Program Evaluation Guide

Contents

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Getting started:
the basics of evaluation

What is evaluation?

What comes to mind when you think of evaluation? An invaluable tool to improve your program? Or do you find the idea of evaluation intimidating because you don't know much about it?

Evaluation is part of the critical learning and improvement process whose goal is to increase impact. When done well, it is thoroughly integrated into the cycle of strategy, planning, doing, learning and changing.

Why evaluate?

Evaluation provides information to help improve our programs and activities. Information on whether goals are being met and on how different aspects of a project are working is essential to a continuous improvement process.[ii] Evaluation also frequently provides new insights or new information that was not anticipated. The "unanticipated consequences" of a program are among the most useful outcomes of the assessment enterprise.[iii]

When we use the term "evaluation" here at the McCormick Foundation, we are referring to a systematic investigation of the value or effectiveness of a program, project, activity or other entity.[i]

Evaluation is used to help answer these questions:

✔ What needs to be done?
✔ What do you do?
✔ How does it happen?
✔ What is working and not working well?
✔ How do you know whether or not you are succeeding?
✔ Is it more effective for particular groups of people or under certain conditions and not others?
✔ Are there things that could be done to increase its effectiveness?
✔ Are there data that you can use to help tell your story to others — funders, colleagues, others interested in your work?
✔ Is what you are creating worth the cost in staff time and other resources to you?

The use of evaluation within philanthropy and the organizations that they fund is changing. This is a reaction, in part, to the increased focus nationally on examining the effectiveness of new and longstanding projects, initiatives, organizations and interventions and trying to determine their impact, whether or not we are doing what we think we are doing, how to improve our organizations and programs, and whether or not the communities that we are serving are really benefiting as we hope they are. It is good that foundations are asking the same questions of themselves. However, to answer them, we need to ask you, our partners, to join us in this inquiry.

Over the years, evaluation has frequently been viewed as an adversarial process, being used as a mechanism to give a "thumbs-up" or "thumbs-down" about a program or project. Not surprisingly, this use of evaluation has led program staff, project directors and coordinators to view it as an external imposition that is threatening, disruptive, and unhelpful. Although this may be an accurate depiction of evaluation in some situations, it need not be conducted in such an adversarial mode. Evaluation should be an integral part of the entire process, not separate from or added to a project, but rather a part of it from the beginning.

Planning, implementation and evaluation are all parts of a whole, and they work best when they work together[iv].

Getting started

The general steps in carrying out evaluation are quite simple—you need to answer the seven questions[v] listed in the box at right. This guide will addresses each of the seven questions in detail and help you think through how to approach evaluation of your organizations or projects in ways that will be most helpful for you and your colleagues, participants and funders, as well as others who may be interested in your activities.

Over the years, evaluation has frequently been viewed as an adversarial process... a mechanism to give a "thumbs-up" or "thumbs-down" about a program or project.

1 What do you want to evaluate?

Programs vary in size and scope. Some programs have many components, whereas others have only one or two. You can evaluate your entire program, one or two program components, or even one or two services or activities within a component. To a large extent, your decision about what to evaluate will depend on your available financial and staff resources and the questions that you want to answer. If your resources are limited, you may want to narrow the scope of your evaluation. It is better to conduct an effective evaluation of a single program component than to attempt an evaluation of several components or an entire program without sufficient resources.

For the McCormick Foundation, the decision about what to evaluate is a collaborative activity between at a minimum, you and your program officer. However, if what you are evaluating involves other participants (including organizations, individuals, interest groups or service providers), involving them in the decisions regarding what should be the focus of your evaluation will be important.

2 What is the purpose of the evaluation?

Determining the purpose of your evaluation is quite simple. What drives the evaluation are the questions that you want to answer. While we often want to ask the question, "What is working?" or "How effective is the program in achieving its goals?" there are many other types of questions that you may want to consider as well[vi], such as:

- ✔ How do multiple programs compare re: specific indicators or outcomes?
- ✔ What is the environment (political, social, economic, cultural, and scientific) in which the program is taking place? How does the environment affect the program?
- ✔ What does it cost to achieve the program's outcomes?
- ✔ What affects is the program having on clients, regardless of the program's stated goals?
- ✔ How do the programs being carried out support (or undermine) the mission of the organization?

