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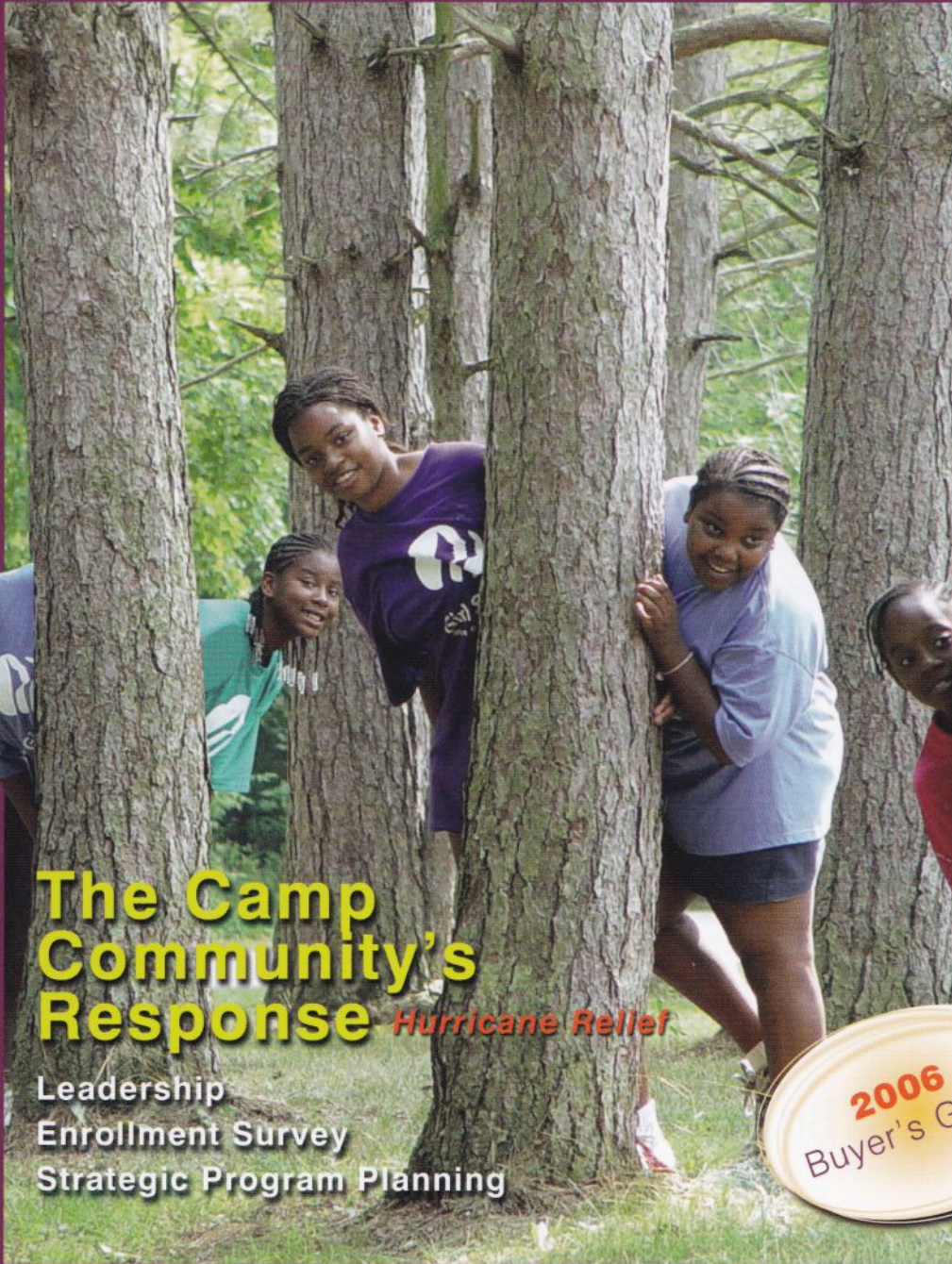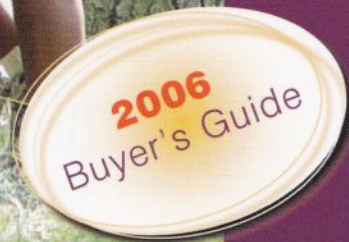
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Strategic Program Planning

A Recipe for Success

Laurel Molloy

If you are like camp professionals everywhere, you are using the off-season to plot the course for next summer. Upon reflection, you have identified your program's strengths and weaknesses. You have heard back from campers, parents, and staff. Now you sit faced with boundless amounts of information, ready to start planning, but wondering — where exactly should I begin?

