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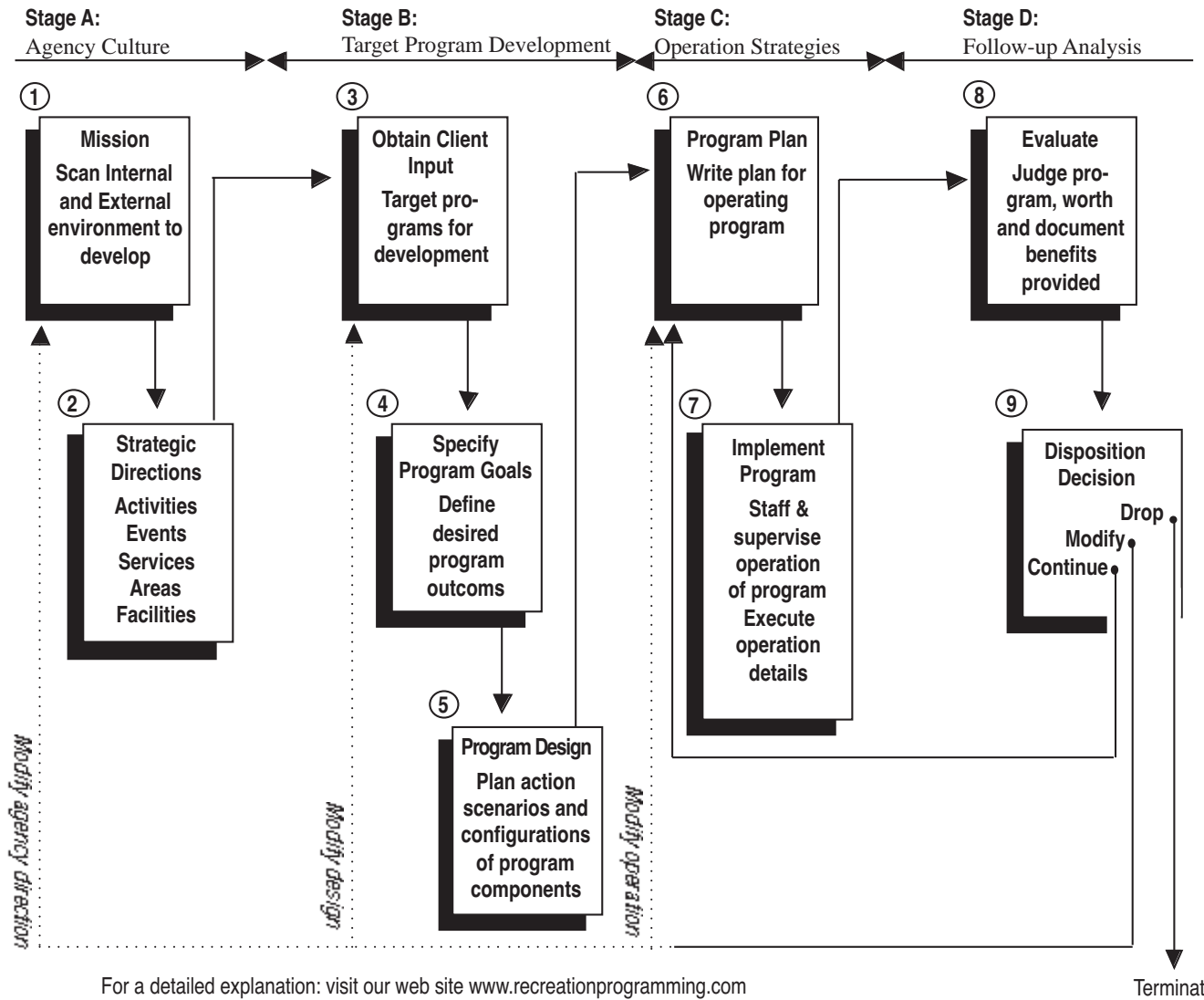
## The Program Development Cycle

Programs are developed in a methodical and cyclical manner. A conceptualization of the steps included in program development and the order in which they occur are included in the book on page 72, the Program Development Cycle. The cycle includes four major stages and nine specific steps. In this chapter, the overall concept of the Program Development Cycle and the function of each step will be briefly explained. The methods and techniques used in each step are developed further throughout the chapters of the book.

Before explaining the cycle, however, we need to comment on the actual nature of program development. Although the diagrammatic representation of the cycle gives the illusion that planning a program is a linear, sequential process, in reality it is an iterative, interactive process requiring continued recycling of these steps until an operational program plan is completed.

