
ASPECT: Automated System for Program Evaluation and Client Tracking

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

It has become increasingly apparent in the social services field that we have been in need of some mechanism or system by which to evaluate the results of the services that we have been providing to our disabled clients. Although some of us have kept general data by which to measure our success, many of us, outside of a general "feeling" regarding having done a good, fair, or poor job, just don't really know the real value of our services.

Since we don't know much about how successful we are, it follows that it is difficult to manage our programs in the most efficient manner. Good management depends upon good data in any business, including rehabilitation. In order to improve the quality of our services, identify and develop new services, and to provide services at a cost-effective level, we need good, concise information by which to manage.

The purpose, then, of establishing a program evaluation system for our facilities is to be sure of what services we provide, who we are serving, what we intend to achieve, how successful we are, and what changes we need to make to improve our performances.

Many uses and benefits should come out of the development of the system. Most important is responding to the increasing need, if not demand, for accountability to the general public, those whom we serve, and our referral and funding sources. It should also help the facility to better describe and market its services, with the net result being an enhanced public image and increased community support, referrals, and funding.

USES OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

After its establishment, we can expect the following potential uses of our program evaluation system.

Increased Benefits for Persons Served

The data which we collect will allow us to better select those persons who have both the need for our services and who can benefit from their delivery.

Benefits should increase by encouraging staff to strive for positive results.

The system will allow for specialized studies to be undertaken, resulting in new benefits.

The Addition of New Programs

The data we collect will help us identify new program or service needs and point us toward the direction we should be going. In establishing new programs, we will be minimizing the risks of failure through our ability to structure, plan, and monitor results.

Should we have limited resources to invest, we can establish new programs utilizing zero-based budgeting and sunset strategies to determine, in the short run or by a fixed period, whether the program is showing positive results and whether the success of the program for the extended outlook looks good enough to invest resources necessary for its continuation.

The structure will allow us to replicate highly successful programs developed by others using similar program evaluation systems.

The Containment of Costs

The inclusion of cost and efficiency objectives and measures into our program evaluation system will provide us with essential feedback on what our programs and client benefits are costing. This information will allow us to determine if our costs are acceptable compared to other program providers. These measures will also encourage the minimization of costs, and will allow us to show our referral and funding sources exactly how much our services cost, where the costs are, whether the resources provided by purchasers are sufficient to cover our costs, and to establish any need for subsidized support by the community.

Decisions regarding the continuation, expansion, or termination of programs can most easily and accurately be made with this data available to us. Decisions on whether to provide service directly or to contract for services can also now be made with greater confidence.

As a Useful Marketing Tool

Our programs can now be confidently sold in terms of the actual results that can be achieved.

Being better able to identify our program's ability to provide services to satisfy specific needs and problems, or to serve special populations of disabled clients, will enhance our marketing efforts.

Our system will allow us to identify potential new, successful markets for existing or new programs.

Data gathered from the system would provide information regarding potentially new funding sources.

Relationships with Other Organizations

Accrediting organizations as well as many regular type agencies now require program evaluation. Our system will meet or exceed all existing requirements. Community funding agencies, such as the United Way, who allocate their funds among many "worthy" causes will have good, solid information from you as to the success of your program by which to determine your level of participation.

Your ability to show success with disabled people will be an asset in establishing and maintaining good and mutually beneficial relationships with consumer groups and organizations.

Cooperative endeavors and working contract agreements will be made easier to obtain and continue with the availability to program evaluation data from your system.

Cooperative community projects involving joint planning and maximum use of existing resources will be enhanced by the use of your program evaluation system.

Board Relationships

The written structure and format of your system will help your board members to better understand the facility and its programs.

The information available from your system will allow for much improved policy-making and long-range planning by the board.

The availability of proven statistics regarding the success of your programs, their costs, and the need for additional support will enhance the efforts and success of your board in raising funds for your facility.

Regular management reports of progress will keep the board up-to-date and informed, and make your presentations of how well the facility is doing much easier and more professional.

Once established, the utilization of our program evaluation (P. E.) system, ASPECT, is a matter of commitment on the part of the board, the chief executive officer, and all facility staff. Commitment to utilization must start at the top and filter throughout the organization.

Staff, starting with the chief executive, must be held responsible and accountable for results. Remember, we are here to provide the best possible service to the disabled, as described in our organizational purpose statement. We are not perfect, and our programs are never as good as they "could be", but we must be committed to striving continuously to improve them as well as to develop other programs and services should the need become apparent.

As part of the program evaluation process, as data is compiled showing us the extent to which our programs are effective and efficient, we will need to develop methods, techniques, and plans to improve our performance in the areas where improvement is indicated.

Implementation of a program evaluation system requires commitment from every level within the organization. It is not sufficient that the chief executive officer and staff recognize the need for program evaluation, but the governing body should also go on record as meeting the value of program evaluation and require its implementation.

ASPECT SYSTEM OVERVIEW

The program evaluation system is a menu driven system designed to help simplify and accelerate the speed of client tracking and program evaluation. There are special features that assist the user with data entry and application selection. All options available, including selections from the menu, are single key commands that are described on the screen for easy reference. When entering coded information, a HELP screen is available to facilitate the selection process. Data validation is performed automatically, and appropriate error messages are highlighted at the bottom of the screen. Each character is validated for numeric, alphabetic, and/or special characters as entered. Logical tests are

also performed on the data. For example, descriptor and program codes are edited to see if they correspond to the user-supplied tables.

