

Writing SMART Objectives

No. 3b | updated August 2018

This brief is about writing SMART objectives. This brief includes an overview of objectives, how to write SMART objectives, a SMART objectives checklist, and examples of SMART objectives.

Overview of Objectives

For DASH funded programs, program planning includes developing five-year program goals (a broad statement of program purpose that describes the expected long-term effects of a program), strategies (the means or broad approach by which a program will achieve its goals), and annual workplan objectives (statements that describe program results to be achieved and how they will be achieved).

Objectives are more immediate than goals; objectives represent annual mileposts that your program needs to achieve in order to accomplish its goals by the end of the five-year funding period.

Each year, your workplan objectives should be based on the strategies you have selected to reach your program goals. Because strategies are implemented through objectives and program activities, multiple objectives are generally needed to address a single strategy. Objectives are the basis for monitoring implementation of your strategies and progress toward achieving your program goals. Objectives also help set targets for accountability and are a source for program evaluation questions.

Writing SMART Objectives

To use an objective to monitor your progress, you need to write it as a SMART objective. A SMART objective is:

- 1. Specific:**
 - Objectives should provide the “who” and “what” of program activities.
 - Use only one action verb since objectives with more than one verb imply that more than one activity or behavior is being measured.
 - Avoid verbs that may have vague meanings to describe intended outcomes (e.g., “understand” or “know”) since it may prove difficult to measure them. Instead, use verbs that document action (e.g., “At the end of the session, the students will list three concerns...”)
 - Remember, the greater the specificity, the greater the measurability.
- 2. Measurable:**
 - The focus is on “how much” change is expected. Objectives should quantify the amount of change expected. It is impossible to determine whether objectives have been met unless they can be measured.
 - The objective provides a reference point from which a change in the target population can clearly be measured.
- 3. Achievable:**
 - Objectives should be attainable within a given time frame and with available program resources.
- 4. Realistic:**
 - Objectives are most useful when they accurately address the scope of the problem and programmatic steps that can be implemented within a specific time frame.
 - Objectives that do not directly relate to the program goal will not help toward achieving the goal.
- 5. Time-phased:**
 - Objectives should provide a time frame indicating when the objective will be measured or a time by which the objective will be met.
 - Including a time frame in the objectives helps in planning and evaluating the program.



Objectives Checklist

Criteria to assess objectives	YES	NO
1. Is the objective SMART ? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific: Who? (target population and persons doing the activity) and What? (action/activity) • Measurable: How much change is expected • Achievable: Can be realistically accomplished given current resources and constraints • Realistic: Addresses the scope of the health program and proposes reasonable programmatic steps • Time-phased: Provides a timeline indicating when the objective will be met 		
2. Does it relate to a single result?		
3. Is it clearly written?		

SMART Objectives Examples

Non-SMART objective 1: Teachers will be trained on the selected scientifically based health education curriculum.

This objective is not SMART because it is not specific, measurable, or time-phased. It can be made SMART by specifically indicating who is responsible for training the teachers, how many will be trained, who they are, and by when the trainings will be conducted.

SMART objective 1: By year two of the project, LEA staff will have trained 75% of health education teachers in the school district on the selected scientifically based health education curriculum.

Non-SMART objective 2: 90% of youth participants will participate in lessons on assertive communication skills.

This objective is not SMART because it is not specific or time-phased. It can be made SMART by specifically indicating who will do the activity, by when, and who will participate in lessons on assertive communication skills.

SMART objective 2: By the end of the school year, district health educators will have delivered lessons on assertive communication skills to 90% of youth participants in the middle school HIV- prevention curriculum.

For further information or assistance, contact the Evaluation Research Team at ert@cdc.gov. You can also contact us via our website: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/evaluation/index.htm>