

Using Targets to Achieve Better Outcomes

The ability of a local CAA agency is to set and meet realistic targets reflects the expectations of the Government Performance Results Act by:

- Establishing performance goals to define the level of performance to be achieved by a program activity.
- Expressing such goals in an objective, quantifiable, and measurable form.
- Providing a basis for comparing the actual program results with the established performance goals.

A target is a number representing the projected scope of the outcome that you predict you can achieve. Another way to think of a target is that it is a commitment of projected performance based on your knowledge of past performance.

That figure will answer questions such as:

- ✓ How much?
- ✓ How many?
- ✓ What percent of those needing or receiving service are expected to achieve the result?

A negative characteristic of targets is that managers may set and report on targets that are not challenging. This is the concept that once you set a number of expected results, you either “pass or fail” in achieving the set number. Consequently, managers may be tempted to set low targets so they are sure on “passing” and reaching the established number.

A target that is set too low can make it appear that an organization is not aiming high or is unable to evaluate its own performance in a realistic way. Easy targets also fail to provide much information about what will work to gain continual program improvement with experience.

Although, if you achieve a much higher number of results than predicted, funders may assume that you do not need all of the resources you put into the project in the current year.

The unique aspect of NPIs is that they are a collection of indicators that are used by all Community Action Agencies across the country, and as such they provide a standard set of data that can be aggregated at the national level.

In addition, many of the NPIs measure progress toward a sub-goal which itself is quite broad. For example, NPI 1.1 A—unemployed customers who obtained a job. Your agency may have several areas of activity that are designed to help customers achieve one or more outcomes under the sub-goal “obtain a job.”

Activities might include vocational testing and counseling; a choice of several vocational training courses; classes in “soft skills” such as how to develop good work habits and good workplace interpersonal skills; résumé-writing workshops; and job-hunting supports. For each of these activities,

you have an expected outcome. For each indicator, you should set a target for the number and percent of customers who will achieve each indicator.

A target demonstrates your expectation about your capacity to deliver results. The process for establishing targets also tests your ability to be realistic about your expected achievements. Targets can connect this year's results to your future management decisions if targets are well designed and provide feedback on what works and what does not.

The targeting "requirement" can initiate an ongoing process of regular, thoughtful review of the expectations your agency team shares for its programs.