

2) Preparing and planning evaluation

The best way to insure that you have the most productive evaluation possible is to come up with an evaluation plan. The best time to do this is before you implement the initiative. After that, you can do it anytime, but the earlier you develop it and begin to implement it, the better off your initiative will be, and the greater the outcomes will be at the end.

With the help of preparing and having an evaluation plan you will have the following benefits:

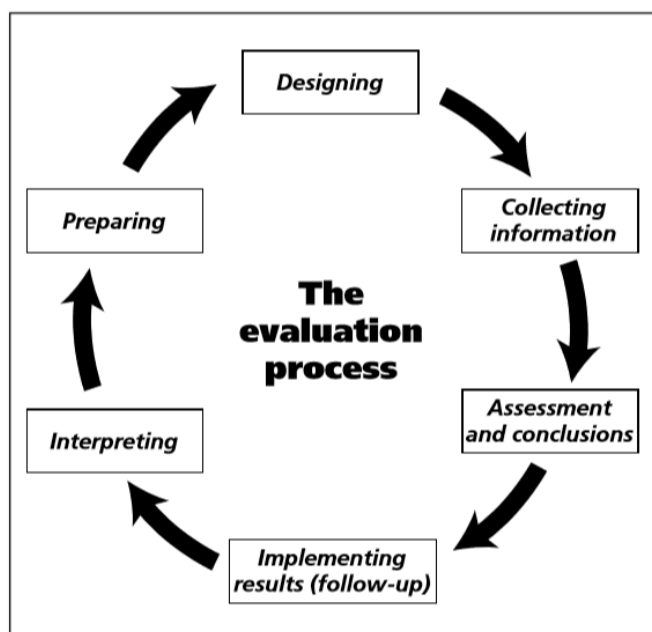
- It guides you through each step of the process of evaluation
- It helps you decide what sort of information you and your stakeholders really need
- It keeps you from wasting time gathering information that isn't needed
- It helps you identify the best possible methods and strategies for getting the needed information
- It helps you come up with a reasonable and realistic timeline for evaluation
- It will help you improve your initiative!

An evaluation plan tells many things.

- How you will know (the criteria you will use to evaluate success – tests, surveys, etc.)
- Methods that will be used to collect evaluation information
- Methods that will be used to analyze the evaluation information
- When you will conduct the evaluations (milestones, quarterly, annually)
- Describes who is going to evaluate (qualifications, credentials)

There are some different approaches toward planning and preparing evaluation. But the main idea stays the same. Planning an evaluation can be done like planning a project: determining the objectives, working methods, action plan, etc.

The following graphic illustrates some of the steps of an evaluation process. Evaluations are not always planned or conducted this way (and need not to be) but implicitly these elements are and should always be present.



Inspired from Warren Feek, Working effectively, 1988

Preparing Preparing the evaluation is first of all setting its aims and purpose: why is the evaluation necessary? Who needs it? Who should be involved in doing it?

Designing Once we are clear what the purpose of the evaluation is, we need to define its objectives, namely what is going to be evaluated (the use of resources, the educational methods, the

results, the impact, etc.). These objectives will determine the indicators or criteria (qualitative, quantitative) and the time when evaluation should start.

Collecting the information The indicators and criteria being established, the next process is actually getting the information (data) needed (how many people participated, what did they learn, what did they do afterwards, etc.). The criteria and the objectives will determine the way of collecting the information (written records, interviews, during the project or after, etc.).

Interpreting the information What does the data and information that we possess mean? The interpretation, like the stages that follow reflect the most difficult challenge in evaluation: objectivity. Reality can always be interpreted in different ways and people can also influence the evaluation by their own interests and concerns. An awareness of the need to be objective is nevertheless essential.

Interpretation can be made easier (and showing the path to the conclusions) if the information can be compared with other experiences of the same nature.

Assessing and conclusions The assessment is actually the process of drawing the relevant conclusions out of the information acquired. It is looking for the reasons for what happened, highlighting the results and putting them into perspective with the original aims and objectives of the project.

Implementing results All the information and the conclusions drawn from it are, in a way, meaningless if nothing is done with them. The function of evaluation towards social change is lost if there is no desire to change, to admit the results of an evaluation, etc. The sources of resistance to change are many (institutional, personal, political, etc.). They can be limited by the objectivity of the evaluation as well as dependent on who has been involved in carrying it out.

