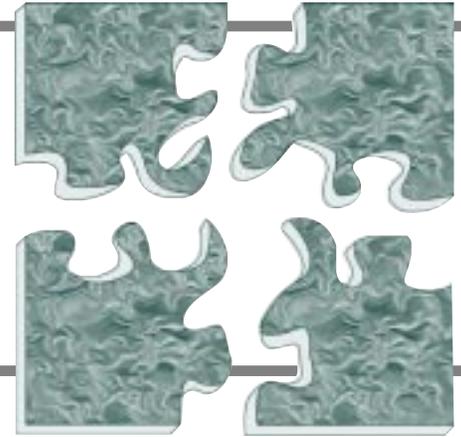


# BEST PRACTICE BRIEFS



## PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

### RECOGNIZE

- five levels of outcomes
- interventions at multiple levels lead to impact

### USE THE OUTCOME-ASSET IMPACT MODEL

- to think through program implications
- to design evaluations

### USE AN INTERAGENCY WORKGROUP

- to formulate community/system impact and characteristics
- to identify each agency's contribution to the impacts



OUTREACH  
PARTNERSHIPS

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## EVALUATING SERVICES BY LINKING OUTCOME-BASED AND ASSET-ORIENTED APPROACHES:

### THE OUTCOME-ASSET IMPACT MODEL<sup>©</sup>

*One of the major shifts in human services is an increased emphasis on accountability for prudent use of the funds provided by the public, whether through taxes or donations. This accountability increasingly focuses on what happens as a result of expenditures for human services. To understand how program activities lead to program outcomes, funders, managers, and service providers are beginning to utilize logic models. This BEST PRACTICE BRIEF explores a logic model that agencies and staff can use to formulate and understand the impact of their services, as a first step in an evaluation process.*

### APPROACHES TO DEMONSTRATE IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

*For years, the XYZ Agency provided information to their United Way on the number of clients served and the number of sessions. But these measures are no longer acceptable as a valid measure of accomplishment...*

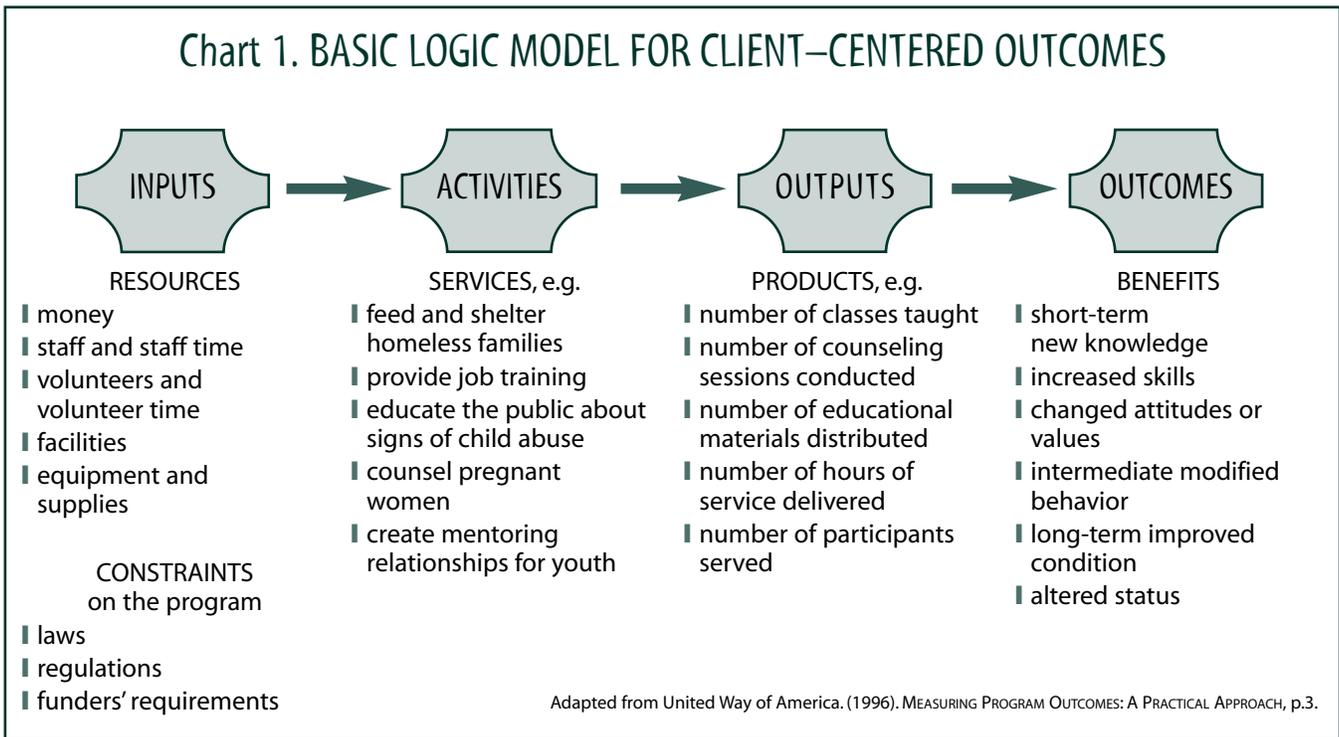
*Linda Therapist just knows her efforts are paying off—she has the anecdotal stories to prove it...*

