MissionSpark
Strategies for Social Impact

Evaluating Programs & Initiatives:

A Toolkit for Mission Success

From Actions to Outcomes

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Mission Spark

About Mission Spark and the Author

Mission Spark, LLC (www.missionspark.org) partners with philanthropy, nonprofit and social enterprise leaders to achieve transformative social change and to strengthen the social sector. They work to achieve this mission by providing results-driven consulting, training, and facilitation in Colorado.

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Using this Toolkit

Using this Toolkit

This toolkit is divided into four parts:

- Learn: Program Evaluation Fundamentals
- Plan: Actions to Outcomes
- Implement: Design to Delivery
- Utilize: Strengthen Programming

Uses for this Toolkit:

1. Articulate and align your theory of change, goals and objectives with the outcomes you seek
2. Identify ways to use your evaluation findings to improve programs and engage stakeholders
3. Understand core evaluation terminology and principles to guide your evaluation methods design
4. Plan initial or refine existing evaluation strategies suitable for your organization through the use of practical, customizable tools
5. Deepen learning through vetted 'selected resources'

Introduction

Introduction

Program evaluation is a daunting task for nonprofits overall. Limited staffing, confidentiality and safety issues, transience of clients seeking services, and limited infrastructure to support evaluative efforts are just a few of the barriers standing between many non-profits and the ability to link the impact of their actions with the outcomes they desire through their work. There are many good reasons to evaluate efforts—such efforts provide valuable information about what works and should be continued to best serve communities. With precious few resources at organizations' disposal, results can inform where to continue to invest and strengthen programming and where to terminate activities that are not achieving intended goals. Essentially, evaluation is a tool that provides critical information in connecting the change we wish to see in the world and the actual change we are achieving. Many funders require evaluative efforts based on specified outcome measures to enable them to see effectiveness of both individual organizations and programming impact at a state or national level. Often, though, busy and burned out staff find the evaluation process to be a means to a funding end—hoops to be jumped through to secure necessary resources to continue service provision.

Our intent is that this toolkit can help demystify the evaluation process, and provide the tools and resources needed to strengthen organizational capacity to use evaluation results to improve organizational outcomes. As such, we aim to do several things within this content: establish strong links between actions and outcomes – the inspiring reasons staff and volunteers continue with this critical work – keep evaluation concepts practical, customizable and applied, and focus specifically on supporting organizations as they meet the evaluation requirements and aims of their funders.

Hallmarks of Organizations Successful in Program Evaluation

1. Shared commitment to program evaluation among staff, Board, and volunteers
2. Uses evaluation results to modify and improve programming, and to discontinue ineffective strategies
3. Documents and maintains research, metrics and outcomes over time upon which to build a case for funding and community support
4. Has an evaluation/outcomes measurement plan in place with assigned responsibilities that is regularly monitored
5. Has an efficient and systematic method for tracking key measures
6. Shares results with staff and stakeholders, connecting program activities to desired outcomes

Introduction

Program Evaluation Fundamentals

Part 1. Learn

This section of the toolkit focuses on four things:

- Understanding the value and basics of evaluation
- Providing an overview of Outcomes-Based Program Evaluation
- Identifying evaluation considerations specific to non-profits
- Cultivating resilience in implementing program evaluation

Program Evaluation: A Means for Continuous Learning, Improvement & Impact

What is evaluation? Evaluation is a systematic collection of information used to:

- Better understand your program
- Improve your program's effectiveness
- Make decisions about future programming
- Understand the impact of your mission through the activities and services you undertake

Evaluation isn't (but is often mistaken for):

- Assessment that focuses on "diagnosing" individuals
- Program audits, which examine whether a program is in compliance with laws and regulations
- Conclusions about program effectiveness based on perceived patterns, gut feelings and/or day-to-day experience (valuable, but not program evaluation, per the definition above!)

Why does program evaluation matter?

