

Education is the single largest focus of AmeriCorps service, with approximately 60 percent of programs serving in this area. These programs serve individuals ranging from preschool children to adults. They operate in schools from kindergarten to twelfth grade, community colleges, universities, and community-based organizations. Some of their varied services are listed in the table below.

Although programs addressing education issues are diverse, they face some common evaluation issues. This chapter addresses some of these issues.

Chapter 7 Education Programs



Education Activities

Computer and technical skills
Basic adult literacy education
GED support and education
ESL support and education
Tutoring
Enrichment activities
Service-learning education
Mentoring
Parenting education
Classroom support and instruction
Helping parents support their children's school

I. Objectives - The Building Codes




Introduction

Objectives are your building codes for getting things done. Like building codes, objectives are measurable and contain clear criteria for program success. As with other AmeriCorps priority areas, writing objectives for programs addressing education issues requires a description of activities, results, measures, standards of success, and beneficiaries. Objectives reflect the needs of the population served and the diversity of services offered. The services provided (e.g., tutoring) may vary, even within one objective. For instance, your program may state that AmeriCorps members provide tutoring services. However, members may tutor students of different ages, in different subjects, and for different amounts of time. This presents challenges when writing measurable objectives that truly reflect the complexity of your program. The following are issues and suggested remedies for objectives addressing education issues. See Chapter 1 or “Writing Outcome Objectives” in the reference section for more information.

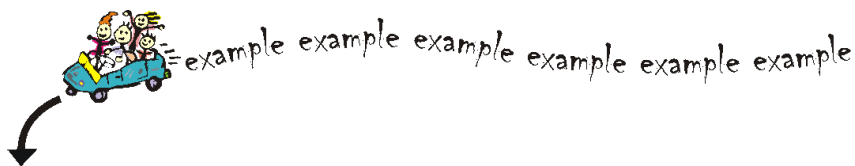
Activities and Results

Often there is an overlap between tutoring and mentoring. Tutoring may vary from thirty minutes a week for a small group of students, to an hour of one-to-one attention each day. Mentoring relationships may last as few as five hours, or may persist throughout your program year. Frequently, tutoring programs contain relationship elements of mentoring, while mentoring programs may conduct tutoring as part of their services. Recognize that different service activities (e.g., tutoring and mentoring) will produce different results. Write your objectives to include specific information regarding the nature, intensity, and duration of the service. Make sure that your expected result is reasonable given the type and context of the service you offer.



Tip: Specify the type of service you provide.

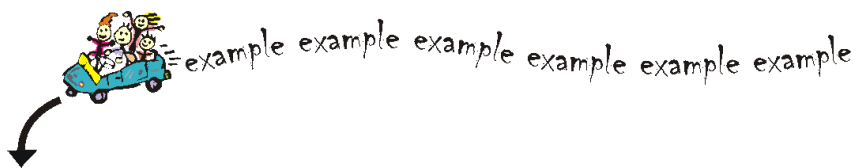
In writing your education program objectives, it is important to specify the type of service you provide. For example, your program may tutor students of different ages, in different subjects, and for different amounts of time. Your intended result should be reasonable given the level of service you offer.



Activity: Ten AmeriCorps members will mentor ten chronically truant and disruptive youth, ages nine to sixteen, for three hours a week, during and after school, for twelve weeks.
Result: School attendance and behavior will improve.

Measures

If you have hard-to-determine results, provide sufficient descriptions of the services in your activity. Talk to AmeriCorps members, program staff, and service recipients to help you identify appropriate measures and standards for your objective. They can identify specific changes they have seen occur in service recipients due to AmeriCorps services.



Activity: Fifteen AmeriCorps members will provide support services to increase involvement of low-income parents in their children’s education. This includes parent-teacher conference information and reminders, transportation coordination, and staff assistance in getting parents to attend school open house nights.
Result: Parent follow-through and participation in student homework and discipline will increase.
Measure: Number of parents attending conferences. Pre/post survey of teachers regarding parent responsiveness to discipline issues. Survey of parents attending open house nights.



Tip: Make sure that your measure, standard, and beneficiaries follow your result.
 Identify one result when you write your objectives for multiple levels of service recipients. For example, service-learning provides benefits to both youth and communities; parenting education provides benefits to both parents and children. If your result applies to all of your service recipients, you can use the same standard. However, if your result differs depending on the service recipients, you will need a separate standard for each recipient.

Programs addressing education issues often serve individuals with multiple needs or those receiving services from other programs. It can be hard to separate the outcome of the AmeriCorps service from other types of service. The table on page 34 lists activities, potential results, and measures to consider. The following are two common situations that present some unique challenges.