*Molly Manager worries about the women served by her agency. “We are very effective, in training,” she says, “but what about the other things they need...”*

These three scenarios indicate that it is very easy for human service providers to report process measures—the number of persons served, the number of services provided, etc. It is much more difficult to frame and be able to report results in terms of client-centered outcomes. Logic models, showing the relationship between various components of an intervention, can assist human service providers to respond to this change of perspective.



Chart 1. BASIC LOGIC MODEL FOR CLIENT-CENTERED OUTCOMES



### Basic Logic Model

In an effort to move funded agencies from a process-oriented to an outcome-oriented focus, the United Way of America (UWA) has developed a logic model that provides a conceptual and visual method for linking program inputs (resources) to program outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

The **Strengths** of the United Way of America Model are as follows:

- Clarifies assumptions about how programs work
- Indicates clearly the difference between outputs and outcomes
- Indicates clearly the difference between short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes
- Demonstrates how short-term outcomes lead to intermediate outcomes which in turn lead to long-term outcomes
- Helps managers, service providers, and evaluators to think about individual and family outcomes
- Is easy to use

The **Weaknesses** of the United Way of America Model are as follows:

- Considers only client-centered outcomes
- Doesn't promote thinking about outcomes on an agency, service delivery system, or community level
- Doesn't clarify how outcomes on one level influence outcomes on another level
- Doesn't help clarify our understanding of how outcomes produce long-term impact

Something more was needed! To incorporate the strengths and address the weaknesses of this basic outcome logic model, Bob Brown and Celeste Sturdevant Reed developed the Outcome-Asset Impact Model<sup>®</sup> for Outreach Partnerships @ MSU.

<sup>1</sup>Another model in widespread use is called Targeting Outcomes of Programs developed for extension educators. Bennett, Claude and Rockwell, Kay. (March 1995). *Targeting Outcomes of Programs (TOP): An Integrated Approach to Planning and Evaluation*. Authors' draft.

## THE VOCABULARY—DEFINING THE TERMS FOR CHART 1.

Inputs:	Resources dedicated to or consumed by the program such as money, staff and volunteer time, equipment, constraints (laws, regulations)
Activities:	What the program does with its inputs to fulfill its mission; the interventions of programs
Outputs:	The direct products of program activities, such as number of clients served and units of service provided
Outcomes:	Benefits for participants during and after program activities
	Short-term..... New knowledge, increased skills, changed attitudes, beliefs, values, aspirations
	Intermediate.... Changes in behavior
	Long-term..... Improved condition or altered status resulting from changes in behavior over a period of time

## THE OUTCOME-ASSET IMPACT MODEL<sup>©</sup>

The Outcome-Asset Impact Model<sup>©</sup> (See Chart 2) provides a framework for evaluating impact and complex efforts by suggesting that:

### 1. Outcomes occur on five levels.

OUTCOMES FOR:	ARE OBSERVED THROUGH CHANGES IN: <sup>2</sup>	OUTCOMES FOR:	ARE OBSERVED THROUGH CHANGES IN:
<b>Individual</b>	Attitudes, perceptions Knowledge, competence Skills, abilities, capacities Behaviors, actions Lifestyles: e.g., income, employment, levels of empowerment	<b>Service Systems</b>	Relationships, interaction patterns, linkages and networks Practices Policies Delivery of services Resource generation and use
<b>Group/Family</b>	Interactions, behaviors, actions Values, culture	<b>Community</b>	Values, attitudes Relations, support systems Civic action/empowerment Social norms Infrastructure Policies, laws, practices Social-economic-environmental conditions Institutionalization
<b>Agency</b>	Number of services or programs Type of services or programs Access Practices: e.g., expanded hours Resource generation Resource use Policies		

<sup>2</sup> Used with permission, from Taylor-Powell, Rossing, and Geran. (1998). *Evaluating Collaboratives-Reaching the Potential*. University of Wisconsin-Extension, p.111.

