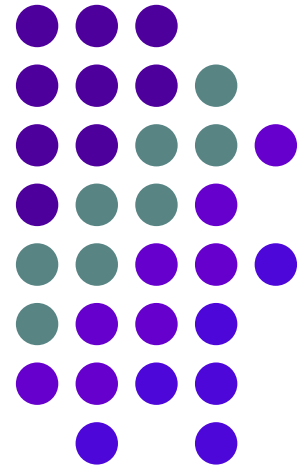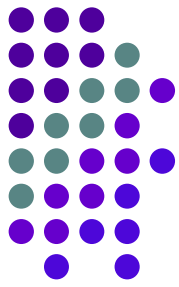# Outcome Based Evaluation for Digital Library Projects and Services

Kristine Brancolini, Director

Digital Library Program
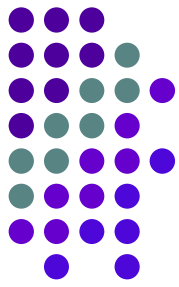
Digital Library Brown Bag
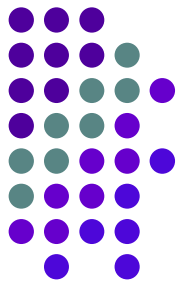
March 25, 2005

Project Evaluation

- **Formative evaluation** during the project
  - Delivering collections/resources in a way that meets user needs
  - How well did you do it?
- **Summative evaluation** at the end of the project focused upon the goals of the project
  - Did we do what we promised?
  - Did we finish on time and with the budget?
  - Does it work?
- **Impact evaluation -> Outcome based evaluation**
  - Did the fact that you did it make a difference for your audiences?
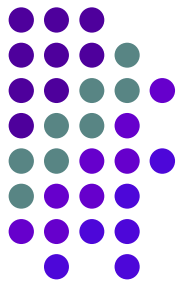
Measuring Success

- Easy to measure
  - Did we do what we promised?
  - Did we finish on time and with the budget?
  - Does it work?
- More difficult to measure
  - Delivering collections/resources in a way that meets user needs
- Most difficult to measure
  - Intended impact
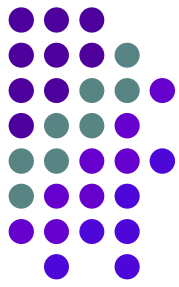
Outcome Based Evaluation [1]

- Based upon a two-day training program developed by Performance Results, Inc.
- Sponsored by the Institute of Museum and Library Services
- All recipients of National Leadership Grants are required to attend
- Since I attended in 2001, the focus has expanded from evaluation to planning and evaluation: OBP & E not just OBE

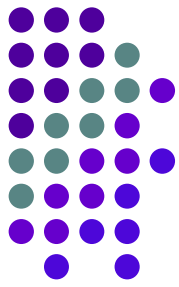# Outcome Based Evaluation [2]

- Purpose of the workshop is to "engage participants in the clarifying the purpose of the project and desired collective and individual results."

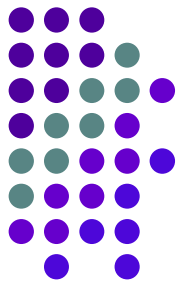- Focus on outcomes, not outputs alone

Definitions

- Outcome based *planning* uses audience needs and hoped-for results as the foundation for programs and design decisions.

- Outcome based *evaluation* (OBE) is a systematic way to assess the extent to which a program has achieved its intended results.

Key Questions in OBE

- How has my program made a difference?
- How are the lives of the program participants better as a result of my program?

- The origins of the methodology are clear by these questions: social services and education.
- Not the type of questions we usually ask ourselves about our work – but not a bad idea!
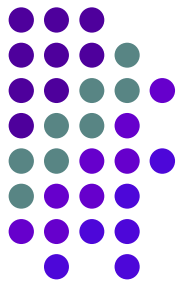
Benefits of OBP & E

- Provide a logical framework for program development
- Increase program effectiveness
- Communicate program value
- Generate information for decision-making

Note the use of the word "program," not "project." May be more useful for former than latter.
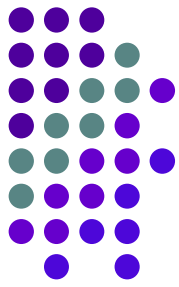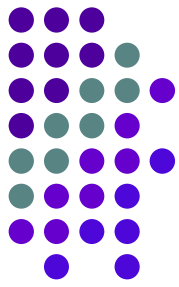
Limitations of OBE

