About Objectives

Objective is a common word in program planning and evaluation, as is the term **goal.** Goal tends to refer to more general, broad end states while objectives are the more specific means to achieve them. Goals entail the program's purpose and aims. Objectives are narrower and more specific. Patton (1997, p. 169) indicates that "the only dimension that consistently differentiates goals and objectives is the relative degree of specificity of each: objectives narrow the focus of goals."

Goals and objectives have often been used to signify intent and purpose (e.g., the goal of the program is to build healthy, safe communities; the objective of the program is to provide a series of policy-oriented seminars; our objective is to reach 10 percent of the homeless people in the city). **Objective,** in this usage, does not indicate change or value or potential benefit for intended beneficiaries. Rather it refers to various types of inputs and outputs. Thus, we prefer to use the term **outcome.**

Increasingly, we see that outcome and objective are used interchangeably. In 1967, Suchman talked about a chain of objectives as divided into immediate, intermediate, and ultimate goals. Suchman's **chain of objectives** has become largely synonymous with the phrase **chain of outcomes.** But be clear about use and meaning. Because words do carry meaning and do matter, check and clarify the language that you and others are using. Increasingly, we see the addition of adjectives to bring greater clarity to language and meaning: **process objective** is used interchangeably with **process outcome** to signify the series of actions focused on implementation that precede **outcome objectives** or **short-intermediate-final outcomes.**

Also, in the educational arena, objectives have largely focused on the individual as "learner objectives." In 1956, Benjamin Bloom, University of Chicago professor, shared the "Taxonomy of Educational Objectives" that has greatly influenced the design and evaluation of educational and other types of programs. It includes six levels of increasing cognitive complexity: (1) knowledge, (2) comprehension, (3) application, (4) analysis, (5) synthesis, (6) evaluation. The emphasis is on thinking. The taxonomy does not include the affective domain or aspects of feeling, being, seeing, and doing. And educational programming often focuses on the individual. For example, in community- based programs the focus might instead be economic, environmental, civic, and/or social.