- While reporting on activities and outputs is important, showing **results and impact** is essential in demonstrating success and effectiveness of approaches, theories and invested resources.
- Understanding the impact of an organization's actions can help in **improving programs** and identifying ways to have greater effectiveness and impact.
- Building trust and credibility throughout your evaluation process leads to **participation and investment by stakeholders** in ongoing and future evaluation efforts.

Gathering information directly by evaluating your programs and activities and/or by learning through the evaluation activities of others (examining secondary research) allows you to engage in "evidence-based" practice – meaning you use the best scientific evidence you can find to decide how to provide services and how to help people and communities supported by your services. Program and process design can be informed by evidence-based practice—learning from the best practices of others, and also by collecting data on your own program to understand the unique environment and community in which you work.

Program Evaluation Fundamentals

Planned evaluations can help you:

1. Verify that resources are being devoted to meeting unmet needs
2. Verify that programs provide needed services
3. Determine whether programs are meeting their goals
4. Determine which services provide the best results
5. Provide information needed to maintain and improve quality
6. Identify unplanned side effects as a result of programming

We do this well	We need to improve

Program evaluation is most effective as an organizational tool for continuous improvement and increased impact when it:

- Starts with an organization's mission
- Ties to program goals and objectives
- Links to program planning and delivery
    - Involves the participation of stakeholders in evaluation design and implementation
- Supports an organization's capacity to learn and reflect
- Respects and engages the individuals and community served by the program
- Enables the collection of the most (useful) information with the least effort and resources (Everyone's busy!)

Evaluation Guiding Values

Trustworthy ***Authentic*** ***Credible***

Evidence-Based ***Inclusive***

Program Evaluation Fundamentals

Outcomes-Based Program Evaluation

There are two primary types of program evaluation, both of which are important to direct service providers: Process Evaluation and Outcomes-based Evaluation. Though this toolkit is primarily about the latter, it is useful to distinguish between the two and to also note the ways assessing process factors may inform desired program outcomes.

Type	Purpose	Questions to Answer[1]	Methods
Process	Assesses **WHAT WE'RE DOING**, i.e. how programs are operating in relation to intent, and serves as a way of checking assumptions about how program design will effectively serve clients and enable program implementation.	• What (exactly) are we doing? • How are we doing it? • Who is receiving our services? • Who isn't receiving our services? • How satisfied are service recipients? • How satisfied are staff? Volunteers? • How are we changing? • How can we improve?	1. Interviews with staff, volunteers and service recipients 2. Focus groups, behavioral observations 3. Reviewing program records
Outcomes	Assesses **WHAT IMPACT WE'RE HAVING,** i.e. program impact – whether program activities are successful in bringing about the outcomes needed by your clients; serves as a way of testing your hypotheses about why and how engaging in programmatic activities leads to desired results.	1. How are the activities we are engaged in bringing about desired results? 2. Do our activities have any unintended consequences? 3. Are our program activities based on the right assumptions of cause and effect? 4. Is our target audience experiencing the changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, or awareness that we seek?	1. Surveys 2. Pre/post tests 3. Observations 4. Service recipient focus groups 5. Interviews 6. Reviewing program records

[1] Questions identified in "Outcome Evaluation Strategies for Domestic Violence Service Programs Receiving FVPSA Funding" by Eleanor Lyon, Ph.D. & Cris M. Sullivan, Ph.D.

Program Evaluation Fundamentals

When designing outcome measures, it is common to include a number of "process-oriented" questions as well, since links between how services were delivered or how the organization operates and communicates can directly link to the effectiveness of how a particular service was delivered. In essence, including some process elements helps us determine the connection between how program services were received and outcomes achieved. For example, when reviewing how a service was delivered you might find a client was more likely to remember key information or change a particular behavior as the result of face-to-face case management as opposed to over-the-phone case management. If the desired outcome was achieved via face-to-face service delivery you may decide to change your standard process.

In Section 3 of this toolkit we will go into more specific detail about implementing outcomes-based program evaluation. This focuses on identifying both process objectives and outcomes objectives, but specifically ties process to impact, focusing on how the actions organizations take tie directly into desired changes in behavior, skills, actions and knowledge.

