

Design the Program

Chapter Topics

1. Understand the Community Through Data
 2. Formulating Program Ideas
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Understand the Community Through Data

A good proposal begins with the collection of good data. You need to make a case that clearly shows that there is a substantial community need that should receive attention. It is often not obvious to people why programs are needed, and why your community should get money before other communities get funds. This chapter will take you through several steps toward understanding the problem and, ultimately, creating a program.

At this point, even though you may think you know what services you want to offer, it is important to keep an open mind about what the program might look like and let the data speak to you. The success of the proposal requires that you have a clear understanding of the nature of the problem you plan to address and that you have a sound approach for addressing it. The best way to reach this goal is to understand the factors that cause or contribute to the problem in the first place.

Have you ever gone without medical or dental care because you couldn't afford it? Have you seen homeless mentally ill persons pushing shopping carts up your city streets? These are examples of community needs because

they affect the quality of life of the population in a geographic area. Other examples include: the incidence of HIV infection, the number of babies born with birth defects, the number of persons who go to bed hungry, the incidence of high school drop outs, domestic violence or date rape, or, perhaps, the quality of air or water. In short, there is a problem in the community that requires attention, and this problem is expressed as a need. In defining the problem, Kettner, Moroney, and Martin (2008) state,

A problem that is inadequately defined is not likely to be solved. Conversely, a problem that is well defined may be dealt with successfully assuming that adequate resources are made available and appropriate services are provided. Still, it must be understood that problem analysis is by nature more an art than a science. (p. 42)

They provide the following questions as a guide to problem analysis (pp. 45–49):

1. What is the nature of the situation or condition?
2. How are the terms being defined?
3. What are the characteristics of those experiencing the condition?
4. What is the scale and distribution of the condition?
5. What social values are being threatened by the existence of the condition?
6. How widely is the condition recognized?
7. Who defines the condition as a problem?
8. What is the etiology of the problem?
9. Are there ethnic and gender considerations?

Every community is unique. Think about the city you live in and those factors that define it—geographic, political, economic, and social components that make your city or town what it is. A quick visit to the website of your city will provide you with basic demographic information such as the number of persons living in the city, average age, average educational attainment, average income, and the number of children, working adults, and retired persons.

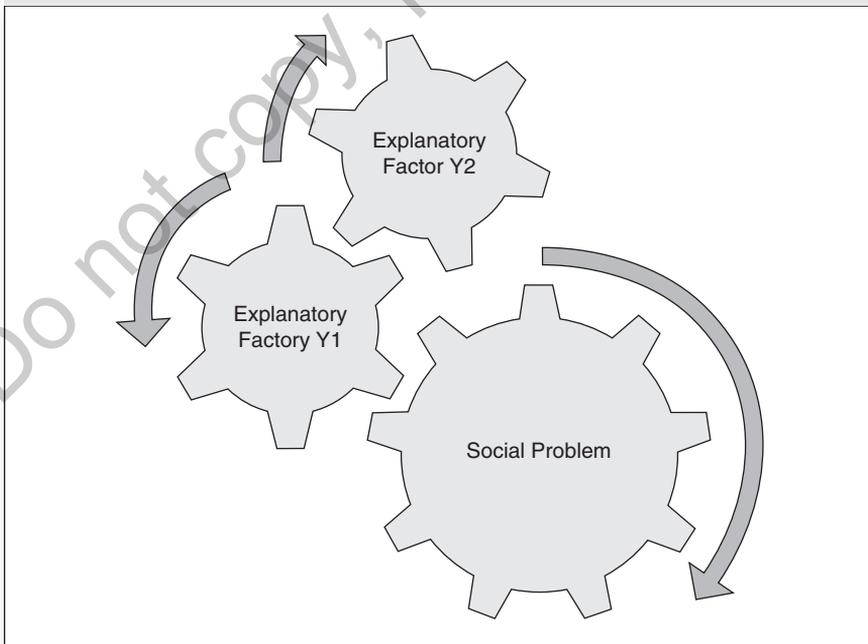
The following samples of data collection categories will provide you with a guide to the kind of data useful in both developing programmatic ideas and writing the need statement. You will want to obtain data on the following:

