

Guidance for Program Descriptions

Program Descriptions, like Logic Models, are basically communication devices. Logic Models provide more detail than Program Descriptions, and provide more information about the implicit program theory. Program Descriptions on the other hand are more “readable” for most audiences, and can serve a range of purposes (marketing, website information, etc.) The following suggestions are not intended to define a Program Description rigidly, but are meant to offer general guidance and suggestions that can be applied to and adapted for individual programs.

Generally, a program description should...

- Be in prose (not bullets, at least not exclusively).
- Be what you consider complete (it should stand alone) but not be excessively long.
- Convey a true sense of the program (staff and participants would recognize it).
- Take into account the perspectives articulated in stakeholder analysis.
- Align with boundaries set forth in program boundary analysis.
- Be clear, readable and understandable to an outside audience (does not contain jargon or references to things internal to the organization).

A program description should cover at least some of the items in the following groups, according to what is relevant for this particular program:

1) Program information, such as:

- program capacity (average or expected N=?)
- main program activities (including general content and format: lecture, workshop, hands-on)
- who delivers program and their training (staff, volunteers, etc.)
- average program duration
- target population
- participant selection criteria (if applicable)

2) Context, such as:

- local community and programmatic context of program
- state and/or federal programmatic context of program setting (where and when program takes place)
- funding sources
- history of the program lifecycle stage of the program

3) Goals, including possibly:

- main outputs or “take-aways” for participants
- how activities are thought to lead to hoped-for outcomes
- the theoretical framework behind program approach (if there is one)