

Program Evaluation



Why Evaluate Programs?

- To ensure that programs are meeting the needs of constituents.
- To demonstrate the value of our work.
- To enhance program effectiveness and efficiency.
- To determine readiness to begin new work.
- To measure what matters.



A Program of the Stony Brook-
Millstone Watershed Association

31 Titus Mill Road

Pennington NJ 08534

Phone: 609-737-3735

Fax: 609-737-3075

www.thewatershedinstitute.org

April 2009

What is Program Evaluation?

Program evaluation is the collection of information that will enable you to determine the need for and impact of your program. It also helps in identifying any modifications needed to enhance the program.

When we look at the effectiveness of our work, we often evaluate ourselves, our staff, our boards. Were we effective? Did we complete our deliverables? Did we conduct our work in a professional and timely manner?

While evaluating our own effectiveness is important, evaluating the impact of our programs is just as important, if not more so. No matter how well we do our work, unless we evaluate the work itself, we will not have an accurate indication that we are meeting our goals.

Demonstrating that a particular program is the appropriate strategy and that it will achieve the results we intend has many benefits. It shows donors that their money is being used wisely; reinforces the value of our work; and also demonstrates to the public and our constituents that our work is worthy of their support.

Things to Consider

- ◇ **Timing:** When do you conduct evaluation and how often? Timing is critical in creating a thorough, yet realistic, evaluation process. See the “When Do I Evaluate?” section for more detail on timing.
- ◇ **Resources:** The amount of time, funding, and additional resources available will impact the extensiveness of your evaluation.
- ◇ **Expertise:** Who will conduct the evaluation? Staff and board members may have the skills and resources to conduct the evaluation. However, if time and skills are limited, consider asking an experienced volunteer to assist or hiring an impartial and experienced consultant.
- ◇ **Participants:** Who should be involved in the evaluation and at what stages? Potential participants include program managers, organizational staff, constituents, donors, and other stakeholders.
- ◇ **Level of detail:** How in depth do you want to be? Do you plan to evaluate one program or a suite of programs? This depends on your organization’s needs and available resources.
- ◇ **Type of evaluation:** What method best meets your needs? The evaluation method that you use for one program or audience may not be appropriate for another. See “How Do I Measure Effectiveness?” for examples.
- ◇ **Information sharing:** Who do you want to share the evaluation results with? The results are not only useful internally, but may be beneficial to share with constituents, donors, and other organizations.
- ◇ **Definitions:** Different people may use different terms to mean the same thing, or similar terms to mean different things. Focus on the concepts, not the terminology.

When Do I Evaluate?

It is imperative to conduct evaluation throughout all phases of a program, from program planning through program conclusion. There are three main times to conduct evaluation.

- ◇ Before program planning: Needs assessment occurs prior to planning a program. It enables you to learn about the existing conditions, whether it be water quality or the public's current knowledge of, and attitude towards, your issue of focus. This will help you to decide if there is a need for a program and what type of program will have the greatest impact.
- ◇ During program design and implementation: Formative evaluation takes place while designing, piloting, and implementing your program. By gathering data during program implementation, you are able to assess your impact along the way and make any necessary modifications.
- ◇ At program conclusion: Summative evaluation gathers information about conditions after your program. By comparing the summative evaluation with the needs assessment, you will be able to determine the impact your program had.

While evaluation is best done on an ongoing basis, it is beneficial to conduct more in depth evaluation when developing a new program, when you have been running a program as is for an extended period of time, and when organizational direction changes.

What Do I Evaluate?

What you evaluate, or measure, will depend on your program, program purpose, audience, and resources. For example, if you are conducting a stream buffer planting, you may want to measure the number of volunteers participating in the planting, plant survivability over time, water quality improvement, and/or habitat enhancement. You may also want to set specific objectives for each measure, such as 80% plant survivability over 3 years. However, if you are conducting an educational program, you may want to measure not only program attendance and participant satisfaction with the program itself, but also the impact the program has had on long-term behavior of the attendees.

There are various tools to assist you in determining what to measure. Two such tools are logic models and rubrics. Brief summaries of these tools are included here; refer to the "Additional Resources" section to find out where you can obtain further information.

Logic Models

A logic model is a pictorial representation of a program: the resources needed; the actions to be taken; short, mid, and long-term results expected; and external factors which may influence the program. It provides a road map for the program and enables you to identify what you are measuring; however, it does not tell you how to measure it.

Once a logic model is created, it can then be used to develop a plan for collecting data and measuring program effectiveness. In their 2002 paper *Evaluating Capacity-Building Efforts for Nonprofit Organizations*, Paul Connolly and Peter York state that "Using the logic model as a framework, the questions that need to be addressed in the evaluation should be carefully crafted; good questions lead to good answers. Then, indicators of success for each question can be stated, and sources of the necessary data can be identified."