The Main Menu allows the user to select the client data sheet which contains each client's personal data and two to four programs. The recording, manipulating, and searching of client data is all handled within this function. Another selection allows for the modification of descriptor data. This option permits the creation of descriptors for client data, and identifies agency programs with the objectives and corresponding standards.

The system's reporting capabilities function by aggregating and correlating client data into meaningful reports. The Main Menu offers a selection for report generation. When selected, the user is transferred to the Report Menu where there are five choices. The Descriptor Report generates a printed report using available client data for a particular program during the specific period. Each program objective which has been achieved is tallied by descriptor, giving the percentage of clients with that descriptor. This is performed for all the program objectives for each client descriptor.

The Objective Summary Report evaluates program objectives in the form of a percentage. It computes the percentage of client achievements by objective for the specified period and year-to-date. It also lists the objective standard for comparative analysis. This is performed for each objective in the program.

The Program Status Report gives you a printed look at all of the clients' programs. It identifies certain program related dates, the case manager, and the days in each program.

The Descriptor Cross Tabulation Report enables the user to evaluate clients by descriptor. This report can provide a complete breakdown of the client population.

The final selection from the report menu is not a report, but a database generator. This selection gives the user the ability to generate specialized reports for specific needs. Utilizing this feature increases analysis capabilities, resulting in better control over agency programs. A nice feature of this generator is that the user can select the data for the database. Up to 45 fields (depending on your database program limitations) can be selected. The Database Generator is designed to operate most easily with PC-File III; however, it is compatible with most database systems.

The ASPECT System has been designed with the intention of offering you an efficacious procedure for the tracking of clients through various programs. Its goal is to reduce the time spent in voluminous record keeping, and provide the capability for more rapid and thorough analysis.

SYSTEM HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS

1. IBM-PC/XT/AT WITH MINIMUM 192K OF INTERNAL MEMORY AND 2 DISK DRIVES
2. IBM-AT WITH ANY COMBINATION OF FIXED OR FLOPPY DISKS TOTALING 2 OR MORE DRIVES
3. MOST IBM COMPATIBLE COMPUTERS SUCH AS COMPAQ, TELEVIDIO, CANNON, AT & T, AND OTHERS WITH MINIMUM 192K OF INTERNAL MEMORY AND 2 DISK DRIVES

SYSTEMS SOFTWARE REQUIREMENTS

1. IBM DOS 2.0 OR HIGHER, OR EQUIVALENT
 2. ONE 360K FLOPPY DISK CAN HOLD A MAXIMUM OF 280 CLIENTS.
 3. A 10 MEG. HARD DISK CAN HOLD A MAXIMUM OF 7,730 CLIENTS.
- * A HARD DISK WILL PROVIDE FOR GREATER CAPACITY AND SPEED TO ACCOMMODATE A LARGER CLIENT DATA FILE ON A CONTINUOUS VOLUME.

SYSTEM PRINTER REQUIREMENTS

1. ALMOST ANY LETTER-QUALITY, DOT MATRIX, OR THERMAL PRINTER WILL FUNCTION ON THIS SYSTEM.

SYSTEM CAPABILITIES AND COMPONENTS

This is the first screen that will be seen upon entering ASPECT. The selection of the Client Data Sheet, Descriptors Create/Modify, Report Generation, or Terminate System are accessible in this menu.

DESCRIPTOR: CREATE/MODIFY MODULE

Sixteen descriptor categories are provided for clients' personal description. This screen permits the identification of descriptor categories. Up to 14 individual descriptors for each category may be specified. The adding, changing, or deleting of descriptors is handled within this module. This function would normally be used when the system is first installed.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES: CREATE/MODIFY MODULE

There are sixteen possible programs that a client could participate in. The naming of each program and all corresponding objectives are specified here. Up to 14 objectives for each program may be specified. The adding, changing, or deleting of objectives is handled within this module.

PROGRAM STANDARDS: CREATE/MODIFY MODULE

After the program names and program objectives have been specified, the program standards may be entered. For each program, the objectives will be listed with their corresponding standard. At this point, the standard for a particular objective may be changed or deleted.

AGENCY SCREEN

Every agency that purchases this system will have their agency name printed on this screen. It serves the purchaser as identification, and will appear on all reports.

CLIENT DATA SHEET

The client data sheet is an input screen that allows the entry of the client name, complete address, referring agency and counselor, personal information as related to the descriptors, and programs that that client is participating in. While using this screen, all personal data may be updated. There are a number of functions which can be performed while using this screen. A user can search for a client record, delete an existing client, use the help screen for the descriptors and program selection, transfer to a program sheet if the client has an existing program, and return to the agency screen or main menu.

PROGRAM DATA SHEET

The program data sheet is an input screen for the individual programs. Each client can have up to four program sheets. a program must be defined on the client data sheet before gaining access to the program sheet. In this screen, a user enters data relative to tracking a client through a program including the selection of appropriate objective for the client.

REPORT GENERATION MENU

This is the first screen in the report section of ASPECT. The user may select from Database Generator, Descriptor Report, Objective Summary Report, Program Status Report, Descriptor Cross Tabulation Report, or return to Main Menu.

DATABASE FILE SELECTION

The Database Screen divides a client's records into two selections. They are client data and program data including data related to all programs. The client data section allows selection of any data from the Client Data Sheet. Program data and related data sections allow selection for any program, its objectives and standards, and the dates related to the programs selected. There are 21 fields pre-selected as defaults, but the user is free to make any selection up to 45 fields.

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