



How To Develop Clear Objectives That Work Every Time

Whether you are developing goals and objectives for a grant application, during a strategic planning process, or for your staff members or team, there are four items you need to remember to ensure your goals and objectives are easy to understand and implement. To illustrate these items below, I will use the example of developing a new program brochure.

Your goals should be broad. They are the end goal; the result you want to achieve. Objectives are more specific; they are the action steps you take to achieve your goal. As our goal is to “Develop a new program brochure,” an objective to meet this goal might be to “Via email, solicit three bids to develop a three panel brochure, by September 1, 2009.”

Since the objectives are the action steps you need to take to meet your goal, they need to be:

Clear and specific. When you read the objective, is it clear? Does it make sense? Do you know exactly (specifically) what you need to do to complete that action step, and by when? The objective above tells me very clearly that I need to solicit precisely three bids, via email, by September 1st, that the brochure will have three panels, and that the bid needs to be based on the development of a three panel brochure. Prior to implementing objectives, run them by a trusted colleague who will provide honest feedback regarding each objective’s clarity.

Realistic and achievable. Is the objective actually achievable? Do you have the time, energy, and resources to complete this action step? For example, have you allotted sufficient time in which to solicit the three bids? Can you realistically complete this action step by September 1st? Also, does your budget allow for a professional looking three panel brochure or is it more suited for a two panel brochure? You don’t want to sacrifice quality, so make sure you get the most professional looking brochure, while adhering to your budget.

Measurable. How will you know when the objective has been completed? How will you measure its success? In using our example, your measure is to solicit three bids by September 1, 2009. If you only secure two bids (documented via email) by September 1st, then you haven’t met this objective, or at least not in the time frame you initially established. When you develop clear objectives with sufficient detail, it is easier to measure completion of the objective.

Time limited. Does your objective have a deadline or date when it needs to be completed? Using the above example, September 1, 2009 is your deadline or completion date. When you set a deadline, your intent is to take action to achieve that objective on time. It gives you a specific

game plan of what needs to be done by when, so you stay on track and move your project forward. Can you imagine an objective without a deadline? It could cause confusion, enable people to procrastinate (as there's no accountability factor), and seriously hinder the ultimate success of a project.

When you take the time to develop objectives that are specific, realistic, measurable, and time limited, it will help everyone involved to understand, implement, and achieve them. It will also aid in your monitoring efforts, as there will be no doubt what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and how it will be done.

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Sharon L. Mikrut, MSW, CTACC, of <http://www.createitcoaching.org>, is an Executive & Life Coach, speaker, columnist, and CEO of Create It! Coaching. She believes that everyone has the ability to create the life they desire and deserve! Visit her website for additional information and to sign up for her free monthly messages, tidbits, and resource information, designed to help you create the life you desire.