WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRACKING COMMUNITY OUTCOMES AND EVALUATING THE OUTCOMES OF CHANGE STRATEGIES?

- Community outcomes are conditions that are desired for the whole community — such as on-time graduation for all high school-age youth in a given school district or all residents of a county living in adequate housing at an affordable cost.

- Outcomes of change strategies are the specific changes that are expected to result from the implementation of particular strategies, often in a particular situation or with a particular group

- Change strategies may be targeted at specific groups within the community — for example, at students who are currently behind grade level in middle school or neighborhoods with a high number of absentee landlords who are not maintaining their properties.

- Change strategies may also target organizations or institutions rather than individuals, because these organizations and institutions are in control of resources or opportunities that affect what happens to individuals. For example, change strategies may target school-based management teams to increase the diversity of their membership and the effectiveness of their actions. Or, change strategies may target banks to increase the availability of moderate-interest loans for home improvements or small business start-ups in a particular neighborhood.

- Groups working for change generally want to know about both kinds of outcomes — the conditions of well-being for the whole community that they are ultimately hoping to affect, and the specific results of their activities.

- Gathering information about community outcomes is often called "outcome tracking" and the data are often presented in the form of a community "report card."

- Showing trends and differences between groups in these outcomes can be a powerful way to demonstrate that a problem exists that needs to be addressed.

- It is also a good way to tell whether what is being done is starting to make a difference across a whole community or other group.

  - Measuring the outcomes of specific strategies or activities for specific people, organizations or institutions who are the targets of those strategies is an important part of evaluating change efforts. It is often done to look at whether or not we are on track to making changes for the community as a whole, before those kinds of broad changes could reasonably be seen.

- If you are using a theory of change approach to evaluation, your theory of change should show how you expect changes for particular people, institutions or organizations to lead to changes for the community as a whole.

- Then, if your evaluation shows that your strategies do produce the specific changes for the particular groups you have indicated, you have a basis for concluding that at least some of the conditions for improving community outcomes are in place as a result of your efforts.