WAYS OF WRITING SMART OBJECTIVES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

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Abstract: *For DASH funded programs, program planning includes developing five-year program goals (a broad statement of program purpose that describes the expected long-term effects of a program), strategies (the means or broad approach by which a program will achieve its goals), and annual work plan objectives (statements that describe program results to be achieved and how they will be achieved). This article is about writing SMART objectives. This brief includes an overview of objectives, how to write SMART objectives, a SMART objectives check-list, and examples of SMART objectives.*

Key words: *DASH funded, long-term, annual, SMART objectives.*

INTRODUCTION

Objectives link strategy, priorities and targets and indicate clear measures of success. Because they outline what each individual needs to deliver over a certain period, they also strengthen accountability. When setting objectives focus on identifying a set of appropriate challenges supported by a development plan: **between three and five is a good number of objectives over a year.**

Objectives should be recorded in the appraisal form. Remember that objectives can change in a review period if requirements or aims change and the document should be update accordingly.

AGREEING OBJECTIVES

Objectives should be agreed between individuals and managers and not simply set by managers. Objectivesshould be challenging and achievable.

PREPARING

• Think about the year ahead - what contribution do you hope to make to The University in support ofthe department's/team's priorities and targets.

• Phrase your targets so that they demonstrate outcomes.

• Consider the activities you need to carry out to achieve these outcomes.

• Set a time frame for your achievements.

• Identify potential obstacles and ways to overcome them in advance.

• Think about whether your skills are sufficient or whether you need development.

DRAFTING

Objectives are simply statements of what you want to achieve. Objectives focus on the desired result or achievement, rather than the process, and avoid the use of unnecessary words or phrases like: 'ensure that', or 'as far as possible'. Your role, accountabilities and team priorities are all valuable points of reference.

When introducing change it is important to have clear objectives of what you are aiming to achieve. It can helpto use the **SMART** approach to formulating objectives.

Specific & Stretching *clear and unambiguous (is it exactly what needs doing?)*
who, what, where, when, which, why?

Measurable   *quantify and quality where possible (how close am I, how will I know when I have reached my goal?)*

Achievable & Agreed   *must be agreed (by both) and achievable (allow for workload etc.)*

Realistic & Relevant *must be able to happen, must have resources, support, knowledge and must provide results, should be linked to team and organisation annual goals (does it need to be done?)*

Time-scaled   *with review dates and a deadline (realistic time frame adds focus)*

EXAMPLES:

▪ To identify and present to the team at least two work process improvements having quantifiable operationalor financial benefits by the end of Q2. (Performance Objective)

▪ Submit a grant application every 'x' months until successful and take on role of a PI or Co-Investigator for a major grant over 'x'£ by 'x' date. (Performance Objective)

▪ Update and coordinate new module content due to staff changes and act on student and Internal Peer Review feedback by 'x' date. Disseminate expertise by delivering faculty training on delivery and module organisation. (Performance Objective)

▪ To take over the line management of the Research Staff, review and introduce new working practices andidentify training needs they may have by March 2018. (Performance Objective)

▪ To gather feedback on my communication skills from every member of the team and my line manager; identify and document areas for change and ways that I can improve these skills. (Development Objective)

The 9 step approach to setting SMART objectives

1. Sort out the difference between objectives and aims, goals and/or targets before you start. Aims and goals relate to your aspirations, objectives are your battle-plan. But this is different from your work plan.

2. SMART stands for Specific/Stretching, Measurable, Achievable/Agreed, Realistic/Relevant and Time-scaled.

3. Don't try to use that order. M-A/R-S-T is often the best way to write objectives.

4. **Measurable** is the most important consideration. You will know that you've achieved your objective, because there is evidence. Make sure you state how you will record your success.

Consider:

• How will I know that the change has occurred?

• Can these measurements be obtained? (It is worth noting that if it can't be measured now, thechances are that it won't be possible to measure in the future either).

5. **Achievable** is linked to measurable. Usually, there's no point in starting a job you know you can't finish,or one where you can't tell if, or when, you've finished it.

How can you decide if it's achievable? You know that it is achievable when:

• Others have already done it.

• It is, in principle, possible (it is clearly not unachievable).

• You have the skills to do the task well.

• The necessary resources are available, or there is a realistic chance of getting them.

• The limitations have been assessed.

The performance objective should be within your control and not overly dependent on outside factors.You should be rated only on work for which you are responsible.

6. The main reason it is not achievable is that it's not a high priority. Often something else needs to be donefirst, before you'll succeed. If so, set up two (or more) objectives in priority order.

7. If it's achievable, it may not be **realistic or relevant**. If it isn't relevant, it's not a good use of time.

You need to know:

• Do you have the resources and support to meet this objective?

• How does it link to your line manager's and departmental objectives?

• What contribution will it make to the delivery of the University's strategy?

8. Objectives should be **specific**. They should specifically describe the result that is desired in a way that is, detailed, focused and well defined. To be specific an objective should have a description of a preciseor specific behaviour, achievement or outcome which is or can be related to a percentage, frequency, rate or number.

You will know your objective is specific enough if:

• Everyone who's involved knows that it includes them specifically.

• Everyone involved can understand it.

• Your objective is free from jargon.

• You've defined all your terms.

• You've used only appropriate language.

To increase specificity when writing objectives, use verbs which are action-orientated to describe those actions which need to be taken to fulfil objectives or results-based language (written in the past tense asif completed).

Useful action verbs for objectives include:

• increase	• design	• plan
• establish	• implement	• investigate
• create	• produce	• complete
• reduce	• perform	

9. Time-scaled means setting milestones and deadlines. You must include at least one, otherwise yourobjective isn't measurable. But your deadlines must be achievable.

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