



Measuring The Difference: An Outcome Evaluation Resource for the Disability Sector

**Prepared for
Alberta Council of Disability Services**

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INTRODUCTION

Disability services are in the business of *making a difference*:

- a difference in the quality of lives of the individuals they support;
- a difference in individuals' capacity to live to their fullest potential as respected and valued members of the community;
- a difference in society's willingness and ability to be inclusive and embracing of persons with disabilities;
- a difference in creating meaningful careers for dedicated staff;
- a difference, ultimately, in the type of world we leave for future generations.

But how do we *know* that we really are making these differences? And how do we know if we are making differences to the extent that we can or should?

Measuring The Difference gets disability service providers started on the journey (if they have not embarked on it already) to think about how to measure the difference that their organizations make. Drawing on a vast literature on outcome evaluation theory and practice, *Measuring The Difference* boils down the jargon and technical terms to practical information about what outcome evaluation is, its rationale and benefits, how to implement outcome evaluation systems and processes, and how to know that the information collected and produced is valid and credible. Presented in topic-specific modules, with a list of useful references and online resources for sample tools and more detailed advice, the intent is to present just enough start-up information for an audience whose comfort and expertise lies in disability service delivery and management rather than in evaluation research methodology.

Developed by The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute (VRRI) for the Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS), *Measuring The Difference* is an essential resource to prepare service providers for ACDS' newly introduced *Creating Excellence Together* (CET) Standard 43:

"The service provider facilitates continuous quality improvement and outcome evaluation."

Supplementing the outcome evaluation training sessions hosted by ACDS starting in September 2009, *Measuring The Difference* provides basic knowledge and tools to help service providers get started onto the road of quality improvement required by the CET survey process.

Other Key Resources

- One of the most useful and easily understandable resources available on outcome measurement is *Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach* (1996), published by the United Way of America, available from the United Way Store at 800-772-0008 (toll-free U.S.) or 703-212-6300 for US\$5 (plus shipping and handling). Much of the practical information presented in *Measuring The Difference* Modules 3, 4 and 5 is drawn from this well-used resource.

- Module 8 is a list of online resources providing a wide range of information on and links to other sites related to outcome measurement theory and practice. Many of the materials available at the websites listed in this Module are available for free.
- Module 10 is an Annotated Bibliography of many excellent materials on outcome evaluation. Most of these are available from The VRRRI's Dr. Randy J. Tighe Resource Centre, 3304-33 Street NW, Calgary. Please contact our library (403-284-1121, ext.431; library@vrri.org) to place your order. You can also search for other materials in our collection through the online database on our website (www.vrri.org).
- The VRRRI Research Department's evaluation team has first-hand knowledge of the disability sector and can provide technical expertise in planning evaluation projects, developing logic models and outcome frameworks, recommending data collection methods and strategies, creating customised tools and templates for managing outcome data, and teaching how to generate and interpret outcome findings. Please contact the Director of Research (403-284-1121; research@vrri.org) to discuss how we can help you with your research and evaluation needs.

We encourage you to access these resources to help build your knowledge and understanding of outcome evaluation and to increase your comfort level and capacity to create outcomes-focused cultures in your organizations.

FEEDBACK FORM

We want your feedback on *Measuring The Difference*. We need to know, for our own continuous quality improvement purposes, how this resource has contributed to achieving our outcomes of increasing service provider knowledge and understanding on outcome measurement, thereby enhancing the capacity of the disability sector to provide quality supports.

Please complete the [Feedback Form](#) attached at the end of this section after you have gone through the manual, and return it to us at your early convenience. Your feedback is extremely valuable to us.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

- The information presented in *Measuring The Difference* is intended to be a *basic guide* to introduce organizational managers to the world of outcome evaluation.
- *Measuring The Difference* is based on information drawn from reputable academic and community publications, as well as the author's own experience in program evaluation. The practice of outcome evaluation is rapidly evolving and dynamic, with new methods and approaches being presented faster than most of us can keep up. As readers embark on their own search for additional materials, they will undoubtedly find information that is different from what is presented here. Our advice is that you use whatever information you feel best suits the needs of your organization, its culture and your key stakeholders.
- *Measuring The Difference* does not necessarily represent ACDS' views or recommendations for practice with respect to its accreditation process. ACDS should be consulted for all matters specific to the CET Accreditation Standards requirements.
- Implementing outcome evaluation strategies and developing an organizational culture of continuous quality improvement is a complex process. *Measuring The Difference* assumes no responsibility for any organization's success or failure in its efforts in this process.

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