You will probably have to prioritize your questions, given limitations of time and money. Focus on what you need to know and need to report, not what would simply be of interest. Let your stakeholders be a part of this process and help you determine what questions should be included in the evaluation. If you are dependent on folks to help you collect data, to understand it once it is

Designing an effective and helpful evaluation usually requires you to break down the larger question(s) into smaller sub-questions that require different types of data. Here are a few examples[vii]:

Hunger initiative

Main question: ✔ Who benefits from the childhood hunger program?

Sub-questions: ✔ Who actually participates in the childhood hunger program? At what level of involvement?
      ✔ Who else gains from the program? What do they gain?
      ✔ How do program participants compare to the population in general?
      ✔ Who may be negatively affected? How?

Child abuse prevention and treatment

Main Question: ✔ Is the positive parenting program duplicating other efforts?

Sub-Questions: ✔ Of what does the positive parenting program consist?
      ✔ What other similar programs exist—of what do they consist?
      ✔ How are aspects of these programs alike? Different? Complementary?
      ✔ What is our particular expertise/niche?

Housing/homelessness program

Main question: ✔ Did people learn the importance of Supportive and Transitional Housing from the conference?

Sub-Questions: ✔ Did people know anything about Supportive and Transitional Housing before attending the program?
      ✔ Was the environment conducive for learning?
      ✔ Did any other programs or agencies promote the importance of Supportive and Transitional Housing?

collected, or to do things for or with you based on these data, then having their participation from the very outset of thinking about the evaluation is critical. One of the mistakes that people often make with evaluation is that they collect data and then try to figure out how they are going to use the data and what they can say with these particular data. That is called 'putting the cart before the horse'. Don't let your data determine what questions you want to ask. In fact, without carefully identifying the questions that you would like to answer in the beginning, you may find at the end of your evaluation that your tools and data

cannot provide the information that you need. Figure out what your questions are, what type of evaluation would best answer your questions, and how you will use the answers to your questions—your data.

Don't forget to think about who is going to use the data and how *they* want or need to use the data. For instance, if you are using the data to help staff assess how a program is being implemented, putting a lot of time and money into a long, glossy report that gets delivered to you at the end of the project may not be as helpful for them as a series of shorter reports or updates and discussions throughout the year. Or if you want your elected representatives to pay attention to your outcomes, you may want to collect data in such a way that you can separate it by district or community. You may have multiple audiences who would be interested in your evaluation, but for whom different types of data would be meaningful or helpful. Let your questions and your intended use of your data guide your evaluation design.

3 What type of evaluation do you want to use?

The questions that you want to answer will fall within one of two major categories of evaluation[viii].

Formative/process evaluation

The first major category of evaluation is **'formative'** or **'process' evaluation**, which focuses on how and why something—a program, a product, a service, a policy, an organization—is functioning as it is. It answers questions such as:

- ✔ How is the implementation going?
- ✔ What processes need to be adjusted?
- ✔ Do the roles/responsibilities seem to be working well?
- ✔ Are there environmental factors that weren't taken into account that require the model to be adjusted?

In some cases, the 'thing' being evaluated is relatively new. A parenting program is developed to reduce the risk of child abuse. Or a policy is implemented to encourage access by teen mothers for pre-natal health services. These 'interventions' can also be thought of as 'innovations'. In general, the more innovative and interesting the intervention, the more likely that you are going to experience problems of one sort or another. The role of formative evaluation in this case is to help you figure out what is working better or worse, and using the glitches or failures to improve the quality of the new intervention.

Don't forget to think about who is going to use the data and how *they* want or need to use the data. Let your questions and your intended use of your data guide your evaluation design.