Enter the Program Logic Model

Essentially a flow chart for communicating how you operate and what you are seeking to accomplish, the Program Logic Model can be an incredibly useful planning tool. It allows you to organize your work for maximum results, keeping your focus on what matters most to your camp.

Although its roots are in the nonprofit community, this model can benefit the planning efforts of any camp — for profit or nonprofit, big or small, new or long-standing. Moreover, it can be used to plan individual aspects of your camp program (i.e., ropes courses, swim classes, nature programs), or the program as a whole.

If you are unfamiliar with the Program Logic Model, rest assured that you can learn to use it very quickly, since its format is similar to a much more common tool — a recipe. Yes, logic models are like recipes. And once you understand how, you will be able to plan your programs with ease.

Consider first this very basic pasta recipe:

Ingredients:
- Pasta
- Sauce
- Water
- A heating source (capable of bringing water to a boil)
- A pot
- A stirring utensil

Preparation Steps:
1. Bring 4-6 quarts of water to a rolling boil.
2. Add contents of entire box to boiling water. Stir gently.
3. Return to a boil, stirring occasionally. For "al dente" pasta, boil uncovered for 9 minutes. For more tender pasta, boil for 10 minutes.
4. Remove from heat. Drain well.
5. Serve immediately with your favorite sauce.

Serving Size: 8 servings

Much like this recipe, a logic model has various components:

Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes

*Inputs are the resources required to deliver a program. In other words, they are like a recipe's **ingredients**. They include items like staff, participants, facility, supplies, and funding.*

*Activities are the actions taken to deliver a program or what your program does with its inputs. As such, activities are like a recipe's **preparation steps**. They are conveyed as action statements, demonstrating what your program does to provide service.*

*Outputs are the direct products of your program's activities, which are often communicated through numbers. Thus, they are like a recipe's **serving size**. They speak to the scope of the program's work.*

In Table 1, the details from the aforementioned recipe have been plugged into part of a standard logic model template to further exemplify the connection between logic models and recipes.

Inputs Are Like Ingredients

Many parallels can be drawn between ingredients and inputs. When developing a list of inputs for inclusion in your Program Logic Model, keep in mind the following similarities:

Table 1 **Recipe as Logic Model**

Inputs (Ingredients)	Activities (Preparation Steps)	Outputs (Serving Size)
Pasta Sauce Water Pot Stirring utensil Heating source	1. Bring 4-6 quarts of water to a rolling boil. 2. Add contents of entire box to boiling water. Stir gently. 3. Return to a boil, stirring occasionally. For "al dente" pasta, boil uncovered for 9 minutes. For more tender pasta, boil for 10 minutes. 4. Remove from heat. Drain well. 5. Serve immediately with your favorite sauce.	8 servings produced

- **Quality** Anyone who has ever prepared a dish will tell you that the quality of the ingredients affects the final product. Using homemade sauce made with fresh vegetables will produce a higher quality dish than using canned sauce. Similarly, the quality of your inputs can affect your program's ultimate benefit.

  Tip: *If your program uses quality inputs, highlight them in your logic model with descriptive terms (i.e., trained staff, top-of-the-line computer equipment).*

- **Resourcefulness** How many times have you set out to prepare a dish only to discover that you are out of a key ingredient? Perhaps to remedy the situation, you knocked on your neighbor's door or made a run to the corner market. When delivering services, similar discoveries are often made. More funding is needed, so you write a grant. A van is needed to transport clients, so you partner with another local agency. You make adjustments based on the resources you have available.

  Tip: *Use your logic model as a planning tool, and you can make critical discoveries about such shortcomings before you actually begin providing services.*

- **Choice** There are undeniably many ways to prepare basic pasta. Some people favor cream sauce over marinara. Some will only eat wheat pasta, while others can't stand it. It's these choices about specific ingredients that make even the most basic "pasta" dishes different. Along the same line, it's often the use of unique inputs that make programs that appear similar in name like "environmental education" or "outdoor adventure" so very different.