According to another approach there are slightly different way to plan an evaluation with focusing on important moments of the project. The evaluation can be planned in following steps:

Step 1. Identify your evaluation audience

Identify who the evaluation audience or stakeholders are. The evaluation audience include the people or organisations that require an evaluation to be conducted. There may be multiple audiences, each with their own requirements. Typically, this includes the funding agency, and may also include partner organisations, the Council (or Councillors), the project team, and the project's participants or target group. Remember that evaluation is generally undertaken for accountability, or learning, and preferably both together.

If you have limited funds for evaluation, you may have to prioritise your evaluation by identifying who are the most important people to report to.

Step 2. Define the evaluation questions

Evaluation questions should be developed up-front, and in collaboration with the primary audience(s) and other stakeholders who you intend to report to. Evaluation questions go beyond measurements to ask the higher order questions such as whether the intervention is worth it, or could it have been achieved in another way (see examples below). Overall, evaluation questions should lead to further action such as project improvement, project mainstreaming, or project redesign.

You should also identify at this stage whether the evaluation audience has specific timelines by which it requires an evaluation report. This will be a major factor in deciding what you can and cannot collect.

Step 3. Identify the indicators and data sources

The next step is to identify what information you need and where this information will come from. It is important to consider data collection, in terms of the type of data and any types of research design. Data sources could be participant themselves. You can then decide on the most appropriate method to collect the data from the data source and to conduct an evaluation.

Step 4. Identify who is responsible for data collection and timelines

It is advisable to assign responsibility for the data collection so that everyone is clear of their roles and responsibilities.

Step 5. Identify who will evaluate the data, how it will be reported, and when

Remembering that evaluation is the subjective assessment of a project's worth, it is important to identify who will be making this 'subjective assessment'. In most cases, it will be the project team, but in some cases, you may involve other stakeholders including the target group or participants. You may also consider outsourcing a particular part of the evaluation to an external or independent party.

For an evaluation to be used (and therefore useful) it is important to present the findings in a format that is appropriate to the audience. This may mean a short report, or a memo, or even a poster or newsletter. As such, it is recommended that you consider how you will present your evaluation from the start, so that you can tailor the way to present your findings to the presentation format (such as graphs, tables, text, images).

Step 6. Review the plan

Once you have completed your plan, go through this checklist. Does your plan:

- Focus on the key evaluation questions and the evaluation audience?
- Capture all that you need to know in order to make a meaningful evaluation of the project?
- Only asks relevant and avoids the collection of unnecessary data?
- Know how data will be analysed, used and reported?
- Work within your budget and other resources?
- Identify the skills and other resources required to conduct an evaluation?

According to another approach there are four main steps to developing an evaluation plan:

- Clarifying program objectives and goals
- Developing evaluation questions
- Developing evaluation methods
- Setting up a timeline for evaluation activities

Clarifying program objectives and goals

The first step is to clarify the objectives and goals of your initiative. What are the main things you want to accomplish, and how have you set out to accomplish them? Clarifying these will help you identify which major program components should be evaluated. One way to do this is to make a table of program components and elements.

Developing evaluation questions

For our purposes, there are four main categories of evaluation questions. Let's look at some examples of possible questions and suggested methods to answer those questions. Later on, we'll tell you a bit more about what these methods are and how they work

• **Planning and implementation issues:** How well was the program or initiative planned out, and how well was that plan put into practice?

○ *Possible questions:* Who participates? Is there diversity among participants? Why do participants enter and leave your programs? Are there a variety of services and alternative activities generated? Do those most in need of help receive services? Are community members satisfied that the program meets local needs?

○ *Possible methods to answer those questions:* monitoring system that tracks actions and accomplishments related to bringing about the mission of the initiative, member survey of satisfaction with goals, member survey of satisfaction with outcomes.

- **Assessing attainment of objectives:** How well has the program or initiative met its stated objectives?
 - *Possible questions:* How many people participate? How many hours are participants involved?
 - *Possible methods to answer those questions:* monitoring system (see above), member survey of satisfaction with outcomes, goal attainment scaling.
- **Impact on participants:** How much and what kind of a difference has the program or initiative made for its targets of change?
 - *Possible questions:* How has behavior changed as a result of participation in the program? Are participants satisfied with the experience? Were there any negative results from participation in the program?
 - *Possible methods to answer those questions:* member survey of satisfaction with goals, member survey of satisfaction with outcomes, behavioral surveys, interviews with key participants.
- **Impact on the community:** How much and what kind of a difference has the program or initiative made on the community as a whole?
 - *Possible questions:* What resulted from the program? Were there any negative results from the program? Do the benefits of the program outweigh the costs?
 - *Possible methods to answer those questions:* Behavioral surveys, interviews with key informants, community-level indicators.