Summative/outcome evaluation

The second major category of evaluation is **'summative'** or **'outcome' evaluation**, which focuses on determining the effectiveness or value of a program. It answers questions such as:

- ✔ Is the program achieving its objectives?
- ✔ What is its overall quality?
- ✔ What predicted and unpredicted impacts has the program had?
- ✔ Is this something that we want to continue to support or encourage its expansion?

These types of evaluation are done primarily to ask questions of cost/benefit, allocation of resources, alternative choices for interventions, or comparison of services or practices between providers. Data that come from this type of evaluation are often used for marketing and PR as well, demonstrating to potential supporters and donors the value of a program or service.

While foundations have asked grantees to provide 'evaluations' for many years, much of this has consisted of data used to determine whether or not their funds have been used as intended, what activities took place, and who participated in the projects/activities. This type of information is what is called **'outputs'.** Outputs are the direct and measureable products of a program's activities or services, often expressed in numbers of units (hours, numbers of people, units of service provided). Outputs refer to the activities that you conduct and the people you reach. While this monitoring function is important (foundations are legally required to verify that their funds actually have been used in particular ways), limiting evaluation to collecting these types of data leads organizations to lose out on the potential power and value that good evaluation processes and the knowledge that they generate have to offer. Evaluation becomes much more valuable when we shift our focus from outputs to **'outcomes'**. Outcomes are the results or impacts of these programs, services or products and refer to changes in knowledge or understanding, behavior or attitudes in participants.

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4 What data do you need to answer your questions?

Once you have determined your questions, you need to figure out how to find the answers. What data will you need to answer the questions? Sometimes, the questions that you are asking have straightforward answers that are answered clearly with one or two pieces of information. For instance, if you want to determine if an afterschool sports program is reaching a particular group

of students, you need to collect data on the numbers and characteristics of students who are attending. But other times, the questions that you are asking are more complex, and answering them well is more difficult. We use **indicators** to help us answer the question, "How will we know?" They are the evidence of accomplishments, changes made or progress achieved. These are the measurements that answer evaluation questions. So looking back at that afterschool sports program, if we want to know if the program is having a positive impact on the health and academic performance of the participating students, we first must identify those actions or conditions that can indicate students' health and academic performance has improved, such as improved BMI (Body Mass Index) or level of physical activity as indicators of improvements in students' health, or improved grades and rates of grade promotion as indicators of improved academic performance.

Make sure that when you are considering what indicators to use, you ask the populations or communities whose needs you are serving what they believe are valid indicators, and include them when measuring success. Their indicators may differ from your own, but it is critical to honor their perspectives and priorities as well as your own.

Finally, depending on the size and diversity of your program, it may be that looking at the data from a **sample** of the participants, rather than the entire population, will be sufficient for your evaluation needs. Collecting data from a smaller number of individuals usually reduces cost and time for processing and analysis, but there are other technical considerations related to sample size and methods that need to be weighed as well.

Qualitative and quantitative data

Another consideration when thinking about what information to collect is whether you want to gather **quantitative data** (numbers) or **qualitative data** (non-numeric forms of data, such as interviews, photos, focus groups). Each type of data has benefits and challenges associated with it[ix].

Good quantitative data are powerful in conveying information about groups of individuals or communities. So if, for example, we are looking at Child and Youth Education programs, key quantitative data could include truancy rates, test scores, grade point average, and reading skill level. But many important processes and outcomes are not measureable in a numerical way that is helpful, and trying to measure them quantitatively can be misleading.

Good qualitative data are powerful in conveying the experiences of individuals, or filling out the picture with context and examples. So powerful qualitative data could be case studies of students who participate in the programs, descriptions of the characteristics of programs that have greater effectiveness, and problems

Another consideration when thinking about what information to collect is whether you want to gather quantitative data or qualitative data.

that have developed in program implementation and how they were addressed. However, qualitative data is often inappropriate when trying to address the needs of entire groups of people or guide policy decisions.

When possible, using both quantitative and qualitative data in evaluations is preferable, due to the different types of questions that these data can answer. In general, qualitative data yields rich information about people's behavior and perspectives and may reveal new insights that have not been considered. The information is non-numerical and sample sizes are much smaller than quantitative data samples. Conversely, quantitative methods can reach a larger number of respondents and produce results that are generalizable to a wider population. It is most appropriate when used to test a fixed set of ideas or concepts.

