Urban Alliance's 5-C Framework: Core Services

URBANALLIANCE

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Core Services Overview

Most people engage with a program as a result of an unmet need. Core services are the key offerings of a program that facilitate change in a person's life.

Urban Alliance's 5-C Framework

Capacity is the degree to which programs have mechanisms in place to effectively operate.

Core services are the key offerings of a program that facilitate change in a person's life.

Culture is comprised of program values, quality of relationships, service procedures, and characteristics of the program environment.

Connection occurs when a program links people to resources in the community.

Christian witness is reflecting the love and truth of God through words and actions.

Core services are the key offerings of a program that facilitate change in a person's life. Most people engage with a program as a result of an unmet need. Situations and needs take a variety of different forms:

- a food insecure family seeks assistance from a food pantry or community meal program
- a struggling parent seeks information and support from a parenting class
- a youth navigating the challenges of adolescence begins attending a youth group
- a widow walking through a season of grief receives support from a church care ministry
- a person with chronic health conditions engages in a health ministry because they are struggling to maintain a healthy lifestyle

In each scenario there is a person with an unmet need seeking support and help from a program. The program exists to meet the need and thereby facilitate change in the person's life.

The food pantry provides food and other supports to increase life stability, the parenting class provides knowledge and skills that build parenting confidence and efficacy, the youth group provides developmental relationships and experiences that promote healthy youth development, the care ministry provides emotional support and facilitates a healthy grieving process, and the health ministry offers information and support to promote a healthy lifestyle.

While this may sound like common sense, all too often programs engage in a variety of activities and do not consider whether or not they are having the impact in people's lives that they desire. In fact, there are many programs in the community that are well-intended but are not implementing their programming in a way that maximizes impact on people's lives. Core services consist of elements of programming that are linked to greater impact and enhanced outcomes when executed effectively.

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Mission, goals, and outcomes: There is a clear program mission, goals, and outcomes.

Best practices: Research based interventions are regularly implemented.

Logic model: The program has developed a logic model describing the relationship between the program's resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact.

Supervision, training, and support: Staff and volunteers engage in continued learning opportunities and receive regular ongoing support and supervision from senior staff or qualified volunteers.

Feedback and continuous improvement: A process is in place to routinely gather feedback from the people served to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

A first step for any program is to establish their mission statement, outcomes, and goals.

Mission, Goals, & Outcomes

Mission, goals, and outcomes: There is a clear mission, goals and outcomes

A first step for any program is to establish their mission statement, outcomes, and goals. All programming should then be tailored to accomplishing the mission and goals and achieving program outcomes in the lives of people served. Additionally, mission statements often encompass values inherent in the program.

A **mission statement** conveys the purpose of the program. It should state what a program does, how it accomplished its goals, and why it strives to reach these gaols. The following table illustrates characteristics of strong and weak mission statements.

Table 1. Strong Verses Weak Mission Statements

A Strong Mission Statement...	A Weak Mission Statement...
Uses language your audience uses	Uses jargon or language your primary audiences don't under-stand
Is emotionally stirring	Is logical or cold
Communicates the "why"	Communicates only "what" and "how"
Is concise	Is really long
Is a single powerful sentence	Is a rambling paragraph
Sounds good spoken aloud	Is full of clauses and is hard to say
Is memorable	Is forgettable
Surprises	Is dull
Is actionable	Can't be quantified

Goals are statements of what a program wants to accomplish. They are an observable and measurable end result. Goals provide a framework for defining more specific program outcomes. **Outcomes** describe measurable changes in a person's life. They often describe one of the following: increasing something, improving something, reducing something, or saving something. The acronym SMART can be used to describe characteristics of strong goals.

SMART Goals

Specific: well defined, clear, and unambiguous

Measurable: with specific criteria that measure your progress towards the accomplishment of the goal

Achievable: attainable with available skills and resources, not impossible to achieve

Relevant: the goal is important and aligned with broader goals

Time-bound: within a clearly defined timeline, including a start and end date

For example, a food pantry provides food to food-insecure community members and offers coaching to improve their life stability.

- **Mission:** The mission of the Capital Area Food Pantry is to fight hunger by providing access to nutritious food to people in need in our local community.
- **Goal**: To provide high-quality, nutritious food to 300 residents and coaching to 50 residents each month.
- **Outcome**: Residents who receive food from the pantry and participate in coaching will have improved food security and greater overall life stability.

Hartford City Mission

Best practices are regularly implemented to achieve desired program outcomes.