2. **The effectiveness of a single agency in accomplishing successful outcomes for individuals often depends on activities at more than one level.** Accomplishing outcomes for individuals may be contingent on circumstances and interventions at the interagency and community level.

*Examples: Women trained for work cannot use their new skills if no jobs are available.*

*A program teaching leadership skills to youth can succeed on an individual level, i.e. youth learn skills. However, it will fail to accomplish the desired outcome if the community does not include opportunities for youth to become involved in its decision making process.*

3. **Human service situations are so complex that often, in order to achieve impact, a community must look at achieving outcomes on all five levels.** Thus, in these situations, effectiveness requires getting interagency/community agreement and participation.

*Example: It has become a common understanding that no one agency or program is able to achieve “healthy youth” or “strong families.” To achieve these impacts, the outcomes of activities on the individual, family, agency, service delivery system, and community levels must all be aimed toward the same end. The spectacular success of Boston in accomplishing no juvenile homicides was achieved by efforts over an extended period fueled by a common recognition on the part of many people and agencies that violence was preventable.*

4. **Defining the individual characteristics (or assets) related to a desired impact enables managers, service providers, and evaluators to link outcomes to impact.** Using an asset or strength-based approach provides the means and language to describe these characteristics (see BEST PRACTICE BRIEFS NO. 2).

*Example:*

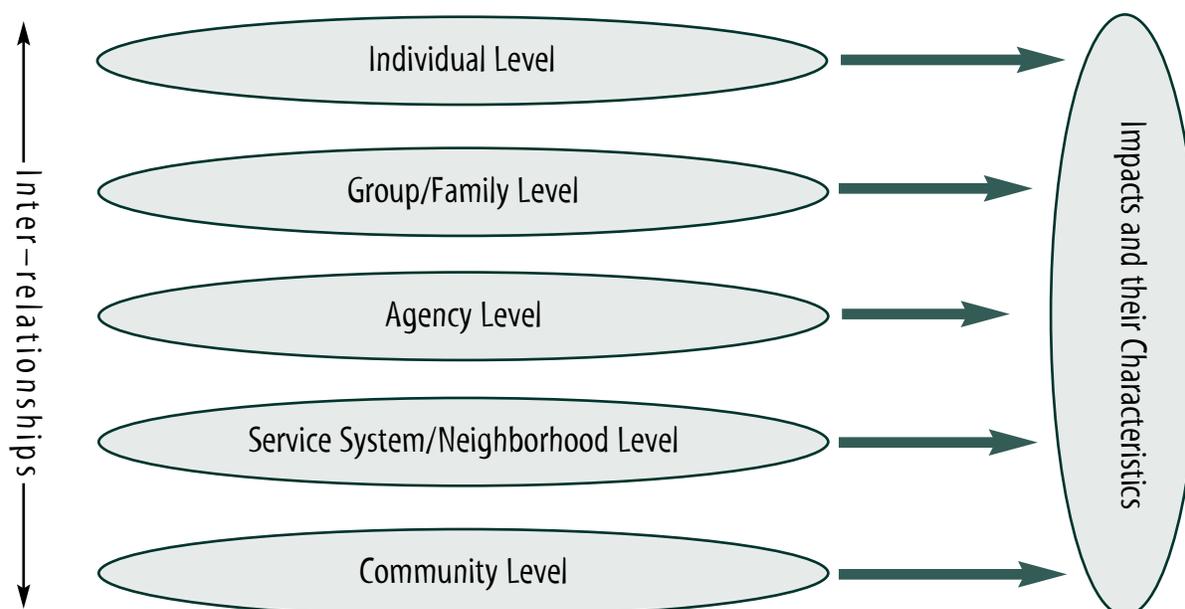
<i>Desired Impact:</i>	<i>Children and youth use social competency skills.</i>
<i>A Characteristic of this Impact:</i>	<i>Children and youth seek to resolve conflict non-violently (a Search Institute-defined asset).</i>
<i>Link to Outcomes:</i>	<i>In order for children and youth to seek to resolve conflict non-violently, what practice or behavior must occur (intermediate outcome)?</i>
	<i>For that practice to occur, what changes in values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge must occur (short-term outcomes)?</i>