Baselines and benchmarks

Quite a bit of new and revived terminology is being tossed around in the world of evaluation these days, and two terms that relate to data that you may come across are **'baseline data'** and **'benchmarks'**. Baseline data are information about the performance or functioning of an organization, program, community or population prior to the introduction of some type of intervention. It can be used to indicate progress towards the goals/objectives of a program, and at the completion of a program to measure the amount of change. It is important that the information collected and used for baseline data actually describes the situation that the project goals and/or objectives are addressing. If the information is not relevant, you will not be able to evaluate them properly[x]. Sometimes, data already exist that you can use for your baseline. But oftentimes you need to collect it yourself.

Benchmarks are data that are used to compare programs or organizations that are doing similar types of work. Usually, these are quantitative data about outputs, outcomes and costs. Sometimes, two or more organizations allow individuals from the other organizations to observe their operations and data, and then learn how each could improve their programs. The data gathered in these situations often are qualitative as well as quantitative[xi].

5 How do you gather the information?

Once you know what you would like to know, and from whom you want to get these data, you then need to determine what **data collection methods** you will use. While most people know about surveys and interviews, two popular data collection methods, there are quite a few others that can be incorporated into

evaluations. These include tests, observations, focus groups, photographs, videos and other types of pictures, document review and analysis, journals/logs/diaries and simulated problems or situations. The methods that you choose should be guided by the following questions:

✔ Which methods are most likely to provide the data you need?

✔ Which methods are most appropriate, given the values and capacities of those who are collecting the information, and those who are being asked to provide it?

✔ Which methods are least disruptive to your program and clients?

✔ Which methods can you afford and do well?

While data to answer your questions frequently come from the program's participants or beneficiaries, other valuable **sources of data** include other individuals who may have valuable insights and information such as experts in related fields, key informants, program staff, collaborators, legislators, funders and policy makers, as well as data such as documents and other media. These sources can help you learn from work that already exists. This can decrease the amount of time you spend doing background research and the all too common feeling of being overwhelmed by the body of knowledge.

Along with the methods that you are going to use and your sources, you need to think about **when you will collect data**. While it certainly can be done at the end of a program, it often is done before and after programs (e.g. pre- and post-tests), at a single point in time (e.g. a survey, an end of program assessment), at various times throughout the life of a project or activity (e.g. focus groups at 3, 6 and 12 month intervals), or continuously (e.g. daily logs). Collecting data along the course of a project provides the opportunity to add collection tools should you stumble upon a new insight during the project that you would like to investigate further.

Confidentiality and consent

As you evaluate the experiences of participants in your programs, you may be collecting stories they tell you about their lives, their feelings, their behaviors and the environments in which they live. Two critical issues that have to be carefully addressed in your evaluation are those of **confidentiality** and **consent**[xii]. Participants in our programs have not only an ethical right to privacy, but legal rights as well. Just like any other activity that is a part of a program or service that you offer participants, if participating in an evaluation involves anything more than minimal risk, you must inform them and get their written consent. (A sample consent form is included at the end of this guide.) Be sure you know the legal issues concerning how to work with and collect information from those involved in your activities and programs.

Protecting confidentiality

Make certain that you have established a clear set of procedures to protect the confidentiality of your evaluation participants. This includes:

✔ assurances that participation in the evaluation is voluntary and that they can decline to be involved and still participate in the project.

✔ making sensitive information only accessible to the evaluator (unless the participant has given permission for it to be used more widely).

✔ reporting information in such a way that it does not permit individual participants to be identified.

6 How will you analyze the information?

Organizing and analyzing your data to allow meaningful interpretation takes time and effort—often, more time and effort than you'd expect[xiii]. The purpose of data analysis is to make sense of the information. It needs to be presented in a way that people can understand it and see not only what is obvious, but more subtle nuances that may be important.

