



## Outcomes-Based Project Evaluation for Soroptimist Clubs

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### What is project evaluation?

Simply put, outcomes-based project evaluation is the assessment of how well a project is meeting its goals. Outcomes-based evaluation is the regular, systematic tracking of the extent to which project participants experience benefits or changes to their lives as a result of the project. This type of evaluation:

- allows clubs to verify accomplishment of their goals.
- ensures that the correct activities are being conducted to bring about the impact needed by project beneficiaries.
- measures the benefit or change to beneficiaries as a result of the project.
- allows clubs to state the impact of its projects.
- enables clubs to make well-informed decisions about continuing, ending or revising a project.

Clubs that conduct outcomes-based evaluation are able to speak more specifically about the impact of their work in the community to improve the lives of women and girls. Outcomes-based evaluations do not need to be complex or lengthy. The scope of the evaluation should match the complexity of the project.

### Important Terminology:

The first step in implementing an outcomes-based evaluation is understanding the terms involved. The following is a glossary of the most common words used in project evaluation.

**Goals**—describe future expected outcomes or states. Goals explain what will be accomplished. They focus on ends rather than means.

**Objectives**—statement of intended outcomes that can be measured. They depict action and indicate a direction of change. They show how success will be measured.

**Inputs**—various resources needed to run the project including money, facilities, project staff, etc.

**Activities or Process**—how the project is carried out, e.g. how beneficiaries are served, what is created, who delivers the products and services. These are the activities or processes the project undertakes with/to the client in order to meet the beneficiaries' needs.

**Outputs**—units of service, e.g. number of customers provided with service, amount of awards, etc.

**Outcomes**—impacts on the customers or beneficiaries receiving services. These are the actual impacts/benefits/changes for participants during or after the project.

**Outcome Targets**—desired number and/or percent of change for participants.

### What is the difference between goals, objectives and outcomes?

The most frequent question or stumbling block in outcomes-based evaluations is the difference between the three key terms goals, objectives and outcomes. The goal should be the big lofty change in the lives of the project participants as a result of the project. The objectives are the specific, measurable changes in their lives that will occur, and measuring these things will determine that the goal has been met. Outcomes are what actually happened or occurred as a result of the project. Outcome targets are designed prior to the project and explain what measurement will define the success of the project. The objectives describe what change is *expected*. Outcomes measure what *actually happened*.

### **Why isn't it enough to just track project input and output?**

The most common form of evaluation measures the input—those things that go into making a project possible like financial and human resources, and output—counting the number of people reached or amount of awards given. In other words, what goes in and what comes out. This kind of evaluation does not give a clear picture of whether the project is accomplishing what it set out to do. Without measurements about the change in the lives of the project participants, inputs and outputs do not explain the full success of a project.

### **Why do Soroptimist clubs need to institute outcomes-based evaluation?**

Today many not-for-profits claim their projects are making a difference in the lives of others. Non-profits are facing increased scrutiny and the most successful organizations are those that can demonstrate a measurable impact on their beneficiaries. The needs of the women and girls SIA serves are increasing at the same time that funding and support is decreasing. Clubs must be able to demonstrate the local-level impact on project beneficiaries. Outcomes-based evaluations are needed to ensure that Soroptimist clubs are serving their targeted beneficiaries efficiently and effectively. Evaluations will also serve as a feedback loop and can be used for project improvement.

**What can impact information be used for?** When a club can demonstrate project impact, it can be used to:

- Motivate members
- Enhance the project's—and the club's—public image
- Retain and increase funding from internal and external donors
- Improve club projects
- Support long-range and annual planning
- Guide budgets and justify resource allocations
- Promote the project to potential participants and referral sources
- Attract and engage partners
- Recruit new members

### **Who is the audience for the evaluation?**

Members, the public-at-large and SIA.

### **Instructions for conducting an outcomes-based project evaluation**

A club committee can design an outcomes-based project evaluation. Follow the steps outlined below and work to answer each question. Once the evaluation is described and outlined, it can be presented to the entire club for comment and approval. Outcomes-based evaluations can be instituted at any time but should always be part of project planning. Even if the club has been conducting the project for years, it is not too late to institute outcomes-based evaluations. Examples from the federation Women's Opportunity Awards outcomes-based evaluation are used below. A sample club project evaluation is at the end of this document.

