

Program Design 101

Having passion and a vision is where it all begins.

It is understandable to feel the urge to dive right in and start delivering something to address the need immediately, but taking a moment to pause and plan can make all the difference. By embracing best practices in program design, you can ensure that your proposed project is not only well-intentioned, but also strategically planned and thoughtfully executed.

Program design is about having a robust, impactful, and sustainable response that creates change, and this website and others available are here to guide you through the journey of turning that vision into a reality.

What is program design?

Program design is about thoughtfully and *intentionally* creating initiatives to meet community needs, promote safety, and achieve specific goals. It involves planning out how a program will be structured, what resources are needed, and how it will be put into action.

A successful program design follows a clear sequence. This means each step, from identifying the issue to reporting on outcomes, builds upon the one before it, ensuring a structured and effective way of addressing community challenges.



How is program design relevant for you?

Understanding program design is essential for two main reasons: building your skills and improving your grant applications.

Capacity building

As a part of the community services sector, dealing with program design may seem complex or like unnecessary bureaucracy that can get in the way of just being able to deliver something to help your community. However, while community programs often stem from a sincere desire to help, their implementation might not always meet best practice standards.

Acknowledging this gap is a chance to learn and grow, leading to better and more sustainable outcomes for the communities we serve. Engaging in all aspects of program design can benefit both you and your community by:

- **Building skills:** Learning program design principles helps you grow professionally and build your abilities. Gaining insights into best practices empowers you to better serve your community and address its needs more effectively.
- **Achieving strong outcomes:** Thoughtful program design paves the way for strong outcomes and a meaningful impact in your community. With careful planning and

strategy, you boost your chances of success and ensure your efforts translate into tangible benefits for those you serve.

- **Embracing best practice:** Adopting program design principles shows your commitment to best practice and professionalism in the community services sector. This makes your initiatives evidence-based, well-planned, and responsive to your community's needs, ultimately enhancing your credibility as a service provider.
- **Empowering communities:** At its heart, program design is about empowering communities and fostering positive change. By taking the time to design programs that are relevant, inclusive, and effective, you contribute to building stronger, more resilient communities.

While program design involves navigating administrative processes and compliance requirements, it can help to reframe your perspective. Rather than seeing it as red tape, consider it as a roadmap that guides you towards your goals and maximising your impact.

Embracing program design principles is not just about meeting requirements – it is about making a difference in the lives of those you serve.

Applying for grants

Program design plays a vital role in crime prevention programming, offering a structured approach to create interventions that reduce crime, improve community safety, and address risk factors and increase protective factors. When applying for grants, remember that assessment panels receive many applications. The ones that stand out are those with clear evidence of intentional work and a strong alignment with funding criteria.

A well-designed program shows assessment panels that you have thoughtfully addressed the needs of your target group, developed effective strategies, and planned how to implement and evaluate the program. This makes your application more competitive and ensures it aligns with the funding priorities and requirements set by the grant provider.

First steps

Start with the end in mind

It is natural to start to think about what program response you can create with the resources you have and the activities you can deliver.

- *“I can run activity X that will help teach young people Y.”*
- *“I have a basketball court, so I will run a basketball activity and participants will learn teamwork.”*



However, program design means starting with the end in mind and identifying the issue you are trying to address *before* determining the activities and strategies to achieve them. The below framework will guide all aspects of program design, implementation, and assessment.



Breaking that down

Identify the issue

- What specific issue or problem am I trying to address in my community?
- Who is affected by this issue, and to what extent?
- What are the root causes or contributing factors to this issue?
- Am I an appropriate organisation or individual to address this issue?

Community consultation

- What feedback or insights have I gathered from the community about their needs and priorities?
- Have I engaged with community members or stakeholders to understand their perspectives on this issue?
- How can I integrate community input into my program's design and development, taking into account cultural sensitivities and practices?
- Am I the most suitable person or organisation to address this issue, particularly if community-led initiatives already exist?
- Could my program duplicate an existing service that addresses this issue in the community?

Program Logic Model

What is a Program Logic Model?

A Program Logic Model is a visual map that shows how your program works. It links what goes into the program, the activities you do, and the results you want to achieve. This model helps explain how resources are used and what outcomes you can expect. It is a helpful tool for planning, communicating, and managing your program effectively. It can also strengthen your funding application.

Why should I do a Program Logic Model?

Integrating a program logic model into your program design process has several advantages:

- It offers a clear framework for understanding how your program works and how it will achieve its goals.
- It helps pinpoint potential gaps or areas for improvement in your program, ensuring resources are well-used and outcomes are optimised.
- It improves communication and transparency within your organisation and with stakeholders and funders by clearly showing the logic behind your program's activities and expected outcomes.
- It can be used to support an assessment of your program to determine whether it has been effective in achieving the outcomes you set out to achieve.

The [Australian Institute of Family Studies](#) provides excellent resources on Program Logic Models, including step-by-step guidance, examples, templates, a training video and a checklist to help you review your draft model.

Program Logic Model

- What are the inputs required to implement the program effectively, including resources, funding, and personnel?
- What are the key activities or interventions I will carry out as part of the program?
- What outputs or deliverables are expected to result from these activities?
- How do these outputs contribute to achieving the intended outcomes of the program?
- What are the short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes that the program aims to achieve?
- What indicators or measures will be used to track progress and evaluate the success of the program?
- How will I collect and analyse data to assess the impact of the program on its target audience?
- How will the Program Logic Model be communicated to stakeholders and used to guide program implementation and assessment?

The Program Logic Model informs:

Goal

- The goal provides a broad direction and purpose for the program, guiding its activities and strategies.
- What is the overarching goal I am trying to achieve in addressing this issue?
- How does this goal align with the broader mission or objectives of my organisation?
- Who will benefit from achieving this goal, and how will their lives be improved?

