Chapter 1

Contemporary Issues in Social Service Program Planning and Administration

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce:

- The major governmental and other initiatives that have prompted the need for program planning
- The relationship between the logic model and program planning
- How agencies and community-wide networks relate to each other in addressing social problems
- The steps that are involved in effectiveness-based program planning
- The elements of a program that are critical to measuring effectiveness
The following topics are covered in this chapter:

- The era of accountability
- Designing for monitoring, performance measurement, and evaluation
- The Logic Model
- Community focus
- The issue of effectiveness
- Assessing an existing program
- What is effectiveness-based program planning?
- Using effectiveness principles to understand existing programs
  - Defining programs
  - Problem analysis
  - Needs assessment
  - Selecting a strategy and establishing objectives
  - Program design
  - Data requirements for performance measurement
  - Monitoring, using information technology
  - Budgeting
  - Program evaluation

**The Era of Accountability**

When it comes to planning, funding, and implementing human service programs at the federal, state, and local levels, times have changed dramatically over the last few decades. There was a time when expectations were relatively simple: do your best to meet local needs, manage the budget responsibly, and pass an audit each year. This situation began to change in the 1980s when public, tax-funded support for human service programs began to decline. With decreased funding came more competition between human service providers as well as increased demands for accountability, including the monitoring of service provision, performance measurement, and program evaluation. Fast-forwarding to the present day, human service programs are now embedded in a system of performance accountability. The overriding question being asked by both government and private sector funding sources (e.g., United Ways and foundations) is: Do human service programs work? The logical follow up question is: If they don’t work, why should they continue to be funded?

The Government Performance and Results Act has become a major driver of performance accountability at the federal level. GPRA, as the law is known, requires federal departments and agencies to annually report their performance to the president and Congress. To facilitate this
annual reporting, the “Executive Branch Management Scorecard” ranks federal agencies on several criteria, including how well they have implemented performance accountability and the extent to which performance is linked to the budget process (see www.whitehouse.gov/results).

A second driver of performance accountability at the federal level is the performance contracting requirements of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR). The FAR represents the formal contracting policies and procedures of the federal government. The FAR requires that “all federal service contracts (including human service contracts) be performance based to the maximum extent possible” (www.acqunet.gov/far).

At the state and local government levels, two major drivers of performance accountability are the reporting initiative of the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) and the performance measurement requirements imposed by governors and state legislatures. GASB sets financial and reporting standards for state and local governments. GASB has long advocated that state and local governments adopt performance accountability systems that track and report on the outputs, quality, and outcomes of government programs. GASB calls its recommended performance accountability system “service efforts and accomplishments (SEA) reporting” (GASB, 1993). As of 2006, 48 of the 50 states have some form of mandated performance accountability systems (Melkers and Willoughby, 1998); many of these initiatives also tie performance measures to the budget process. Some 50% of municipal and county governments nationwide have some sort of performance accountability system in place (Melkers and Willoughby, 2005). Private sector funding organizations, such as foundations and the United Way (1996, 2006), have also adopted performance accountability systems. Most nonprofit human service agencies that receive government, foundation, or United Way funding through grants and contracts have likewise adopted performance accountability systems in order to satisfy the reporting requirements of their funders (United Way, 2003).

Designing for Monitoring, Performance Measurement, and Evaluation

The primary focus of this book is on designing programs and services in a way that allows collection of the kinds of data that will support responsiveness to funding source mandates for accountability, and at the same time will allow program evaluators to determine whether or not the programs
work. This is an important point. If monitoring, performance measurement, and evaluation activities are anticipated at the end of service provision, they will be possible only if certain design elements are incorporated at the beginning of the planning process. The Urban Institute pioneered an effort to establish criteria by which programs could be assessed in terms of whether or not they could be evaluated. They called this effort “Evaluability Assessment.” Some of the criteria they specified in order for a program to be considered “evaluable” include: evidence required by management can be reliably produced, evidence required by management is feasible to collect, and management’s intended use of the information can realistically be expected to affect performance (Schmidt, Scanlon, and Bell, 1979). The term evidence refers to the collection of data around specified variables that define service characteristics and results. Social work has adopted the term evidence-based practice to emphasize that clinical decisions must be based on the best available evidence from systematic research wherever possible (Johnson and Austin, 2006; McNeill, 2006). Management’s use of evidence simply takes this concept to the next level, defining the parameters within which evidence will be collected, how it will be aggregated, and how it will be used for monitoring, performance measurement, and evaluation. One thing should be made perfectly clear. Designing programs that can be evaluated will mean collecting quantified data on service provision and client response. It will also require that data be captured in a spreadsheet or database to facilitate analysis. Only when data are displayed in some comparative format such as these can the program planner or analyst begin to understand what works and what doesn’t.

