

Benchmarking to Build Sustainable Communities: “Expect, Like and Love to See”

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“If you don’t know where you are going, how will you know when you get there?”
(author unknown)

Here is the situation: You are working with a group of people who want their community to become more environmentally friendly. Even in the best-case scenarios, with action steps identified and progress made toward implementation, groups will ask themselves, “Are we really making any progress?” and “How do we know we are reaching our goal?”

But, what if early in the group discussion there had been a conversation about what the group would *expect* to see, would *like* to see and *love* to see happen as a result of their effort? Could these ideas then be incorporated into some kind of benchmark or evaluation plan so that the goal becomes more concrete?

With large comprehensive, group projects, such as those targeting changes in individual and group behavior, finding ways to organize plans and maintain motivation over time can be challenging. However, framing issues in terms of “expect, like and love to see,” can bring the discussion down to a human level and make

it easier to measure and document progress. It also becomes a way to begin with the end in mind.

This approach has a few benefits. First, discussing the proposed result in a tangible way can often help groups see or communicate their larger collective “big picture” vision. Second, the ideas generated by the “expect, like and love to see” can serve as benchmarks used to evaluate the progress of the effort and identify adjustments that might need to be made along the way. Finally, communicating what members would love to see keeps the collective goal in front of people, and when action steps are made toward the goal, it allows the group to celebrate a real accomplishment.

The “expect, like and love to see” benchmarking process, or Success Outcome Markers (SOMs), was developed in the early 2000s by a small group of Nebraska Extension professionals who wanted to better document significant and lasting changes in clientele behavior around transformational change.



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Why the Process was Developed

Educational programs that bring about a major behavior or transformational change are essentially about people relating to each other and their environment. They are a combination of service, technology transfer, and facilitation, and are applied in a focused way on in-depth programs that help individuals develop and grow. These “transformational” programs address complex and interrelated issues in social, economic, political, and/or technological contexts. In transformational learning situations, people’s behaviors, relationships, actions, and/or activities change to improve their own lives, as well as the health and well-being of a community. These unique changes are typically something that groups want to monitor and track because they can be presented to show public value and impact.

Because of the “people factor” in the transformational aspect, organizations have encountered numerous challenges in assessing and reporting these outcomes. Each community group or agency is often under increasing pressure to demonstrate that transformational programs produce significant and lasting changes in their clientele. These outcomes may result from multiple organizations working together with no single organization or agency being able to claim sole credit.

To address this issue, extension staff in Nebraska working in the areas of welfare-to-work, youth mentoring, capacity building for youth and families, juvenile diversion, and coalition building formed a small working group. They started with the Outcome Engineering approach and used an appreciative inquiry process to explore how the concepts might apply in extension’s transformational programming.

The iterative two-year process encouraged them to question their assumptions and mental models, engage in meaningful dialogue, and create visions that energized action. The group also collaborated with sister agencies to test concepts in complementary types of programming. What resulted was a model called Success Outcome Markers in Extension (SOME).

Although designed for extension, the model also can be successfully used in other organizations and in a wide variety of situations — from evaluating specific program efforts to monitoring community-wide initiatives.

How to Develop Success Outcome Markers

When a group uses SOMs it significantly alters the way it understands its program goals and assesses its performance and results. One of the benefits of this process is the use of a multistep model to confirm a

vision in a social, economic, or environmental condition (Figure 1).

For the participants within the program’s sphere of influence, the SOMs process helps to:

- identify the vision the group has for a program;
- acknowledge the mission which states how the vision will be carried out;
- identify program partners and program beneficiaries (i.e., who is involved?); and
- link these entities to written outcome challenges and corresponding success outcome markers (SOMs) which are identifiable actions or behaviors that indicate successful accomplishment of the outcome.

Transformation is accomplished through fundamental behavioral changes in clientele at the individual, business, and community level, becoming a central concept of the model.

