

## Overview of the Program Development Cycle

Over two-thirds of your text is dedicated to explaining how to implement the steps in the copyrighted Program Development Cycle. Some instructors will introduce the steps to the overall cycle and then proceed through the book as they choose introducing a variety of techniques for implementing each step. Other will assign you to read this overview as a mean for introducing the cycle. As you read this chapter, remember there is much more detail in the text about how to actually implement each step.

In 1985 Carpenter and Howe introduced the notion that there is a cycle to developing successful programs. This notion of a cycle has been developed by other authors including Farrell and Lundegren (1991), Rossman (1989), and others. During the development of a cycle for programming, the number of steps increased. We believe the Program Development Cycle included in your text cumulates the work in this area. A diagram of the steps included in program development and the order they occur are included in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the book on pages 98 and 99—the Program Development Cycle (a smaller version is included below). The cycle includes four major stages and nine specific steps.

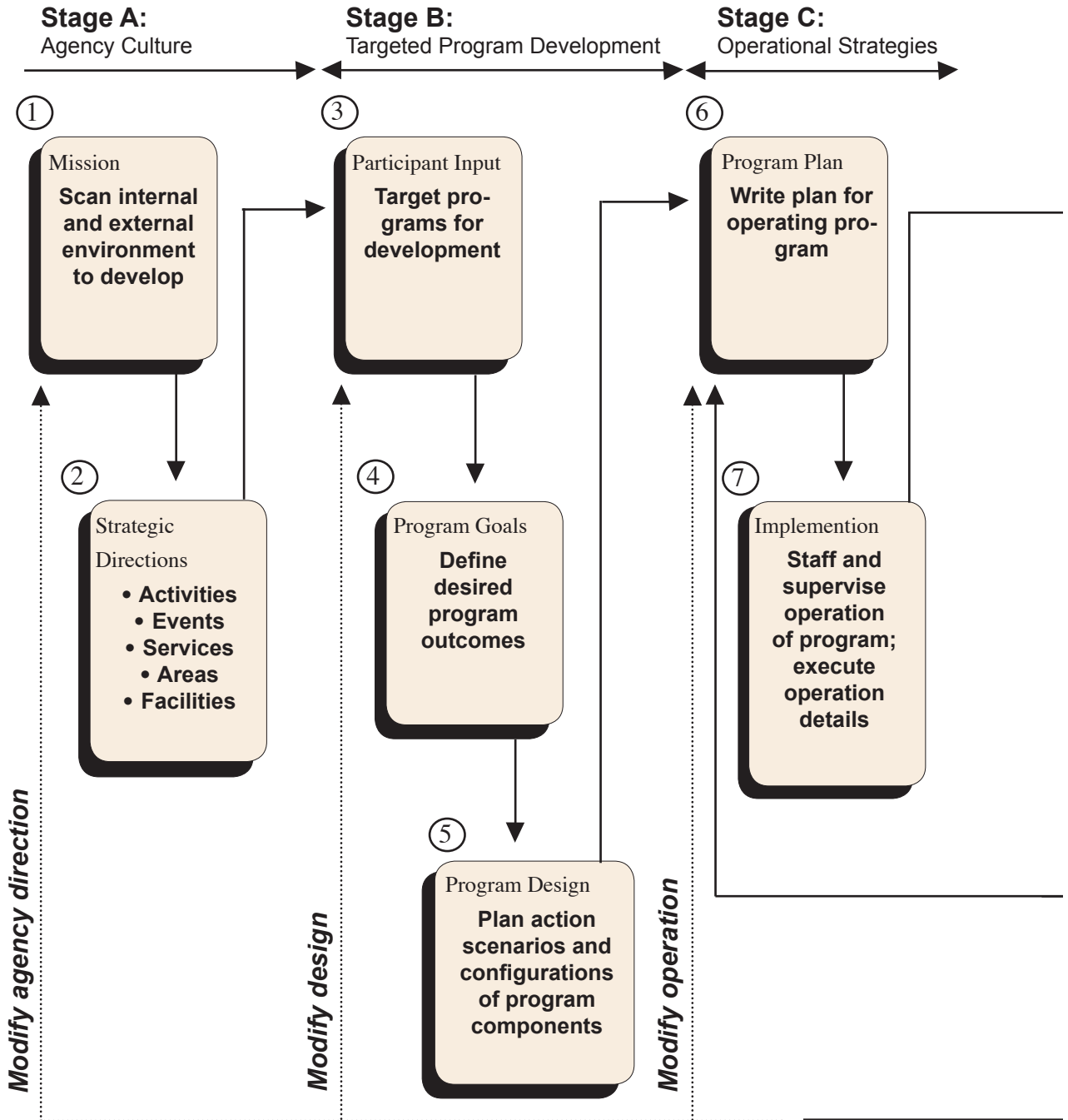
Before explaining the cycle, we want to comment on the actual nature of program development. Although the diagrammatic representation of the cycle gives the illusion that planning a program is a linear, sequential process, in reality it is an iterative, interactive process requiring continued recycling 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. It is unusual for a perfect program to be planned and 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 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, organizations have a number of experiments under way at all times. Successful ideas are nurtured and developed further. Unsuccessful ideas are dropped. Successful 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 is a model for action that guides professional practice. It provides a path to follow, and it contains a

# The Program Development Cycle

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**Stage D:**  
Follow-Up Analysis

⑧

Evaluation  
**Judge program worth and document benefits provided**

⑨

Disposition Decision  
**Drop**  
**Modify**  
**Continue**

Terminate

**Stage A: Agency Culture**

In this stage, the programmer develops an understanding of the agency's programming philosophy and the overall programmatic goals of the agency. This stage is relatively static because of the stability of an agency's mission and direction. Programmers usually do not write agency missions but must understand them so the program services developed help fulfill the mission.