The Logic Model

The framework for design is a variation of the logic model approach, which is built around basic concepts associated with systems theory. The logic model can be useful in helping the practitioner establish a context for incorporating theory into the planning process (Savaya and Waysman, 2005). The variation of the logic model that we use here uses “program” as the unit of analysis. The purpose of the logic model is to depict the sequence of events that identifies program resources, matches them to needs, activates the service process, completes the service process, and measures results. The sequence is depicted in Figure 1.1 below.
The Logic Model

**Definitions**

**Resources and Raw Materials**

**Activities that use inputs to achieve objectives with raw materials**

**Measurements of services provided and completion of all services prescribed**

**Demonstrated benefits to those receiving services**

**Measurable changes occurring in organizations, communities, or systems as a result of services**

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**Example**

**Resources**

- Staff, Volunteers, Money, Materials, Space, Technology

**Raw Materials**

- Clients

**Inputs**

- Parent training for abusive and neglecting parents

**Process**

- Number of training hours provided; Number who complete the entire course and receive a certificate

**Outputs**

- Number of those who completed the course who actually demonstrate improved parenting skills

**Outcomes**

- Reduction of reports of abuse and neglect in the community

**Impact**

Figure 1.1 The Logic Model
This model allows the planner to see the rational flow of addressing a problem and applying a process, while maintaining a focus on the purpose of the entire effort: effecting positive changes in the lives of clients and reducing the size and scope of a problem in a community.

**Community Focus**

One result of the emphasis on accountability has been to shift the focus from what an agency is providing and accomplishing to what impact a program is having on the community. Most problems addressed by human service programs are community problems, such as children in need of a safe environment, homeless people in need of shelter and rehabilitation, victims of crime and violence in need of protection, family breakdown, the spread of AIDS, and others. These problems are so complex that it is unlikely that services from just one agency can have a significant and measurable impact on an entire community. For this reason, funding sources have learned that they must put resources (primarily money) into a community with the expectation that a number of agencies will collaborate in addressing the problem in the interest of achieving a more comprehensive impact.

The consequences of this approach for program planning are that, early in the planning and proposal writing stages of a program, planners need to know something about the problem and the characteristics of the target population and need to include these data elements in their management information systems. In the following chapters we will examine in great detail the many developmental phases a program must go through and the many elements that need to be included if it is to be considered “effectiveness based.” We will also attempt to illustrate how agency management information systems and agency budgets can be structured in a way that allows them to fit into a larger community system and enables the community to measure the impact on the problem while the agency measures the effectiveness of its services.

Basic to all program monitoring, performance measurement, and evaluation is the need for appropriate information technology support in terms of computer hardware, software, and expertise capable of tracking clients and generating program reports. And to achieve the full benefits of effectiveness-based program planning, there must also be a strong...
commitment from the top and all the way through entry level personnel that evaluation of effectiveness is critical to the success of any client service program, and that evaluation data will be used to initiate changes in the program as it becomes clear that they are needed.

The Issue of Effectiveness

Both efficiency and effectiveness have become major considerations in social service program and agency administration. Efficiency can be defined as the ratio of outputs to inputs or, in other words, how much service a program provides in relation to its costs. Effectiveness refers to the achievement of client outcomes (quality of life changes) as the result of receiving services. Measuring outputs and outcomes requires that service providers track such factors as the amount of service a client received, whether or not the client completed the program or dropped out, and how much the client improved between entry into and exit from the program.