Developing evaluation methods

Once you've come up with the questions you want to answer in your evaluation, the next step is to decide which methods will best address those questions. Here is a brief overview of some common evaluation methods and what they work best for.

Monitoring and feedback system

This method of evaluation has three main elements:

- *Process measures:* these tell you about what you did to implement your initiative;
- *Outcome measures:* these tell you about what the results were; and
- *Observational system:* this is whatever you do to keep track of the initiative while it's happening.

Member surveys about the initiative

It might seem like an overly simple approach, but sometimes the best thing you can do to find out if you're doing a good job is to ask your members. This is best done through member surveys. There are three kinds of member surveys you're most likely to need to use at some point:

- *Member survey of goals:* done before the initiative begins - how do your members think you're going to do?
- *Member survey of process:* done during the initiative - how are you doing so far?
- *Member survey of outcomes:* done after the initiative is finished - how did you do?

Behavioral surveys

Behavioral surveys help you find out what sort of risk behaviors people are taking part in and the level to which they're doing so. For example, if your coalition is working on an initiative to reduce car accidents in your area, one risk behavior to do a survey on will be drunk driving.

Interviews with key participants

Key participants - leaders in your community, people on your staff, etc. - have insights that you can really make use of. Interviewing them to get their viewpoints on critical points in the history of your initiative can help you learn more about the quality of your initiative, identify factors that affected the success or failure of certain events, provide you with a history of your initiative, and give you insight which you can use in planning and renewal efforts.

Community-level indicators of impact

These are tested-and-true markers that help you assess the ultimate outcome of your initiative. Studying community-level indicators helps you provide solid evidence of the effectiveness of your initiative and determine how successful key components have been.

Setting up a timeline for evaluation activities

When does evaluation need to begin?

Right now! Or at least at the beginning of the initiative! Evaluation isn't something you should wait to think about until after everything else has been done. To get an accurate, clear picture of what your group has been doing and how well you've been doing it, it's important to start paying attention to evaluation from the very start. If you're already part of the way into your initiative, however, don't scrap the idea of evaluation altogether--even if you start late, you can still gather information that could prove very useful to you in improving your initiative.

Outline questions for each stage of development of the initiative

We suggest completing a table listing:

- **Key evaluation questions** (the five categories listed above, with more specific questions within each category)
- **Type of evaluation measures** to be used to answer them (i.e., what kind of data you will need to answer the question?)
- **Type of data collection** (i.e., what evaluation methods you will use to collect this data)
- **Experimental design** (A way of ruling out threats to the validity - e.g., believability - of your data. This would include comparing the information you collect to a similar group that is not doing things exactly the way you are doing things.)

With this table, you can get a good overview of what sort of things you'll have to do in order to get the information you need.

When do feedback and reports need to be provided?

Whenever you feel it's appropriate. Of course, you will provide feedback and reports at the end of the evaluation, but you should also provide periodic feedback and reports throughout the duration of the project or initiative. In particular, since you should provide feedback and reports at meetings of your steering committee or overall coalition, find out ahead of time how often they'd like updates. Funding partners will want to know how the evaluation is going as well.

When should evaluation end?

Shortly after the end of the project - usually when the final report is due. Don't wait too long after the project has been completed to finish up your evaluation - it's best to do this while everything is still fresh in your mind and you can still get access to any information you might need.

Also when planning and preparing evaluation use these advices:

DO	DON'T
Involve different people in evaluation, and take them seriously	Get stuck in the negativity of some evaluations. Do bear in mind that many people still believe that evaluating is stating what did not work or what went wrong. Honesty does not mean not highlighting the positive aspects (especially to sponsors)
Look at results of similar projects. Are there any things or trends that can be compared?	Use the evaluation as a way to sort out conflicts (although it can be a starting point...)
Recall the original needs analysis, aims	Feel attacked if some things did not go exactly as you

DO	DON'T
and objectives	planned or felt. Respect the other people's evaluation.
Remember that there is no such thing as an "objective" evaluation. But you may limit the level of subjectivity (by diversifying sources and methods)	Keep the results for yourself
Run through the results and impact of what the project with the young people. This way you will help them understand the change in them.	Focus on what can not be changed, focus on areas where change is possible
Think about the evaluation while planning and running the project (not only towards the end)	Run an evaluation without planning it first
Show possible discrepancies or differences of opinion in matters where there is no clear conclusion or data	
Expect to be misunderstood	

T-kit project management