SMART Objectives[1]

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Overview

While goals are broad statements of desired change, objectives are more specific and measurable statements that would indicate progress on the achievement of a goal. Within Cooperative Extension, program objectives are a central part of the program description and are used to assess the extent to which progress is being achieved through Extension programming. In its guidelines for tenure and promotion, Florida Cooperative Extension states:

"The program objectives should be clear, measurable and concise statements of the major intended outcomes of the program, i.e., the major changes the target audiences (e.g., county agents, turf producers, golf course managers, parents, youth, senior citizens, etc.) were expected to make. These may be expressed in terms of changes in practices, knowledge, attitudes, skills, etc. The objectives are derived directly from the situation statement (expected returns on investment), therefore the tie with the situation statement should be obvious. The end result (i.e., impacts) of these changes that affect participants' economic, environmental, or social status can be discussed in the Outcomes/Impacts Section." (IFAS Extension 2015, p. 4).

Objectives should be developed during the program planning stage and should guide the development and delivery of educational materials, as well as the evaluation approaches to be used. In Cooperative Extension, objectives should specifically articulate the ways in which program participants or clientele will build knowledge and skills through education (learning objectives) or change their behaviors (behavioral objectives) as a result of participating in programs. Objectives are useful for planning programs (clarifying the intended outcomes of a program) and for evaluating programs (measuring the extent to which change has been achieved). Strong objectives are a critical element of reporting and provide the structure for understanding what change should be taking place as a result of programmatic efforts.

SMART Objectives

The framework of "SMART Objectives" has been proposed by a variety of thinkers, including Michael Patton who discusses SMART Indicators using the following mnemonic (Patton 2008):

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Timebound

Specific: Does the objective explicitly state how the target audience will change? In contrast to goals, which are purposefully broad, objectives should be specific and should

very clearly communicate the desired change that will take place. In Extension programs, objectives should clearly state what knowledge will be built, what attitudes will be changed, what skills will be strengthened, or what behaviors will be increased. Additionally, the specific audience that will experience the change should be identified when possible (e.g., people with diabetes, homeowners, youth in 4-H, etc.). Objectives should be concrete and should be easily understood.

Measurable: Is the objective measurable, and can you measure it? To be useful, objectives need to be measurable in the context of Extension programming. Extension agents should be able to describe the ways in which objectives will be measured to assess progress. This means that Extension agents should describe the means by which they will measure the possible change in their target audience (workshop survey, follow-up survey, interview, observation, etc.).

Achievable: Is the objective achievable given the resources and program you have in place? Objectives should be reasonable, realistic, and achievable within the context of the program being proposed or delivered. When objectives are developed for a new program, it can be difficult to assess what is realistic; however, analysis of evaluation data can be used to inform future expectations about program performance. Other agents delivering similar programs may also be a source for "benchmarking" how much change is realistic to anticipate.

Relevant: Is the objective aligned with the larger goals of the program and with the goals of the participants? Objectives should be aligned with the overarching goals of the educational program and should be consistent with the participants' desires for increased knowledge or behavior change. When this alignment takes place, the objectives are relevant and may be used to describe progress toward the larger programmatic goals.

Timebound: Does the objective state the timeframe for the proposed change? It is helpful to place a time boundary on the achievement of objectives; because Extension reporting takes place on an annual basis, many objectives are also written with an understanding that they should be achieved within that year. Objectives can also be framed relative to timeframes following programming, such as "immediately after training" or "within 6 months after training." Typically, these time boundaries should correspond to the data collection time table (When will you collect post-test data? When will you collect follow-up data?)

Recipe for Objectives

Table 1 is a four-step recipe that can be used to develop SMART Objectives.

