



SMART Criteria

Brief Description

SMART criteria are used to develop objectives for interventions and projects. With their help, objectives are worded in a way that makes them:

- specific,
- measurable,
- attractive,
- realistic and
- time-bound.

SMART (-ly) worded objectives are a marker of quality and facilitate the assessing results (evaluation): SMART criteria are an integral component of many approaches to quality development. The acronym is taken to stand for different sets of adjectives in the literature.

Prerequisites

There are no particular prerequisites for using SMART criteria. Participatory Quality Development however envisages the involvement of people with the necessary knowledge of lived experience as well as practical and professional knowledge in order to give life to the criteria (e.g. to be able to judge which objectives are realistic in the local context). This means that target groups and project personnel are also included where appropriate. Such participatory processes require sufficient time as well as a preparedness to learn and discuss on behalf of all involved.

Applications

- Developing objectives during project development and planning
- Tailoring the objectives of prevention and health promotion interventions to local situations and to the specific needs of target groups
- Preparing for evaluation
- Developing a funding application that includes determining project objectives

Resources Required

The effort required varies according to the amount of consultation to be conducted. If the SMART criteria are used for collective goal setting in a participatory group process, the discussion may be time-intensive. Much depends on how similar or dissimilar the views of those involved are: if they make strongly divergent assessments (e.g. about what may realistically be feasible locally and within a particular timeframe, and be attractive at the same time), more time may be required to reach consensus than when participants' views match.



Working Steps

An objective is worded in a SMART way if it satisfies the following criteria:

S Specific: Is the objective concrete and unambiguous, i.e. is it clear what should have changed for whom?

M Measurable: Is it possible to check whether the objective has been reached? Not every objective or outcome can be measured in numbers - there are other ways to assess whether an objective has been reached. In any case, indicators (from the Latin *indicare* = to show, point out) that show whether an intended process has taken place are helpful. Indicators for the acceptability of an event could be, for example, the size of the audience, the vigour of the applause or feedback from the target group. Good indicators are of central importance, economical, simple, timely and accurate.

A Attractive: Is the objective desirable for all involved? In different sources the "A" of the SMART criteria is also taken to stand for "acceptable", "aligned", "achievable", "agreed", "assignable", "actionable", "action-oriented", "ambitious" or "appropriate" (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_criteria#cite_note-Wiktionary-10). The latter means that an objective should be tailored to the situation of the target group. "Ambitious" means that an objective should not be aiming too low. On the contrary: in most cases, significant effort is required to fulfil important objectives. "Action-oriented" emphasises that objectives should encourage practical steps, including target group participation.

R Realistic: Can the objective actually be achieved? An objective should not aim too high, but should be achievable given the available resources and competencies. Otherwise, disappointment and diminishing motivation will result.

T Time-Bound: Can the objective be achieved within a manageable time frame? In some sources, the "T" in SMART signifies "time-framed", indicating a requirement to determine the period within which the objective is to be achieved.

Please Note:

- The SMART criteria compete with each other to some extent: e.g. an objective may be attractive because it is ambitious and reflects the vision of those involved or the mission of the service organisation, but it is possible that this objective cannot be achieved within a project period of e.g. 2-3 years, and is therefore not realistic. It is therefore also important to weigh up the criteria against each other.

Further Advice

- Do not forget the "R"! Sometimes objectives aim (too) high and a reality check is advisable: "Do we really think we can achieve this objective within 1-3 years (or whatever the project period is)?"
- SMART criteria can be applied to goal-setting in many respects: a workshop participant said that SMART had become a new way of thinking for him, helping him set goals in a variety of ways.

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Participatory Quality Development in HIV Prevention

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Further Reading and Links:

SMART Objectives in quint-essenz (Switzerland): <http://www.quint-essenz.ch/en/topics/1133>

Zielfindung und Zielformulierung - Ein Leitfaden. Materialien zur Qualitätssicherung in der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ) 1999. Zugänglich über: http://www.univation.org/download/QS_21.pdf

(Goal-setting and Wording Objectives - A Guide. Materials on Quality Assurance in Children's and Youth Services. Federal German Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) 1999. Available at: http://www.univation.org/download/QS_21.pdf (In German))