  Tip: *Provide details on all of your particular inputs to reflect what sets your program apart.*

- **Quantity** The amount of ingredients you have available to you will affect how many servings you yield. If you only have half a box of pasta, you will not be able to satisfy as many people as with a full box. Likewise, the amount of inputs you have will dictate how many people you can serve. With a small budget or limited supplies, you may not be able to cater to a large audience.

  Tip: *Be specific about the quantity of inputs you have available, or you may make promises that you can't keep regarding how many people you can serve.*

others toward the end. That particular combination of spices is what makes your dish unique. Programs operate in much the same way. After delivering services for some time, you find more success by adding an additional step or adjusting an existing one.

Tip: *Make sure your logic model is dynamic; it should be updated as your program changes.*

Outputs Are Like Serving Size

Outputs communicate that activities have occurred, just as servings demonstrate that individual ingredients have been transformed into a whole new dish. When brainstorming your program's outputs, keep in mind the points outlined below.

- **Quantity** Ingredients and serving size are interrelated. The amount of servings you seek to prepare can dictate the quantity of ingredients necessary. If you want to make eight servings, you will need to prepare the whole box of pasta; dinner for one requires less. Likewise, the number of people your program intends to serve will affect the amount of inputs (funding, staff, supplies, etc.) that you need.

  Tip: *If you are mandated to provide a certain amount of services, list your required outputs first and work backwards to inputs.*
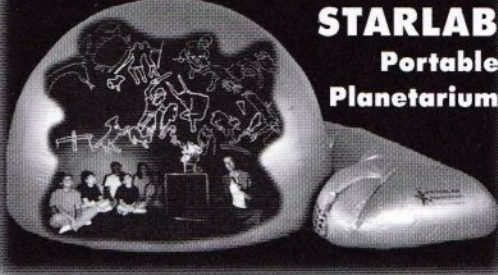
- **Production** You can't produce a serving of food without first following the necessary preparation steps, and you can't produce outputs without first conducting activities. Outputs are the direct result of a program's activities. They convey the scope of the work and are often communicated using precise numbers. If you state in your activities column that you intend to "provide environmental education workshops," you must include in your outputs column what happened as a direct result of these workshops (i.e., the number of workshops you provided and how many people attended each).

  Tip: *Make sure that every activity has at least one corresponding output; often these outputs will reflect how many people were served, how often they received service, and for how long.*

- **Quality** Going through the steps necessary to transform individual ingredients into a whole new dish is one thing. The amount of servings that you produce suggests that you did indeed follow the preparation steps. However, serving size speaks nothing of quality. Likewise, outputs suggest nothing more than that activities were carried out. They speak nothing of the quality of the service, just the scope. Quality is where outcomes come into play.

Outcomes Are Why You're Cooking

Outcomes are how individuals change or benefit as a result of their involvement in a program; these changes are often related to knowledge, attitude, skill, and behavior. In the context of the recipe example, outcomes relate to how a person changes or benefits from the prepared food. Therefore, whereas activity statements are written from the perspective of the service provider to express what they intend to do, outcome statements are written from the participants' perspective, expressing

how they have changed as a result of their involvement.

Depending on the scenario, preparing food can benefit people in different ways. Prepared food can be consumed to address hunger, to nourish, to give energy for daily activities. It can be offered as a gift, providing comfort and inducing happiness. Or it can be used for social purposes, serving as the common experience over which conversations flow and bonds are built.

In much the same way, your program can yield a variety of benefits or outcomes. Some of these benefits are experienced immediately, while others can take quite some time. As you brainstorm the final component of your logic model, keep in mind these similarities.

- **Need** We usually prepare food because we are hungry. Hunger is the need, and preparing food is our means to address it. Programs too are developed and delivered to address needs. In fact, your program was undoubtedly created to address a larger need in the community.

  Tip: *Think about the need that your program was created to address and how it relates to the long-term outcomes you seek for your participants.*

- **Keep the End in Mind** When you eat, in addition to reducing your hunger you may also desire to be healthier. If better health is your ultimate goal, the ingredients you choose and the manner in which they are prepared will be impacted. You may avoid cream sauce or choose not to add salt to the boiling water, for example. In much the same way, your ultimate program outcomes can significantly affect your choice of inputs and activities.