1. Incidence of the problem: whether the problem has increased, decreased, or remains the same
2. Clients' current physical, emotional, social, and/or economic status

3. Factors contributing to or causing the problem
4. Need in your target area to compare with other cities, counties, your state, and other states
5. Short- or long-term consequences of no intervention (including cost analysis if available)
6. Activities and outcomes of other organizations responding to the same or similar need, including any cost-benefit analysis
7. Demand for service: waiting lists, requests for service, lack of culturally appropriate services, and costs
8. Research studies on effective intervention strategies and evaluation results

Identify the interrelated components of a problem as illustrated below (see Figure 6.1)—there are usually many components causing a problem and these are often different in different areas of the country or among various populations and ethnic groups. For example, X Problem (e.g., homelessness) may be associated with Y factors (e.g., mental illness, unemployment, drug abuse). Social problems tend to be multi-dimensional and there is rarely a single factor that explains the phenomenon.

Figure 6.1 Problem Analysis



The following section identifies sources that you can use to find for the types of data just described.

Client/Community Needs Assessment

A needs assessment gathers information about the client's/community's perception of the problem and needs. This type of assessment is usually conducted through interviews with program recipients, through focus groups, or with questionnaires. Many agencies have conducted needs assessments and may be able to share the results with you, such as a local health care council or the United Way. These documents are invaluable to making a case for your project. If you conduct an assessment on your own, it is important to involve members of various ethnic groups (stakeholders) who experience the problem and who will benefit from the proposed program as well as individuals who serve this population. You may find that there are different perspectives on the problem and different solutions.

City, County, and State Demographic Data

Most county governments and universities compile information about the residents in geographic areas based on U.S. Census data conducted every 10 years. These demographic data provide such things as the number of adults and children, the number of single-parent households, the income level, the educational level, and housing density. Some university-based research centers have *geo-mapping* (geographic information systems) capabilities that allow a user to define a geographic area and extract demographic data and other indicators for that region.

Specific problems or issues are often tracked by county government and by state departments working in those issue areas. Teen pregnancy rates, for example, may be found at the County Health Care Agency or child abuse rates at the County Department of Social Services. Community-based organizations will frequently have data already compiled on certain community problems. The most organized of these agencies will have the incidence of the problem at the local level (city or county), the state level, and the national level. It is frequently necessary to determine how your geographic area's needs compare to other areas.

Journal Articles

There is a rich storehouse of information in scientific journals. You will find research into the causes of problems as well as research on effective solutions to the problems. From meta-analysis of the effectiveness of various program designs to studies on a single program's effectiveness, you will be

happy to see that there is a wealth of information on the effectiveness of different program approaches in various populations. When you draw upon this information and select a known and effective intervention, you are said to be using “best practices” or an “evidence-based” model. In addition, the bibliographies in the articles in academic journals can help a newcomer to a particular field find other important work quickly.

Local Newspapers

Articles in local newspapers can be another resource to help the grant writer develop a sense of the community perception of the problem and of local resources. (However, the grant writer must be cautioned not to depend solely on newspaper reports, as their articles are only as accurate as their informants.) A local newspaper can assist in identifying local leaders and current events in communities.

Formulating Program Ideas

The previous section of this chapter helped you to think about developing a program with those to be served foremost in your mind. It also challenged you to look beyond your own ideas about what might be a good program idea and review the scientific and professional practice literature. You have also been advised to consider the capacity of the agency or organization to successfully launch the project and to think of ways in which all or parts of the initiative can be sustained post-funding.

You now need to refine your thinking and hone your ideas in order to formulate the specific direction you are heading with the proposed program. Similar to a funnel, you start with a number of ideas and directions that could address the need/problem (see Figure 6.2). You consider these in light of current resources, opportunities, agency capacity, as well as constraints, along with any parameters that the funder may have. Ultimately, you develop a program that you believe will achieve the desired results and address the need/problem.

As you read through the next nine steps, you will gain a good sense of the different components of the proposal. The following process will introduce you to new components such as goals, objectives, and implementation activities to name a few. We are going to take you through our nine steps to develop the beginning of a proposal and continue to expound on these steps in the remaining chapters.