For instance, reporting that adults who participated in literacy programs achieved higher rates of employment could lead to a recommendation that literacy programs, in general, should be supported. But if the data were analyzed, comparing employment rates for adults who participated in literacy programs with an employment focus, to employment rates for those who participated in traditional adult education programs, and only one type of program led to improved outcomes for participants, the nature of your recommendation would likely change. Or maybe you would find that certain groups of adults with particular education levels or experiences fared better under one type of program, or that adults entering one occupation were more successful when they participated in one type of training program versus those who entered a different occupation.

Once the data have been analyzed, they need to be interpreted, to be put into context, to be judged. For instance, what does it mean that 70% of the participants in an employment training program were placed in a job upon completion? Is this greater or less than what has been achieved by other job training programs? Is it better or worse than what is typical with this population? What types of wages are they earning? Can they live on these wages? What, if anything, should be done next?

Numbers don't speak for themselves. They need to be interpreted and each person's perspective on them may differ, based on their understanding, priorities and experiences. The same holds true for qualitative data—it needs to be interpreted, and perspectives on its meaning will vary between people. Sometimes your results turn out very differently than expected. Thus, a critical step in good evaluations is to make sure that a variety of individuals—program staff, participants, collaborators and other experts—all have an opportunity to look at the data and weigh in on its interpretation. It doesn't mean that any one individual or group's perspective is necessarily right or wrong. But the chance that you will derive a robust understanding of the data and its meaning for all of the people who are interested in it is greatly improved by putting in this effort.

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After you have interpreted your results, it is important to draw your conclusions and make any recommendations that you feel come out of the data. What did you learn? What needs to be continued or done differently? Translating data into understanding, and then understanding into action is where evaluation shows its greatest power and potential.

7 How will you use and share the results?

The use and dissemination of evaluation data should be carefully considered early on in the evaluation, when the initial planning is taking place. How you communicate the findings from your evaluation should be determined by a number of factors. First of all, what was your original intention with the evaluation? What were you trying to accomplish? If your goal was to help your staff gain a better understanding of your program and how their interventions were enhanced or hindered by particular factors, then sitting down with your staff and having a conversation where you 'unpack' all of the data and discuss what you want to do with your program, in light of your findings, is an excellent way to use your evaluation data.

If your hope was to encourage other service providers in your field to consider using or avoiding particular types of programs, then setting up a meeting with your colleagues where you present your evaluation – the questions that you had, the ways that you went about answering them, the data that you collected and your analysis, in a forum that allows them to discuss it with you and weigh in on your interpretation of the data, your conclusions and recommendations could lead to some powerful changes in the field.

Or if getting the information out to the larger public is your goal, holding a press conference where the data are presented and policy makers have an opportunity to talk about how these data are going to guide their next steps is a great use of evaluation.

Whatever your intentions with the evaluation, if it is possible to do so, you should find a way to share your findings with the people who participated in the evaluation. It is not only respectful, but it is likely to lead them to a greater willingness to participate in future evaluation efforts[xiv].

Making the most of your data

Make sure that a variety of individuals all have an opportunity to look at the data and weigh in on its interpretation, including:

✔ program staff
✔ participants
✔ collaborators
✔ other experts

Cultural awareness and responsiveness

What does cultural awareness have to do with evaluation? Culture is "the shared experiences of people, including their languages, values, customs, beliefs, and mores. It also includes worldviews, ways of knowing, and ways of communicating. Culturally significant factors encompass, but are not limited to, race/ethnicity, religion, social class, language, disability, sexual orientation, age, and gender. Contextual dimensions such as geographic region and socioeconomic circumstances are also essential to shaping culture."[xv] When you undertake an evaluation, it is steeped in culture. There is no such thing as a 'value free' or 'culture free' evaluation. The questions that are asked, the way that they are phrased, the type of data that is used to answer them, the ways that we collect the data, the analysis and interpretation all are a function of our perspectives, values, the way we view the world, and our culture. As we become a more diverse society, it is important to understand the cultural contexts in which our programs are functioning. If we don't, the chances of our evaluations (and programs) being effective and addressing the needs that we have defined diminish.[xvi]

What are some of the steps that you can take to help strengthen your evaluation in terms of its cultural awareness and responsiveness?[xvii]

✔ Make sure that your evaluators understand and appreciate the importance of cultural competence

✔ Give the populations whose needs are being addressed by your programs the chance to review your data collection tools

✔ Consider carefully what is meaningful, reliable, and valid data

✔ Use data collection and analysis methods that are sensitive to cultural differences in how knowledge is constructed and communicated

✔ For participants who might be limited by language, abilities, or factors such as familiarity or trust, use intermediaries to help collect data.