**Step One: What activities/processes are necessary to undertake the project?** This is a descriptive process about what the project is and the activities needed to conduct the project. The target population should be included.

#### ***Women's Opportunity Awards Summary***

*The Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards program is Soroptimist's major project. Through the program, clubs in 19 countries and territories assist women who provide the primary source of financial support for their families by giving them the resources they need to improve their education, skills, and employment prospects. Recipients, many of whom have overcome enormous obstacles including poverty, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol abuse, may use the awards to offset any costs associated with their efforts to attain higher education—such as books, childcare and transportation.*

*Eligible applicants must be women who provide the primary financial support for their families, and who are enrolled in or have been accepted to a vocational/skills training program or an undergraduate degree program. Applicants must demonstrate financial need. Only residents of Soroptimist International of the Americas' 19 member countries and territories are eligible to apply.*

*The program begins on the club level, where award amounts vary. Club-level recipients become eligible for additional awards at other levels of the organization. In addition, Soroptimist grants three \$10,000 federation finalist awards each year. Soroptimist disburses almost \$1.5 million annually through this program to help*

women reclaim their dreams of a better life for themselves and their family. Since 1972, Soroptimist has disbursed about \$20 million and helped more than 25,000 women through the Women's Opportunity Awards program.

**Step Two: What is the goal of the project?** The goal statement should describe what will be accomplished as the result of the project. It should not describe activities or processes but rather should focus specifically on what will occur as a result of the project. A project can have more than one goal.

***Women's Opportunity Award Goal:***

*Through increased education and/or training, women will secure employment that provides an improved standard of living for themselves and their dependents.*

**Step Three: What change will occur in the lives of the participants?** Answers to this question will create the objectives of the project. Objectives will be measurable outcomes that will reflect the change in the lives of the participants. Objectives should begin with a word indicating a direction of change.

***Women's Opportunity Awards Objectives:***

- *Increase the number of women who receive the resources needed to access education/skills training.*
- *Increase women's sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.*
- *Increase the number of women who earn an educational degree/certification.*
- *Increase the number of women who have secure employment.*
- *Improve the standard of living for women and their dependents.*
- *Increase the number of women who serve as role models for their dependents and other women.*

**Step Four: What targets will define success?** Figure out what targets the club project is trying to reach—how many women, what percentage of participants, etc. These are the outcome targets. There should be at least one target for each objective. There can be more. For existing projects, figure out the targets that were reached in prior years. Are these sufficient? Should they be increased? For new projects, figure out the best estimate. For each year of the project, the targets can change based on realistic outcomes and what the club would like to achieve. Once a benchmark has been established, the club can decide if it is satisfied or if the club wants to increase the targets.

***Women's Opportunity Awards Outcome Targets:***

- *Almost \$1.5 million will be given to more than 1,000 women.*
- *100% of region award recipients will report an increased sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.*
- *85% of region award recipients will earn an educational degree/certification.*
- *100% of region award recipients will find secure employment.*
- *100% of region award recipients will report an improved standard of living for themselves and their dependents.*
- *100% of region award recipients will report serving as a role model for their dependents.*

**Step Five: What evaluation design will be needed to get measurements?** For most club projects, the needed measurements will be simple and easy to gather. Usually a pre- and post-survey of project beneficiaries can be the easiest way to measure success. Steps should be taken to ensure the anonymity of surveys, which will ensure more accurate results. Step five is an opportunity for creativity and brainstorming. Once the club has identified the objectives, the method of measurement should be clear. Make sure there is at least one measurement for each target.

***Women's Opportunity Awards Measurements:***

*Because the federation funds the region and federation awards, outcome measures will focus on the region award recipients. The following are the methods that will be used to track outcomes:*

- *Number of award recipients*
- *Amount of money disbursed to award recipients*
- *Results from region recipient survey*
- *Narrative stories of recipients' successes.*

**Step Six: When will the evaluations be conducted?** To ensure that the club knows when and how evaluations must be conducted, include them in the timeline of the project.