## THE VOCABULARY—DEFINING THE TERMS FOR CHART 2.

<b>Individual</b>	The child or adult who is receiving services
<b>Family, Group</b>	The members of the immediate and extended family of the child or adult who is receiving services
	The influential group to which the child or adult belongs: classroom, workgroup
<b>Agency</b>	The organization providing services
<b>Service System</b>	The various organizations impacting the life of the child or adult; the coalition or collaborative body
<b>Community</b>	The city, county, region, ethnic community in which the child or adult resides
<b>Impact:</b>	The ultimate person-centered desired benefit or goal of a set of activities described as a quality or aspect of a person; for example, “People who are economically self-sufficient while maintaining their basic needs.”
<b>Characteristics:</b>	The internal and external assets of the person-centered impact
	<b>Internal Assets:</b> Strengths and capacities of individuals
	<b>External Assets:</b> Caring, support, and opportunities in the environment

## Chart 2. OUTCOME–ASSET IMPACT MODEL<sup>©</sup>

Relationships among Actions at the Various Levels



Robert Brown and Celeste Sturdevant Reed, **OUTREACH PARTNERSHIPS**<sup>©</sup> 1999, Board of Trustees, Michigan State University

### The Model in Practice: An Example

In Traverse City, Michigan, staff members of programs that provide basic needs for people recently worked together to develop a “picture” of their combined contributions. They were encouraged to ask themselves,

**“What do our clients look like when they don’t need us?”**

Using the Outcome-Asset Impact Model<sup>©</sup>, they replied,

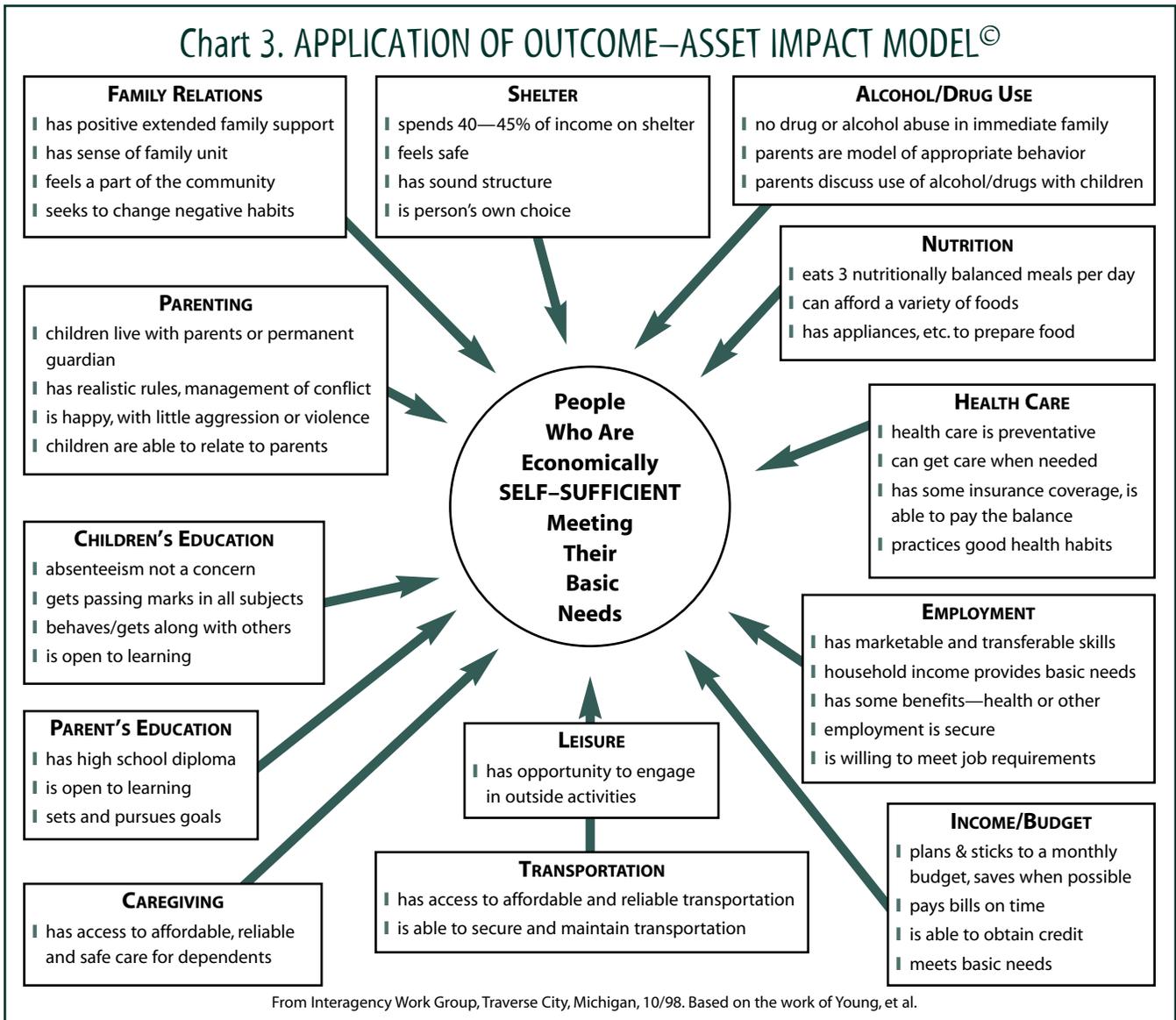
**“When our clients no longer need us, they are economically self-sufficient people whose basic needs are met.”**

