

---

## WHAT IS AN OUTCOME AND WHAT IS AN OUTCOME INDICATOR?

### Outcome

- An **outcome** is a desired state of well-being— a set of conditions, experiences or behaviors— that is the goal for change or improvement. Outcomes can be defined for:
  - an individual such as a child, an employee, or a resident;
  - sets of people defined by specific relationship or membership such as a family or an organization;
  - a larger group of people or organizations/systems, defined by geography, background or affinity— such as a neighborhood, an immigrant community, subprime lending institutions, health care providers.
- For groups seeking changes in their community, an outcome is the desired end state— where the community would end up or what the community would look like if all the hoped for changes took place.
- An example of an outcome is: Children of recent refugees and immigrants enter first grade fully prepared for school success.

### Indicator

- An **indicator** is a specific piece of information that measures all or part of the condition, experience or behavior that is the desired state of well-being or outcome.
- You often need to use several different indicators to get a sense of progress toward the outcome of interest.
- For example, some indicators of progress toward “all children of recent refugees and immigrants entering first grade fully prepared for school success” might include:
  - Children have self-confidence and enthusiasm for learning, as measured by teacher and parent observation.
  - Children exhibit age appropriate language development, in the language primarily spoken in their home.
  - Children have had a developmentally appropriate pre-school experience in a culturally appropriate setting.
  - Schools screen all children at kindergarten entrance for hearing and vision and ensure that appropriate follow-up services are provided.

Good indicators generally have the following characteristics:

## WHAT IS AN OUTCOME AND WHAT IS AN OUTCOME INDICATOR?

- They are:
  - **Meaningful**– they are clearly related to the outcome (sometimes called having “face validity”– that is, they are valid on their face).
  - **Powerful**– research indicates that a change in the indicator predicts a change in the condition of well-being they are trying to measure.
  - **Actionable**– it is possible to change the indicator by individual, group, organizational or institutional action
    - Groups sometimes choose indicators that are important, but which are not likely to be affected by their strategies, at least in the short-term over which they will be measuring changes. These indicators may not meet the test of being “actionable” for purposes of evaluation.
    - For example, people trying to reduce the differences in school achievement among racial groups (the achievement gap) often choose as an indicator rates of graduation from high school for different groups.
    - However, if their strategies focus on improving the ability of kindergarten and primary school teachers to work with children from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds, those strategies, even if they are implemented very well, won’t affect rates of graduation for many years. In addition, there are many other things that affect high school graduation rates, including policies and practices in the school, resource allocation across schools, and the like.
    - Thus, an indicator that is unlikely to be affected by your strategies, even though it is an important indicator of well-being, is usually not a useful indicator (at least in the short-term) of whether or not you are making progress toward your goal.
  - **Measurable**– the indicator can be defined precisely and clearly, so that you would know exactly what information to collect to measure it
  - **Reliable**– different people observing the same behavior would measure it as the same behavior (for example, they would choose the same rating or category on a tool to describe what they were observing). This is important so data collected at different times or by different people can be grouped together or compared.
    - Inter-rater reliability– which describes how much different people describe the same behavior in the same way– is especially important to think about when an indicator is somewhat subjective, and the behaviors are being measured for people of different races or by people of different races
  - **Available or Feasible to collect**– data are currently being collected and stored so that they can be retrieved and used; or, given its importance, the indicator can be made available through new data collection such as a survey.
  - **Universal**– data are available for all members of the defined population (all children, all low-income families, all residents of a particular neighborhood, all banks doing business in a metropolitan area, for example)

## WHAT IS AN OUTCOME AND WHAT IS AN OUTCOME INDICATOR?

- They can be used to **Reveal differences**– the indicator can be tied to other information so it can be broken down (disaggregated) into the categories you care about (by, for example, jurisdiction, other geographic areas such as census tract or zip code, income, class, socioeconomic status, and especially race/ethnicity/language group)