Classroom assistance:

Your program provides individual or small group attention to students during regular lessons. Your aim is to increase student academic achievement. Unfortunately, results are intertwined with the regular instruction; thus, it is difficult to attribute students' academic change to your service without a more complex design, such as one using comparison or control groups.

After-school enrichment programs:

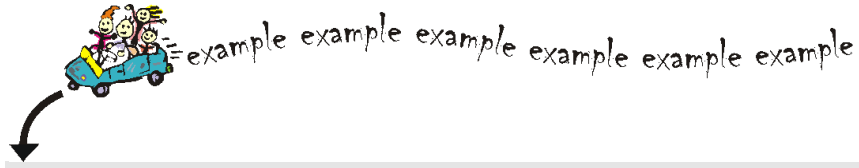
With a varied focus, from sports and recreation to substance abuse education, you provide a program in smaller parts. Your program has identified results that range from reduced delinquency to improved self-esteem. Two issues may hinder your ability to measure results — the breadth of services provided, and the difficulty of showing the connection between your activity and specific results. Consider measuring the outcomes of a few of the more connected, intense enrichment activities (e.g., substance abuse education and refusal skills) rather than trying to measure each of the individual activities you conduct.

Activities, Potential Results, and Measures

Service Activity	Potential Results (choose only one)	Possible Measures (select measures appropriate to your desired result)
Tutoring, Adult Education, GED/ESL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in academic achievement • Improvement in reading, math, etc. • Improved attitude toward education • Students progress to next grade level • Students remain in school • Students make progress toward graduation • Students attain GED/ English skills • Clients learn new skills • Students increase successful homework completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific test scores (GED, TABE, TOEFL) • Report card grades • In-class test scores • Count of students passing to next level • Student survey, teacher survey • Parent survey • Log recording skills developed • Rubric (reading, writing, math, life skills) • Goal setting records • Subject-area test scores
Mentoring, After-School Enrichment, Service Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved positive behavior • Reduced negative behavior • Improved self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-worth, resiliency • Improved personal/social responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of behaviors • Student self-report surveys (behaviors, self-esteem, self-efficacy) • Content analysis of student journals • Goal setting records
Parent Education, Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased involvement in school • Increased involvement in child's education/ ability to help with child's homework • Improved school readiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of behaviors • Teacher report of parent behaviors • Parent self-report • Program-specific tests

Standards

Make sure your standards are a reasonable reflection of what you hope to accomplish with your activities.



Activity: Sixteen AmeriCorps members will coordinate and participate in service-learning activities, including stream cleanup, tree planting and graffiti removal with youth ages twelve to sixteen. Members will provide supervision during service, class education, and reflection about service.

Result: Youth will have an increased ethic of service.

Measures: 1) Pre/post survey of youth on community responsibility. 2) Number of youth volunteering outside of the service-learning program (from item included in pre/post survey). 3) Student reflection journals.

Standards: 1) At least 80 percent of youth will increase their ethic of service by fifteen points or more out of 100 points on the pre-post surveys.


2) At least 30 percent of youth will begin to volunteer for community service outside the service-learning program, by the post survey.

3) At least 80 percent of students' reflections will indicate that they believe volunteer community service is worthwhile. (Students make statements such as, "I believe the service I am doing is important," or "I feel like I really made a difference.")

Beneficiaries: fifty youth

Beneficiaries

Programs addressing education issues typically provide service to under-served, special needs populations. They may not fit into measurement frameworks designed for "traditional" populations (e.g., low-income youth and adults, single-parent families, individuals with limited English proficiency, youth behind in academic work, youth with behavior problems, and adults with minimal literacy skills). Be specific when describing your beneficiaries.



II. Evaluation Plans - The Blueprints

Evaluation plans are the “blueprints” that lay out a plan for implementation according to the building codes. They describe an overall picture of what the evaluation entails and include specific information on when data will be collected, how often, and by whom. Evaluation plans consist of information from the objectives, including program activities, beneficiaries, results, instruments to be used, and standards for success. In addition, the plans identify who will be responsible for analyzing and reporting results. The following are specific tips and considerations for developing your evaluation plan. See Chapter 2 or “Evaluation Plans” in the reference section for more information.

Multiple Audiences

When planning your evaluation, consider that the information you collect may be useful to many audiences. In education settings, the audiences listed below may want to be informed.

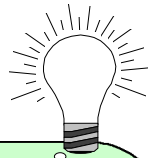
Multiple Audiences	Teachers	Local government
	Parents	Employers
	School administration	State commissions
	Host agencies	National Direct parent organizations
	School boards	Corporation state offices
	Community members	Corporation for National Service
	Law enforcement agency	

Community Collaboration

Programs often select instruments that require community collaboration. Schools control grades, test scores, school discipline records, or attendance as indicators of improved academic success and/or behavior. Other indicators recorded with instruments such as rubrics or tutoring logs, like student demonstrations of specific skills or behaviors, may require outside assistance.