Once a program has established its mission, goals, and outcomes it must decide specifically what it will do to impact people. Programs have a variety of options to choose from when selecting the activities or interventions they will use.

Evidence-based Best Practices

An **evidence-based best practice** or intervention is a method or technique that has been shown, usually through research, to be an effective way to achieve a particular outcome. The term **best practice** can also be used to describe a set of guidelines, ethics, or ideas that represent the most prudent course of action. It may encompass a whole program or single facet of programming.

For example, following the social work code of ethics when offering direct services is a best practice. Or following ServSafe's guidelines for food preparation is another example of a best practice. When programs choose from existing best practices, they are selecting practices or interventions that are most likely to achieve the desired impact in the lives of the people they serve.

An **intervention** is a specific protocol that can be used in delivering services to a specific population to achieve a particular outcome. **Evidence-based interventions** are interventions that have been well researched and shown to achieve particular outcomes. For example, Circle of Security is a parenting education curriculum that can be used to improve parent-child relationships. When followed as intended, research has shown that Circle of Security results in improved attachment relationships between parents and young children. Another example is coaching using motivational interveiwing. This intervention can be used to faciliate behavior changes linked to specific goals such as improved nutrition, sobriety, or improved money management.

Selecting a Best Practice for Your Program

Generally, it takes a little time and research to identify the existing best practices that have been used by others to achieve the outcomes your program hopes to achieve. The steps to select a best practice or intervention can be broken down into the following:

1. **Identify Outcomes.** Identify the issue of concern, goals, and the outcomes you would like to have on the people you serve.
2. **Research.** Search the internet, books, and research articles and talk to other service providers to learn about what similiar programs have done to achieve similar outcomes.
3. **Weigh Pros and Cons.** Consider the benefits and disadvantages to different options and unique considerations related to the people you will be serving (ethnicity, language, contextual factors).
4. **Select.** Select an appropriate evidence-based practice or intervention to use for your program. When possible, it is best to select one that has demonstrated positive outcomes within a similiar program and on a similiar population of people served.

In selecting best practices, it is important to balance both the degree to which the best practice has demonstrated success as well as its practicality. Sometimes there are excellent best practice curricula that are very expensive to purchase or that require extensive training that is not offered nearby. Program leaders must also consider program capacity (e.g. financial resources, staffing, facilities) when selected a best-practice. The good news is that there are many options for best practices that are low or no cost! They simply require staff and volunteer to be committed to intentionally implementing them and willing to learn new informaiton and procedures.

Logic Model

The program has developed a logic model describing the relationship between the program's resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact.

