

A Sample Descriptor Scale

Descriptor scales consist of a set of perhaps five increasingly positive descriptions of an observable situation or behaviour. Each description provides a discrete, objective and observable view of the situation in a community against a specific aspect or outcome. The descriptions move from a worst case to best case situation in perhaps up to five steps, to allow progress to be assessed over time. Ideally a baseline assessment is made to decide the best description of the situation at the start of a project which is updated/ revisited at the mid point and at the end of the programme to establish distance travelled in relation to project outcomes. The assessment might be made by the project leader or by participants and could be independently verified by an external evaluator.

Descriptor scales are a handy way to capture subtle changes in behavior that you can observe, and which can help show your work is making a difference. For the objective of encouraging interaction between younger and older people, for example, look at the scale below. It describes a gradual improvement in the level of interaction that is being achieved by this area of work over the course of the project.

Young people and older people do not mix at all	Young people and older people both attend training or gardening sessions but do not mix	Young people are willing to work with older people if paired up during formal training or gardening sessions	One or two young people and older people are seen working together outside of formal sessions	Young people and older people are frequently seen working together in the garden or in managing produce
0	1	2	3	4

You can make observations periodically or after key events. That way you can begin to see which of the ideas you try out under this area of work make the biggest difference.

For example, you might have run two or three sessions but young people and older people are still pretty much keeping themselves to themselves. So you put on a Barbeque using produce from the garden and maybe a storytelling session and music as well – the barriers are broken and thereafter you see much more interaction – make a note to do that again next time, or to tell others!