with him or her.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Objective A3. Parents will know some stress reduction techniques (i.e., getting organized, changing attitudes or expectations, changing environments or people who you associate with, limiting the number of things on your to-do list, setting priorities, physical exercise, humor).

Sample measurement item:	Never		Always		
<i>I have some things I do to help me calm down when I feel myself getting angry like going for a walk, listening to music, or calling a friend.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Objective A4. Parents will know techniques to support themselves and to cope effectively in times of personal difficulty (e.g., calling a friend and letting off steam, positive self-talk, hot bath, take or plan a vacation, call crisis center).

Sample measurement item:	Never		Always		
<i>I know what to do or whom to call when I feel like I can't take it anymore.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Impact B (NEPEM *Guide* dimension): Parents use appropriate positive discipline techniques.

Goal B1: Parents apply their knowledge of child development to support their child's developmental progress—framing choices, setting limits, and monitoring their child's activities appropriately.

Objective B1. Parents will increase the use of positive strategies for learning self-control such as allowing their child to make decisions and avoiding force.

Sample measurement item:	Never			Always
<i>I let my child make his or her own choices whenever possible.</i>	1	2	3	4 5

Objective B2. Parents will learn characteristics of effective discipline, including being positive, teaching, and giving choices.

Sample measurement item:	Never			Always
<i>Even though I must sometimes correct my child's behavior, I show lots of love to him or her.</i>	1	2	3	4 5

Objective B3. Parents will increase their use of praise, encouragement, and other supportive language.

Sample measurement item:	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
<i>I try to notice and encourage the good things my child does.</i>	1	2	3	4 5

Objective B4. Parents will decrease scolding, punishment, and harsh, punitive, and controlling parenting behaviors.

Sample measurement item:	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
<i>I say far more positive than negative things to my child now than before this class.</i>	1	2	3	4 5

Objective B5. Parents will increase their knowledge of different ways to help their child develop responsibility and use these techniques, such as allowing their child to make decisions, not being overly intrusive, allowing their child to experience the world as a lawful place, and allowing their child to suffer the consequences for his or her actions in order to help the child understand the relationship between actions and consequences.

Sample measurement item:	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree
<i>I believe that letting my child make many little decisions on his or her own is a good way to teach responsibility and self-control.</i>	1	2	3	4 5

(Continued)

TABLE 3.1 (Continued)

Impact C (NEPEM *Nurture* dimension): Parents show affection and nurturance to their child.

Goal C1: Parents listen and attend to their child's feelings and ideas.

Objective C1.1. Parents will know that talking with a child is very important to help the child feel significant as well as to help the child develop language, intellectual, and social skills.

Sample measurement item:	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>			<i>Strongly Agree</i>	
<i>My child learns a lot from something as simple as talking to me.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Objective C1.2. Parents will know that talking with a child is very important to help the child feel significant as well as to help the child develop language, intellectual, and social skills.

Sample measurement item:	<i>Never</i>			<i>Always</i>	
<i>I take time to just talk pleasantly with my child.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Objective C1.3. Parents will increase their knowledge and use of the varying techniques for providing encouragement/nurturance through both verbal and nonverbal means.

Sample measurement item:	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>			<i>Strongly Agree</i>	
<i>I have learned new ways to encourage and praise my child in the last few weeks.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Goal C2: Parents show love and caring for their child.

Objective C2.1. Parents will know that praise should be sincere.

Sample measurement item:	<i>Never</i>			<i>Always</i>	
<i>I tell my child about the good things I see in him or her.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Objective C2.2. Parents will learn to be sensitive to the ways their child gets the message of parental love, including taking time to do things that their child loves and taking time to understand their child's feelings.

Sample measurement item:	<i>Never</i>			<i>Always</i>	
<i>I try to show love to my child in the way that works best for him or her.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

resulting data will be hard to interpret. They will tell us almost nothing about the effectiveness of the program—unless we decide that weight loss is our real program objective. (The theoretical connection between car repair and weight loss will still require attention.)

The matches might be illustrated as follows:

Vision—Goals—Objectives—Instructional activities—Evaluation measures

When all of these program elements are in alignment, greater gains and more meaningful data are more likely.

DEFINING THE KIND OF INFORMATION NEEDED: ● THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

There are many reasons to gather evaluation data, including assessment of participant progress, guiding program decisions, refining program processes, specifying effective program elements, establishing the merit of specific viewpoints, or maximizing program effects (see J. L. Herman, Morris, & Fitz-Gibbon, 1987, for more details on each of these purposes). When we merely do evaluation because it is expected or because it is considered good form, it is not likely to have the benefits that may accrue when we carefully reconsider what data we need and how we expect it to be used.

Common questions that can guide evaluation include the following:

1. What are the ways in which participants are prepared to function better in their family life as a result of our program? (attitudes, knowledge, skills)
2. In what ways do the participants actually function better as a result of our program? (behavior)
3. What elements or combination of elements have the greatest impact?
4. What needs related to program objectives remain unaddressed despite program efforts?
5. What evidence do we have that our program satisfies the objectives of our funders?

These questions can lead to the creation of evaluation objectives. Some scholars (Dunnagan, Duncan, & Paul, 2000) recommend simply changing