The term program also has some very specific meanings. A program is defined as a prearranged set of activities designed to achieve a stated set of goals and objectives (Netting, Kettner, and McMurtry, 2008). This is an important and sometimes elusive concept for a newcomer to the profession to grasp. If there is an expectation that stated objectives will be met and that monitoring, performance measurement, and/or evaluation will take place at some point, an agency must plan in advance to establish goals and objectives, and to provide clear definitions of services to be provided and results expected. Client requests for help must be categorized in some way, after which clients are directed into services that offer the best possibility of meeting their needs and resolving their problems.

The Commonwealth of Australia has done a particularly good job of applying the concept of effectiveness-based program planning for government-sponsored services. In defining programs, for example, police services are broken down into four areas or programs: (1) community safety and support, (2) crime investigation, (3) road safety and traffic management, and (4) services to the judicial process. Services to the aging are broken down into residential care and community care, with specific indicators identified to track access to service and appropriateness and quality of service. Child Protective Services (CPS), in addition to direct services to children and families, include services from police, courts,
education, child care, and health (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, or SCRGSP, 2006). The point is that services need to be categorized, defined, matched to client need, and delivered to determine whether or not they have been successful. Data collection systems are closely tied to program definitions.

Programs may be staffed by specialists who work exclusively with a defined population or problem, or staff responsibilities may cut across more than one program. The important issue is that client data must be associated with specific programs and services so that valid and reliable measures are produced.

Assessing an Existing Program

In this opening chapter we will attempt to illustrate, through the use of a series of questions addressed to the reader, that designing effective programs requires a careful, detailed thought process that begins with an understanding of a social problem and ends with analysis of data on effectiveness. Chapters 2 through 13 will focus on the tasks to be accomplished and the elements to be considered and defined in order to create programs capable of demonstrating effectiveness.

The tasks and processes of program development that will be proposed are by their very nature complex, simply because social and personal problems are complex and sometimes well entrenched. The problems and the populations to be served will require thoughtful study and analysis. The purpose of delving into the complexities of social problems and social service programs is to insure there is a good fit of service to need, so that service can be more precisely focused on getting the kinds of results intended. In short, it is a more proactive approach that is more assertive in ensuring service providers produce results rather than merely hoping that things turn out well for the client.

Perhaps in the same way that an understanding of the law is of critical importance to a practicing attorney or an understanding of the body to a physician, so an understanding of social problems and programs is central to the practice of social work. This understanding will require that old assumptions be challenged and new approaches to serving clients be implemented as we learn more about effectiveness. In a sense, we will be proposing that programs go through periodic checkups to determine their continuing effectiveness and relevance in a changing environment.
What Is Effectiveness-Based Program Planning?

The idea of conducting periodic checkups is, in essence, what effectiveness-based program planning is all about. Designing effective programs requires that social service professionals develop a thoroughly researched understanding about social problems, people in need, and social services. A commitment to effectiveness requires the collection of new kinds of data—data that will provide information about client conditions at entry into and exit from services, thereby making clear the impact of services on problems. This approach, which we will refer to throughout this book as effectiveness-based program planning, will make clear where changes in programs are needed, so that services provided do more of the things that help and fewer of the things that do not. The system is designed to be useful for both direct service and management purposes.

Effectiveness-based program planning involves taking a program through a series of steps designed to produce a clear understanding of the problem to be addressed, to measure client problem type and severity at entry, to provide a relevant intervention, to measure client problem type and severity at exit, and to examine selected indicators in a follow-up study to determine long-range outcomes. The purpose of all these activities is to provide a basis for continual improvement of services to clients and to provide a common database for both clinical and administrative staff for analysis and decision making about program changes. This way, instead of asking clinicians to fill out forms useful only for completing management reports, clinical staff can record data useful for understanding the progress of their clients and, at the same time, provide data and information necessary to good program management.

Using Effectiveness Principles to Understand Existing Programs

In the following chapters we will present a step-by-step process that will enable the reader to begin with a social or personal problem experienced by clients and end with a program designed to get results and be able to document them. Before beginning these chapters, however, we propose that you take a few minutes to take stock of current agency practices in a social service agency with which you are familiar as a means of becoming
acquainted with some of the basic concepts of effectiveness-based program planning. This may be helpful in drawing a contrast between the way social service programs are often designed and the way they must be designed for measurement purposes.

