

Evaluation Planning

Overview

The implementation of projects or programs is an ongoing process, and effective management of the process requires evaluation to help determine what is working and what can be improved in order to have the most positive outcomes possible. Evaluation protocols will be specific to the program being evaluated, but there is guidance for planning evaluations that can be tailored to your program.

What are evaluations?

Evaluations are “systematic investigations of the merit, worth, or significance of an object or effort.” Resources and funding are often limited and being able to evaluate programming can help allocate resources more effectively, which can lead to better outcomes for those receiving services.

Evaluations should be conducted to:

- Examine project performance;
- Measure goals and objectives;
- Discover trends;
- Identify opportunities for improvement; and
- Examine participant satisfaction.

How do you evaluate a program or services?

The following questions need to be answered before your work group begins evaluation:

- What will be evaluated?
- What criteria will be used to judge program performance?
- What standards of performance on the criteria must be reached for the program to be considered successful?
- What evidence will indicate performance on the criteria relative to the standards?

- What conclusions about program performance are justified based on the available evidence?

How do you plan an evaluation?

Evaluation planning can occur at any time during a program, but it is best to start planning for evaluation of a program before the initial implementation program begins. By starting evaluation planning before the implementation of your program, the evaluation planning process helps you to clarify what you want the program to do and what outcomes you would like there to be. Also, it gives you the opportunity to start evaluating sooner in order to make necessary changes for positive outcomes. Another way to foster positive outcomes is to ensure evaluation plans outline what you want to evaluate as well as how and when evaluations should be conducted. This can help you use your time and resources efficiently.

There are four main steps to developing an evaluation plan:

1. Clarifying program objectives and goals:
 - Your team needs to decide the main things that you want to accomplish the program and how to accomplish them.
2. Developing evaluation questions:
 - Your team needs to outline what questions need to be answered to determine if the program is accomplishing the objective and goals
3. Developing evaluation methods:
 - Your team needs to consider and decide what evaluation methods can help answer the questions.
4. Setting up a timeline for evaluation activities:
 - Your team needs to determine what time frame is appropriate for evaluation, or when some results will be able to be evaluated.

Considerations for Sharing the Lessons Learned

In order to facilitate the appropriate use of findings, your evaluation team needs to strategically plan how results can inform decision-making before the evaluation begins and after the evaluation is completed.

Consider the following when planning how to use evaluation results:

- **Design** - the evaluation should be designed around agreed-upon issues with a clear focus and should be organized in order to know who will do what with the findings
- **Preparation** - stakeholders should discuss how the evaluation's findings will be used in decision making

- **Feedback** - all stakeholders involved in evaluation should have a right to give feedback on evaluation decisions, which can be facilitated through regular meetings where evaluation steps, interim findings, and draft reports are discussed
- **Follow-up** - actively follow-up with users to remind them of intended uses of evaluation findings and to prevent findings and recommendations from becoming lost or ignored
- **Dissemination** - communicating results should be pre-planned and methodical and take into account timing, style, tone, message source, vehicle, and format of information products so that results and lessons learned can be communicated impartially and with full disclosure

Additional Resources:

Community Toolbox: [Framework for Evaluation](#)

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