Step 1: Brainstorm “Expect, Like and Love to See” Early in the Group Process

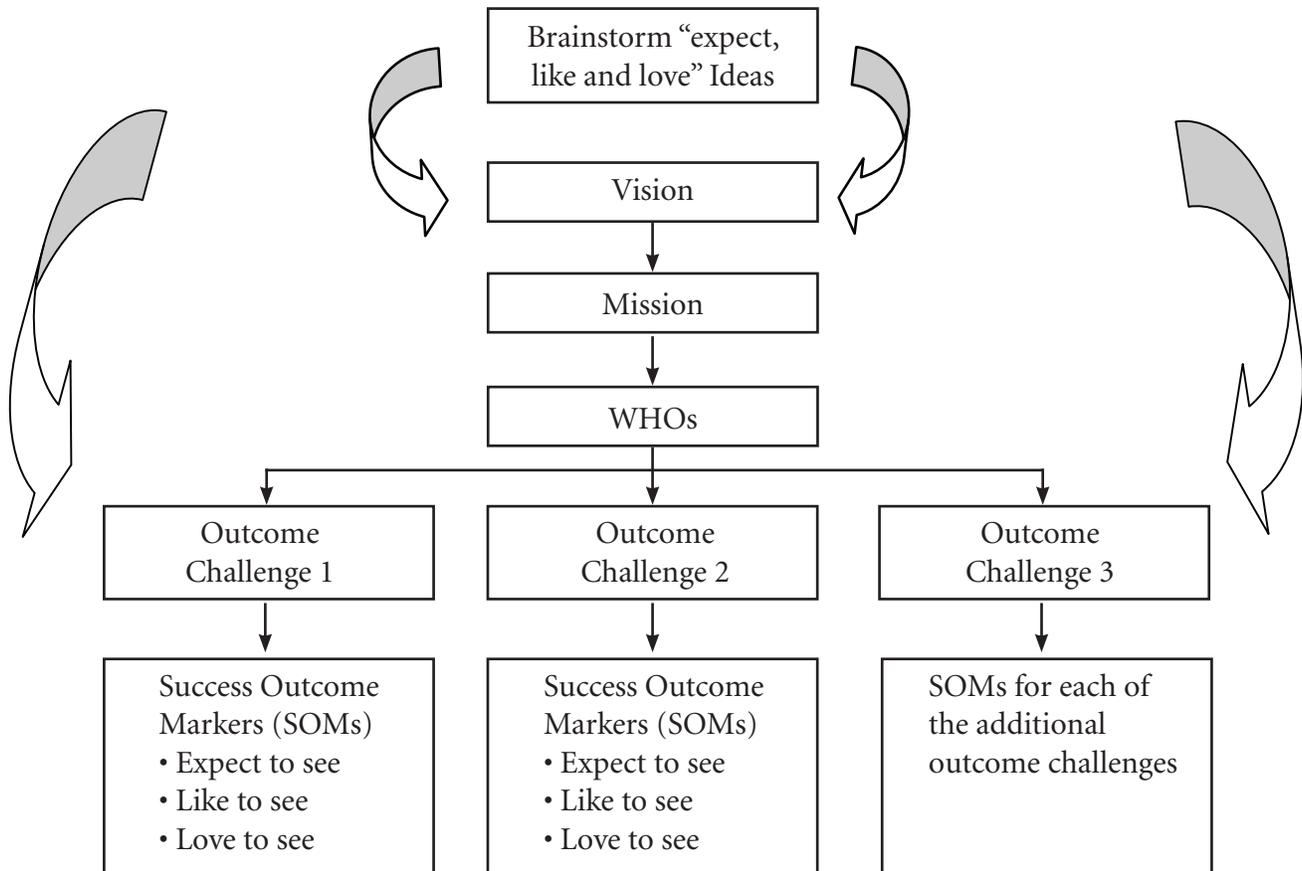
As a group begins to form around an issue or event, it is helpful to spend time brainstorming about what individuals would “expect to see, like to see and love to see” as a result. What would happen if a bare minimum was done? The answer could be a part of the baseline “expect to see.” With a few projects implemented, what would a “like to see” be? And if several major efforts were completed and momentum has been building, what would be some “love to see” results for this community? When people start brainstorming at this level, all kinds of great ideas emerge.

Step 2: Create the Program Vision

With the “expect, like and love to see” documented, it is now time to formulate the program vision. A vision is a vivid and compelling description of a transformed reality that one intends to be a partner in creating. It uses present tense to describe the optimum social, economic, or environmental condition the program hopes to help bring about, as well as a broad behavioral change in the primary clientele.

The vision goes deeper than program objectives, is broader in its scope, and extends over a longer term. The vision represents the ideal social, economic, or environmental condition the program wants to support; it should be inspirational and broad enough to remain relevant over time. The vision statement is used throughout the programming cycle to ensure that activities are consistent with its intent.