The following assessment instrument is divided into sections on each of these topics:

- Defining programs
- Problem analysis
- Needs assessment
- Selecting a strategy and establishing objectives
- Program design
- Data requirements for performance measurement
- Monitoring, using information technology
- Budgeting
- Program evaluation

If you are interested simply in a quick overview of a program’s strong and weak areas, you may wish to limit your assessment to checking yes and no answers. If, on the other hand, you wish to conduct a more in-depth assessment, use the instrument as a basis for interviewing key program staff and fill in answers to the follow-up questions. The program planning model discussed is designed for those programs that provide a direct service to clients. It is not applicable for support programs such as fund-raising, lobbying, and advocacy.

**Defining Programs**

In this section we explore the extent to which agency services are organized into programs. Some social service agencies organize their programs so that each offers a specialized set of services to a defined population (e.g., detox, family counseling, employment services). Others may be designed in a way that all clients come through a common intake point and are systematically assigned to case managers who have room in their caseloads rather than to specialists. This is an important distinction in applying the principles of effectiveness-based program planning, and one of the first elements of design that the practitioner needs to assess. The following two questions are intended to encourage you to think through where your agency stands on its definition and separation of programs.
1. Does your agency provide for clients a number of clearly defined and distinct programs that provide specialized services matched to client need (as opposed to providing undifferentiated casework services for all clients)? Yes — No —

2. If your agency does have separate programs, can you identify agency staff and resources that are allocated to each of these programs? Yes — No —

3. Do staff have a clear understanding of the distinct focus and limitations of the services to be provided to clients within each program (as opposed to open-ended problem solving)? Yes — No —

If the answer to the above questions is no, you may conclude your participation in this survey at this point or select another agency, because the remaining sections focus on questions about programs.

Problem Analysis

In Chapters 2 and 3, we deal with the need for a thorough understanding of the theoretical underpinnings and the etiology (cause-and-effect relationships) of the problem the program is intended to address. Sound practice requires that programs be based on a thorough study and analysis of the problem, but that is not always the case. Programs are sometimes planned and funded for political or ideological reasons without regard for the facts or the realities of the situation. However, as we hope to demonstrate, those programs that have the greatest probability of success will be those that develop a clear understanding of the type, size, and scope of the problem as well as its relevant historical highlights, theory, research findings, and etiology.

For example, if a program is to be designed to treat drug users, it would be important to understand that people use drugs for different reasons, and treatment must be carefully tied to these reasons. Suburban housewives, junior high school kids, and street gang members, for example, each need to be understood in context. Program planners, therefore, must set out to discover how many of each type are in the community, their reasons for using drugs, where they live, and how severe their problems are. This approach provides a solid foundation on which to build an effective and precisely targeted program or intervention.
4. Thinking of one particular program or service, can you identify the problem(s) this program is intended to address (e.g., teen unemployment; lack of housing for families with temporarily unemployed breadwinners)?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, state it/them:

5. Can you define the target population(s) this program is intended to serve (e.g., unskilled, unemployed high school dropouts ages 16 to 21; homeless families in need of temporary shelter for up to 90 days)?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, define it/them:

6. Can you identify geographic boundaries for the population served by your program?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, state them:

7. If necessary, could you provide a reasonably accurate estimate (based on reliable documentation) of the number of people within these boundaries who fit the description in questions number 4 and 5 for problem and target population?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, identify the populations and list the estimates:

8. Can you identify data sources for the above statistics?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, list them:

9. Are there commonly agreed-upon understandings among staff who work in your program about the primary or most common causes of this problem and about cause-effect relationships (e.g., limited education, peer pressure, substance abuse, etc.)?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, list them:

10. Is there sound theory and research to back up these understandings, and are staff aware of the theory and research?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, briefly explain:
Needs Assessment

When someone is experiencing a problem, that individual has a need. Sometimes the need is obvious: Someone who is homeless needs a home; someone who is unemployed needs a job. At other times the need is more subtle and more difficult to meet—for example, the need for a permanent and loving relationship with a nurturing parent substitute, the need for a mentor to help build self-confidence, or the need to learn a work ethic in order to succeed in employment.

