

CAUSES OR CONSEQUENCES

As discussed in the Root Cause Analysis exercise, understanding the often invisible sources of some of our communities' most persistent problems takes learning about why and how things work. It is important to look at the daily activities of your organization and examine when they address the causes of our community problems, and when they deal with the consequences of those problems. Both are important. Without the essential daily services that agencies provide, most people could not even begin to explore the source of the inequities they face.

This tool helps board, staff, and/or volunteers assess where their work is having an impact. It is important to note that not everyone will agree on the root causes of community problems. However, a critical awareness of the larger forces that affect the community and its residents can prompt those participating in this exercise to understand, acknowledge and speak about the conditions and systems in your community and our society that keep people from reaching their fullest potential. This in turn can inform participants' assessment of the impact of their work and the work of the agency as a whole.

PURPOSE OF THIS EXERCISE:

This exercise helps service providers and other stakeholders explore how the organization's activities impact community problems, and whether the daily work addresses symptoms of problems or addresses their source.

HOPED-FOR OUTCOMES:

- Explore the extent to which the organization's activities address community problems and the extent to which they address the root causes of these problems.
- Develop a shared analysis by connecting the work of your agency to both community problems and systemic issues.

SAMPLE AGENDA FOR A GROUP EXERCISE

Introduction (10 min)

- Explain that the goal of this exercise is to explore the extent to which your organization's activities address the consequences of community problems and the extent to which they address the root causes of these problems.
- Make sure that everyone understands what the term "root cause" means. Ask for volunteers in the group to offer a definition or, if all participants are unfamiliar with the concept, refer to the definition offered in the box.

Daily Organizational Activities (15 min)

Note: Hand out copies of your organization's program summary or strategic plan (if one is available), as well as a copy of the attached worksheet, as part of this exercise. Use these as an outline for detailing the agency's day-to-day activities in carrying out its mission.

- (5 min) On the attached worksheet, have participants fill out daily activities that staff (and volunteers) do to fulfill the organization's mission, as well as any other activities that seem relevant.
- (10 min) Ask participants to share some of their answers with the group. Record on flipchart or whiteboard.

Worksheet Pairs (10 min)

- Ask participants to break into pairs and answer these questions together on their worksheets. (it's helpful to have them written down on flipchart or a whiteboard):
 - To what degree do these address the **consequences** of community problems?
 - To what degree do these activities address the **causes** of the problem?

Group Discussion (20 min)

- Bring the group back together and ask them to share and discuss some of their answers. Record the responses on a flipchart or whiteboard. You may prompt deeper discussion by asking some of the following questions:
 - What are the key services we provide each day, and why are they important?
 - What are some activities that begin to address root cause, and why are they important?
 - In what ways do our service activities support social change? Is there anything we could do to enhance that?

Note: The facilitator should emphasize the importance of the agency's work, whether it addresses root causes or consequences (or both); staff and other stakeholders must not be left with the impression that their work is unimportant. Rather, this exercise is meant to get participants thinking about the ways the organization contributes to addressing the root causes of problems along with responding to the consequences of these problems.

Closing and Evaluation (5 min)

- Ask people to share:
 1. Something they learned, or a moment in the discussion that surprised them.
 2. One thing they liked and one thing they would change about the conversation.
- Close the discussion and thank people for their participation.

DEFINITION OF ROOT CAUSE

Root causes are the underlying factors that create community problems, and make those problems likely to persist even though services may be in place to help individuals and families meet their immediate needs. The concept comes out of science and it refers to problems that keep occurring because we don't get to the "root" or real cause.

CAUSES OR CONSEQUENCES

Worksheet

WRITE YOUR MISSION STATEMENT:

LIST YOUR DAILY ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES: (one per box)	LIST SOME OF THE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS THAT ACTIVITY ADDRESSES	LIST ANY ROOT CAUSES THIS ACTIVITY ADDRESSES