Outcomes

- Outcomes are specific, measurable changes or results that occur as a direct result of program activities.
- What specific outcomes or changes do I hope to see as a result of my program? For example, changes in behaviour, skills, knowledge, attitudes, awareness, motivation.
- Will I be aiming to reduce risk factors, increase protective factors, or both?
- Are these outcomes realistic and achievable within the scope of my resources and capacity?
- How will I measure or assess the success of my program in achieving these outcomes?

Activities

- Activities are the specific actions or interventions implemented by the program to achieve its goals and produce desired outcomes.
- What activities will I deliver to achieve those outcomes?
- Are these activities evidence-based or informed by best practices in the field?
- Will those activities lead to the outcomes?
- Do I have the necessary resources, expertise, and support to effectively implement these activities?
- Am I the appropriate source to deliver these activities?

Assessment

- How will I assess my program to measure those intended changes and impact?
- Is the assessment method relevant and appropriate?
- What data or metrics will I collect to measure progress towards my goals and outcomes?
- Will I conduct pre-program assessments to establish baseline data, and post-program assessments to measure change over time?

What does that look like in real life?

As an example, imagine that you are a basketball organisation.

Identify the issue

- Observe that youth crime is high in your area due to a lack of engaging activities and mentorship for young people.

Community consultation

- Talk to local residents, schools, and youth organisations to understand the community's needs and priorities regarding youth crime prevention.
- Identify a gap in services that offer positive activities and mentorship opportunities, and find resources to collaborate with an organisation to bring a program to the community to address this issue.

Program Logic Model

- Create a Program Logic Model to map out the connections between what goes into your program, the activities you offer, and the outcomes you aim to achieve.

Goal

- Your program's main goal is to empower young people to make positive life choices and become active community members.
- This goal aligns with your organisation's broader mission of using basketball for youth development and community engagement.
- The program aims to provide personal growth, skill development, and social connections for young people.

Outcomes

- The program aims to boost self-esteem, teamwork abilities, conflict resolution skills, and community involvement among participants.
- Long-term goals include reducing youth crime, improving educational attainment, and increasing employment prospects for participants.
- Outcomes are tracked through pre- and post-program assessments, surveys, and feedback from stakeholders.

Activities

- Program activities are designed to align with the program's goals, focusing on basketball training, mentorship, life skills development, and community engagement.
- Activities include basketball sessions with qualified coaches, mentoring with adult volunteers, workshops on leadership and decision-making, and community events like tournaments and outreach activities.
- Each activity is planned and implemented to maximise participant engagement and enjoyment.

Assessment

- Put a thorough assessment plan in place to measure the program's effectiveness and impact.
- Use pre- and post-program assessments to track changes in participants' skills, knowledge, and attitudes.
- Collect feedback through surveys and interviews with participants, parents, coaches, and other stakeholders.
- Analyse data on attendance, retention, and community engagement to monitor program success over time.

Spot the difference

"I have a basketball court, so I will run a basketball activity and participants will learn teamwork."



"Young people in my community lack pro-social behaviours and engage in low-level community crime. This is because they do not have access to positive activities or role models. My program will aim to increase their protective factors by delivering resilience-building activities and mentorship, and this will be delivered through structured basketball-based activities."

A Program Logic Model helps you to describe your program and its impact accurately and succinctly; check out the *writing a grant application section* of the website for more details on this. This is important with being able to clearly communicate your program to your community, participants, stakeholders, and potential funding bodies.

Naming your proposal

After identifying the issue, consulting with your community, and designing your program using a program logic model, the next step is creating an impactful name for your proposal. Creating an effective name can set the tone for your program and influence its success in marketing and public perception.

There is no need to include descriptors and redundant words in the program title.

- For example, a title like 'Youth Impact Project - inspirational presentation for positive community impact' is very wordy and repetitive. Just *Youth Impact Project* is succinct but relevant.
- The why, how, who and where can be unpacked further in your application.

Consider the following key points when creating a name:

- **Clarity and relevance:** Choose a name that clearly conveys the purpose of your program and resonates with your target audience.
- **Mindful language:** Avoid long-winded descriptive names or deficit-based labels that include "at-risk youth." Focus on strengths and potential, respecting the language and preferences of the communities you are serving.
- **Research:** Google your intended name to see if it already exists and is associated with appropriate groups
- **Positive and inclusive:** choose language that fosters a welcoming environment and emphasises program benefits.
- **Conciseness:** aim for a straightforward, catchy name that is easy to remember and reflects the community input you received during consultation. While you can add "program" or "project" at the end of the title, it may be redundant. Treat the name as a proper noun and consider leaving it out for simplicity and impact.
- **Evergreen appeal:** Consider choosing a name that will stand the test of time and avoid using trendy slang or phrases that may date your program quickly. An evergreen name ensures your program remains relevant and accessible to future participants and stakeholders.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** Choose a name that is respectful of the communities you are serving and avoids offensive terms.
- **Appropriate acronyms:** If using an acronym, ensure the word it spells it is suitable for your audience and aligns with your program's tone and values.
- **Consistent branding:** Align the name with your overall branding and messaging strategy for consistency across all materials.
- **Visual appeal:** Consider how the name will look in print and digital media and aim for visual attractiveness and simplicity.

Summary

By following a systematic approach to program design, incorporating community input, and aligning activities with clear goals and outcomes, organisations can develop effective initiatives that address community needs and produce meaningful, lasting change.

Through careful planning, implementation, and assessment, programs can empower individuals, strengthen communities, and contribute to positive social impact.