Accuracy and skill in matching needs to services comes from solid, thorough work on problem analysis. Once you are comfortable that you have an understanding of need, it is time to turn to techniques of needs assessment. There are four different perspectives from which we look at need: *normative need* (as defined by experts in the field), *perceived need* (as seen by those experiencing the need), *expressed need* (from those who seek out services), and *relative need* (needs and resources in one geographic area compared with needs and resources in another) (Bradshaw, 1972).

The following questions will give you an opportunity to explore your understanding of each of these perspectives on need, and to think through the extent to which your programs have taken these perspectives into account.

11. Given the problem you identified in question 4, is there agreement among your clinical staff about the major categories of needs of clients who come to you with these problems (e.g., parent training, shelter, etc.)?  
   Yes — No —
   If yes, list the categories of need:

12. Are there any standards that are used to establish normative need (i.e., a point or level defined by experts below which one is defined as being in need in this particular problem area, for example, people below a certain income are said to be in need, children experiencing specified levels of neglect are said to be in need)?  
   Yes — No —
   If yes, identify the standards:

13. Can you define what consumers of your services (clients) perceive their needs to be?  
   Yes — No —
   If yes, list the major categories of need:
14. Of those people who seek services from this program, do you know approximately what percentage is served? Is there a waiting list? Yes ___ No ___

If yes, state the percentage:

15. Do you know how the volume of services provided in your community compares with the volume of these same services provided in other, comparable communities in terms of percentage of needy population served? (In other words, do you serve a larger or a smaller percentage than other, comparable communities?) Yes ___ No ___

If yes, cite data that help depict comparative need:

Selecting a Strategy and Establishing Objectives

Once the problem analysis and the needs assessment have been completed, it is time to begin to think about a strategy for reducing or eliminating the problem by meeting the needs of people who have the problem. This involves a number of steps. By this point in the program planning process, we are well grounded in history, theory, research, and etiology of the problem; therefore, we are in a position to propose an appropriate intervention. We then propose one or more program hypotheses—statements about what outcomes are expected if a person with the problems we have defined receives appropriate service(s). Program hypotheses, then, provide a framework for the development of precisely stated goals, objectives, and activities.

The following questions should help in assessing your understanding of a program’s underlying assumptions and expectations.

16. Can you spell out the underlying assumptions about your client population and the expected effects of your program in the form of a series of “if . . . then” statements (e.g., If parents learn good communication skills and if they use them with their children, then they are less likely to resort to physical violence with their children)? Yes ___ No ___

If yes, state them:
17. Can you identify the following as they relate to your program?
   • an independent variable (services provided)    Yes __    No __
   • a dependent variable (expected ultimate or long-term results of services)    Yes __    No __
   • an intervening variable (intermediate or short-term results of services)    Yes __    No __

   If yes, state them:

18. Looking at the way you assess client need in your program:

   Does it permit you to categorize and compare clients at intake by type and severity of problem?    Yes __    No __

   If yes, identify the assessment instrument and list its categories:

19. Does your program have written objectives that specify expected outcomes for clients?    Yes __    No __

20. Is there evidence that your program staff attempt to move clients toward these outcomes?    Yes __    No __

   If yes, describe the evidence:

Program Design

It is one thing to understand a need; it is quite another matter to design an intervention that will meet that need. Research in the field has made it clear that certain problems will respond better to certain, more precise interventions. The purpose of the program design phase is to put together that service or combination of services that appears to have the best possible chance of achieving the program’s objectives. Program design involves careful consideration of the resources needed to address the needs of clients and attention to the ways in which these resources will be organized. It is a critical point in the planning and management of programs.

If we simply consolidate a great deal of program design under the heading of “casework,” we leave decisions about client assessment, service provision, service completion, and outcome assessment to the professional judgment of each caseworker. When this happens, it becomes difficult if not impossible to examine program effectiveness and to modify program design in the interest of improving services to clients. On the other hand, bringing precision to each element of program design allows for constant
examination and constructive program change as data and information about effectiveness become available to guide our refinements.