  Tip: *Brainstorm all of your intended outcomes and see if they are logically connected to the inputs and activities you are using; if a disconnect exists, you should consider adjusting your services or expected outcomes accordingly.*

- **Stages of Benefits** After you eat, you will be less hungry. Perhaps because you are less hungry you are better able to perform well in a big meeting at work. And because you performed so

well at that meeting, you were given a promotion, which led to higher pay, which led to a better quality of life. That one meal is not the sole reason you achieved a higher quality of life, but it did contribute to the sequence of events. Likewise, program outcomes occur in stages that logically follow one another. A person enjoys immediate benefits due to their involvement in your program (like increased access to certain services and increased knowledge of particular topics), which lead to other changes down the road (like improved attitudes and behaviors).

Tip: *Be mindful of the stages of change that your participants will experience; draw connections between initial outcomes and those that follow.*

- **Unexpected Benefits** Following a recipe can yield various benefits. For instance, if you prepare a meal with someone else, you may not only produce a dish to address your hunger, but also grow closer due to your time spent together. Similarly,

programs can yield more than one benefit — some of which may be totally unforeseen.

Tip: *Think about all of the ways that your participants may change as a result of each activity; consult with line staff and participants to uncover the more obscure but nonetheless important benefits. At the same time, don't take undue credit for changes; be realistic about what changes your program can logically affect and include only those outcomes in your model.*

To further illustrate the connection between food consumption and outcomes, the recipe as a logic model concept is revisited in Table 2 using some of the examples listed previously.

Final Considerations

When you sit down to complete your Program Logic Model, you can begin by identifying your long-term outcomes and work backwards from there. Or, you can start by listing your inputs or even your activities. Really, any place you begin is fine. Just keep in mind how the various components are interrelated and remember:

Develop Your Own Program Logic Model

Using this blank template, begin creating your own logic model. Brainstorm your program inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes.

Program Name:_____

*This program was created to address the following need:*_____

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
In order to deliver the services required to address the identified need, our program needs:	To impact our participants in a way that will address the broader need, our program will:	The following numbers reflect what occurred as a direct result of each of the program's activities:	During or immediately following their involvement in our program, participants will:	In the long term, following the achievement of the short-term outcomes, participants will:

Table 2 **Recipe as Logic Model 2**

Inputs (Ingredients)	Activities (Preparation Steps)	Outputs (Serving Size)	Shorter-Term Outcomes (Short-Term Benefits)	Longer-Term Outcomes (Longer-Term Benefits)
Pasta Sauce Water Pot Stirring utensil Heating source	1. Bring 4-6 quarts of water to a rolling boil. 2. Add contents of package to boiling water. Stir gently. 3. Return to a boil, stirring occasionally. For "al dente" pasta, boil uncovered for 9 minutes. For more tender pasta, boil for 10 minutes. 4. Remove from heat. Drain well. 5. Serve immediately with your favorite sauce.	8 servings produced	Individual will eat pasta serving(s). Individual will be less hungry. Individual will perform well at key meeting.	Individual will receive a promotion with a higher salary. Individual will achieve a higher quality of life.

- If an item is listed as an input, its use should be accounted for in your list of activities and vice versa.

- If an activity is listed, it should be clear which output(s) and outcome(s) will result from it. Each outcome must be logically tied to at least one activity or your program cannot take credit for the change, and it should not be included in your model.

- If a long-term outcome is identified, the short-term outcomes should logically lead to them.

Developing your logic model should be a collaborative process. Once you have independently completed a draft of the model, share it with other stakeholders within your camp (like staff, volunteers, parent representatives, and campers) to see if you have missed anything. Or, work with a small group from the very beginning. You will find that the conversations not only ensure that your model is comprehensive, but provide insight into how others think about your camp program.

Lastly, please note that through this process you may discover that your activities do not logically connect to your intended outcomes. If that's the case (and it's not all that unusual), it is time to reconsider either how or why your camp program operates. Then take action to see that they are aligned in the future. ∎

Photo on page 39 courtesy of Camp Woodbrooke, Richland Center, Wisconsin.

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