Programs are developed through trial and error methods of implementation that continue until a suitable program design is developed. A perfect program is not planned and then implemented. The notion that perfect planning must occur before implementing a program is a myth that is perpetuated in the literature. Peters and Waterman (1982) clearly point out that one of the distinguishing characteristics of successful organizations in America today is that they act on their environment. Successful organizations do not allow new ideas to be "planned" into oblivion. They act on an idea as soon as possible, evaluate their actions, rework the idea, and implement it again. Operating in this manner allows organizations to have a number of experiments under way at all times. Successful ideas are nurtured and developed further. Unsuccessful ideas are dropped. Successful organizations, then, have a number of ongoing experiments at any one time to observe and possibly nurture and expand. Successful products and programs are the result of ongoing, incremental expansion and improvement over a period of time.

In programming, this same principle needs to be followed. The Program Development Cycle provides a path to follow, and it contains a number of recycling loops that illustrate the need to retrace certain steps in the ongoing development of a program. Because of the way this illustration is drawn, it appears that following the recycling loops is done only because of a failure to implement the system properly in the first place. This is not the case! It is very likely that a successful program will have been through several iterations of the



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**Figure 5-1**  
**The Program Development Cycle**  
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cycle during its development. Having to rework a program through several trial and error operations of the program is the normal course for program development—not an indication of failure.

## **The Four Major Stages**

There are four major stages in the program development cycle. In each stage, the major goal to be accomplished makes a unique contribution to the final program that will be developed.

### **Stage A: Agency Culture**

In Stage A, agency culture, the programmer develops an understanding of the agency's mission and the strategic goals of the agency. These goals provide a general direction for program development and specify the area of programming that an agency will develop. Most often the document that outlines this direction is the agency's mission statement or vision statement, accompanied by a three to five year strategic plan for implementing the agency's mission. A programmer often cannot have any short-term influence over the direction outlined by the mission statement because it is a policy-level decision that the programmer is not in a position to influence or because the time frame covered by the document is longer than the more short-range task of program development.

This stage is relatively static because of the stability of an agency's mission and strategic direction. It is usually unnecessary to complete the work outlined in this stage for each program developed. Programmers must make certain, however, to demonstrate that the programs they are developing are included within the activities defined by the mission and that their programs contribute to implementing the agency's strategic plan.

### **Stage B: Target Program Development**

In Stage B, target program development, the programmer begins focusing on the unique programming needs of specifically targeted client groups. In this stage, the programmer combines the data obtained from client input with the resource limits of the agency and its mission and strategic goals. The programmer then designs and develops programs for specific groups of clients that the agency has indicated it wishes to serve. It is in this stage that programs are designed for specific groups of people who can be identified and described with some precision. Programs are designed to create programmed leisure experiences that will meet client needs within the framework of the agency's policy,

resource limits, and mission. To accomplish this requires an understanding of the experience one is trying to create and an understanding of how to organize and coordinate the efforts of a work group to produce leisure services.

### Stage C: Operation Strategies

In Stage C, operation strategies, a written program plan that is a “blueprint for operation” is developed, and the program is implemented. Patrons actually engage the environment created by the programmer and interact with the environment—patrons experience the program. During operation of a program, the programmer oversees the implementation of all details, including program promotion, registering participants, staffing, supervising operations, and perhaps engaging in face-to-face interactions with clients. Patrons who participate in a properly implemented, programmed experience will have the experience envisioned and intended by the programmer during the design phase of program development.

### Stage D: Follow-up Analysis

In Stage D, follow-up analysis, the program is evaluated and a disposition decision made on the basis of evaluation data about what management action to take with the program. The worth of a program should be determined from many perspectives. With these evaluation data, a decision about whether to continue, drop, or modify a program is made. Evaluation data need to be sufficiently detailed and comprehensive so that appropriate program modifications can be made if warranted. In this book, emphasis is placed on using evaluation data that have been systematically collected from many sources so that disposition decisions can be made from a broad-based analysis of the evidence.

## Stage A

### Step 1: Mission

In step one, the programmer either learns the agency’s mission or helps develop it. Each recreation organization delivers a different type of service. Differences in these services are partly accounted for by different missions and philosophies of various organizations. For example, the Girl Scouts deliver different services than the Y.M.C.A. The Y.M.C.A. delivers different services than municipal recreation agencies. Municipal recreation agencies deliver different services than church recreation agencies. Church recreation agencies deliver different services than commercial recreation agencies. And so on.