The following questions should help you in assessing the level of precision achieved in specifying the elements of your program design.

21. Does your program have identified problem or need categories that can be checked off at intake and used to help in understanding client needs in the aggregate?  
   Yes ___  No ___  
   If yes, list the categories:

22. Does your program have some method for quantifying or scaling severity of problems?  
   Yes ___  No ___  
   If yes, describe it:

23. Do you collect quantified data on the following?  
   • client demographics  
   • client social history data  
   • client problem type and severity  
   Yes ___  No ___

24. Do you itemize service tasks for each service you provide and record the amount of time or volume of each task provided for each client?  
   Yes ___  No ___  
   If yes, list the service tasks:

25. Do you specify acceptable service methods for each type of service (e.g., one-to-one counseling, group treatment, classroom instruction)?  
   Yes ___  No ___  
   If yes, list them:

26. Do you have some way of identifying those who complete your program and those who drop out so that you can do some analysis of these as separate populations?  
   Yes ___  No ___  
   If yes, describe how they are tracked:

27. Do you quantify and measure results with clients using some sort of a pre-post measure?  
   Yes ___  No ___  
   If yes, describe it:

28. Do you follow up with clients and collect data that indicate long-term effects of treatment?  
   Yes ___  No ___  
   If yes, list the follow-up variables:
29. Do you have a formally defined unit of service that you use to measure the amount or volume of service provided by your program?  
Yes — No —
If yes, describe it:

30. Do you have written standards to which you adhere that protect the quality of service provided to clients?  
Yes — No —
If yes, cite them:

Data Requirements for Performance Measurement

Data collection is the *sine qua non* of effectiveness-based program planning. All the effort put into the development of a program hypothesis, goals and objectives, and design will mean little if the correct data are not collected, aggregated, and reported. Data collection systems must be designed to answer questions about meeting community need, program implementation, productivity, costs, and achievement of outputs and outcomes. Principles associated with performance measurement should be understood before attempting to design a management information system. The following questions may be useful in understanding the data requirements effectiveness-based program planning:

31. Do program planners have a common understanding of the community need that is intended to be met by the program?  
Yes — No —
If yes, state the need:

32. Is there agreement about how data on service delivery requirements, such as service definition, service tasks, and standards, will be collected?  
Yes — No —
If yes, describe data collection plans:

33. Is there agreement about how data on products/services, quality, and service completions will be collected?  
Yes — No —
If yes, describe data collection plans:

34. Is there agreement about how data will be collected to measure program success?  
Yes — No —
If yes, describe data collection plans:
35. Is there agreement about how unit costs for services provided, service completions, and client outcomes will be calculated?  

Yes ___  No ___

**Monitoring, Using Information Technology**

Once program data elements have been designed and implemented in accordance with the guidelines established for effectiveness-based program planning, they can be collected, processed, and aggregated in a manner that informs both clinical staff and administrators. Programs can be said to meet objectives and to bring about positive changes in clients’ lives only if the data generated from the program provision process can support such statements.

In contemporary social service agency management, computerized data management is absolutely essential. Narrative case recording is useful for individual case analysis, planning, supervision, and documentation, but virtually useless for purposes of program management and administration. In effectiveness-based program planning, we propose a client data system that is capable of producing data and information about the progress of clients throughout each episode of service and the effects of these services at termination and follow-up. This information, we believe, should be used by all levels of staff, each from its own perspective.

The following questions may be useful in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of an existing monitoring system.

36. Do you have a computerized data collection and data processing system that is used for client data?  

Yes ___  No ___

37. Do you collect, enter, aggregate, and cross-tabulate selected variables (such as those listed below) to help you achieve a better understanding of your clients and their problems?  

