

Toolkit: Analyzing Problems and Goals

This toolkit helps in analyzing personal and environmental factors that influence the problem to be addressed.

Outline

1. **Justify the choice of the priority problem or goal to be addressed. Include:**

- a. How often does the problem occur (or is the goal attained)?
- b. How many people are affected?
- c. For what amount of time are they affected?
- d. How severe (significant) is the effect?
- e. How important is the problem or goal perceived to be by others?
- f. How effective are efforts to address it likely to be?
- g. Are there any likely negative impacts of addressing the problem or goal?

Related resources:

[Defining and Analyzing the Problem](#)

[Conducting Concerns Surveys](#)

[Collecting Information About the Problem](#)

2. **Frame the problem or goal to be addressed. State as:**

- a. Lack of/too few of a POSITIVE condition (e.g., more youth should graduate from high

- school; all should be safe in their neighborhoods) or
- b. Presence of/too much of a NEGATIVE condition (e.g., too many children drop out of high school; there is too much violence) or
 - c. Both (if different stakeholders seem to respond to different framing).

Related resources:

[Defining and Analyzing the Problem](#)

[Analyzing Root Causes of Problems: The "But Why?" Technique](#)

3. Review the naming and framing of the problem or goal.

- a. Does the statement of the issue focus on the condition or outcome of interest? (e.g., improving school success and/or decreasing dropouts; improving safety and/or decreasing violence)?
- b. Does it avoid defining the problem in terms of a preferred solution?
- c. Is the problem or goal framed in a way to build consensus?

Related resources:

[Reframing the Issue](#)

4. Ask questions about the problem or goal to identify key behaviors, actors, and consequences.

- a. What behaviors (of whom) contribute to the problem or goal? (Who is doing -- or not doing -- things that contribute to the problem or goal?)
 - i. Whose behavior needs to change? To address the immediate problem? To change the conditions that contribute to the problem or goal?
 - ii. Which specific behaviors need to change in what specific people?
 - iii. How does this identification of target behaviors influence how we would address the problem or goal?
- b. Who is affected by the problem or goal?
 - i. What types of people are affected? (e.g., children, parents, neighbors, service providers)
 - ii. How many people are affected?
- c. How are people affected by the problem or goal?
 - i. What are the consequences of the problem (achieving the goal) for those affected?
 - ii. How often does the problem occur?
 - iii. For what amount of time are people affected?
 - iv. How severe (socially significant) are the effects?
 - v. How important is the problem or goal perceived to be? By community members? By outside experts?
- d. When and where did the condition or problem behavior first occur, or when did it become significant?
 - i. Is the problem new or old? Is it increasing or decreasing?
 - ii. Where is it prevalent (in what places or groups)? Why?

Related resources:

[Defining and Analyzing the Problem](#)

[Analyzing Root Causes of Problems: The "But Why?" Technique](#)

Targets and Agents of Change: Who Can Benefit and Who Can Help?

5. **Analyze "root" causes of the problem to identify the environmental conditions and related behaviors that might contribute to the problem or goal.**
 - a. State the issue or problem (e.g., "Too many kids are dropping out of school"; "Too few young children receive quality care")
 - b. Ask "But, why?"
 - c. For each answer given, repeat the question, "But, why?"
 - d. Based on the answers to the "But, why?" questions, identify environmental conditions and related behaviors that need to change.
 - e. Based on the analysis, identify promising interventions that might contribute to improvement.

Related resources:

[Analyzing Root Causes of Problems: The "But Why?" Technique](#)

[Criteria for Choosing Promising Practices and Community Interventions](#)

6. **Identify restraining and driving forces that affect the problem or goal.** (Conduct a "Force Field Analysis.")
 - a. What forces are keeping the situation the same?
 - b. What forces are causing it to change?
 - c. Indicate how this analysis influences how we would address the problem or goal.

Related resources:

[Defining and Analyzing the Problem](#)

7. **Find relationships between the community's problems and goals.**
 - a. State your priority problem(s) and/or goal(s) and how they may be linked to other related issues.
 - b. Draw a map or diagram of possible links between the priority problem(s) and/or goal(s) and other related issues. Use arrows (pointing one or both directions) to show how these issues may be related to each other.
 - c. How does this picture influence how we would address the problem or goal?

Related resources:

[Defining and Analyzing the Problem](#)

8. **Identify personal factors that may contribute to the problem or goal. How do each of these factors contribute to the problem or goal within your community?**
 - a. Knowledge and skill
 - i. Knowledge
 - ii. Beliefs
 - iii. Skills
 - iv. Education
 - b. Experience and custom

- i. Experience
- ii. Cultural norms and practices
- iii. Social status
- c. Biology and genetics
 - i. Type and degree of existing health
 - ii. Cognitive, mental, or physical disability
 - iii. Chronic illness
 - iv. Gender and age
 - v. Genetic predisposition

How do each of these factors contribute to the problem or goal within your community?

Related resources:

[Understanding Risk and Protective Factors: Their Use in Selecting Potential Targets and Promising Strategies for Interventions](#)

9. **Identify environmental factors that may contribute to the problem/goal.** How do each of these factors contribute to the problem or goal within your community?

- a. Support and services
 - i. Availability and continuity of social support and ties
 - ii. Availability of appropriate services
 - iii. Availability of resources
- b. Access, barriers, and opportunities
 - i. Physical access and barriers
 - ii. Communication access and barriers
 - iii. Competing requirements for participation
- c. Consequences of efforts
 - i. Social approval and disapproval
 - ii. Incentives and disincentives
 - iii. Time costs and delays
- d. Policies and living conditions
 - i. Policies
 - ii. Financial barriers and resources
 - iii. Exposure to hazards
 - iv. Living conditions
 - v. Poverty and disparities in social status

How do each of these factors contribute to the problem or goal within your community?

Related resources:

[Understanding Risk and Protective Factors: Their Use in Selecting Potential Targets and Promising Strategies for Interventions](#)

[Enhancing Support, Incentives, and Resources](#)

[Improving Services](#)

[Modifying Access, Barriers, and Opportunities](#)

[Changing Policies](#)

[Changing the Physical and Social Environment](#)

10. Identify targets and agents of change for addressing the community problem or goal.

- a. Identify targets of change or those whom the effort is trying to benefit, reach, or change. Consider those who experience the problem or are at risk and those who contribute to the problem or goal through their behavior. Who would this include in your community?
- b. Identify agents of change or those who can influence the behaviors and conditions that relate to the problem or goal. Consider those with the power to bring about needed change, including those who experience the problem or are at risk.

Who would this include in your community?

Related resources:

[Identifying Targets and Agents of Change: Who Can Benefit and Who Can Help](#)

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