- OBE is not identical to formal research
- OBE suggests cause and effect; it doesn't intend to prove it.
- OBE shows contribution not attribution
  - What does this mean? My program contributed to a particular outcome but I cannot say that the outcome is specifically the result of my program.
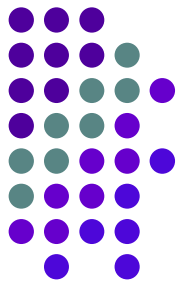
Program Defined

- Activities and services leading towards intended outcomes

- Generally has a definite beginning and end
  - We would call this a "project," not a "program"

- Designed to change attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, or increase skills and abilities based upon assumed need
  - This is what makes it "outcome based" – focus on impact of our work upon one or more audiences
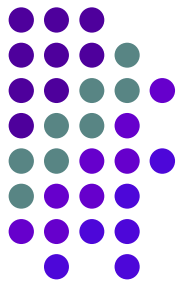
Step 1.1 – Build: Needs

- Audience needs – programs are developed as a result of assumptions about people's needs
- Need: A condition, want, deficit that is commons to a group of individuals
- Solution: A program that will change or improve behaviors, knowledge, skills, attitudes, life condition, or status
- Desired results: The change or improvement you expect to achieve

Step 1.2 – Build: Stakeholders

- Stakeholders are individuals, agencies, funding sources, competition, community groups and professional affiliations. They influence:

  - Type and nature of services

  - Who is served

  - Desired outcomes

  - How results are communicated
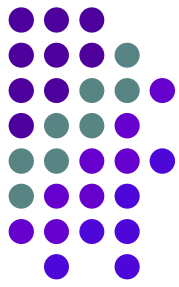
Step 1.3 – Build: Program Purpose

Program purpose is driven by assumptions about need. It relates to the organization's mission statement. It defines audience, services, and outcomes.

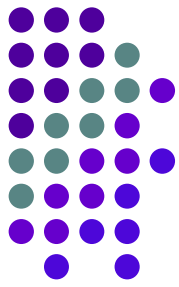*We do what, for whom, for what outcome or benefit?*

The tricky part is the outcome. Remember: We want to change or improve behaviors, knowledge, skills, attitudes, life condition, or status. That's the outcome. Digitizing photographs, for example, isn't an outcome. What will be the result for – for our audiences -- of digitizing the photographs?
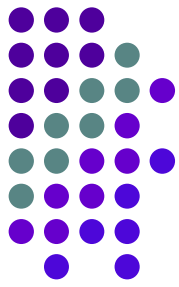
Step 2.1 – Evaluate: Logic model

- An outcomes logic model (evaluation plan) is a clear, graphic representation of the links between program activities, the results these activities produce, and how the results will be measured. Elements of logic model:
  - Outcome -- intended impact
  - Indicators – observable and measurable conditions or behaviors
  - Data source – sources of information about conditions being measured
  - Applied to – the population being measured
  - Data intervals – when data are collected
  - Specific goals (also called Targets) – amount of impact desired

Step 2.2 – Evaluate: Inputs

- Resources dedicated to or consumed by the program
  - Staff
  - Funding
  - Materials
  - Existing infrastructure
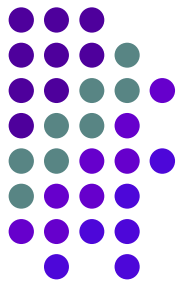 - Facilities

Step 2.3 – Evaluate: Activities/Services

What are you going to do to accomplish your project goals?

- Activities are management related
- Services directly involve end-users

These distinctions don't hold up for digital library projects. Some of our project services involve project partners and some involve our digital library audience.
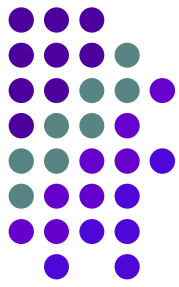
Step 2.4 – Evaluate: Outputs

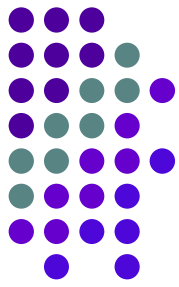- A direct program product, usually measured in numbers