An agency's programming philosophy is formally articulated in the mission statement and is the result of several years of development. According to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), a mission statement most often reflects an agency's formal declaration of its intended clientele in order to seek the resources it needs to function and ensure its survival. An agency's mission is developed through an analysis of both the internal and external environments of the agency. Accomplishing this requires completing an organizational and community needs assessment. The mission of the agency is developed from the joint implications of the needs of the community in which it is located; the identified needs of patrons, and the needs, resources, and abilities of the organization itself.

### Step 2: Strategic Directions

In step two, general planning directions for the development of program services are outlined. The long-range philosophy or mission of the agency is further defined with the development of strategy goals and objectives. These goals and objectives delineate in a hierarchical, systematic manner what the agency intends to accomplish. Usually these are developed with three- to five-year goal statements that are defined further with one-year management by objective statements.

It is important to recognize that a programmer will often be responding with one-year objectives to three- or five-year goals that have been developed by higher level administrators or by a board. The policy-making body of an organization will establish the agency's mission statement. Staff members, however, are often responsible for developing strategic directions for implementing program services that will fulfill the agency's mission. Upper-level administrators usually develop the three- to five-year planning goals and then ask lower-level staff members to develop specific one-year programming goals to implement the longer-range goals. The programmer, then, is often responding to a three- to five-year goal with a recommendation about annual program services that will be developed to implement the agency's strategic plan.

## Stage B

### Step 3: Obtain Client Input

In this, the programmer tries to identify program services, benefit packages, and program features that cohorts of targeted clients may want. The goal in this step is to obtain client input so that program services can be developed to meet identified client desires. Several techniques for accomplishing this are discussed including needs assessment. According to Carpenter and Howe

(1985), needs assessment is defined as “a process of identifying and discovering constituents’ leisure needs, attitudes, values, and behaviors, as well as areas in which clarification, improvement, or reinforcement of leisure functioning is desired” (p. 78).

Needs assessment is a misunderstood step of the program development cycle. The objective in this step is to systematically assess the needs and desires of the organization’s client groups so that one can prioritize the allocation of limited resources among competing interests. Too often, programmers simply look at needs assessment as a process that is supposed to identify for them a completed program they can implement. This is hardly ever the case. Needs assessment provides partial information about clients, their needs, possible service for implementation, available resources, and other types of information. The information developed in a needs assessment must be analyzed and interpreted by a well-trained programmer before recommendations for program services can be made from the data collected. Collecting client information with a marketing philosophy is also covered in this step. These data usually focus on client desires for specific program services as well as specific features about program delivery that clients want. The ultimate goal of collecting marketing data is to match an identifiable cohort of clients with a service that has the features they desire.

Interpreting data and developing program recommendations from them are unique abilities of the leisure service profession. Accomplishing this task requires an understanding of leisure behavior and the factors that contribute to and constrain the occurrence of the leisure experience. Too much of the literature about assessing data assumes that the problem is that programmers are not collecting the data properly. The recommended solution is better training in the techniques of collecting social science data. What is needed, however, is better training of programmers in understanding leisure behavior and how leisure experiences are construed by the individuals in them. This understanding will provide a better framework for interpreting the data. Once programmers understand how to move from data to program design, improving data collection will improve the whole process. But until there is a better understanding of how to use data in the programming process, focusing on acquiring better data is of marginal value. In this step, then, the programmer attempts to systematically collect information about clients that will be useful in developing and revising program services so that agency resources can be allocated to serving identified client wants.

#### **Step 4: Specify Program Goals**

Once data are collected and analyzed, it should be possible to begin identifying some specific programmatic goals that the data have implied. These goals will be partial descriptors of the program to be developed. For example,

from the data collected one may be able to indicate that there is a need for a program in a specific geographical area of a community, for specific age groups, during a certain time period, with specific outcomes from participation. On a military base, for instance, one may discover a need for a program off base, for servicemen under 21, on weekend evenings, that will offer the opportunity for socialization with members of the opposite sex.

A key point here is that in this step one begins to integrate client data with the two previous steps, which have already provided some direction regarding program development. Those steps gave some normative policy direction about what programs the agency will develop. Data from clients represents the first instance in the cycle where the needs of individual clients enter the program development cycle. In step four, the implications of these two are integrated, and a data-based description of a needed service consistent with the agency's mission is developed.

### Step 5: Program Design

The purpose of program design is to conceptualize and plan the action scenarios and configurations of program components needed to operate a program. Program design is the major transitional step between needs assessment and operation. During this step, programmers develop leisure experiences for patrons by vicariously experiencing the program before it occurs through projective imagery and other design techniques. During the design process, programs are designed that are within the limits determined by the agency's mission statement, that meet identified client needs determined during step three, and that are feasible with agency resource limits and operationally possible for the agency in the community where it is located. In the program design phase, client data are interpreted and analyzed in a manner that results in the design of an actual program.

