

USING RESULTS

Tips for conducting program evaluation

One of the most important benefits of conducting a program evaluation is using your findings to improve services, motivate staff, or even to change public policy. This tip sheet focuses on ways to use your results to improve services.



Review and discuss the results

A primary purpose of conducting an evaluation is to help you better understand your program's strengths and develop strategies for providing services that are more effective and cost-efficient. The

specific issues you will want to discuss once evaluation results are available will vary depending upon the priorities of the program and the questions you addressed in your evaluation.

Program outcomes

If your evaluation measured the outcomes or impact of your program on participants, you should now have some information about the extent to which the program met its goals. Think about the following:

- Which areas showed the most success or improvement? What program components do you think contributed to these outcomes the strongest? Why do you think these components were important?
- Which areas did not demonstrate success? Were these outcomes below the level expected or below an acceptable level? Why do you think outcomes were not more positive? How could you strengthen programming to promote more positive outcomes? Could new program components improve your outcomes?

Stakeholder satisfaction

Assessing participant satisfaction in your program provides valuable information. If you collected satisfaction information, you will want to consider these questions:

- What areas of the program did participants like best? What program components do you think most contributed to their satisfaction?
- What areas of the program did participants least enjoy? Was satisfaction below the level expected or below an acceptable level? Why do you think satisfaction was not more positive? How could you strengthen services to increase satisfaction?



Participant background/characteristics

Knowing information about the people your program serves is an important feature of any evaluation. Review the information you have learned about the program participants and ask:

- How would you describe the individuals who received services? What were their major demographic characteristics? What kinds of issues brought them to the program?
- Are there any features of the population served that have changed over time?
- If so, do these changes have any implications for changes in services?
- Do some participants have more success in the program, or like the program better, as compared to other participants? If so, do services need to be modified to better meet the needs of diverse participants?

Service delivery

In addition to providing information about program participants, an evaluation often includes an assessment of the types of services provided and how they were delivered. This information allows you to look at the connection between service delivery and program outcomes or participant satisfaction. Consider the following:

- How much service did participants receive? What kinds of service? Was this consistent with the program's intended service approach? If not, does the program need to be modified to increase or decrease the amount of service each individual receives?
- If the program formally defines service completion, what percentage of participants successfully completed the program? What factors do you think influenced participants' completion? How can the program be modified to increase the percentage of participants who complete?
- If the program was attempting to replicate an established service model, was it implemented with fidelity to the original model? If not, why not? How do you think the changes in the model may have impacted the program outcomes? What strategies can be used to ensure stronger fidelity in the future?
- What challenges and barriers did you encounter in providing services? How can these barriers be reduced in the future?
- Do participant outcomes or satisfaction differ based on the type or amount of service that was provided? If so, are there changes to service provision that should be considered?

Setting performance targets

It might also be helpful to set performance targets for your outcomes and participant satisfaction ratings. Performance targets are measurable goals set forth by a program that reflect exactly what is desired in terms of performance. They can help you gauge your level of success in meeting outcomes and help you prioritize program improvement

efforts. Desired performance targets may specify expected quality, quantity, time, or cost. For example, you might expect that at least 90 percent of participants will be satisfied with the advocacy they received, or that at least 75 percent of participants will feel safer as a result of your services.

Ultimately, the performance of the target group should relate to the expected and desired results for your participants while also reflecting your organization’s goals. Keep in mind, however, that setting

unrealistic targets can be a detractor for performance. The targets you set initially may also be revised over time. Revising targets is a good strategy when performance levels are initially very low or there are changes in staff or service provision.

Other issues

Review the list of other issues examined in your evaluation, and consider the implications of the findings. Explore reasons for your

evaluation findings and determine strategies for enhancing service delivery.

Evaluation design

If you intend to evaluate your program again in the future, it is also important to reflect on the evaluation process itself. You may be able to save yourself time, money, and headaches if you can apply lessons learned from carrying out the evaluation the first time around to future evaluation work. Consider the following:

- What challenges emerged during the implementation of the evaluation?
Can the evaluation be revised to minimize these challenges?
- Based on your review of the evaluation results, will you be modifying the program

- design? If so, do these changes require changes to the evaluation design?
- Did your review of the evaluation findings raise any questions that you could not answer? Do you want to revise the evaluation to explore these issues further in the future?

Develop an action plan

When you develop your action plan, you will want to focus on key findings in select areas. If you try to address all concerns at once, you can find it overwhelming. It might be helpful to document your next steps in a table like the example below. Assign

individuals and timelines to each action step to ensure the plan is implemented. Keep in mind that given your key questions and evaluation findings, follow-up action may only be required in certain domains.

DOMAIN	FOLLOW-UP ACTION	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TARGETED COMPLETION DATE
Outcome evaluation			
Stakeholder satisfaction	Work with staff to increase responsiveness to phone messages left by victims	Program Coordinator	Within 3 months
Client background/characteristics	Identify strategies for increasing hotline usage rates among older victims	Program Coordinator	Within 3 months
Service deliver			
Other issues			

Tips for using evaluation results

Consider the following suggestions when making programmatic decisions based on your evaluation findings:

- Develop action plans that specifically identify what needs to be done, who is going to do it, and when it will be completed. This increases the likelihood of follow-through.
- When reviewing the results, be open to different options, explanations, and alternatives. Fully consider the findings and their implications before implementing any programmatic changes.
- Include key stakeholders in your discussion. Multiple perspectives not only enhance the exchange of ideas related to program improvement, but also increase stakeholder buy-in and support.
- Consider both short-term and long-term program improvement strategies. There may be some small, easy changes that can be implemented immediately, while some goals may require a more thoughtful, long-term approach.
- Review other programs or evaluation studies for suggestions for increasing your program's effectiveness. Find out what similar programs have done that you can incorporate into your services or your evaluation.
- Consider a variety of program improvement strategies, but prioritize those that are most likely to help you achieve your goals. Because it may not be feasible to implement all of the suggestions that emerged from the evaluation, identify the key strategies that most relate to your program's goals and will have a direct impact on your program.

Quick links to more information

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation tool Kit: Using Evaluation Findings

<http://www.wkkf.org/Default.aspx?>

[tabid=90&CID=281&ItemID=2810022&NID=2820022&LanguageID=0](http://www.wkkf.org/Default.aspx?tabid=90&CID=281&ItemID=2810022&NID=2820022&LanguageID=0)

Public Health Agency of Canada, Guide to Project Evaluation: A Participatory Approach (Chapter 8: Using evaluation results)

http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/html/fvprojevaluation_e.html

In future tip sheets

- Using evaluation for policy development and advocacy (10/08)

Find previous tip sheets on the web: www.ojp.state.mn.us/grants/index.htm or www.wilderresearch.org.



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