Sample Objectives

While objectives will vary from situation to situation, this recipe can be used to develop SMART Objectives for a variety of program areas. Samples from Extension faculty include the following:

- **Nutrition:** After a series of five lessons, 50% of participating children will eat more fruits and vegetables as measured by children's pre/post self reports.
- **Fertilizer Use:** Following two on-site visits and soil testing, 80% of farmers will reduce the amount of phosphorous fertilizer applied per acre of pasture by at least 10% as determined by a pre/post survey of producers' fertilizer use.
- **Car Safety:** Within one year, 50 individuals will be certified to become Child Passenger Safety Technicians, as measured by the certification exam.
- **Pesticide Use:** From 2008–2012, 75% of professional horticulture service companies in the county will be in compliance with Florida pesticide licensing regulations.
- **4-H:** In 2012, 80% of 200 youth who participate in animal science educational activities will gain decision-making and self-responsibility skills (i.e., accounting, time management, writing, marketing, and goal-setting) related to work in animal management operations as evidenced by project reports, standards of excellence awards, and club participation records.
- **Diabetes Management:** After nine lessons, at least 30% of program participants with diabetes will improve their blood glucose control as evidenced by reduction of their A1c value as reported on laboratory results. (According to the American Diabetes Association "good control" is less than 7% [i.e.154 mg/dl average blood glucose].)
- **Master Naturalist:** From 2010–2014, 60 participants completing a Florida Master Naturalist Program class will increase their understanding of coastal systems by at least 10% as measured by pre/post knowledge tests.
- **Forage Management:** Ten cow-calf operators in the county will adopt improved forage management practices, including at least one of the following: installing additional cross fencing, renovating/establishing permanent pastures, or including improved or alternative forage species to their forage production systems. This will be measured by a follow-up survey and field observations.

- **After-School Program:** Within one year, 90% of youth in school enrichment programs will improve their skills related to self-awareness, decision making, and organization as measured by pre/post tests and teacher observations.

- **Small Farms:** Within three months, 50% of clients participating in the Small Farm Establishment Series will understand the importance of treating a farm/ranch like a business. This will be measured through a 3-month follow-up interview.

- **CED/Administrative:** In the current year, 70% of agents will apply for grants to support Extension programming, and 20% will successfully obtain funding. Data will be compiled from faculty Reports of Accomplishment.

Conclusion

While SMART Objectives are critical to Extension programming, it can be challenging to develop good objectives that correspond to program content and are measurable given the time constraints of many programs. It can also be difficult to ensure that your objectives are meaningful and connect strongly to your expectations for your program. It is always a good idea to have your peers or supervisor review your objectives and use their feedback to fine-tune your work.

SMART Objectives are a critical part of all Extension programs and can be used to guide both program development and program evaluation. Within Florida Extension, objectives are a key component of Plans of Work, Reports of Accomplishment, and review for tenure and promotion. Good objectives create the foundation for good programs and keep educators focused on the change they seek to create in their target audience. Because they are measurable, objectives also form the foundation for evaluating how much progress faculty members are making toward their larger programmatic goals.

References

IFAS Extension 2015. "Preparing tenure/permanent status and/or promotion packets with emphasis on the Extension program section." University of Florida. Available at: https://hr.ifas.ufl.edu/assets/pdf/tenure/Ext_Program_Section_for_P-T-PS_document-Revised_2015-Vers1.1.pdf

Patton, M.Q. 2008. *Utilization-focused evaluation.* p. 247. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Table 1. Four steps for developing SMART Objectives.

Step	Specifics	Example
1. Set time frame for the objective.	By such and such a time…	Within 3 months of program completion, …
2. Set the threshold for the target audience.	_____ % or _____ #	at least 50% of program participants with diabetes
3. Describe the desired change (behavior or knowledge).	will do ... or will know…	will adopt two or more diabetes self-management practices
4. Describe the measurement approach.	as measured by…	as measured by a 3-month follow-up survey.
Example Objective:	Within 3 months of program completion, at least 50% of program participants with diabetes will adopt two or more diabetes self-management practices as measured by a 3-month follow-up survey.	