Figure 1. Multistep Group Process for Identifying and Using Success Outcome Markers (SOMs)



While achieving the vision usually lies beyond the program’s potential, program activities contribute to, and facilitate, the transformed reality. As you work with a group you typically see that evaluation will usually measure the program’s contribution to the vision, not the achievement of the vision.

Example of a Vision Statement

Local citizens, businesses, and government entities who participate in the “Keep Our Community Green” program first think about the environmental consequences of their actions, conscientiously plan for sustainable development, and implement environmentally friendly alternatives that enrich the community.

Step 3: Describe the Mission

The mission statement tells how the program will carry out the vision. It describes the domain or the way in which the program supports the vision rather than specific activities the program will use. It’s an ideal statement that describes how the program will contribute as it supports the vision.

Example of a Mission Statement

The Keep Our Community Green program supports the vision by connecting interested participants with a multidisciplinary resource team from various regional agencies. It will rely on research-based, relevant information that can help identify appropriate and sustainable actions at the household, business, and governmental level to help build a environmentally friendly community.

Step 4: List WHOs; Write Outcome Challenges

WHOs are individuals, groups, or organizations that work together to achieve program success. WHOs (comparable to the term “stakeholders”) include those who can influence a program, as well as those the program directly targets. If the program does not directly interact with a WHO, it determines the person the program can influence who will, in turn, interact with the WHO.

In this way, the program stays within its sphere of influence but with a broader vision. For example, a “Keep Our Community Green” program may not be able to interact with the entire sanitary pickup crew directly, but

it can interact with the manager or department head of the group who can influence the workforce. So the manager or department head would be included in the list of WHOs, but the entire sanitary pickup crew would not.

When listing WHOs, the program includes partners, as well as program beneficiaries. Generally, WHOs fall into four categories:

- **Primary beneficiaries:** the program’s target population for whom the program works to improve social, economic, or environmental conditions.
- **Partners:** individuals, agencies, or organizations that cooperate or offer interrelated services to the same primary beneficiaries. Extension partners can include educators, specialists, program assistants, and volunteers. Other community partners may be from education, government, or human service agencies/organizations.
- **Catalysts and Overseers:** individuals, groups, or organizations that have the power to promote, block, or otherwise influence how the primary beneficiaries are reached and affected. Included in this group are program funders, advisory boards, as well as others to whom change agents may report.
- **Change agents:** persons who develop or implement best practices. Included in this list are those who design or teach research-based programs to primary beneficiaries in response to identified needs.

Example of WHOs for a Keep Our Community Green Program

Passionate citizens of all ages
 Public service managers (libraries, parks and rec, sanitary services, transportation, etc.)
 Elected officials
 School administrators, teachers, youth and children
 Service clubs (Rotary, Lions, etc.)
 Recycling coordinators
 Granting agencies providing activity funds
 County extension educators
 Businesses within the community
 Agricultural producers

Outcome challenges describe intended impacts on key program partners. They also describe how patterns of behaviors, procedures, or actions of individuals, groups, or institutions will change if the program is extremely successful. Outcome challenges should focus on behavioral change and be idealistic but also realistic. They are phrased so they capture how the participants in the organization or group will behave and relate to others if the program

reaches its full potential as a facilitator of change. Outcome challenges typically have three distinct parts:

1. Identification of the program partner (WHO),
2. A clause describing successful attainment of a desired change (i.e., what beneficiaries gain from the program), and
3. A behavioral intention that represents a significant attainment for the person or group targeted.

Example Outcome Challenge for Youth in a Keep Our Community Green Program

- **WHO:** *We intend to see youth who...*
- **Clause describing change:** *We intend to see youth who participate in the “Keep our Community Green” program act responsibly toward our local natural resources ...*
- **Behavioral intention:** *We expect to see youth who participate in the “Keep our Community Green” program to act responsibly toward our local natural resources and continue to make appropriate life choices that positively impact community sustainability.*

Step 5: Write SOMs for Each WHO

Success outcome markers (SOMs) are similar to indicators because they are identifiable actions or behaviors that lead to successful accomplishment of the outcome challenge. They advance in degree from simple participatory activities to complex, life-changing behaviors. SOMs are listed at three levels: EXPECT to see, LIKE to see, and LOVE to see.