This simple overall Impact statement was expanded to include various Impact components of these people’s lives that would be in place: nutrition, shelter, health care, employment, etc. These components were then defined in terms of the characteristics, or internal and external assets, of people who had their needs met in each category.

With this formulation in hand (see Chart 3), each agency was able to identify its contribution to the “self-sufficient person.” For example, participants defined a person who is meeting his/her basic employment needs as “having marketable and transferable skills,” a “household income that provides basic needs,” “secure employment,” and a “willingness to meet job requirements.” The agency that provides employment and training services used these characteristics to link their outputs (i.e., training for the un- and under-employed) to outcomes for the participants (i.e., new beliefs about the training and themselves as well as new knowledge and skills).

The cluster of employment-related characteristics illustrates an important point: some outcomes are necessary to achieve other outcomes (see Chart 4). In this instance, “having marketable and transferable skills” is a short-term outcome that contributes to an intermediate outcome of “secure employment,” which in turn facilitates earning “household income that provides basic needs.”

By mapping the characteristics of a desired impact, agency staff were able to see how each of their own programs was contributing. As a group, they were able to identify the scope of the interventions that would be needed to actually create their shared desired impact: the “economically self-sufficient person whose basic needs are met.” This was important information for the local United Way staff person who had initially brought the agency staff members together for joint planning.



### How and When to Use the Outcome-Asset Impact Model<sup>©</sup>

At **OUTREACH PARTNERSHIPS @ MSU**, this model is being used in training and with Community Partners in two related but different ways to:

- think through programming implications
- design evaluation efforts

The model is used in the **CHECK POINTS**

training program to:

- think through programming implications
- frame the definition of desired impacts
- design evaluation efforts, including evaluation at any of the five levels

*For more about the Outcome-Asset Impact Model<sup>©</sup> enroll in Check Points, an outcome-based 12-session or customized training program for staff in education and human service organizations. For a catalog, call 517-432-2500.*

However, whether or not service providers intend to design an evaluation program, they will find it helpful to answer the question, “What will people who no longer need our efforts look like?” The Outcome-Asset Impact Model<sup>©</sup> helps to clarify a number of unspoken assumptions about how interventions will change people (or agencies or communities) as well as how achieving outcomes will contribute to the desired impacts. Specifying impacts provides a way for managers and service providers, individually and across agencies, to understand their own and their combined efforts.