Step 1: Understand the need/problem. Answer the questions: What is the problem? Why is this a problem? Who is experiencing the problem? Is it

Figure 6.2 Formulating the Proposal Idea



recognized as a problem/need, by whom, and how widespread is it? Are there social/political implications? What factors contribute to the need/problem?

Step 2: Brainstorm solutions. Think creatively and freely about what might be done to address this problem. Dream of what might be possible and effective in creating change and positive results. Examine the scientific and professional practice literature to mine successful program ideas and use “best practices” when developing your plan. Consider the strengths and resources within your target population, the agency, and the community that can be coalesced to achieve positive results. Make a list of all of the ideas you and your team generate. Develop two or three program goals that are statements of the ultimate mission or purpose of the program you are proposing. (In some state or federal Request for Proposals, the goals are given.) Goals are often lofty and future-oriented statements such as (1) to eliminate birth defects in Grant County; (2) to prevent child abuse; (3) to make our oceans and streams pollution free; (4) to eliminate tobacco use; (5) to improve health outcomes in Grant County. The idea is to use a goal statement as a

hoped-for outcome for a project. Goal statements are also used to identify major sections of the program, and it is useful to have several goals if the program is serving distinct populations or offering distinct types of service.

Step 3: Select solutions and describe results. Identify the best program ideas from your list that will achieve your goals and write these in the form of an objective. Objectives identify the target to receive the service and the *expected* results. They provide the “promise” of what will be achieved over the course of the funding period. Objectives are specific, achievable, measurable statements about what is going to be accomplished within a certain time frame, and usually focused to address the various causes of the problem. It is also useful to think of objectives as the steps that you will take to reach the goal. For example: The goal of a program may be “to eliminate child abuse.” Objective 1 may state that “Fifty (50) high-risk families will improve family functioning by 25% by June 30, 2019,” or “Twenty (20) abusive parents will increase their coping skills by 50% by October 30, 2019.” Each program goal will have at least three to four objectives. (More in the evaluation chapter.)

Step 4: Think about barriers. Insure that the target population can participate as fully as possible. For example, a brick-and-mortar clinical services model to provide health care services may miss seeing clients who have no transportation to the clinic. Or another clinic may not be able to attract Spanish-speaking clients as there is no Spanish-speaking staff to greet them. The reasons why a client does not access service are known as *barriers* to service.

Barriers may exist as a result of a client’s orientation to services wherein he or she may lack the knowledge, desire, or skills necessary to seek treatment or prevent a problem. An example of this type of barrier exists in drug treatment services when the client denies that he or she has a problem. The client may also hold attitudes or beliefs that are not compatible with the seeking of certain types of services. For example, an individual who uses traditional cultural healers may not value the services offered by Western doctors. Many times, however, barriers are created by the service providers themselves or through the program design and are usually assessed in five domains:

1. *Availability:* Are services provided in the community, or is the cost prohibitive? Are the hours of operation convenient for the client?
2. *Accessibility:* Can the client get to the site? Does it take special physical needs into consideration such as handicap access? Is there transportation to and from the site? Are there eligibility criteria that may influence accessibility? To what

extent are multiple services provided at a convenient single location?

3. *Acceptability*: Are the services in the client's language and sensitive to cultural issues? Is the staff perceived as friendly, professional, competent, and helpful? Is the decor and design of the service setting inviting to and respectful of the client?
4. *Appropriateness*: Is this the right service for the client? Will this service address the problem as the agency expects?
5. *Adequacy*: Is the service sufficient in amount and approach to meet the individual or community's needs? Are services as comprehensive as possible?

Step 5: Think about sustainability and the life cycle of this project. A funder may ask, "Do you plan to continue this project in the future? If so, how do you plan to support or fund it?" In the majority of cases, the answer to the first question will be "Yes," followed by a brief description of how the program may be developed in the future. The answer to the second question may be more problematic for the grant writer. Human nature being what it is, we are more likely to have fixed our minds on obtaining the initial funding for the project rather than concerning ourselves with the funding of the project beyond the current request.