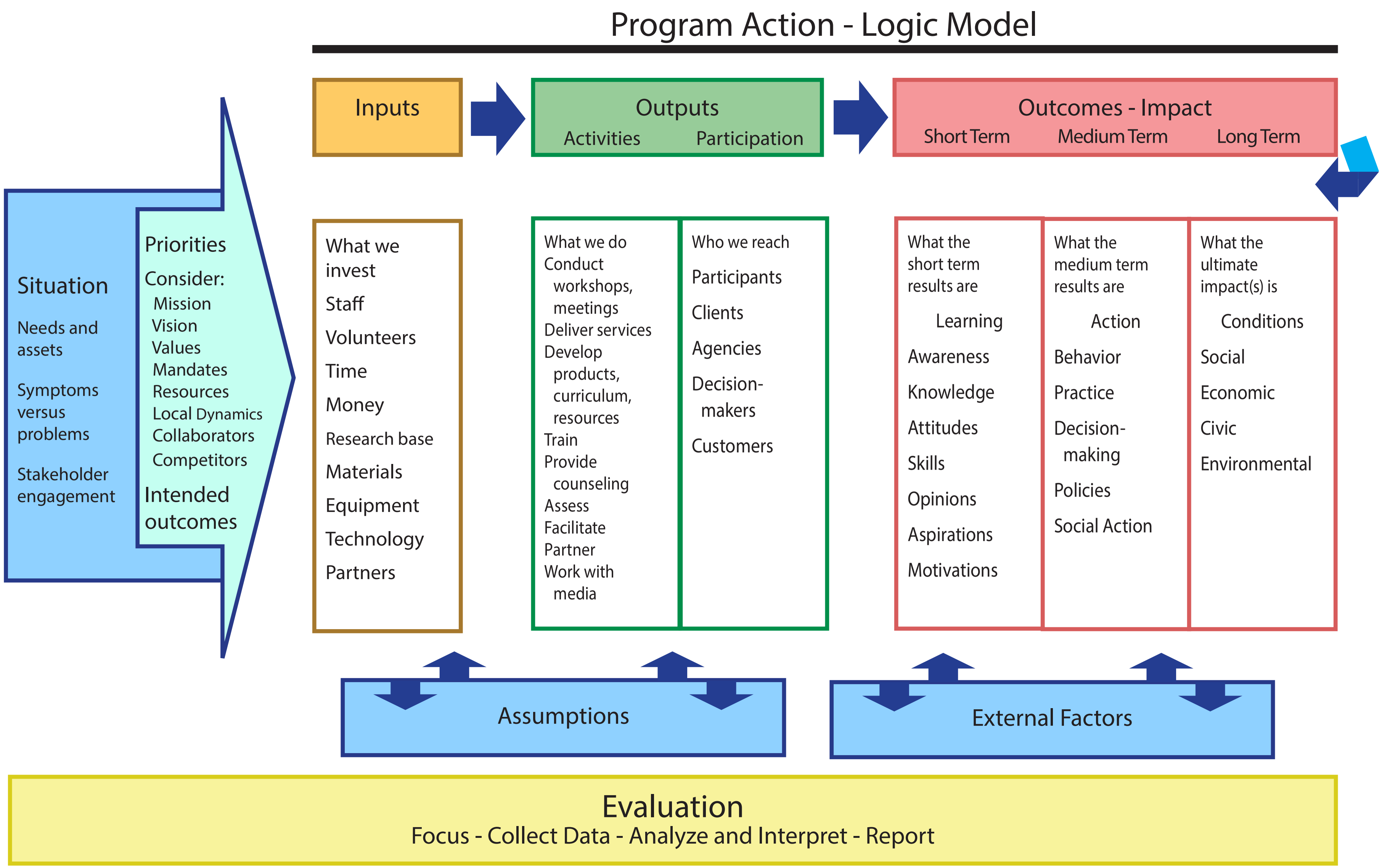
A logic model is a high-level diagram of the flow of materials and processes to produce the results desired by an organization or program. The process of developing a logic model is very helpful for program leaders as they think through how the various aspects of programming interact to produce the desired outcomes. Logic models should include major reoccurring functions, not one-time events. Further, logic models should be concise and easy to understand.

What to Include in a Logic Model

The level of detail in a logic model should be sufficient for the reader to grasp the major items that go into an organization or program. This includes people served though programming, inputs needed to make programming run smoothly, important program processes, the resulting outputs, and the overall benefits or outcomes that occur as a result of programming. Sometimes they also include information about the situation, program assumptions, and important external or community factors.

- **People Served** (characteristics of people served): Logic models include a description of the people who will be served by the program and important demographic information.
- **Inputs** (raw materials): These are materials that the organization or program takes in and then processes to produce the desired results. Examples of inputs are people, money, equipment, facilities, supplies, people's ideas, people's time, etc. Inputs are often associated with a cost to obtain and use. Budgets are listings of inputs and the costs to obtain and use them.
- **Processes** (activities, strategies, methods): Processes are used by the organization or program to manipulate and arrange the inputs to produce the desired outcomes. Logic models are usually only concerned with the major recurring processes associated with producing the desired outcomes. For examples, the major processes used by a nonprofit program that provides training to people served might include recruitment of participants, training, and evaluation. An afterschool program might include recruitment of youth, homework help, and enrichment activities. Or, a food pantry might include food distribution, coaching using motivational interviewing, and referrals to needed community programs.
- **Outputs** (tangible results): Outputs are the tangible results of the major processes in the organization. They are usually accounted for by their number. For example, the number of people who participated in a program, number of classes taught, or the amount of food distributed. Outputs are frequently confused with benefit or outcome. These two ideas are quite different. For example, many people can participate in a class, but not learn any new information due to poor delivery. Or, a food pantry can distribute a large quantity of food, but people may not eat it because it is very poor quality or not culturally appropriate for the people served.
- **Outcomes** (short, medium and long-term): Outcomes are the impacts on the people receiving services from the program or organization. Outcomes describe measurable changes in a person's life. Outcomes can be divided into short-term, medium-term and long-term. Short-term outcomes are those that occur relatively quickly (days or weeks) such as changes in attitudes, knowledge or new skills. Medium-term outcomes are those that can be achieved in a moderate amount of time (months) such as changes in behaviors or habits. Long-term outcomes are those that take months to years to achieve such as changes in condition or life situation. It is important for programs to consider how they will measure the desired outcomes (**program evaluation**) to ensure they are impacting people as intended.