✔ Discuss the analysis and interpretation of data with those groups who are the focus of the evaluation.

✔ Ensure that stakeholder reporting occurs in ways that are sensitive to audiences' communication and language needs.

Working towards cultural awareness and responsiveness in our evaluations is not a one-step, check-the-box activity. It starts with the very questions we are asking, and their answers that should provide information important to stakeholders and on which sound decisions can be based. Engaging in this process, though it will likely take extra time and resources, can help your evaluation be one that addresses the needs of the project and all of its stakeholders.

Next steps

Evaluation is not a 'one size fits all' activity. What you want out of it and are willing to put into it will shape its design, which in turn, will influence dramatically what you gain from the process. We hope that this guide will help you create an evaluation that serves your needs, the needs of your program and most importantly, the needs of the populations being served by your organizations.

If it is possible to do so, you should find a way to share your findings with the people who participated in the evaluation.

Useful evaluation terms<superscript>xix</superscript>

Assessment: Synonym for evaluation, but often used to refer to a technique (e.g., practical assessment) or a mini-study.

Benchmarks: Performance data used for comparison purposes. They can be identified from your program's own prior data or relative to performance in the field.

Compliance/Monitoring: Type of evaluation where evaluation questions are focused on adherence to pre-specified procedures.

Comparison Groups: Nonparticipants who are identified as a reference for comparison (e.g., individuals at different sites).

Control Groups: Nonparticipants who are usually identified in the use of an experimental design. The treatment or experimental group actually participates in the program and the control group, although eligible and similar, does not receive or participate in the program. Results of treatment and control group outcomes are then compared to determine program contribution to outcomes.

Formative or Process Evaluations: Focus on ways of improving and enhancing programs and are conducted in the early or ongoing stages of a program.

Generalize: To assign qualities based upon group membership, or to make inferences about groups or programs based on the outcomes of a sample or subset of members.

Goals: Conditions (usually broad) that programs are working toward (e.g., to promote well-being).

Indicators: Observable, measurable characteristics of changes that represent elements of an outcome (e.g., normal birth weight is an indicator of a healthy baby outcome).

Needs Assessments: Determine whether existing services are meeting needs, where there are gaps in services, and where there are available resources. These are often conducted prior to initiation of an evaluation or in response to evaluation findings.

Objectives: Something that is worked for or strived for, that can be observed or measured.

Outcomes: Results for participants, during and/or after participation in a program.

Outputs: Products of a program's activity (e.g., # of sessions held, # of participants served).

Qualitative Data: Consist of detailed description of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs and thoughts; and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records, and case histories. Qualitative data collection methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in-depth and detail and typically to produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases.

Quantitative Data: Come from questionnaires, tests, standardized observation instruments, and program records. Quantitative data collection methods permit the complexities of the world to be broken into parts and assigned numerical values. To obtain quantitative data it is necessary to be able to categorize the object of interest in ways that permit counting.

Random Assignment: A technique that allows program providers to randomly divide participants into treatment (those who get services) and control groups (those who don't).

Reliable Measures: Those that can be repeated under similar conditions.

Research: A systematic collection of information, undertaken to discover new knowledge, test theories, establish universal truths, and generalize across time and space.

Summative or Outcome Evaluations: Are aimed at determining the essential effectiveness of a program. They are especially important in making decisions about terminating, maintaining, or extending a program.

Triangulation: Multiple streams of information obtained by either collecting different kinds of data about the same subject; using different workers to complete the same tasks; using multiple methods to obtain data; and using multiple perspectives to analyze information.