Baseline Data and Measures

In order to know whether change has occurred, you need baseline or comparison data. Schools generally have readily available baseline data, if you can gain access to them and get records for the individuals you serve. These include report card grades, attendance records, and records of school behavior. These measures, however, may be neither accessible nor appropriate for gauging the results of your services. Report card grades, for example, reflect student performance in subject-level domains, such as reading. However, a tutoring program designed to assist with homework may not be reflected in reading grades.



Tip: Get buy-in from district stakeholders.

If you serve in conjunction with a school, but outside the school setting, you may not be able to access existing information due to confidentiality rules. Get buy-in from district stakeholders at all levels to tap into existing information or collect data from students in the school setting.



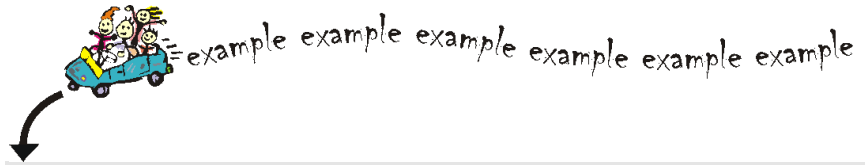
Tip: Keep it simple.

Do not expect teachers and adult education clients to complete more than a page (two-sided) at any one time or to do extensive backtracking through their own records.



Tip: Talk to people to gain educational information.

Talk with teachers, parents, principals, school office staff, school district staff, school boards, host agency staff, host agency boards, and advisory committees to gain valuable educational information.



Activity: Ten AmeriCorps members will mentor ten chronically truant and disruptive youth, ages nine to sixteen, for three hours a week per youth, during and after school for twelve weeks.
Result: School attendance and behavior for youth will improve.
Indicators: Attendance, behavior, and teacher perception of the effect of the program.

Program-specific instruments, such as teacher or student surveys and tests designed for use in your program, also need baseline or comparison data. For these instruments, it is important to plan your data collection before starting your program, if possible. Baseline data should be collected prior to the beginning of your services or as soon as possible thereafter. For programs that run for several months, it may still be possible to obtain baseline information weeks after the start of the program. See the table below for common indicators, measures, and sample baseline/comparison data.





Education Baseline and Comparison Data

Indicator	Measures	Possible Baseline or Comparison Data
Student grades, attendance, and behavior	Record of report cards, classroom test scores, attendance, behavior (e.g., increase in time on-task)	Records for the same individual or group from previous semester or year
Behavioral and academic skills developed	Log recording skills developed, skill inventories (e.g., individual reading inventories)	Initial log of interview with client
	Rubric (reading, writing, math, life skills)	Initial rubric scores for the client
	Goal attainment records	Goals set by the client
Attitudes (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy)	Parent, student or teacher self report survey, interview	Pre-service survey or interview

Your evaluation. They are the tools used to measure the services of your program and collect information needed to determine your outcomes. As with carpentry, there is not an all-purpose tool; you need special tools for particular tasks. Therefore, the more specific the instrument is to your measurement task, the more likely you will achieve a high-quality result. The table below presents various considerations regarding instruments for programs addressing education issues. See Chapter 3 or in the reference section for more information.

III. Instruments - The Hammers and Saws

Typical Education Methods and Instruments

<p>Standardized Tests Examples: Woodcock-Johnson, Johns, Detroit, Stanford 9, CTBS</p> 	<p>Advantages: May already be in use and/or available in certain areas. Some may be used in entirety or in parts. Established reliability and validity for specific purposes.</p> <p>Constraints: Can be expensive. Somewhat time-consuming. May need someone else to administer and/or score. May not reflect impact of AmeriCorps service specifically. Possibly not valid for program's purposes.</p>
<p>Logs Examples: tutoring, homework completion</p> 	<p>Advantages: Useful for tracking activities. Easy to use.</p> <p>Constraints: Limited information about impact.</p>
<p>Rubrics Example: Summerbridge Rubric</p> 	<p>Advantages: Provides excellent picture of progress. Development entails participation of multiple stakeholders. Provides explicit criteria for outsiders. Can include a variety of assessment techniques. Useful for demonstrating success to members.</p> <p>Constraints: May be too subjective. Time-consuming to develop. Reporting is cumbersome.</p>
<p>Program-Based Instruments Examples: Participation survey, teacher activity feedback, skill inventories</p> 	<p>Advantages: All data are directly related to program activities. Can be structured to provide both quantitative and qualitative data. Can be used to collect data for continuous improvement as well as impact.</p> <p>Constraints: Time-consuming to develop. No way to check validity or reliability. May not see enough variation in data. May not make a compelling case because the instrument is not nationally recognized.</p>

Much like lumber and brick, data serve as the “raw materials” to build your evaluation. You must obtain these materials to build your evaluation. Data collection involves administering instruments, gathering responses, and organizing responses before analysis. The following are tips and considerations to think about when collecting data for your evaluation. See Chapter 4 or “Data Collection” in the reference section for more information.