Logic Model Template



Supervision, Training, and Support

Supervision, training, and support: Staff and volunteers engage in continued learning opportunities and receive regular ongoing support and supervision from senior staff or qualified volunteers

High quality supervision is a key component of direct service work. When implemented effectively, supervision ensures staff and volunteers feel supported, are equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to successfully carry out their work, are provided with accountability to ensure they are offering services in a responsible manner, and are provided an opportunity for reflection and personal growth. Staff and volunteers who are provided with high quality supervision are more likely to be successful in their role, satisfied with their work, and will be retained longer.

In "Supervision in Social Work" (4th edition), Daniel Harkness and Alfred Kadushin describe the key qualities of a good supervisor as being friendly, approachable, competent, and willing to put the time in to get the job done. Further, they describe three important roles supervisors play:

- **Administrator**: Supervisors must uphold their position as an authority while simultaneously maintaining a strong relationship with their supervisee. The supervisor ensures the supervisee understands their responsibilities and holds them accountable to the tasks and procedures associated with their role.

- **Educator**: A strong supervisor is knowledgeable, competent, and willing to share information in a way that is beneficial to the supervisee. Supervisors tend to be most successful when they instill a democratic team culture, are strength-based in their approach, and allow space for supervisees to learn from their experiences through dialogue and reflection. Finally, supervisors should encourage continued learning and growth for their supervisee. This can occur informally through discussion or more formally through continued education opportunities.

- **Supporter**: Effective supervisors offer practical and emotional support to supervisees. They are sensitive to their experiences as they learn and provide safe spaces where supervisees can reflect on their experiences. Further, it is important that supervisors can receive feedback nondefensively, and make adjustments when it is in the best interest of the team or organization.

Reflective supervision uses the supervision process as an opportunity for learning and professional development. The three building blocks of reflective supervision are reflection, collaboration, and regularity. This form of supervision originated in the field of early childhood but can be applied to any direct service context. It provides a safe environment where staff or volunteers can learn together, process various work-related situations, and hold one another accountable.

- **Reflection**. Reflection means stepping back

Reflective supervision is a form of supervision that uses the supervision process as an opportunity for learning and professional development.

from the immediate, intense experience of hands-on work, and taking the time to wonder what the experience really means. This requires that the supervisor creates a safe, caring environment where supervisees feel comfortable considering experiences from different perspectives, reflecting on their own reactions to situations, and considering ways they might make changes to their thinking, assumptions, or approach. Through the process of reflective supervision, supervisees are able to share honestly and vulnerably and grow through the process of reflection.

- **Collaboration**: The concept of collaboration asserts that there is a democratic process where power and control are shared in a healthy way. While sharing power is the goal of collaboration, it does not exempt supervisors from setting limits or exercising authority. These responsibilities remain firmly within the supervisor's domain. Collaboration does, however, allow for a dialogue to occur on various topics. Supervisors then do their best to implement new ideas when possible and beneficial.

- **Regularity**: The process of reflective supervision will not be effective unless there is regular interaction between the supervisor and supervisee. Supervision should take place on a reliable schedule, and sufficient time must be allocated for supervision meetings. It takes time to build a trusting relationship, to collaborate, and to share ideas, thoughts, and emotions. Supervisory meetings are an investment in the professional development of staff and volunteers that will in time result in more effective programming.

Finally, it is important for staff and volunteers to have continued learning opportunities. The supervisor should take the lead in understanding ways the supervisee would like to grow and helping them to identify learning opportunities and new experiences that will facilitate growth. There are many free and low-cost community-based and online trainings. Learning opportunities can be free or low-cost, but take intentionality on the part of the supervisor to prioritize so the supervisee has support and encouragement in their professional growth.

Feedback and Continuous Improvement

A process is in place to routinely gather feedback from the people served to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

When a program does not collect feedback, they rob themselves of the opportunity to learn and grow. It is essential that program leaders are willing to assess their program's effectiveness and adjust programming based on feedback and new best practices. There are two different types of feedback that can be collected about programs: process and outcome.

