**Common Outcomes & Indicators – Common Tool Questions (December, 2013)**

**Volunteer Support**

Submitted by Tammy Horne, WellQuest Consulting Ltd., in collaboration with Sharlene Wolbeck Minke and Birgitta Larsson

**PREAMBLE**

***What Are the Common Tool Questions?***

We have developed a collection of questions that address:

* A mix of questions that will suit a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods.
* Flexibility of how questions can be asked (such as survey or interview, some questions also allow for staff observation, creative methods, group discussion/reflection) – so you can decide what the best fit is for you and the people in your program.
* Language and format that will work across program areas and populations
* Feasibility in terms of response time for participants and staff

For each indicator, we have presented at least one closed question and at least one open-ended question.

Each question is written at a ‘mid-level’ of specificity, so that it can apply across multiple program areas that use the same common indicator for which the question is written.

For a particular common indicator, you may wish to choose the question(s) for that indicator that is (are) most relevant to your program. This would be similar to what you now do when you choose the most relevant indicators for a common outcome. Not all questions will be relevant to all agencies/programs.

***Where Do the Questions Come From?***

All questions have at least ‘face validity’ – they appear to measure the intent of the indicator. In some cases, we drew from agencies’ existing tools for content.

Many questions come from other sources (such as existing tools); others were developed ‘from scratch’ using general principles of writing evaluation questions.

Some questions/tools come from research literature or population surveys, and have had further reliability and validity testing done. Some of the more ‘formal’ questions/tools from literature are public domain (Nobody’s Perfect Parenting Program, Community Capacity Building Tool – both from Public Health Agency of Canada), but others are copyrighted. In the latter cases, we used broad dimensions from these tools in our questions and refer to the copyrighted tool. If agencies or their funders wish to order these tools, there would be a fee to purchase. (We understand that some agencies may already be using some of these measures for their own evaluation purposes.)

We made some trade-off decisions for some questions, with regard to how direct & specific versus how familiar a format is (to participants) and quick to use.

***How Can You Use These Questions with Your Existing Agency Tools?***

These questions are intended to strengthen your already existing data collection methods and tools (not replace them). That is, questions can be embedded within tools you are already using.

We have created a sample ‘mock survey’ that demonstrates how questions can be selected and inserted into an existing tool. This type of process will allow agencies to insert ‘common questions’ into their existing tools (surveys, interviews, etc), so agency staff can include some of these common tools with their own agency-specific questions.

The instructions and informed consent information in the ‘mock survey’ tool can be adapted to other methods (such as one-to-one or group interviews, creative methods, staff observation).

If you use any of these questions, please keep the wording provided, so as not to change the measurement intent of the question. However, do feel free to make minor changes to fit your context; for example substitute the word “client” or “user” for “participant”, if you wish. For many questions, you will need to insert the name of your program in the question – where you see [program] in brackets. For some questions, you can choose words that make the most sense for your program (for example, choosing among “program”, “service”, “resource” or some other term that fits).

***Do You Have to Use These Questions?***

Your funding liaison person will let you know if there are certain questions that may be especially useful to ask your participants, and if there is any expectation about reporting on particular questions.

Try out the questions that you like best for your program, and let your funder know which of those questions work well and which ones may still need some work or change. Agency feedback has been integral to the whole process of developing the common outcomes, common indicators, and now the common tool questions. You or someone in your agency may have participated in some of those discussions. Your feedback is valued.

***When Would You Ask These Questions?***

We are aware that there will likely be variation in the times at which agencies can ask questions or make observations of participants. For some agencies pre (BEFORE) and post (AFTER) measurement is feasible, but for others, it is not. Some agencies may decide to slightly modify BEFORE and AFTER to early-program and late-program (we still consider that BEFORE-AFTER). For some agencies, it may work best to ask questions or make observations at one point in time, at/near the end of the program – either because participants would not be able to provide an accurate BEFORE-program measure (e.g., when self-rating their own skills), or because of concerns about resource limitations for staff, response burden for participants, or participant life circumstances that limit multiple measures (e.g., transience). In some cases, it may be feasible to ask participants AFTER to reflect back on how they were doing BEFORE the program; in other cases only an AFTER measure may be practical to gather. We considered these challenges when we were developing and revising these questions, and our NOTES throughout the document suggest options (and in some cases, limitations).

