

## **What are Indicators of Achievement?**

Indicators of achievement are specific, observable and measurable characteristics that can be used to show progress towards achieving an objective. Each indicator must be directly related to measures of success. There should be at least one indicator for each objective and the change measured by the indicator of achievement should represent progress towards what the entity wishes to accomplish. Indicators need to be explicitly stated and specify exactly what is to be measured. Indicators of achievement should state what data will be required.

### **Indicator Types**

**Direct indicators:** Information that has a clear relationship to what is being measured. For example, if you are measuring student learning, you may look at student performance on achievement tests.

**Indirect indicators:** Information that can serve as substitute for items that may be difficult to measure. If one is measuring student learning, one may look at student survey data. Indirect measures are used when characteristics: (a) cannot be measured directly, (b) can be measured directly, but the information is too sensitive to present or (c) it is more cost-effective to assess indirect measures.

### **Considerations in Selecting Indicators**

An essential part of identifying indicators of achievement is how one will define success of the indicators. It is important to note that many indicators of achievement may require several years before any noticeable change takes place. Therefore, it is a good idea to choose milestone indicators for the various steps of an action plan.

When choosing indicators of achievement, please ask the following questions:

1. What do you want to know?
2. What data is likely to tell you what you want to know?
3. Is the chosen indicator of achievement valid, reliable, precise, measureable and timely?

**Valid:** Each indicator of achievement needs to be an effective, logical way to determine goal achievement.

**Reliable:** The indicator must be able to be measured by more than one person in a consistent manner.

**Precise:** Each indicator needs to be comprehensively stated, leaving no room for interpretation of what is being used to measure achievement.

**Measurable:** One needs to be able to measure the success of each action plan component. This can be accomplished through setting action plan targets or through the objective verification that a task has been successfully completed.

**Timely:** Indicator of achievement data needs to be available within the specified timeline for each objective.

In addition to the aforementioned considerations, please review the data availability and other considerations sections below.

**Data Availability:**

- Is the data required readily available? If not, will business practices need to be altered to obtain the needed data?
- Do other constituents require the same type of data?
- Is the required data available in a useable format, e.g., aggregate or student-level?
- Does the data require additional mining or scrubbing that would involve additional personnel?
- Does the data exist in a different variation that could be useable?
- If need be, are the chosen indicators comparable to other institutions, and if so, are the reporting schedules for the data needed the same, e.g., academic/fiscal years?
- Did the indicator have a consistent definition over the period of time in question?
- Was the data collected in the same format over the period of time in question?
- Will the data continue to be collected until the end of the strategic planning cycle?

**Other Considerations:**

- Does the organization have personnel that is trained to interpret the chosen indicator data?
- Is the cost of obtaining the data (including personnel time) prohibitive for the purposes of the indicators?
- Does the chosen indicator provide direct evidence for what one is trying to measure?
- If you cannot find quantitative indicators of achievement for your objective, have you considered qualitative indicators?
- Does the indicator of achievement reflect an important university-wide performance dimension?
- Will monitoring the indicator of achievement lead to improvement?
- Is the indicator of achievement seen as credible?

- Can the indicator of achievement be effectively communicated and understood by campus constituents?

### **Common Indicators of Achievement in Higher Education**

Each objective should have at least one indicator of achievement. Ideally, there would be two indicators from different sources and objectives should have no more than 7 indicators. Higher education indicators of achievement typically fall in one of five categories: (a) enrollment, (b) student success, (c) organizational efficiency, (d) fiscal accountability and (e) employee well-being. Below are examples of indicators that fall into each of the aforementioned categories. Some examples may be used in more than one category.

#### **Enrollment:**

- Enrollment by term (undergraduate, graduate)
  - Demographic data: Ethnicity, gender, age, residency, first-generation, socioeconomic status, class (freshman, sophomore, junior and senior)
  - Enrollment status (full- and part-time)
  - First-time, transfer and concurrent students
  - College/school
- Applied/admitted/ enrolled data
- Standardized test scores (ACT/SAT)
- High school GPA
- Feeder high school
- Utah county or state of origin
- International student country and quota targets
- Mode of instruction: Face to face, online, hybrid
- Student : Faculty ratio
- Class size
- FTE: Total, budget-related and self-supported

#### **Student Success:**

- Undergraduate retention rates
  - Fall-to-fall
  - Spring-to-spring
  - Fall-to-spring
  - Year 1-to-year 2

- Year 2-to-year 3
- Graduation rates
  - 4-year
  - 6-year
- GPA data (semester and cumulative)
- Academic standing
- Degrees conferred
- Time-to-degree completion
- Course completion rates
- Program completion rates
- General Education completion rates
- Transfer out rates
- Licensing examination data
- Student participation in athletics
- Student participation in clubs and organizations
- Student success service participation
- Undergraduate student acceptance rate in graduate programs
- Student learning outcome data
- Campus housing data
- Job placement rates
- Financial aid: federal, state, local and institutional
  - Student loan data
  - Student debt burden
- Student engagement experiences: group learning, active learning, institutional commitment to student learning and success, diverse groups and student interaction with faculty and staff

### **Organizational Efficiency**

- Space utilization reports
- Course/program offerings
  - Online
- Semester Credit Hours
- Faculty Workload
- Program reviews/evaluations
- Campus crime statistics
- Information technology infrastructure, data and security

## Fiscal Responsibility

- Balanced budget
- Discretionary funds
- Endowment
- Fundraising targets
- Net price tuition
- Alumni participation rates
- Community participation in sponsored events

## Employee Well-Being

- Professional development hours
- Volunteer hours
- Turnover
- Sick hours used
- Demographic data: Ethnicity, gender, age, citizenship, terminal degree
- Faculty rank and tenure; employment status (full- and part-time)

## Setting Indicator of Achievement Targets

Targets should be: (a) explicit, (b) measureable, (c) attainable, (d) realistic and (e) time-sensitive.

### Explicit/Measureable Targets

Creating explicit, measureable targets involves knowing exactly what one's going to do, when one's going to do it and how one will determine objective success. Measureable targets infer that one can determine that a change occurred. Target goals may be specified as an end-result target (end of timeline) or an incremental target (multiple milestones with increasing target goals annually). For example:

**Enrollment target:** Increase new freshmen students.

**Explicit, measureable, end-result enrollment target:** Increase new freshmen students by 14% between 2015 and 2022.

**Explicit, measureable, incremental enrollment target:** Increase new freshmen students by 2% annually between 2015 and 2022.

**Realistic/Attainable Targets**

Targets must also be realistic, attainable and relevant to the mission of the institution. A realistic target is one where the organization has the knowledge, skills, abilities and resources to achieve the target and the target can be completed prior to the end of the strategic plan. One should fully understand any target or resource limitations that might prevent objective attainment. Targets can't be too easy or impossible to obtain, and should be in the form of stretch goals. A stretch goal infers that there will be a reasonable challenge to meet the target(s).

**Time Sensitive**

Targets are time-sensitive, as the target should be achieved within the specified timeframe. Having a few indicators of achievement allows for flexibility of measurement in case one of the indicators of achievement becomes unusable or obsolete.