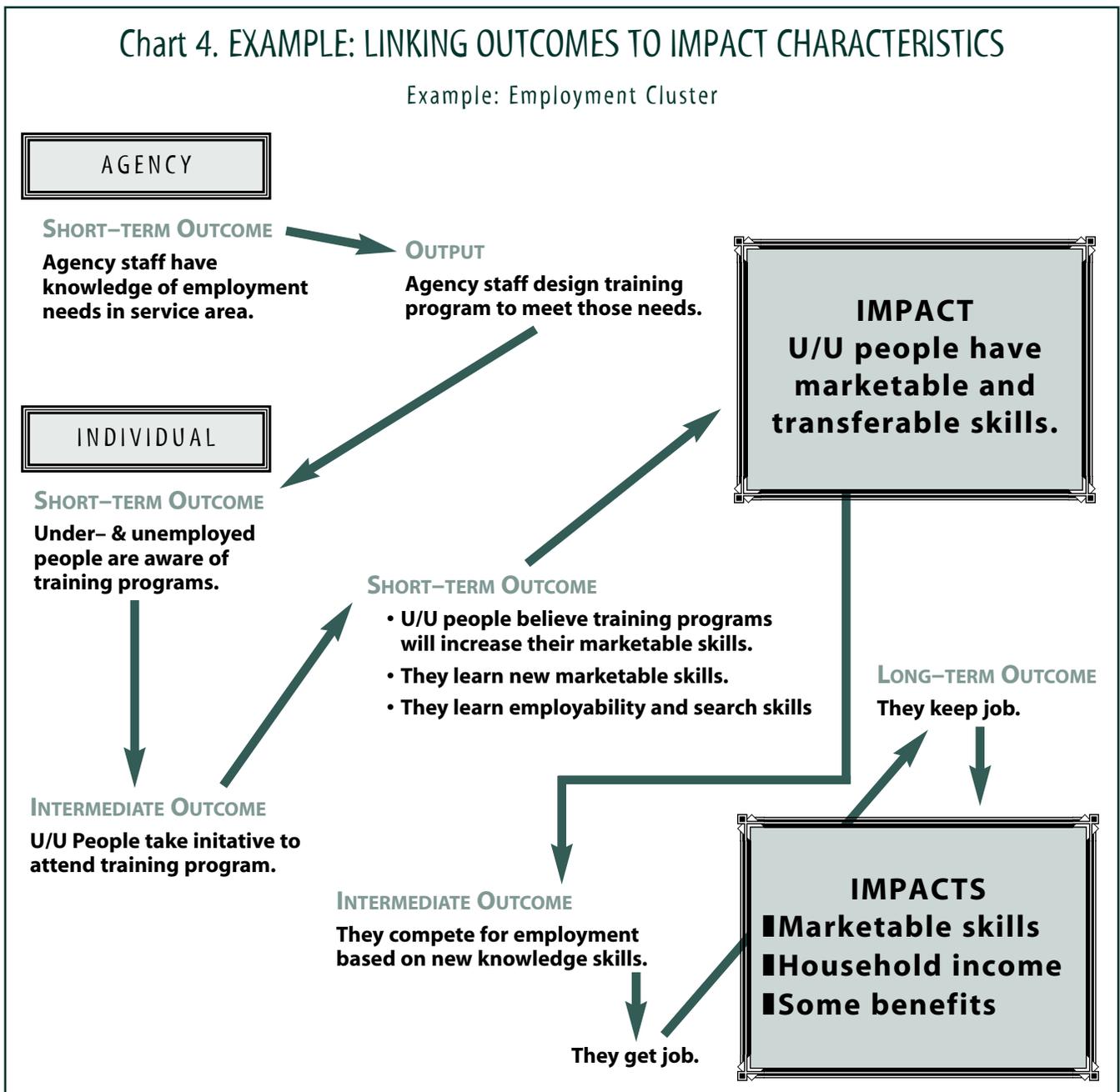
**In Summary: What the Model Does**

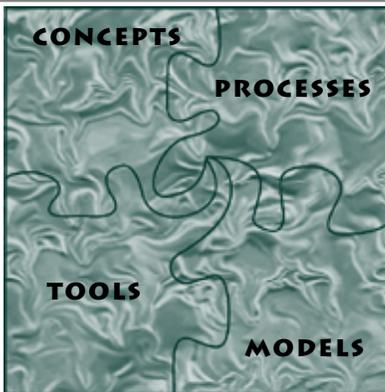
The Outcome-Asset Impact Model<sup>©</sup>

- provides a visual way to describe accountability issues for agency staff and funders

- provides a neutral way (in terms of common commitment to a specified outcome) to present information for mutual engagement, problem solving and priority setting by a collaborative group
- makes visible agency roles and interconnections
- makes evaluation a tool to organize planning at the front end and to focus energies

The Model highlights, but does not solve, such issues as how to collect and summarize information in order to report on outcomes and impacts. Development and use of the characteristics of impacts should always be undertaken in the context of available information from research and evaluation studies.





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