

The SMART Fund

and Social Changes in the Health Sector

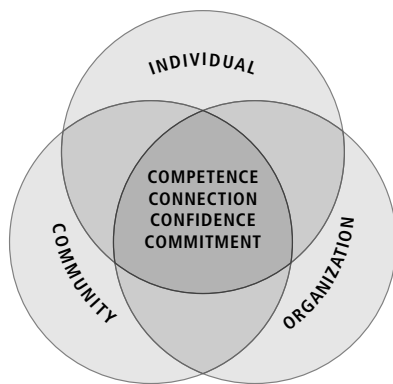
Outcome Measurement and the Sharon Martin Community Health Trust Fund

The Sharon Martin Community Health Trust Fund (SMART Fund) intends to demonstrate the importance of its population health promotion projects in building community capacity. All projects supported by the fund are asked to assist by adopting an 'outcome measurement' approach to project planning, management, and measurement. This guide, as well as training and one-on-one support provided by SMART fund staff, are assigned to assist you in fulfilling this requirement.

What is Community Capacity Building?

SMART Fund projects build community capacity to engage and support its members to work toward improved health status for all. The greater the capacity of our communities, the greater the likelihood that its members will be able to work individually, collectively and in partnership with agencies, government and institutions to address community concerns, such as: homelessness, child poverty, homophobia, racism and isolation.

Community capacity building enhances the abilities



of individuals, families, organizations, community infrastructure, and/or communities as a whole. It builds on the skills and assets already present in the community, directing them towards desired health outcomes. The process relies heavily on

collaboration and partnership, building capacities on several levels, often at the same time.

Types of Activities

Community capacity building activities include: public participation processes, volunteer training, peer support and mentorship, community-based planning, mediation and communication, organization development, networking and partnership building.

Some examples in the community health sector include:

- Recruiting and training youth volunteers to work in youth serving agencies. Youth play an advisory role and gain valuable work experience at the same time.
- Establishing and fostering links with government and community agencies, ensuring a broad spectrum of programs and services are available and accessible to stakeholders.
- Building relationships with businesses in the community where a youth drop-in centre is located. This would provide relationships supportive of the centre and an opportunity to communicate to address conflicts that may occur between businesses and street-involved youth.

Outcome Planning and Management

Outcome Planning is an approach to planning, managing and evaluating projects that encourages us to be clear about what our projects are DOING and what they are CHANGING. In the language of evaluation, this relationship is sometimes called the 'theory of change'. Outcome Measurement fits nicely with 'community capacity building', the principles of which community health organizations increasingly subscribe to.

Outcome Measurement stems from a global change in the way governments work. In Canada, and most industrialized countries, government agencies are re-organizing the delivery of social services to demonstrate and measure the changes that occur as a result of the investment and intervention.

“A great wind is blowing, and that gives you either imagination or a headache.”

*– Catherine II
(The Great)
1729 - 1796
Empress of Russia*

“Be the change you want to see in the world.”

– Gandhi

There is a similar trend within community health organizations, which are being asked to be accountable to their stakeholders, funders and the broader community. They are being asked to communicate the difference they are making in their own communities. Many groups find this to be a challenging requirement because of the nature of the change that the projects bring about.

Measuring Community Capacity

SMART funded projects involve change in Community Capacity to address health issues. This change is particularly challenging to measure because it is qualitative, takes a long time, and is influenced by other factors. The way in which Outcome Measurement is applied to capacity building projects must consider all of these challenges. This is not an easy task and we are collectively learning as we go.

Community Capacity Outcomes

The change that is expected to occur as a result of community capacity building activities include:

- Increased participation of community members
- An expanded and diversified leadership base
- Strengthened individual skills
- Increased ability for mutual support
- A widely shared understanding and vision
- Effective community organizations and institutions
- Improved resource use

The SMART Fund's mission is to work in partnership with communities, other agencies and government ministries to develop and ensure access to responsive, effective and accountable quality services for children, youth, adults and families. The Fund strives to assist individuals and families to enhance their social, emotional, educational and economic well being.

The SMART Fund's vision is one of healthy, civic and productive people living in socially sustainable, safe and caring communities.

How Can Outcome Measurement Help Your Organization?

By engaging people at all organizational levels in a reflective process, Outcome Measurement provides a coherent and systematic set of tools for supporting collaborative planning, making management decisions and establishing an evaluation process.

Outcome Measurement will help your organization:

- Know what to expect from project activities
- Identify who will benefit from the expected results
- Gather just the right information to know whether the project is achieving what you want
- Know how to improve project activities based on this information
- Know how to maximize positive influences (Opportunities), and to avoid or overcome negative influences (Obstacles)
- Communicate plans and achievements more clearly to people and other organizations
- Gain from the knowledge, experience and ideas of the people involved
- Provide accurate and convincing information to support applications for funding

If used for all these purposes, Outcome Measurement will also strengthen your community or organizations' capacity at the same time.

A Word of Caution...

First, the language of Outcome Measurement can vary slightly from one funding body to another. Take heart in knowing that Outcome Measurement is greatly centered around a 'logic chain' that links resources (Inputs), Activities, and Outputs to desired results, such as: changes in people, families, organizations or communities. Short Term Outcomes, Intermediate Outcomes, and Long Term Outcomes are all the terms used in this guide for the results sought after.

Secondly, funding bodies each have their own styles of implementing Outcome Measurement. Some funders are more direct about the Outcomes they seek and fund projects largely on their own terms, while other funders are more open to negotiation.

The best way to prepare for the introduction of Outcome Measurement is to have a good understanding of the language and concepts, and knowledge of how to apply them inside your organization. It is most useful when your organization has a strong, organizational planning and management process already in place.