**Stage B: Targeted Program Development**

In this stage, the unique program needs and desires of specific population groups are identified, program outcome goals that are consistent with the agency's mission are specified, and a program that can meet these goals is designed. Programs developed should be desired by participants, should be within the resource capabilities of the agency, and should fulfill its mission.

**Stage C: Operational Strategies**

In this stage, an implementation plan is developed and the program is delivered to clients. The programmer oversees and manages the details for operating the program. Managing the implementation of program services includes many functions and is the most time consuming stage of programming.

**Stage D: Follow-Up Analysis**

In this stage, the programmer oversees the evaluation of the program. With this evaluation data, a disposition decision is made about the future of the program. It may be continued, dropped, or modified. Deciding to modify a program may require reworking its implementation method or its conceptualization and design, or rethinking the overall mission or goals of an agency.

Overall, although the model suggests that programs are developed in a methodical and systematic way, in reality it is an iterative, interactive process requiring continued recycling of the steps until an operational program is developed. Most often, successful programs are the result of ongoing, incremental expansion and improvement over a period of time.

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 always the case! It is very likely that a successful program will have been through several iterations of the 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.

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## **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.

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

In Stage A, Agency Culture, the programmer develops an understanding of the agency's mission and helps develop the strategic programming 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.

In the short-range (3-5 years), 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. However, programmers must make certain 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: Targeted Program Development**

In Stage B, Targeted Program Development, the programmer begins focusing on the unique programming needs of specifically

targeted participant groups. In this stage, the programmer reconciles program demand determined from participant input with the resource limits of the agency, its mission, and strategic goals. The programmer then designs and develops programs for specific groups of participants 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 participant 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 stage leisure experiences.

### **Stage C: Operational Strategies**

In Stage C, Operational Strategies, a written program plan that is a "script for operation" is developed, and the program is staged. Patrons actually engage and interact with the environment created—patrons experience the program. During the operation of a program, the programmer oversees the implementation of all details, including program promotion, registering participants, staffing, and staging the program including supervising operations and perhaps engaging in face-to-face interactions with participants. Patrons who participate in a properly staged program 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 that has been collected. The worth of a program should be determined from multiple perspectives. With these evaluation data, a decision should be made about which of three management options to take—to continue, drop, or modify a program. 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 disposition decisions can be made from a broad-based analysis of the evidence.

An overview of what is to be accomplished in each step is provided in this next section.

## **Stage A: Agency Culture**

### **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 a 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.

Developing an agency's mission is an activity that is usually performed by the executive staff of an agency in collaboration with a policy making board. Although programmers may have input into this activity, they are not usually responsible for developing or writing a mission statement. They must, however, be very familiar with an agency's mission as they need to develop programs to fulfill it.

### **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 usually tied to budget development.

An example of a strategic direction would be the declaration of an agency to develop services that create environmental awareness; or to implement additional athletic and fitness services for girls and

women. Strategic directions outline new or additional programming directions the agency will pursue.

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 program services that will be developed to implement the agency's strategic plan in a specific budget year.

## **Stage B: Targeted Program Development**

### **Step 3: Obtain Participant Input**

In this step, the programmer tries to identify program services, benefit packages, and program features that cohorts of targeted participants may want. The goal in this step is to obtain participant input so that program services can be developed to meet identified participant 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 participant groups so 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 participants, their needs, services that might be implemented, available resources, and other types of incomplete information—not complete programs.

The information developed through 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 participant information with marketing techniques is also covered in this step. These data usually focus on participant desires for specific program services as well as specific features about program delivery that participants want. The ultimate

goal of collecting marketing data is to match an identifiable cohort of participants 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 participants that will be useful in developing and revising program services so that agency resources can be allocated to serving identified participant wants.

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

Once data are collected and analyzed, it should be possible to begin identifying some specific programmatic goals implied by the data. These goals may be partial descriptors of the program to be developed. For example, from the data collected one may be able to determine 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.

The goals developed could be very definitive as in the case of outcome based programming (OBP) wherein the programmer identifies specific behavioral outcomes to be achieved by a program. The definitive outcomes could come from agency policy, outcomes desired by program sponsors, or the articulated desires of the participants.

A key point here is that in this step one begins to integrate participant 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 participants represents the first instance in the cycle where the needs of individuals 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 stage a program. Program design is the major transitional step between needs assessment and staging experiences. During this step, programmers develop leisure experiences for patrons by vicariously experiencing the program before it occurs through projective imagery and other design techniques. Creativity techniques are used during this step to try any push

During the design process, programs are designed to be within the limits determined by the agency's mission statement, that meet identified participant 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, participant data are interpreted and analyzed in a manner that results in the design of an actual program.

## **Stage C: Operational Strategies**

### **Step 6: Program Plan**

In step six, the programmer prepares a written plan that details all of the arrangements and scenarios needed to stage the experience conceptualized in step five. The program plan is similar to a script for a play or a blueprint for a building. The script communicates to each actor and the director his or her role in performing the play written by the playwright. A blueprint coordinates the activities of many different trades-people so 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 staging the program specifying what each person must accomplish so participants 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 staged. 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 other steps in 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: Follow-up Analysis**

### **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 possible decisions about the future of a program; 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 in 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. For example, misinterpretation of participant input and inappropriate design are 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 article, a program will often be modified several times throughout its implementation history before a totally suitable operational procedure is developed.

When 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. If directed so by your instructor, complete the exercise below in class. If not, contemplate its challenges yourself.

### **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, the steps included in Stage A, 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.

Similarly, an in-depth, systematic collection of participant 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 participant'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.

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