***Women's Opportunity Awards Evaluation Schedule***

*Region award recipient surveys will be administered three years after disbursing the award. E-mails will be sent to recipients prior to congratulate them on their award (one-year anniversary) and to encourage their continued success (second year). Surveys will be anonymous and confidential unless waived by the recipient. Contact will be by email unless not available, and then it will go by regular mail. Surveys will be sent in April/May each year.*

**Step Seven: What will be done with the results?**

Project evaluation is worthless if nothing is done with the results. Clubs should do the following with the results:

- Evaluate the outcomes and plan for the upcoming year. Is this a worthy project? Should the club continue to support the project? Should it revise the plans and activities based on the outcomes?
- Report the outcomes to SIA headquarters. The federation can compile this information with other club information to report on the impact of SIA as a whole.
- Publicize the results as a way to increase awareness of the club, the project and Soroptimist.

**Important note:** Many clubs support other community organizations with financial donations. Before making donations, ensure that the recipient conducts outcomes-based evaluations. Clubs should know before making a donation what that donation will support. Clubs should ask for a report that will let them know if the project is accomplishing its goals and objectives and meeting its targets. Reports on these types of donations should also include impact information the club has received for the organization.

**Need more help?** Planning and conducting an outcomes-based project evaluation is new for many Soroptimist clubs. The federation program staff is happy to assist. For questions or additional information, please contact <[program@soroptimist.org](mailto:program@soroptimist.org)>.

**Sources:**

McNamara, Carter. 2008. *Basic Guide to Outcomes-Based Evaluation for Nonprofit Organizations with Very Limited Resources*. Adapted from Field Guide to Nonprofit Project Designs, Marketing and Evaluation. <[www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/outcome/htm](http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/outcome/htm)>.

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United Way of America. 2002. *Outcome Measurement: What and Why?* <[www.liveunited.org/outcomes/](http://www.liveunited.org/outcomes/)>.

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## Sample Club Project Evaluation

**SI of Anytown's Mentoring Project for Girls** provides annual one-on-one mentoring for at-risk girls. The project began in 1996 and has been conducted annually, reaching almost 200 girls. Each year the project reaches 12 to 15 girls depending on need and availability of mentors. The club works with the local high school to identify at-risk girls who are interested in and could benefit from mentoring. The mentoring is conducted for a full year beginning in September and running through August. Mentors and mentees meet once every week or two depending on their schedules. They also communicate through email, text and telephone in between their face-to-face meetings. In addition, the club holds three group activities a year and involves interested mentees in all of the club's community projects.

Girls and interested club members fill out assessment forms to identify areas the girls and mentors are interested in and might have in common. After collecting the forms, a committee matches girls and mentors. The girls are notified of the matches and are allowed to approve the match or ask for a different mentor. Matching continues until all of the girls are satisfied. The project kicks off with a group activity so that everyone can get to know each other. During this time, the mentoring pairs can set their first meeting and activity. Throughout the year, the mentors get together to discuss progress and any issues that have arisen. In addition, one club member serves as a coordinator in case any of the mentoring pairs need additional assistance.

### Goal:

Through face-to-face mentoring, girls will overcome obstacles to success and reach their full potential.

### Objectives:

- Increase the number of at-risk girls receiving face-to-face mentoring.
- Improve the grades of the mentored girls.
- Increase the girls' knowledge of teen dating violence.
- Increase the girls' knowledge of college opportunities, scholarships, and the application process.
- Increase the girls' interest in pursuing a college education.
- Decrease the girls' use of drugs and alcohol.

### Outcome Targets:

- 15 girls will be offered Soroptimist mentoring. A minimum of 12 girls will complete the program.
- 85% of the mentored girls will show a grade point average increase.
- 100% of the girls will understand the signs of teen dating violence and know how to access help.
- 85% of the girls will have a plan for applying to college and a list of applicable scholarships.
- 85% of the girls will be more interested in attending college than they were before the program.
- 85% of the girls will report a decrease in the usage of drugs and alcohol.

### Measurements:

The following measurements will be used to track success:

- The number of girls that sign up and complete the mentoring project.
- Analysis of grade point average a year before the project, the year it is completed and a year after completion.
- A pre- and post-survey about teen dating violence, interest in attending college, and use of drugs and alcohol.
- The number of girls that have a college plan in place after the project.

### Timeline:

- Grade point averages will be gathered and tracked in August for three years: before the start of the program, immediately after, and one year after. Girls will agree to share their GPAs.
- A survey will be given within a month of the program beginning, immediately after, and one year after the completion of the program. The last survey will be sent by email. All surveys will be anonymous.