

Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are statements that describe what someone will be able to do as a result of learning. Clearly stated, learning outcomes help one understand what is expected of them and help group leadership focus on precisely what they want their group to achieve. They are specific measurable achievements that reflect a standard. There is sometimes some confusion between aims, objectives and learning outcomes but aims are broad purposes or goals whereas objectives are stated as intentions of the group leaders.

Consider the 4As of learning outcomes.

Active

Learning Outcomes use action verbs to describe what someone should be able to do as they develop within the program. However, it is best to avoid words such as 'know' and 'understand' in favor of more specific verbs that say what one can DO to demonstrate their knowledge or understanding. That will be much easier to assess. For example, if you want them to 'understand' fellowship, mission, and outreach, learning outcomes might be that the group can 'explain' the process of achieving those.

Aligned

Learning outcomes should be aligned with the rest of the curriculum. So, session learning outcomes will contribute to the achievement of set outcomes, which in turn contribute to program success - and align again with assessment.

Achievable

It is important that learning outcomes be achievable. Learning outcomes are written so that there is at least some measure of growth and development and should not be too aspirational; they do not describe what we hope is the highest level of participation, but rather a minimum engagement.

It is also important to consider what is achievable at different levels, taking in account available resources and time committed. By setting achievable learning outcomes at the start of the group design process, we set ourselves a clear focus for the content.

Assessed

All learning outcomes must be assessed, which does not mean that we need to set lots of assignments or embark on several initiatives at once. Rather, it is often possible to assess several learning outcomes with one piece of work, and for experiential sessions, the learning outcomes will usually be assessed informally, based on programs or discussions.

Learning Objectives

Every program of instruction, course, or training activity begins with a goal. This goal can be broken down into specific goals, or learning objectives, which are concise statements about what participants will be able to do as they develop within the group.

Why are learning objectives important? They guide your choices.

The philosopher Seneca once said, “If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable.” When you know where you are headed, you can more easily get there. Well-defined and articulated learning objectives are important because they:

- provide a clear purpose to focus learning efforts
- direct your choice of initiatives, programs, and activities
- guide your assessment strategies

What’s the difference between a learning goal and a learning objective?

Learning Goals are what you hope to accomplish in your group: the overall goals that do not necessarily result in products of observable and measurable behavior.

Learning Objectives are brief, clear statements about what members will be able to do with this experience.