

SMARTER objectives checklist

Use the checklist in the table below to make sure you are setting measurable objectives – or in Professor Stephen Olsen’s terminology*, outcomes.

Qualitative indicators are also fine, and you will find ways to measure the important ones.

As Albert Einstein said, ‘Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted’.

Don't get hung up on measuring everything. You will find it easier and more informative to monitor a small number of robust outcomes than a large number of vague ones.

Specific	<input type="checkbox"/> outcomes are precisely defined and may or may not include methods <input type="checkbox"/> key responsibilities for action are stated clearly in positive terms <input type="checkbox"/> objectives are stated in concrete terms that define states/outcomes, not actions – an objective with a verb in it is not likely to be a good one
Measurable	<input type="checkbox"/> achievement of the objective/outcome can be unambiguously measured <input type="checkbox"/> indicator/s of achievement relate to issues, outcomes and methods <input type="checkbox"/> indicators may be qualitative or quantitative (numeric or descriptive) and may include cost
Affordable	<input type="checkbox"/> able to be done with the budget available to both internal and external parties in the required timeframes
Realistic	<input type="checkbox"/> appropriately limited in scope (sensible and defensible things to do) <input type="checkbox"/> achievable in the time, at the cost and with the resources available
Time-bound	<input type="checkbox"/> set an agreed time/deadline for completion <input type="checkbox"/> may include interim targets and/or milestone dates towards completion
Endorsed	<input type="checkbox"/> internal and external parties involved in identifying and managing the issue, signing off on relevant authorisations and helping to meet the objective agree to their respective roles
Relevant	<input type="checkbox"/> your policy and/or business case shows the outcome is within the duties and powers of those responsible for action <input type="checkbox"/> the outcome/s clearly relates to the issues you've identified <input type="checkbox"/> the actions or methods are logically related to the outcome/s

Tip: think about:

- what how why who when where multiple bottom lines#
- first-order outcomes second-order outcomes third-order outcomes
- indicator selection and integrated monitoring between national, regional and local level to meet the requirements of your major pieces of legislation.

* Stephen Olsen’s orders of outcomes are described in UNEP/GPA, 2006, *Ecosystem-based management: markers for assessing progress*, available at <http://bit.ly/owQM9M> or http://www.unep.org/publications/search/pub_details_s.asp?ID=3930.

The triple bottom line addresses social, environmental and economic aspects of sustainable development. The quadruple bottom line adds cultural values in addition to these. Such values are increasingly being talked about in terms of natural capital, along with five or more other capitals, including financial, manufactured, intellectual, human, social and relationship capital.

The earliest use of the ‘SMART’ acronym for objectives seems to have first been outlined by Peter Drucker in his 1954 book ‘Management by objectives’. I’ve adapted the final terms ‘E’ and ‘R’ from different expanded versions I’ve seen over the years, though alas the sources are lost in the mists of time....



Clare Feeney is a sustainability strategist who helps organisations of all types grow their sustainability capability. She can help you grow jobs, increase profits and improve the environment – and have fun along the way! You can find out more at www.clarefeeney.com and contact her at clare@clarefeeney.com.