Goals and Objectives: An Overview


Statements of goals and objectives are frequently confused because both describe a desired condition or outcome. However, these two types of statements usually differ in dimensions of specificity, accountability and time. Goals provide an overall conceptual orientation to the ultimate purpose of the project. They are usually more abstract in content, broader in scope, less subject to direct measurement and focused on more long-term perspectives. Goals should, however, describe aims that can reasonably be achieved by completion of the project.

Most projects have only one or two goal statements. The writer who begins to draft a lengthy list of goals should consider whether the project has been sufficiently well thought out or whether some of the statements are better presented as objectives.

An objective, on the other hand, should be specific and concrete, more likely to be measurable and more likely to address short-term or intermediate accomplishments. A proposal may have several objectives.

The following example of a goal and one objective (which has several subparts) was taken from a demonstration project submitted for funding to the US Office of Education.

GOAL: This program is designed to prepare parents to function independently and effectively in helping their children develop to their own potentials.

OBJECTIVES: The parents who participate in the program will be able to:

1. Identify the educational content in events that occur in the home;
2. Structure sequential and cumulative instructional tasks in the home for the child;
3. Observe the child and use checklists to monitor progress;
4. Use available equipment and processes in the home to teach children specific tasks; and
5. Use packaged materials prepared by the project or other agencies in teaching specific skills.

In reviewing this example, one can see that the goal conveys the overall intent of the entire program. The objective, however, is written to identify several specific accomplishments for which information can later be collected to judge whether these were achieved.
Evaluation Planning: Clarifying Statements of Goals and Objectives

Another Example of Goal Statements

The following is taken from NSF’s User-Friendly Handbook for Mixed Method Evaluations (1997)

Example project goals as stated in a grant application to NSF

The project has four main goals:

1. To further the knowledge of college faculty with respect to new concepts, standards, and methods for mathematics education in elementary schools;

2. To enable and encourage faculty members to incorporate these approaches in their own classroom activities and, hopefully, into the curricula of their institutions; and

3. To stimulate their students' interest in teaching mathematics and in using new techniques when they become elementary school teachers.

Some Questions to Consider in Clarifying Statements of Goals and Objectives

1. What are you trying to achieve with the EHRDO? What short term and long term results do you want to achieve with EHRDO?

2. What kinds of changes do you want to see as a result of the EHRDO?

3. If you are successful, how will participants be different after their involvement with EHRDO than they were before?

4. When the EHRDO works as you want it to, how do participants behave differently? What would I observe that would tell me they are different than they were prior to their involvement?