Valid Measures: Those that accurately measure what they are intended to measure.

Informed Consent Form[xviii]

We would like you to participate in the Evaluation of *[program name]*. Your participation is important to us and will help us assess the effectiveness of the program. As a participant in *[program name]* we will ask you to *[complete a questionnaire, answer questions in an interview, or other task]*.

We will keep all of your answers confidential. Your name will never be included in any reports and none of your answers will be linked to you in any way. The information that you provide will be combined with information from everyone else participating in the study.

You do not have to participate in the evaluation. Even if you agree to participate now, you may stop participating at any time or refuse to answer any question. Refusing to be part of the evaluation will not affect your participation or the services you receive in *[program name]*.

If you have any questions about the study you may call *[name and telephone number of evaluator, program manager or community advocate]*.

By signing below, you confirm that this form has been explained to you and that you understand it.

Please Check One:

☐ Agree to participate

☐ Refuse to participate

_____

Participant or Parent/Guardian Signature

_____

Date

Reporting and disclosure

Does the information/ data collection in your evaluation include questions relevant to behaviors such as child abuse, drug abuse, or suicidal behaviors? If so,

✔ be sure that you know what your legal reporting requirements are before you begin your evaluation.

✔ make sure that evaluation participants are informed of your program's potential legal obligation to report this information.

✔ inform participants that confidentiality may be broken in these cases.

Evaluation helps us improve our programs and activities. In its best and most useful format, evaluation becomes an integral part of the entire process, not separate from or added to a project, but rather a part of it from the beginning and throughout the program's existence. Planning, implementation and evaluation are all parts of a whole, and they work best when they work together.

We invite you to join us in the evaluation process. Together we hope to face the challenges and celebrate the triumphs that await us, in the spirit of strengthening our understanding of the issues and ultimately creating change. We hope this process will strengthen our partnership with you, and assist all of us in improving the lives of those we serve.

Evaluation Steps

1 Figure out what you want to evaluate

Programs vary in size, shape and complexity. Begin by asking the following questions:

✔ Do we want to evaluate our entire program, one or two program components, or even one or two services or activities within a component?

✔ What's the name of the program, program component, service or activity you wish to evaluate?

_____

✔ What's the objective of this program/activity?

_____

2 Determine the purpose of your evaluation.

What question(s) do you want answered?

While most of us would like to know the impact of our programs, some programs are better served by focusing their initial evaluations on how and why programs are functioning as they are, asking questions such as the following:

- Are students comfortable attending our tutoring program?

- Do we need to provide more on-site interpreters for our parent involvement programs?

- Should we alternate sites for our job training program, given the gang boundaries in the neighborhood?

For those programs ready to assess impact, questions such as the following might be asked:

- Does our homelessness program help families stabilize their housing?

- Does our math tutoring program help students improve their understanding of the material?

- Does participation in our hunger initiative lead to a measurable improvement in health indicators?

✔ Use the examples above to write your own question(s) below. If you have more than one question, prioritize them, focusing on what you need to know and need to report.
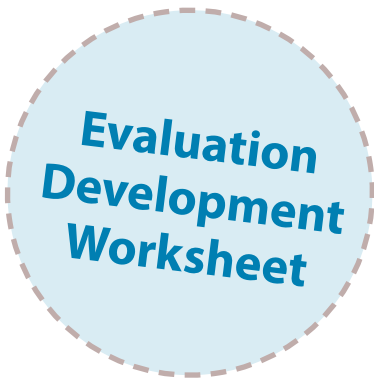
_____

_____

_____

✔ How will you and/or others use the information that answers your questions, once you have collected it?

_____

_____

_____

(Additional information on this step can be found on pages 3–5 of this Program Evaluation Guide.)

3 Determine the information needed to answer your questions

What types of information will answer your questions? Sometimes, it is a clear, easily identified piece or two of data, such as the following:

- What percentage of families moved into, and maintained, stable housing for 6 months?

- What percentage of students improved their grades in math over the two years?

- What percentage of our hunger program participants have improved health indicators?

