

# Office of Planning and Assessment

## Operational Assessment Planning Guide

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### Overview of the Assessment Cycle

The assessment cycle is best conceptualized as an ongoing process that evaluates and identifies continuous improvement within non-academic departments. Part of the assessment process is to create deliberate, measurable objectives about the department's initiatives. A well-developed assessment plan includes a means of assessment for each outcome, review and evaluation of results, and evidence that demonstrates the results were used to improve the department. The following provides a brief summary of the different phases of the assessment cycle:

**Planning Phase** – This is often seen as the beginning phase of assessment. During this phase, operational outcomes statements are developed or revised. The planning phase also involves making decisions about the specific assessment-related activities for each outcome. Other common aspects of the planning phase are establishing timelines and assigning specific personnel to these activities.

**Assessing Phase** – The assessing phase involves selecting the appropriate assessment method(s) for each operational outcome, implementing those assessments, and analyzing the assessment data to learn more about the department's performance in relation to the operational outcomes.

**Improving Phase** – This phase is most commonly omitted from assessment discussions, but it is one of the most important steps in the assessment process. During this phase, administrators reflect upon the information gathered from the different planning and assessment phases to determine the necessary changes to increase department performance. Additionally, the improving phase involves the implementation of changes. For example, administrators may identify problems with the assessment methods and adjust the means of assessment.



# How do I develop my assessment plan?

## Operational Outcomes

**i** An **operational outcome** is a formal statement of what administrators are assessing within their department. Non-academic assessment typically focuses on quality of products, processes, and services. Operational outcomes may be either broad or specific, but must be **measurable** so they can be assessed effectively. Departments are required to have 3-5 operational outcomes related to primary functions of the unit.

Operational outcomes can be thought of as goals for the department. A department will likely have many goals, but for this purpose, outcomes should focus on the most strategic areas of the unit. Outcomes should be succinct, usually one sentence long, and should clearly articulate what is trying to be achieved. **It is usually best to keep operational outcomes statements as simple as possible.** Overly specific and complex outcomes statements can be difficult to assess effectively.

### Examples of operational outcomes:

- Members of the campus community will be able to operate in a safe and secure environment.
- Clients will increase their knowledge and/or awareness of legal issues and processes.
- Texas Tech University faculty and staff will be well-prepared to meet OPA's faculty credentialing, assessment, and strategic plan reporting expectations.

## Assessment Methods and Criteria

**i** Assessment involves the systematic collection, review, and use of evidence or information related to the outcomes. Assessment helps administrators understand how well their department is performing particular functions.

**Assessment methods** provide an objective means of quantifying operational outcomes. These methods indicate what you will use to measure your outcomes.

**Criteria**, also referred to as benchmarks, state the level of performance expected for the outcome to be achieved and is the minimally accepted level of performance for the outcome. Administrators should develop criteria for each operational outcome. Criteria should be reflective of the outcome and related to the assessment method.

**Each outcome should have at least one assessment method and each assessment method should have a corresponding criterion.** Criterion are usually longitudinal and could take years to achieve.

### Examples of Assessment Methods:

- Customer satisfaction
- Retention
- Cost
- Efficiency
- Operational data
- Locally or nationally developed surveys
- Performance ratings

## Structure of an Assessment Method

- **Outcome:** Texas Tech University faculty and staff will be well-prepared to meet OPA's faculty credentialing, assessment, and strategic plan expectations.
- **Assessment Method:** OPA will provide multiple training opportunities for faculty and staff and report satisfaction survey results for the following areas: software training, SSL feedback consultations, in-office trainings, and departmental feedback consultations.
- **Criterion:** OPA will reach and maintain an overall 3.5 on a 4.0 scale for all survey results.

## Challenges and Takeaways

- One size does not fit all. Some methods work well for one program but not others.
- Do not try to develop the perfect assessment all at once. Take a continuous improvement approach.
- Allow for ongoing feedback.
- Data should not be difficult to collect or access.
- Results should be easily interpreted.
- The assessment should be useful for improving the program.

## Results Statements

**i** **Results Statements** should include a statement of results in relation to the criteria as well as an analysis of the results. This is typically a short paragraph that includes actual data along with an interpretation. The goal of data analysis is to determine what needs improvement and what is doing well. Review of results allows you to determine what actions should be taken.

Analysis of assessment data should help departments identify how well the selected assessment method(s) measure each operational outcome, areas for more focused assessment, and areas that may need to be investigated in the next phase of assessment – the Improving Phase.

## Actions for Improvement

**i** **Actions for Improvement** are necessary for “closing the loop” in the assessment cycle. This refers to actions you plan to take in the next assessment cycle with the goal of seeing improvement.

- Actions for improvement should be noted for all assessment methods that were not met. If all assessment methods were met, pick at least one outcome or assessment method to focus on for improvement. You may want to raise your targets or choose something else to assess. It is important to reassess your plan periodically to avoid remaining stagnant.

## What if I'm not meeting my criteria?

- You may not have been able to meet your target, but are moving in the right direction – continue to track improvement.
- You may not have been able to meet your target, but are moving in the wrong direction and need to reassess to get back on track.

If you have questions about developing your assessment plan, please contact Libby Spradlin at [libby.spradlin@ttu.edu](mailto:libby.spradlin@ttu.edu).