IV.

Data Collection – Gathering the Raw Materials



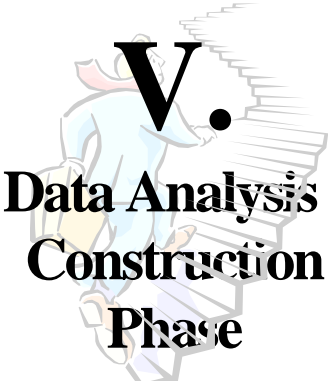
Confidentiality

Talk with school personnel in the planning stages to ensure that you can legally obtain the information identified in your evaluation plan. For sensitive information, it may be necessary to collect data for groups of students (e.g., the number of fights at the school rather than the number of fights involving your students). Identify anonymous information with a code name or number.

Community Collaboration

Involve school personnel as early as possible in your evaluation planning. Obtain and use school district calendars while you are planning. Days before and after holidays, as well as the first and last few weeks of the school year, are difficult times for data collection. Talk with your classroom teachers to select the day and time to collect data. Try to keep your data collection short enough to fit into the class schedule easily.





V. Data Analysis - Construction Phase



Tip: Sort data by the amount of service each program participant received.

For example, drop-in tutoring or after-school enrichment programs may serve many youth. Exclude from analysis those who have received little or no service (those who used drop-in tutoring once, or who came to the enrichment program only occasionally). If you choose to exclude data, include in your report what data were excluded, as well as the reason why the data were excluded.

Data analysis acts as the “construction phase” of your evaluation, where you create a structure from your raw materials. The process of data analysis includes deciding on the appropriate analysis to conduct for each question or test item, preparing data for analysis, analyzing the data, and summarizing the results. For outcome data, the results of analysis should enable you to answer the question, “What changed for service recipients during the program year?”

Analysis is the point at which many AmeriCorps programs encounter difficulties that thwart the evaluation process. Educational data come in a variety of formats, from student essays to scores on standardized tests. In addition, many programs addressing education issues collect multiple sets of data for large numbers of students. The format and volume of data will affect the resources and skills you require for data analysis. Although it is possible to use excerpts from journals or observations as examples when reporting program outcomes, a formal analysis is still necessary. Develop a system for each instrument that analyzes the content of the text. See Chapter 5 or “Data Analysis” in the reference section for more information.

Confidentiality

If you wish to use data from student journals, students must know from the beginning that the information in their journals will be collected, read, and used as data. Remove student names and other identifying information before analyzing data. Set clear guidelines for who handles information before personal identification is removed and where information is stored during the analysis process.

Quantitative Data from Grades or Rubric Scores

Grades and rubric scores may contain scales that are not strictly quantitative or that have flexible meaning. For example, report card grades come in letter form, traditionally converted to a four-point scale, where A equals four, B equals three, etc. Some schools offer “weighted” grades, where an “A” is worth more than four points for more difficult courses. Other schools, particularly elementary schools, use rating scales (e.g., excellent, satisfactory, needs improvement). Check to see how the school assigns value to grades before converting letters and rating scales into numbers.

Reporting your results serves a similar function as an “open house” does for a completed home. It lets consumers and funders know what you have accomplished. Reports can range from informal talks on the results of your evaluation to formal progress reports. In general, reporting your evaluation results should include a summary of your objectives, an outline of the steps you took in evaluating your activities, and a brief description of the instruments you used to collect data. It should provide the relevant statistics or qualitative information from your data analysis as well as stories or examples to illustrate your accomplishments.



You may encounter two specific issues in reporting your evaluation data. The first is that the data collected frequently includes multiple instruments on one objective; this means that a great deal of information may need to be included in reports. The second is that the information collected is useful to multiple audiences, including diverse partner agencies and funding sources; this can require multiple reports that vary in content. See Chapter 6 or “Reporting Your Results” in the reference section for more information.

Multiple Measures

It may take more than one person’s assessment of participant progress to get a reasonable picture of program outcome. Therefore, you need to triangulate. For example, the data used to report on a mentoring program will involve information from students, mentors, and teachers.

Tip: Avoid unclear statements about your outcome.
Avoid a report that simply regurgitates statistics with no interpretation of your results. Provide evaluation results that:

- reflect the “standard of success” stated in your objectives;
- focus on the statistics that are most relevant to your standard of success; and
- are accompanied by interpretation that explains the meaning of the statistics presented.

See “Reporting Your Results” in the reference section for more information.

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