

10 TIPS FOR DESIGNING EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS



1. **Have a plan.** Before you start designing a program, take time to craft a detailed plan. This will help ensure that deadlines aren't missed, budgets are adhered to, and resources are appropriately allocated.
2. **Complete a needs analysis.** The most effective programs meet a clearly identified need; therefore, an essential step for program designers is to examine those needs. Even if a program is developed in response to a need identified by a third party, as in the case of reply to a Request for Proposal (RFP), it is still important to conduct a needs analysis to ensure fit between a proposal and the community's actual needs.
3. **Conduct research.** The scope and depth of your research may vary widely depending on your needs; however, at minimum, preliminary research (e.g., a brief literature review or environmental scan) is advisable. More in-depth research might include formal surveys, focus groups, or interviews of stakeholders (e.g., potential students, employers, funders, and community leaders) and should occur early on in the process.
4. **Make a "business case."** After gathering data, this information needs to be organized in such a manner that it presents a clear and reasonable rationale for the program. The format of this will vary according to who needs to be "sold" on the program idea (i.e., funder, community organization, educational institution, or executive team).
5. **Identify outcomes/objectives.** A well-crafted program description clearly identifies what participants and stakeholders will gain from the program. In reality, the business case and the program objectives should be interconnected. Don't promise outcomes that can't (or won't) be delivered. Consider indicators of program "success;" identify the evaluation criteria from the outset and clearly link learning objectives with program activities.
6. **Develop a detailed program outline.** Spell out logistics such as timelines and resource requirements. For a short program (e.g., seminar/workshop), a simple agenda and brief list of resources, materials, and equipment may be sufficient. For longer programs, the outline might include a course schedule broken down into monthly, weekly, and daily sections with an appropriate level of detail for each. Sometimes outlines will also specify names of instructors, room requirements, reference materials, and pre-reading expectations/activities.
7. **Specify a budget.** Good budgets will break down anticipated income and expenses by category and also provide a cash flow timeline to ensure that expenses will not exceed available funds at any point in the program. The level of detail will vary according to who will be reviewing/administering the program.
8. **Identify sources of funding.** Some programs may be continuously and fully funded for a specified number of years with the option of renewing at the end of the term. Others may have received seed money to aide to design and development, but not funding for implementation. In such cases, it may be necessary to raise ongoing income through fees for service, fundraising, donors, or grants.
9. **Evaluate outcomes.** Evaluation will be most beneficial if it occurs throughout the program – providing both formative and summative feedback. At any stage of the program, an evaluation or audit can determine successful accomplishments and, also, areas that need to be improved.
10. **Update and revise.** Based on your evaluation data, reflect on what worked and what didn't. This process encourages accountability and ensures a spirit of continuous improvements to the program.



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