- **EXPECT- to-see-SOMs** identify behaviors that must occur before there can be any successful program outcomes. They usually focus on participation activities because the WHOs need to be engaged in the program activity before they can begin to react to the subject matter and change their behavior patterns to be consistent with new knowledge, attitudes, skills, or aspirations promoted by the program.
- **LIKE-to-see-SOMs** identify behaviors that come after, or start to emerge from, the “expect to see successes.” They are the more immediate behaviors, or new practices, that program beneficiaries adopt as they start to apply new knowledge and skills, or alter their attitudes or aspirations in their work and life situations. Typically a change at this stage needs to be sustained for at least six

months. Like to see SOMs may be the highest level that many program participants ever attain.

- **LOVE-to-see-SOMs** are longer-term or higher-order behavior changes that come after the “like to see successes.” They are new practices that program partners adopt as they use new skills to affect their own life or the environment in which they live, work, or play. They are sustained over extended periods of time and become indicators of transformational change. Although some program participants may never achieve Love-to-see-SOMs, it should not be viewed as a program failure.

Examples of SOMs from an Outcome Challenge in a Green Community Program

Outcome Challenge: We expect to see youth who attend Keep Our Community Green programs to act responsibly toward our local natural resources and to continue to make appropriate life choices that positively impact community sustainability.

EXPECT TO SEE YOUTH WHO:

1. Participate in school and youth group activities to better understand aspects of the environment.
2. Personally reduce, reuse, and recycle.
3. Participate in group recycling projects.
4. Get involved with community cleanup, tree planting, and community gardening activities.

LIKE TO SEE YOUTH WHO:

1. Attend camps and workshops where in-depth environmental information is shared.
2. Teach sustainable practices to younger children and peers.
3. Actively raise funds for the community projects (e.g., creation of a new bike path).
4. Co-lead community projects that help the environment become more sustainable.

LOVE TO SEE YOUTH WHO:

1. Partner with adults to brainstorm, design, and implement green community practices.
2. Assist with citizen science projects that impact environmental stewardship.
3. Initiate regional projects that reduce, reuse, and recycle.
4. Actively participate in civic and governmental meetings that influence sustainable practices.

Monitoring the SOMs

The program goal is transformational change in the end user. Each SOM is important individually and can be viewed as a sample indicator of behavioral change, but it is the cumulative power of the SOMs that summarizes the transformational change identified in the outcome challenge.

Establishing a way to track progress is an important step. How SOMs will be measured — simple counts, observation, surveys, interviews, focus groups, specific instruments — and who will be responsible for gathering the information are important considerations. Identifying which SOMs are most likely to describe program outcomes and concentrating on appropriate monitoring and evaluation methods for tracking them is an essential part of monitoring the success of this strategy. Putting the key information that needs to be gathered into a chart can be a helpful tool to help track progress over time (*Figure 2.*)

Summary

Success Outcome Markers (SOMs), and the process of creating them, offers a new twist to plan, monitor, and evaluate programs, especially programs that confirm a vision in a social, economic, or environmental condition. Generating success outcome markers helps to carefully determine all partners (including beneficiaries) who may need to change to accomplish program goals and to identify steps to continuously track incremental successes. Hard-to-measure human behaviors become more concrete when success outcome markers are listed. To incorporate SOMs in a community setting, it is helpful to first brainstorm, “expect to see, like to see and love to see” program results. These ideas then help groups to:

- . create a vivid and compelling vision;
- . list the WHOs;
- . write an outcome challenge for each WHO, and
- . determine SOMs.

The final step is to decide how to monitor and report on the markers or benchmarks. Typical methods include simple counts, observations, surveys, interviews, and focus groups, with summaries developed that are shared with appropriate individuals and groups. The ultimate result is a group process that allows participants to begin with the end in mind, and document progress along the way.

Figure 2. Key Outcome Monitoring Chart.

SOMs	How measured?	By when?	Who will measure it?	How will we know we have gotten there?	Who gets the info? By when?	How will we celebrate?
Expect to see...						
1)						
2)						
3)						
Like to see...						
1)						
2)						
3)						
Love to see...						
1)						
2)						
3)						

Resources

Covey, S. R. (2005). *The 7 habits of highly effective people signature program*. Franklin Covey.

Rockwell, S. K., Jha, L. & Krumbach, E. (October 2003). *Success outcome markers in Extension (SOME): Evaluating the effects of transformational learning programs*. Journal of Extension. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2003october/a4.php>

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Developed for the North Central Region Sustainable Communities Task Force, 2011.

This publication has been peer reviewed.

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