This means adding numbers to the indicators. When you specify the amount of change expected in a specific time-frame, you are setting what are called "performance targets". You will want to be very cautious in setting your performance targets, to make sure that they are neither too ambitious nor too easy to attain. In fact, some program evaluators recommend that you avoid performance targets altogether unless your funding source requires them, or you have very good historical data on realistic targets for your type of program. Performance targets can make it easy to determine whether you have achieved the outcomes you expected, but they can also cause serious problems if you do not have good baseline data from which to work. You do not want to set yourself up for failure by holding your program accountable for something that you cannot realistically achieve. For example, even the best local family support program probably cannot eliminate 100% of the child abuse in a given community.

If you do decide to set performance targets (or your funding source requires it), here are some suggestions for setting realistic goals. Once you have identified the outcomes and the number of meaningful indicators needed, you need to ask yourself:

1. How many participants do we plan to recruit for (or who will engage in) the proposed service to meet this particular outcome?

2. How many participants do we think (assume, know from past experience) will attend often enough and long enough to be able to achieve measurable progress?

3. What are the specific levels of participant achievement that we expect to produce?

4. What % of the participants who attend long enough and often enough to achieve measurable progress are likely to attain the specific levels of achievement?

Let's look at an example:

Example: Performance targets for the outcome of "Increased social networking among stay-at- home parents"

How will you choose numbers and percentages that are realistic but that also reflect reaching and assisting a significant number of people in a meaningful way? Well, first think about what you are going to be doing, with how many people, what they will be doing and how much.

What you will be providing? General program participation and specific activities, such as pot- luck lunches, drop-in hours, parent-child interactive programs, adult field trip, volunteer opportunities plus staff encouragement to meet other parents (you know those which are relevant to your program).

For how many people? We think that we could recruit 30 parents with small children in our low income, transient neighborhood.

What they will be doing and how much? We think that in the first year,

> 60% of parents will report doing two or more joint activities with new acquaintances: shopping, recreation, eating together

> 50% of parents will report helping each other out: child care, transportation, shopping

> 50% of parents will report feeling more social support

In the second year, if you worked with the same parents, the levels might be considerably higher in terms of doing joint activities and especially in terms of helping each other out and feeling significantly more social support. It might also be a time when staff would be more likely to actually observe them doing these things. When writing performance targets then, specify that parents *demonstrate* these behaviors (as observed by staff), rather than just self-report them.

How Will You Know That Your Numbers Make Sense?

As noted earlier, it is very difficult to set realistic performance targets. If you do have performance targets, as you discuss assigning them to each indicator, it will be essential to rely on staff experience and participant input. Staff's past experience and participant's future aspirations are a necessary basis for choosing future performance targets. However, it is important not to rely completely on these sources alone as they may underestimate what can be achieved. Staff, in particular, may be fearful of "setting the bar too high" and not being able to meet an ambitious target. It is important both to be realistic in setting performance targets and to introduce a "stretch" factor. Be realistic during the first year, since your efforts will provide data for the next round of targets. But being ambitious has benefits too in terms of making sure that the program strategies are on target and that the participants are receiving a sufficient "dose" of the program.