



Because the World is Counting on Us.

**ASSESSMENT:
IS THIS NEW
PROGRAM A
GOOD IDEA?**

**You may only answer each question with a YES or a NO.
Two words that may not appear in any of your answers: MAYBE or IF.**

Spend some time on this. You can go through it once quickly but it is intended to generate a great deal of good thought. To be honest, far too many new programs are launched with very little consideration for the vast implications. And that is why this assessment tool feels so important.

Ready?

No, not quite. There is one more catch...

You cannot do it by yourself. You need to do it with a staff member, your board chair, someone who knows your organization and its place in your sector well. Someone you trust.

Why?

Because if you have been stricken with BSOS, you won't be objective. If there is a dangling check (and you have bills to pay), you may not be objective.

Make a copy of the assessment for each participant. Or just pose each question one at a time to the group and get their responses.

Remember: YES or NO only.

OK, so let's give this a go, shall we?

THE ASSESSMENT

1. Was this program idea surfaced during your most recent strategic planning process (or if you don't have a plan, during any strategic program conversation in the last two years?)
2. Is there a real and tangible need for this program?
3. Is there another organization in your community who is or could do this program work equally well (or better)? [Is yours the only organization in the community who could do this program work well?]

4. Can you describe its connection to your mission in two clear sentences?
5. Can you finish the sentence: We should add this program because _____ without any reference to an individual person or donor or to any promised funds?
6. Is there a full year of funding for this program available? (Don't answer this one until you have taken time to figure out the real be-honest-with-yourself cost of at least year one.)
7. Can you identify 3-5 potential new sources of funding who would give unrestricted funds to support your work because it now included this new program.
8. Is there a person who can be identified who bears responsibility for the launch and success of this program?
9. Does this person have sufficient bandwidth to take on something new – and the capacities and experience to drive a successful program launch?
10. Does your organization have the bandwidth to add this to the program docket? Have you considered the amount of attention and resources that this program will divert from your other programs and strategic priorities, and do you and your board both understand the implications and are OK with them?
11. Do you believe that your current programs are sufficiently funded?
12. If you turned this down, would the unique need for this program go unfulfilled?
13. Would this program add measurable value to your existing programs? For example, would it fill a gap and help more of your current participants to be successful? Is there real SYNERGY?
14. Do you already have a sense for what the major obstacles or challenges are they you'll face with the new program, and do you have confidence you will be able to overcome them?
15. Are you willing to set realistic goals and metrics for success? For example, your planning might reveal that, realistically, you will only serve 20 children in year... but the funder was hoping you would be able to serve 100. Are you willing to present this lower – realistic – target to the funder?

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

That was hard, wasn't it? Not like those quizzes you take online that tell you which character you'd be in *The Sound of Music*. That is why you needed time and at least one thought partner.

Now what?

There is no ranking here. Because as you go through them you will see that they are all interconnected.

And now I am about to give you a big fat headache.

Before you can consider giving a "yes" to the new program, you and your thought partner(s) have to say YES without hesitation to at least 10 of these questions.

And even then, you cannot give the idea the thumbs up. First, you have to tackle the (at least) 4 NO's. For each no, develop a legit plan to mitigate the issues.

AN EXAMPLE

A local organization supports homeless teenage girls with children under the age of 4. They have a shelter, a day care center, and a high school. The city municipality offers them a ridiculous deal on a building within walking distance of their facility. The building is designated for low income housing. A donor comes forward and thinks it would be great if the building provided low rent to young men and women starting out in the work force.

This is an organization that is working with homeless teenage girls with children under the age of 4. Run quickly through the assessment. There is need and funding. So YES to two questions. Almost all the other questions are straightforward NO.

Adding this program will COST this org more money in the long run. It is a clear NO.

What if this organization went back to the city, walked them through the thinking, why this was not a fit for them, and talked through the funding they need for the current programs that fit together so nicely. How can the city help so that there is a win-win?

In this fictitious example, it is fair to ask if the word NO is the END of the conversation with the city about this building. It MIGHT be. Or it could be the START of another conversation about what this organization DOES need and/or how the building could be of value to the CURRENT programs.

SO HOW DOES THIS EXERCISE END?

YES

Go forth. It is clear that this program fills a need, you have funding, you have prospects, and you have bandwidth. Most importantly, it rightfully belongs at your organization – it is clearly on mission.

YES IF....

Perhaps you have answered YES to many of the assessment questions and there is one problematic area – let's say funding. You have a check for some but not all of year 1. Go to the initiator of the idea and walk her through this thorough assessment (she'll be impressed). Maybe she will add a zero to the check (Or find you someone who will.) Partner with the initiator to turn the small number of NO's around.

NO

You have given the idea thorough consideration and have exactly what you need to go back to the messenger or the funder and say NO. You might want to take the messenger / funder through these questions and how you landed on your answers. You will score points for being strategic and thoughtful.

It is even quite possible that this exercise will unearth or highlight a different need and perhaps you can pivot your donor in **that** direction.

Thank her for the idea and even the offer for seed funding. Thank her for helping you to take intentional time to think strategically about your programs. Tell her that it amplified a current need in the organization. It is very possible that in this education process, you can take the funder / board member up to a more strategic altitude, enabling her to better understand not just "why no" but why the organization needs to stay focused / what funds really are needed for.

Maybe, just maybe, you can, through this kind of conversation, even secure her gift as unrestricted.

Stranger things have happened!

Here's hoping this assessment will help you get smarter about when to say "no." A friend and fundraiser often tells me, "NO is just a bump on the road to YES."