Yes ___  No ___

- client demographics
- client social history data
- client problem type
- client problem severity
- staff characteristics
- material resources provided to clients
- service type
- service tasks
• unit of service
• method of intervention
• service completion
• intermediate outcome
• long-term outcome
• financial data

38. Do you produce tables of aggregated data about clients and client services on a regular basis? Yes ___ No ___

39. Do appropriate groups such as the following use these tables to better understand the effects of services provided?
   • clinical/direct service staff
   • supervisors
   • program managers
   • administrators
   • board of directors or political body to whom the program is accountable

   Yes ___ No ___

40. Do you periodically discuss what changes should be made to improve your program based on data produced by your monitoring system? Yes ___ No ___

Budgeting

All programs and services depend on funding for their continuation, and for many funding sources there are no guarantees that the same level of support will continue year after year. It is, therefore, in the interests of clients and staff to ensure that the best possible results are being achieved for the lowest possible cost. A well-designed budgeting system is capable of generating important and valuable information for use in making program changes in the interest of providing better quality services for clients at a lower cost. Unfortunately, many budgets in human service agencies reflect only categories for which dollars are to be spent. These are called line-item budgets. In effectiveness-based program planning we propose, instead of or in addition to this simplistic type of budgeting, methods for calculating costs for items such as provision of a unit of service (e.g., an hour of counseling), completion of the full complement of prescribed services by one client (e.g., 10 parent training sessions), achievement of a measurable outcome by one client (e.g., improved parenting skills), and achievement of a program objective (e.g., at least a 50% reduction in child abuse reports on those who complete the class).
For example, by costing out services we may learn that it costs just $1,500 per trainee to complete a training program. However, if we also find that there is a 50% dropout rate, the cost then doubles to $3,000 per “graduate.” These kinds of calculations help staff keep focused on using resources in a way that steers clients in the direction that offers them the best possible chance of success at the lowest cost. These types of calculations should ultimately lead to more cost-effective and cost-efficient operation of social service programs.

The following questions should help you in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of your current budgeting system.

41. Can you calculate the following from the budget data you collect?
   • line items by program Yes ___ No ___
   • direct costs by program Yes ___ No ___
   • indirect costs by program Yes ___ No ___
   • total program costs Yes ___ No ___
   • cost per intermediate output (unit of service) Yes ___ No ___
   • cost per service completion Yes ___ No ___
   • cost per client outcome Yes ___ No ___

Program Evaluation

One of the most exciting features of effectiveness-based program planning is that it produces information that informs staff about how successful the program was in relation to expectations as expressed in objectives. How many abusing and neglecting parents completed parent training? How many can demonstrate improved parenting skills? How many have stopped abusing and neglecting and are progressing toward more effective relationships with their children? This information can bring together direct service staff, supervisors, managers, administrators, and board members around a common set of concerns and interests. It is always more satisfying to be able to say, at the end of a program year, “We helped 75% of our clients to master at least 10 techniques of effective parenting” than simply to be able to say, “We provided services to 100 abusing and neglecting families.” Furthermore, the database produced can provide the raw material for an ongoing research and development function within the agency, a function usually reserved for only the wealthiest organizations.

In this section we will explore methods of evaluating social service programs from several different perspectives.
42. Do you regularly use any of the following approaches to program evaluation?

- evaluation of the amount of staff time and resources used in direct client services and ways to reduce costs  
  Yes — No —

- evaluation of the service provision process and the extent to which it fits the program design as originally intended  
  Yes — No —

- evaluation of the cost of outputs (units of service) and ways to reduce costs without adversely affecting service quality  
  Yes — No —

- evaluation of outcomes achieved with clients and ways to improve them  
  Yes — No —

- evaluation of the costs of outcomes and ways to reduce costs without adversely affecting clients  
  Yes — No —

- evaluation of the contribution made by your program to the total community in terms of its impact on the social problem experienced by the community  
  Yes — No —

The foregoing questions are intended to provide a very general overview of a particular program in terms of its fit with the principles of effectiveness-based program planning. The purpose is to familiarize you with some of the more important concepts, but applying the questions to a program can also provide some clues to where the major work needs to be done to allow for monitoring, performance measurement, and evaluation.

The following chapters are intended to explain each of the phases of effectiveness-based program planning. As you proceed through these chapters we encourage you to think through and apply the concepts to a specific program, perhaps the program you have assessed using the foregoing questionnaire. While the most ideal application of these principles is in designing new programs, you may also find that existing programs can be converted with careful attention to the details of each phase of the planning process.

References