Rubrics

Unlike logic models, rubrics can be used to make measurements, in addition to identifying what you are measuring. According to the website www.rubrics.com, “a rubric is a printed set of scoring guidelines (criteria) for evaluating work (a performance or a product) and for giving feedback. A rubric answers the questions:

1. By what criteria will the work be judged?
2. What is the difference between good work and less impressive work?
3. How can we make sure our judgments (or scores) are valid and reliable?
4. How can both performers and judges focus their preparation on excellence?”

When using rubrics, you develop a ranking scale for criteria based on the qualities you anticipate, from weakest performance to strongest. For example, one end of the scale for a buffer planting could be no surviving plants after 3 years, while the other end of the scale would be 100% survivability after 3 years.

How Do I Measure Effectiveness?

Once you determine what you want to measure and when to measure it, then you need to decide how to collect data. Before choosing your data collection methods, first consider the level of rigor you are looking for. Would anecdotal data suffice or do you need detailed statistics? In addition, you need to consider your audience or issue; an evaluation tool that is effective for adults may not be appropriate for children or wildlife. The various evaluation tools each have strengths and weaknesses, and you will need to find the best tool, or combination of tools, for your program and audience or issue.

Data collection methods include, but are not limited to:

- ◇ Interviews
- ◇ Focus groups
- ◇ Surveys
- ◇ Observation
- ◇ Tests
- ◇ Rubrics
- ◇ Products (e.g. posters, journals, etc.)
- ◇ Water quality monitoring
- ◇ Habitat assessment

I've Collected Data, Now What Do I Do?

Now that you've collected data, you should review it, analyze it, and figure out what it is telling you. Refer back to your logic model or rubric to determine whether or not you met your expectations. If you did, is there still a need for your program or is it time to start a new program? If the program did not fulfill your objectives, what may have prevented that? What changes could you make so that the program is more effective?

Also, consider sharing your data. Let those involved in the evaluation and program implementation processes know the results. Use the results in your grant proposals to demonstrate the need for, and success of, your program to funders. Share your information with other organizations so that they can use your program and evaluation as a model for their own work.

Build on what you learned through the evaluation process and use it to move your organization forward. Remember, evaluation is a critical tool to assist your organization in learning and growing.

Additional Resources

Publications

Evaluating Capacity-Building Efforts for Nonprofit Organizations

Connolly, Paul and Peter York, The Conservation Company, 2002.
<http://tccgrp.com/pubs/evaluation.php>

Introduction to Survey Design and Delivery

NOAA Coastal Services Center, 2007
<http://www.csc.noaa.gov/surveydesign/>

Learning As We Go: Making Evaluation Work for Everyone

Peter J. York, TCC Group, 2003
<http://tccgrp.com/pubs/evaluation.php>

Logic Model Development Guide

W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004
<http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf>

Taking Stock: A Practical Guide to Evaluating Your Own Programs

Horizon Research, Inc., 1997
<http://www.horizon-research.com/reports/1997/stock.pdf>

Whole Measures

Center for Whole Communities, 2007
<http://www.measuresofhealth.net/>

Website Resources

Charity Channel

<http://charitychannel.com/>
Holds workshops, has articles on evaluation, and has a directory of consultants who specialize in nonprofits.

Free Management Library

<http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/evaluatn.htm>
Provides online guides and resources for various types of evaluation.

Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation

<http://www.grdodge.org/learning/assessment/index.htm>
Contains information and resources on assessment. While focused more on organizational evaluation, concepts may be adapted to program evaluation.

The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University

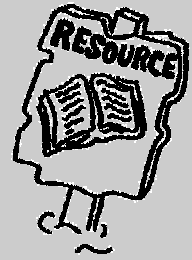
<http://ec.wmich.edu/glossary/prog-glossary.htf>
Provides a glossary of program evaluation terminology.

The National Survey Indicators Database

<http://tarc.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/mcid/index.php>
Provides examples of survey questions, measures, and instruments for data collection activities. Focused on community involvement, but may be applied to other topics.

University of Wisconsin Extension

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/>
Contains various resources on evaluation, including "Planning a Program Evaluation" booklet, logic model templates, and an online course on using logic models.



Organizations Specializing in Program Evaluation

NOAA Coastal Services Center

Provides resources and trainings on project design and evaluation.
<http://www.csc.noaa.gov/>

TCC Group

Provides evaluation consulting to nonprofits and other organizations. Website has various papers and articles on evaluation.
<http://tccgrp.com/>

The Leadership Group

Provides training and consulting services to nonprofits.
<http://www.leadershipgroup.info/>



Funding for this project was provided by the Geraldine R Dodge Foundation.