Process and Outcome Evaluations

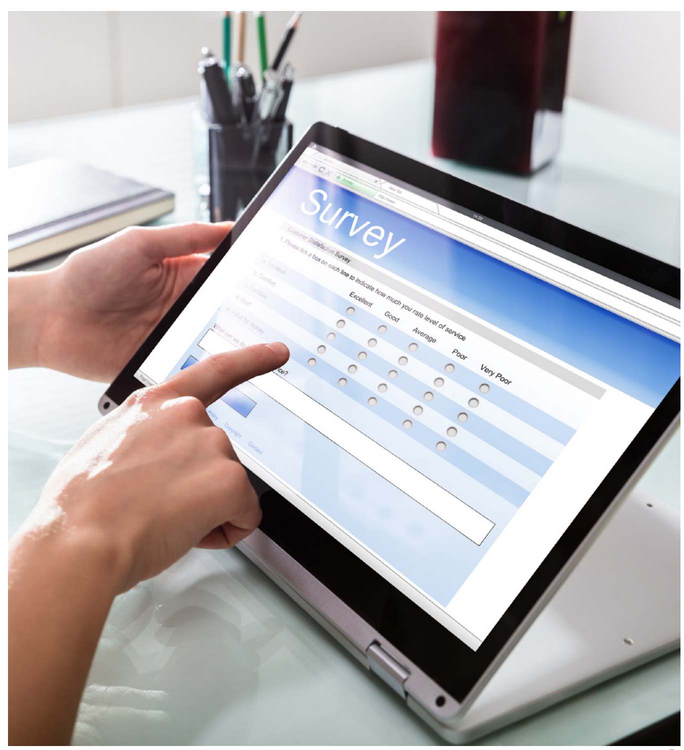
An **evaluation** is a tool that is used to collect information about a program. It allows program staff and volunteers to better understand what the program is doing and its impact. An outcome evaluation shows whether or not a program achieved its goals. A process evaluation tells you how and why. A process evaluation describes a program's services, activities, policies, and procedures.

Process evaluation. Process evaluation provides early feedback as to whether the program is being implemented as intended, people's experiences receiving services from the program, people's satisfaction with the program, barriers that have been encountered, and changes or improvements that are needed.

Process data should be collected before outcome data. Sometimes a process evaluation shows that a program is not delivering services as intended or that the people served are having a negative experience with the program. These issues should be addressed as they will likely get in the way of a program having its intended impact. Process data can be gathered using surveys collected from a large group of people, as well as through verbal feedback collected from focus groups. A focus group is a group of people who come together to answer questions and offer feedback. Surveys can be used to collect information from a larger group of people, but focus groups provide more detailed and in-depth information as well as stories and examples. Once a program has conducted a process evaluation and determined that services are being delivered as intended, and that people are satisfied with the services they receive, it is time for an outcome evaluation.

Outcomes evaluation. An outcome evaluation determines whether intended outcomes were achieved. It tests a theory by comparing conditions before and after participation. An outcome evaluation shows changes in knowledge, attitude, behavior, or a situation as a result of program participation.

This type of evaluation is needed to demonstrate that a program is evidence-based and having the desired impact on people served. While it does take time, intentionality, and rigor to conduct an outcome evaluation, it can be very helpful in demonstrating a program's effectiveness to potential donors, volunteers, community members, and people served. While there are many excellent programs in the community, an outcome evaluation can help a program to stand out and help to tell the story of how it impacts the people it serves.



Evaluation Design

There are a number of different outcome evaluation designs. Quasi-experimental and pre-post are stronger designs than post- only, and provide a stronger case for the effectiveness of a program. However, the post-only design is easier to conduct and does not require complex statistics.

1. **Quasi-experimental evaluation.** A set of standardized questionnaires are provided to a group of people receiving services (intervention group) and a group of people who are not receiving services (control group). The questionnaires are provided to the intervention group before and after receiving services and to the control group at set time intervals. This type of outcome evaluation answers the questions: Does the program result in predicted outcomes for the intervention group? Does the program have a greater impact on the intervention group when compared to the control group?
2. **Pre- and post-evaluation**. A set of standardized questionnaires are provided to a group of people receiving services from the program at set time intervals both before and after receiving services. This type of outcome evaluation answers the questions: Does the program result in predicted outcomes? Are people different after receiving services compared to before receiving services?
3. **Post-evaluation**. A questionnaire is given to people upon completion of a program asking about perceived impact. That is, how people believe they were impacted by participating in the program. This reflects their opinion about impact rather than actual data capturing changes before and after receiving services. This type of outcome evaluation answers the question: Do people perceive differences in their life after program participation?

It is important to develop process and outcome evaluations that meet the program's needs. Programs need to be realistic in balancing evaluation best practices with their capacity. It is also better to collect some data, as opposed to none.

When a program does not collect feedback, they rob themselves of the opportunity to learn and grow.

North End Farmers Market