## Stage C

### Step 6: Program Plan

In step six, the programmer prepares a written plan that details all of the arrangements and scenarios needed to actually operate the experience conceptualized in step five. The program plan is similar to a musical score for an orchestra or a blueprint for a building. The musical score communicates to each musician his or her role in performing the piece written by the composer. A blueprint coordinates the activities of many different tradespeople so that their collective efforts result in the building intended by the architect. Similarly, a program plan communicates the program concept to all who will be involved in

the program's operation and what each person must accomplish so that participants can have the experience intended by the designer. The written program plan is also used to guide future operations of the program.

### **Step 7: Implementation**

In step seven, the program is actually implemented and operated. There is much to be attended to in this step, including obtaining and arranging the physical space for the program, promoting the program, registering patrons, staffing the program, supervising the operation, and other matters. This step occupies the majority of the programmer's time. A myriad of details must be attended to in operating a large number of programs simultaneously. In reality, the programmer usually has a number of programs in various stages of operation going on at the same time. Pressured by implementation details, many programmers focus too heavily on the importance of implementation and often cite inadequate implementation as the primary cause of a failed program. Too many programmers are overwhelmed by the need to attend to all of the implementation details of program operation. As a result, they overlook or circumvent the other steps of the Program Development Cycle. This often leads to unsuccessful programs.

All that is involved in this step is detailed in subsequent chapters. For now it is sufficient to indicate that at this point patrons actually come into the program, interact in the social occasion designed by the programmer, and have an experience—hopefully a leisure experience.

## **Stage D**

### **Step 8: Evaluation**

In step eight, a post-program evaluation is conducted. Evaluation is a procedure designed to help judge the worth of program services. It is an elastic concept that covers many different activities. There are several ways of conducting evaluations, and an agency will have different evaluation activities occurring simultaneously. The emphasis in this text will be on developing evaluations that provide value judgments from multiple value perspectives. Conducting systematic program evaluation assures ongoing managerial review and action of all program services.

### **Step 9: Disposition Decision**

In step nine, the evaluation data developed in step eight are used to make one of three decisions about the future of a program. The programmer will select

one of three alternatives: to continue the program without modification, to continue it with modifications, or to end it. Each of these decisions leads the programmer to different recycling locations of the program development cycle. When programmers end a program, as the arrow in the Program Development Cycle illustrates, they leave the Program Development Cycle. However, it is always necessary to predict the implications of program termination before actually ending a service.

The decision to modify a program includes more choices than the other two decisions. As illustrated in the Program Development Cycle, a program may be modified in several different ways. The solid line for the decision to modify leads to the implementation step. This is often the problem area and one that should be investigated first. However, it is also likely that a program has failed because of small omissions and failures at each step of the cycle. Inadequate interpretation of client input and/or inappropriate design are also possible causes of program failure. It is even possible that one has developed a program that does not fit in with the agency's mission or strategic plan outlined in steps one and two. Thus, it is wise to retrace decisions made at each step. As discussed in the beginning of this description, a program will often need to be modified several times before a totally suitable operational procedure is developed.

In deciding to continue a program as currently operated, the programmer recycles to step six—the program plan. In this instance, a written plan is ready for implementation at the next operation of the program. Now complete the exercise Program Development Cycle below.

### **Exercise**

#### **Program Development Assumptions**

**In class, discuss the difference between assuming that programs are planned perfectly before implementation and assuming that they are developed incrementally over time through many iterations of operation.**

- **What differences are implied by each of these assumptions for programmers?**
- **How must programmers operate under each of these assumptions?**

### **Conclusion**

The Program Development Cycle illustrates all of the steps necessary for designing and implementing a program. Although there seems to be a large number of steps in the cycle, one does not actually complete all of them during the development of each program. For example, steps one and two involving

agency culture are not completed for each program developed. The implications of these two steps are incorporated in each program, but the tasks included in these steps are implemented infrequently. An in-depth, systematic collection of client input data may occur only annually or every two to three years. However, the implications of these data are incorporated into all programs developed after the data have been collected. Programmers tend to focus too much on implementation details without giving sufficient attention to the other steps of the program development cycle. Program implementation is important, but it is equally important to develop program goals from client's expanded desires data, to design programs before writing a program plan, to prepare a written program plan, to properly implement a program, to evaluate the program, and to make a data-based disposition decision regarding the status of the program service.

### References, Chapter Five

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