Other times, the information to answer your questions will not be able to be quantified in a way that is helpful, and other types of data such as interviews, observations and focus groups will better help you to answer your questions. Here are a few examples:

- When looking at a domestic violence program, if you want to understand the impact of individual counseling vs. group counseling, you could carry out interviews with the participants and counselors as well as observations of the groups.

- If you want to understand why some students are able to succeed in college while others drop out, you could hold a series of focus groups with students from each of these sub-groups.

✔ What information will you need to answer your question(s)?

_____

_____

_____

(Additional information on this step can be found on pages 5–8 of this Program Evaluation Guide.)

4   Determine data collection methods

What evaluation tools and processes will help you collect the information you're looking for? Important factors to consider include choosing methods and tools that are most likely to provide the data you need, are the least disruptive to your program and clients, and are most affordable for your agency. Examples include:

- Pre/Post tests

- Case notes tracking the progress of clients

- Focus groups

✔ What evaluation tools and processes are you currently using?

_____

✔ Are these tools providing you with the information needed to answer the questions that you want to ask?

_____

_____

_____

✔ If not, what other tools might you use?

_____

_____

_____

✔ Who might have information on other tools you can use?

_____

_____

_____

(Additional information on this step can be found on pages 8–9 of this Program Evaluation Guide.)

5 Analyze your data

✔ How will you analyze your data once it is collected?

_____

_____

_____

✔ Will you need help analyzing it? If so, do you know where to find this help?

_____

_____

_____

(Additional information on this step can be found on pages 10–11 of this Program Evaluation Guide.)
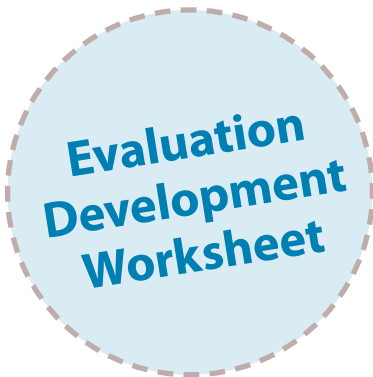
6 Share your results

How you share your findings from your evaluation is determined by the goals of the evaluation. You may want to present it to any/all of the following:

- Program staff, to discuss possible program adjustments
- Funders, to show program impact
- Policy makers, to inform legislation

✔ Who are you trying to reach and what are you trying to accomplish with this information?

_____

_____

_____

✔ What will be the most effective ways to share this information?

_____

_____

_____

(Additional information on this step can be found on page 11 of this Program Evaluation Guide.)

Evaluation Development Worksheet

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

i   Sanders, James, "The Program Evaluation Standards: How to Assess Evaluations of Educational Programs", 3. As referenced in US National Science Foundation's *The 2002 User-Friendly Handbook for Evaluation*. The word 'value' was replaced with 'worth', and 'object' was replaced by 'program, project, activity or other entity'.

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vi   Patton, Michael Quinn. *Utilization-focused Evaluation: the New Century Text*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publ., 2007, 192–193.

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xi   Davidson, Jane, 145.

xii   Wenzel and Brill, 14.

xiii   University of Wisconsin, 13.

xiv   University of Wisconsin, 14.

xv   American Evaluation Association. "AEA Cultural Competency Statement" 22 Apr. 2011. Web. 31 Aug. 2011. http://www.eval.org/ccstatement.asp.

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xvii   American Evaluation Association.

xviii   U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. *The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation, Second Edition*. Web. 08 July 2011. www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/other_resrch/pm_guide_eval/reports/pmguide/pmguide_toc.html, 62.

xix   Adapted from Baker, Anita and Bruner, Beth. *Integrating Evaluative Capacity Into Organizational Practice: A Guide for Nonprofit Organizations and Their Stakeholders*. The Bruner Foundation, 2012. Web. 2 April 2013 http://www.evaluativethinking.org/docs/2010_docs/Integ_Eval_Capacity_Final.pdf, 53-54.

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*These sources were used extensively in the design of this guide.

Your Toolkit for Successful Evaluation

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