This definition doesn't entirely hold up for digital library projects either. We often list our outputs software tools, research reports, conference presentations. However, we do specifically state number of images to be digitized or number of metadata records to be created.
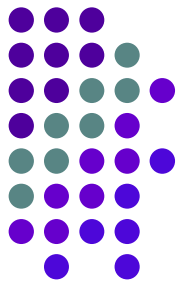
Step 3.1 – Manage: Report

- Reports summarize the results of the outcome data and include
  - Participant characteristics
  - Inputs, activities and services, outputs, and outcomes
  - Elements requested by "influencers"
  - Comparisons of previous periods
  - Interpretation of the data
- What did we want to do? What did we do? So what?
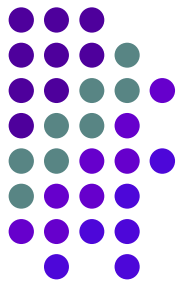
Step 3.2 – Manage: Evaluate System

- After one year of operation, evaluate the effectiveness of the outcomes system:
  - Have audiences been sufficiently identified?
  - Are outcomes clearly written?
  - Are outcomes sufficient to describe what you hope will happen?
  - Are data collection methods cost efficient? Add: Do they provide the data you want and need?

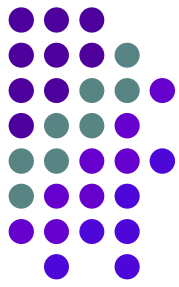# Using Outcome Based Evaluation in Digital Library Projects

- Important and useful tool for planning and evaluation; we write better proposals because we are thinking about outcomes.

- Model is most useful up to the point where we have to measure outcomes.

- Very difficult to measure outcomes in an online environment. Methodology developed in social services/educational environment with direct user contact.
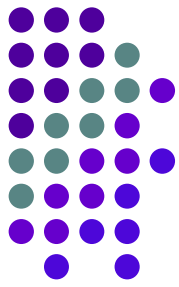
Writing Outcomes

- Each outcome must address a specific target audience.
  - For our projects, the intended audiences are often diverse, due to the nature of the Web
  - Our projects usually address a professional audience as well as users of our resources
  - Our projects often reach unintended audiences. One recent example: Cushman and bloggers
- Difficult to identify desired changes or improvements in skills, attitudes, knowledge, behaviors, status, or life condtion
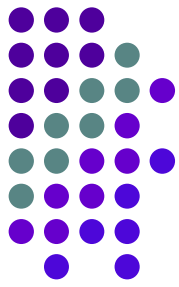
Measuring Results

- Important to find relevant indicators, which must relate to the target audience

- Can be difficult to find appropriate data sources. We can see what people are doing, but not the impact on their lives.

- "Applied to" refers to a sample, but can be difficult to reach a representative sample

- "Targets" – expressed in numbers or percentages are arbitrary and do not seem to be helpful

LSTA Outcomes Plan

- For the first time applicants for the Indiana State Library's Digitization Grants had to submit an Outcomes Chart along with their proposals.

- Many applicants were confused by this and most didn't complete it correctly. Without learning about the methodology, difficult to focus on outcomes, identify indicators, and identify sources and methods.
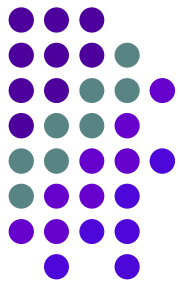
Handouts

Take a look at handouts…

"Measuring Program Results" for our *IN Harmony Project*

"LSTA Outcomes Plan" for our proposed *Online Indiana Authors and Their Books Project*
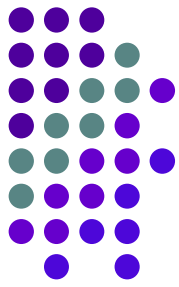
Conclusions

- Outcome Based Planning and Evaluation can be an extremely useful tool for digital library projects

- It is difficult to apply the methodology exactly as described by the training workshop and materials

- The emphasis on accountability at the state and federal level requires us to find ways to document the effectiveness of our work

Resources

- IMLS publication "Perspectives on Outcome Based Evaluation for Libraries and Museums:" http://www.imls.gov/pubs/pdf/pubobe.pdf

- Information about Outcome Based Evaluation on the IMLS web site, including a glossary of terms: http://www.imls.gov/grants/current/log_glossary.htm#intro

- OBE FAQ on the IMLS web site:

  http://www.imls.gov/grants/current/crnt_outcomes.htm