***What Are the Supplementary Questions?***

While we were going through the process of developing these questions, we sometimes thought of other questions that did not quite measure the indicator, or that went beyond the indicator. We have included these questions as Supplementary Questions (under green headings, and in a different font), because agencies may find them of interest for their purposes, beyond COG reporting.

***How to Navigate This Document?***

The main part of each question in bolded blue, as is each question number. Response categories, prompts, and other instructions or comment are in black type. Any notes we have about a question begin with NOTE: in red. To avoid repetition of notes within an outcome section, we often refer you back to an earlier note in that section.

The questions you have received are for the common outcomes/indicators for your program area, as determined with your funder. Please note that because there are often multiple program areas that report on the same outcome, you may see questions that do not seem relevant to your program, That is OK; those questions will be more relevant to another program area that reports on the same outcomes/indicators.

If you are interested in also using some of the questions that go with other common outcomes/indicators outside your program area, please ask your funder for the version(s) of this document that covers the other outcomes/indicators of interest to you.

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| Q | Q. Participants feel they contribute to positive change in the community (or agency) through volunteer activities *(Volunteer support)* | (a) Participants report at least one way in which their volunteering has made a positive difference in the community (e.g., safety, community connectedness, access to supports (food, transportation), beautification, etc) | **NOTE:** This question would likely be most informative as a retrospective (AFTER) question, as it assumes the participant has already been volunteering long enough to have seen their contribution to making a difference. You may also decide to also use it partway through the program, if that would be useful and feasible.    **(Survey or interview with participant)**  **(a.1) In your view, what difference, if any, does your volunteer service make to others? (Please check all that apply)**  **\_\_** The neighbourhood is safer  **\_\_** More people know each other’s names  **\_\_** People can get to their appointments  **\_\_** People get the supplies they need, such as groceries or medicines  **\_\_** The neighbourhood looks better  **\_\_** Other (please describe)  **(Open-ended elaboration or alternative –** as above, but without showing/reading the list  **(a.2) In your view, what difference, if any, does your volunteer service make to others?**  **NOTE:** Code by response categories from above list in a.1, and any other ways that participants see their volunteering making a difference.  **Supplementary Question:** This does not directly pertain to the indicator, but could be useful as a process-oriented question. )  **Please rate the importance, to you, of each of the following reasons that you volunteer at [program]:**   |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Reason for Volunteering** | **1**  **Not at all important** | **2**  **Not very important** | **3**  **Somewhat important** | **4**  **Quite important** | **5**  **Very important** | | I want to help people |  |  |  |  |  | | I like to learn new things |  |  |  |  |  | | I believe it’s important to ‘give back’ |  |  |  |  |  | | It’s a way to meet new people |  |  |  |  |  | | It helps me learn more about what people need in my community |  |  |  |  |  | | It reduces my fees. (Or it makes the program more affordable ) |  |  |  |  |  | | Other (please describe) |  |  |  |  |  | |
|  |  | (b) Participants report that their involvement contributes to goals that their community members are working to accomplish | **NOTE:** Please read the note that precedes a.1, as it applies here as well.  **(Survey or interview with participant)**  **(b.1) In your opinion, how much does your volunteer work contribute to goals that people in your community are working towards?**  1 None  2 Very little  3 Some  4 Quite a bit  5 A lot  **(b.2) In your opinion, how much does your volunteer work contribute to the overall goal of [program]?**  1 None  2 Very little  3 Some  4 Quite a bit  5 A lot  **NOTE:** The questions below are retrospective (AFTER). You may also decide to also use it partway through the program, if that would be useful and feasible.  **(Open-ended elaboration or alternative)**  **(b.3) In what ways do you believe that your volunteer work contributes to goals that people in your community are working toward?**  **(b.4) In what ways do you believe that your volunteer work contributes to the overall goal of [program]?**  **NOTE:** Code responses for both (b.3) and (b.4) by types of volunteer contribution mentioned. |

