

Indicator Criteria

Direct. An indicator should measure as directly as possible what it is intended to measure. For example, if the outcome being measured is a reduction in teen smoking, then the best indicator is the number and percent of teens smoking. The number and percent of teens that receive cessation counseling does not directly measure the outcome of interest. However, sometimes we do not have direct measures or we are constrained by time and resources. Then, we have to use proxy, or less direct, measures.

Specific. Indicators need to be stated so that anyone would understand it in the same way and the data that are to be collected. Example indicator: *number and percent of farmers who adopt risk management practices in the past year*. In this example, we do not know which risk management practices are to be measured, which farmers or what time period constitutes the *past year*.

Useful. Indicators need to help us understand what it is we are measuring! The indicator should provide information that helps us understand and improve our programs.

Practical. Costs and time involved in data collection are important considerations. Though difficult to estimate, the cost of collecting data for an indicator should not exceed the utility of the information collected. Reasonable costs, however, are to be expected.

Culturally appropriate. Indicators must be relevant to the cultural context. What makes sense or is appropriate in one culture, may not be in another. Test your assumptions.

Adequate. There is no correct number or type of indicators. The number of indicators you choose depends upon what you are measuring, the level of information you need, and the resources available. Often more than one indicator is necessary. More than five, however, may mean that what you are measuring is too broad, complex or not well understood. Indicators need to express all possible aspects of what you are measuring: possible negative or detrimental aspects as well as the positive. Consider what the negative effects or spin-offs may be and include indicators for these.