If you view the question from the funder's perspective, you will realize the wisdom of this inquiry about future funding. It is nice to support projects that will do wonderful things over the course of the funding, but rather frustrating to find that they simply cease when your funds are no longer available. From a funder's perspective, it is reasonable to look for projects that have the potential to continue the work into the future.

You may know of other funding sources who will want to fund the project in the future. Or, you may find ways to continue the project without funding, as in ways to "institutionalize" your project, meaning, to imbed it into existing service delivery systems such as schools, hospitals, churches, or other agency services. Or, you may explore whether the project has the ability to receive income from the project itself, building a way to support the project later on. Ask the following questions:

- Can the program charge a fee-for-service or receive a donation from the clients?
- Is it possible to market products or materials developed under the project to other agencies or businesses?
- Can the agency turn the program into a service that the community at-large will pay to receive?

Step 6: Determine tasks to accomplish solutions. These are known as *implementation activities*. There are two kinds: activities that are preparatory to starting a program, and the activities that describe the deliverable or promise

of each objective. As the above objective says: Fifty (50) high-risk families will improve family functioning by 25% by June 30, 2019, and an implementation activity will describe the services that the families will receive to reach this objective: for example, a 12-week educational program on family communication skills.

Preparatory activities prior to the start of services include ideas such as the staff needs to be recruited and hired, participants need to be located and recruited for service, facilities need to be identified and prepared, and program materials need to be created or ordered. Once the program starts, activities include the actual services as scheduled and delivered, tracking and documentation of client participation, and program evaluation is conducted on schedule and in the prescribed manner (More on this in the evaluation chapter.)

Step 7: Estimate resources needed. What are the resources needed in both human and monetary terms? What do you estimate the proposed program components will cost? Will the total available funds be sufficient to cover the cost of the project? Although we encourage free thinking to generate proposal ideas, it is time to ground in reality. Take some time now to briefly assess the cost of what is being proposed (more detail on this is in the budget chapter). Take a quick look at the big ticket items: staffing, rent, and indirect costs. Estimate the cost. Revise the program accordingly.

For example: You are writing a proposal for a \$20,000 foundation grant. You want to offer an afterschool program from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., 5 days a week for 12 weeks for 25 youth. You want to contract a credentialed teacher, a physical education instructor, and a counselor to be present the entire time. The rate for the teacher is \$100/hour times 10 hours for \$1,000/week or \$12,000 per summer. The PE instructor is \$50/hour times 10 hours for \$500/week or \$6,000, and the counselor is \$80/hour times 10 hours for \$800/week or \$9,600. You can quickly see that the design is not supportable.

You might want to solicit in-kind donations—which is when products or services are donated to the agency—to reduce the amount of funding requested. For example, if the project plans to publish a newsletter, you can find a local printer who will provide a donation of printing to the agency. Or, you might receive a donation in the form of books, office supplies, or furniture. People may donate their time and skills to the program in-kind, which can be counted as funds to offset the grantors funds. (See the budget chapter for more on this topic.)

Step 8: Make necessary adjustments to solutions and benefits. The hard reality is that most of the time we think of programs that cost more than the available funding, or we find an insurmountable barrier or other problem in implementation. We have to make some adjustments in the project.

Try not to let yourself be discouraged by this—the ideas may be used in future programs and services.

Step 9: Identify measurement of outcomes. How will we measure success? What evidence is needed to determine whether we have been successful? We have said that we will improve family functioning, increase knowledge, and build skills. We will determine what we will use to measure success such as pre- and post-tests, standardized tests, or observation, for example. (We will address this in greater detail in the evaluation chapter.)

Figure 6.3 summarizes the process of developing a program as you identify the problem, develop approaches or services, conceptualize measurable outcomes, reassess the impact on the problem, and either keep or modify the plan.

Once you have completed these steps you will have developed a very substantial program. The authors have always felt that we could improve upon the program designs we have created, no matter how many times we returned to it. There is always something that can be improved upon. However, there comes a time when you will want to let it go and move on. Once a program is funded and you have the opportunity to “see it in action,” you will bring new ideas and improvements to future iterations of the project.

Figure 6.3 Addressing the Problem