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| R | R. Participants increase their a) knowledge and b) skills through their volunteer involvement  *(Volunteer support)* | (a) Participants identify what they have learned about their community and/or  themselves through volunteering (e.g., community issues, how they can match their own interests or skills with volunteer opportunities) | **NOTE:** This question would likely be most informative as a retrospective (AFTER) question, as it assumes the participant has already been volunteering long enough to have learned from their experience with it. You may also decide to also use it partway through the program, if that would be useful and feasible.  **(a.1) How much did you learn about the following, through volunteering with [program] – that you did not know before you started? (Please check the column that best reflects your learning.)**   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Type of learning** | **1**  **Nothing** | **2**  **Very little** | **3**  **Some** | **4**  **Quite a bit** | **5**  **A lot** | **Not addressed by the volunteer experience** | | Different community resources to help people ‘in need’ |  |  |  |  |  |  | | Reasons people are ‘in need’ |  |  |  |  |  |  | | How this volunteer opportunity fits with my interests |  |  |  |  |  |  | | How my skills fit with this volunteer opportunity |  |  |  |  |  |  | | How this volunteer opportunity helps me to make a difference in my community |  |  |  |  |  |  | | How this volunteer opportunity helps me to make a difference to this program/agency |  |  |  |  |  |  | | Other1 (please specify) |  |  |  |  |  |  | | Other2 (please specify) |  |  |  |  |  |  | | Other3 (please specify) |  |  |  |  |  |  |   **NOTE:** The questions below are retrospective (AFTER). You may also decide to also use it partway through the program, if that would be useful and feasible.  **(Open-ended elaboration or alternative)**  **(a.2) What, if anything, did you learn about your community through your volunteer experience?**  **(a.3) What, if anything, did you learn about [program] or [agency] through your volunteer experience?**  **(program/agency)**  **NOTE:** Code responses for both a.2 and a.3 by categories in a.1 above, as well as by any other types of learning mentioned. |
|  |  | (b1) Participants demonstrate skills that contribute to accomplishing the changes they wish to see as volunteers (e.g., find resources, organize events/activities, build supportive relationships with others, carry out specific tasks that help individuals or groups) | **NOTE:** Please read the note that precedes a.1, as it applies here as well.  **NOTE**: Items are worded as tasks/behaviours that demonstrate skills – i.e., they serve as a ”proxy” for skills.  **(Survey or interview with participant)**  **(b1.1) Thinking of your most recent volunteer experience, would you say you often, sometimes or never performed each of the following tasks?[[1]](#footnote-2) (Please check the column that best reflects your experience.)**   |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Type of task** | **1**  **Often** | **2**  **Sometimes** | **3 Never** | **Not applicable** | | Undertake manual labour or tasks such as cleaning or building |  |  |  |  | | Use your professional skills |  |  |  |  | | Use your business skills |  |  |  |  | | Use your technological skills |  |  |  |  | | Perform activities such as cooking or crafts |  |  |  |  | | Provide administrative support |  |  |  |  | | Help with fundraising activities |  |  |  |  | | Serve on boards, committeesor otherwise provide leadership |  |  |  |  | | Other specific tasks 1 (please describe) |  |  |  |  | | Other specific tasks 2 (please describe) |  |  |  |  | | Other specific tasks 3 (please describe) |  |  |  |  |   **(Staff observation option – using table in b1.1 above)**  **(b1.2)** **Consider the following list of volunteer tasks. Please us the following table to indicate how often [participant] has done each of these tasks? (as applicable)**  **NOTE:** Please read the note that precedes a.2, as it applies here as well.  **(Open-ended elaboration or alternative):**  **(b1.3) Thinking of your most recent volunteer experience, what types of tasks did you do?**  **Prompts:** Most often? Less often?  **NOTE:** Code by types of tasks and whether they were frequent or less frequent.  **(Open-ended elaboration** - takes indicator a little further by connecting tasks to participant perceptions of contribution**)**  **(b.1.4) How do you see your volunteer work as contributing to changes you want to see in your community?**  **NOTE:** Code by types of contributions, and how participants relate those contributions to types of changes.  **Supplementary question**: From Volunteer Canada[[2]](#footnote-3) – not a measure of this indicator (b1) or the next one (b2), but might be a good process question for agencies).  **Using a 10 point scale where 1 means that opportunity was not provided for you at all and 10 means that opportunity was provided frequently. How much opportunity did you have to…**  a. Make a contribution or make a difference \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  b. Improve your employment or academic prospects or network \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  c. Use your skills and experience \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  d. Learn new skills, gain experience or access training \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  e. Support a cause you care strongly about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  f. Support an organization you care strongly about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  g. Spend time with friends or family \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  h. Do something that fits with your employer’s objectives \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  i. Do something that fits with your religious or spiritual beliefs \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  j. Help others or your community \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  k. Have fun or socialize \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  l. Feel good about yourself \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  m. Fulfill an obligation or commitment \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  n. Improve your health \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  o. Be recognized for your contribution \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  p. Volunteer in a positive environment \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
|  |  | (b2) Participants demonstrate skills that could assist them to find employment or enhance their contribution to other paid or unpaid work | **NOTE:** Please read the note that precedes a.1, as it applies here as well.  **(Survey or interview with participant)**  **(b2.1) To what extent did your volunteer work at [program] improve your skills in the following areas? Would you say your skills have improved a lot, some, or none?[[3]](#footnote-4) (Please check the column that best reflects your experience.)**   |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Type of skill** | **1**  **A lot** | **2**  **Some** | **3 None** | **Not applicable** | | Administrative support, such as answering phones |  |  |  |  | | Planning and organizing, such as planning an event or fundraising activities |  |  |  |  | | Relationships and dealing with people |  |  |  |  | | Technology, such as computer systems |  |  |  |  | | Leadership, such as committee or board participation |  |  |  |  | | Manual labour, such as building maintenance |  |  |  |  | | Problem solving skills |  |  |  |  | | Coping skills |  |  |  |  | | Other skill 1 (please describe) |  |  |  |  | | Other skill 2 (please describe) |  |  |  |  | | Other skill 3 (please describe) |  |  |  |  |   **(Staff observation option – using same table as in b2.1 above)**  **(b2.2) Consider the following list of volunteer skills. Please use the following table to indicate to what extent this volunteer has made improvements in each of these skills? (as applicable)**  **NOTE:** Please read the note that precedes a.2, as it applies here as well.  **(Open-ended elaboration or alternative)**  **(b2.3) Since you started volunteering at [program] in what areas, if any, would you say that your skills have improved the most?**  **NOTE:** Code by areas of skill improvements mentioned.  **(Open-ended elaboration** - takes indicator a little further by connecting tasks to participant perceptions of contribution**)**  **(b.2.4) How do you see your volunteer work as preparing you for other work you wish to do (paid employment or unpaid work)?**  **NOTE:** Code by types of preparation, and how participant view preparation as contributing to paid/unpaid work. |

1. Volunteer Canada, Bridging the Gap report (Available at <http://volunteer.ca/content/bridging-gap-report> (some adaptation to simplify wording for participants, and to delete two items too generic to be applicable to the specific skills focus of the indicator; also added more ‘other’ slots at the end, and a N/A category not in original tool) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Volunteer Canada, Bridging the Gap report (Available at <http://volunteer.ca/content/bridging-gap-report> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Informed by Volunteer Canada, Bridging the Gap report (Available at <http://volunteer.ca/content/bridging-gap-report> - with some adaptations to clarify wording for participants, and to include additional skill areas relevant to COG (some additional items are from Family Centre) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)