Evaluation Considerations

As we mentioned in the introduction to this toolkit, there are plenty of barriers for nonprofits in pursuing program evaluation. Some common ones include:

- Program evaluations often require funding, time and technical skills—requirements that are often seen as diverting limited program resources from clients.
- Program staff members are often concerned that evaluation activities will inhibit timely accessibility to services or compromise the safety of clients.
- Program staff members are worried if they can't show positive measurable results they will lose critical funding.

Cultivating Resilience: Committing to Program Evaluation

How can you support successful program evaluation within your own organization? How do you cultivate resilience in the face of significant barriers? Here are some things that you can do to help evaluation activities stay salient:

1. Attitude starts at the top–make sure you help others see the importance and benefits
2. Collaborate with partners and funders to understand your opportunities and constraints, and to garner support
3. Involve staff and the communities you serve; ensure multiple perspectives are represented on both process and outcomes
4. Plan ahead for evaluation needs–consider the resources it will take – from funding, to skill sets to time expended
5. Build evaluation tasks into existing work streams and daily activities, cultivate and reward staff habits which support the process

6. Keep evaluation systems simple and keep systems documented in case of turnover
7. Review current evaluation practices
8. Are you asking the right questions?
9. Are your systems as efficient as they can be?
10. Can you get better information with the same amount of effort?
11. Start small–take baby steps and get results—it's much better to achieve small evaluation wins then to start comprehensive evaluation without adequate support to maintain efforts;
12. Build in chances to review evaluative information into existing communication methods–staff meetings, memos or other regular communications.

Are you ready for a Program Evaluation?

Are you ready to engage in an evaluative effort or is it time to revamp what you've been doing? Sometimes we are on autopilot or completely guided by the needs of funders. Sometimes a fresh look or setting aside even 1/2 hour of time to review what you're doing or to consider what you're not, but could be doing can identify a ways to improve or reveal where to get started. On the next page, we've created a series of questions to guide your thinking, built on evaluation best practices.

Getting Started: Guiding Assessment

1. Have you obtained a complete program description for all of your programs or for the specific program you wish to evaluate?

2. Have you identified and met with Program Stakeholders, including program participants, to gather their feedback and ideas about your evaluative efforts?

3. Have you become familiar with the information needs required by your evaluation—gathering only that which informs process and outcomes?

4. Do you have a clearly identified purpose for your evaluation?

5. Who wants an evaluation? You, staff, board, partners, funders, community members, service recipients?

Program Evaluation Fundamentals

6. Who will use the information you collect and analyze? How will they use it?

7. Who are the participants or target audience you hope to understand better through evaluation?

8. What are the top 3-5 things you want to know? Pose in the form of questions.

9. Over what timeline is the evaluation needed?

10. What resources are available to support an evaluation?

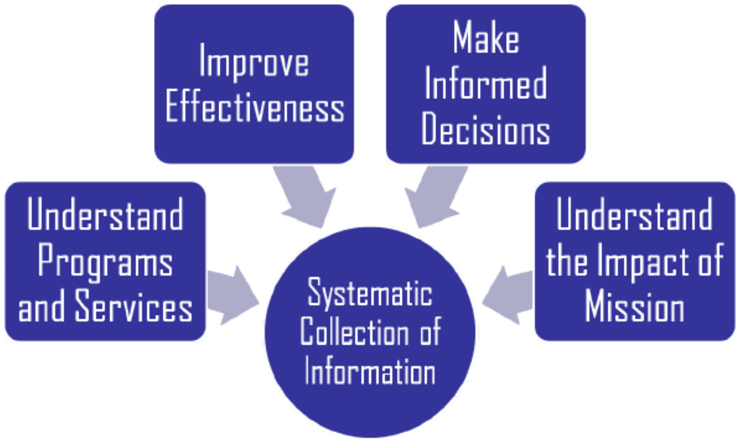
My Key Takeaways from Program Evaluation Fundamentals

Use the space below to identify information or ideas explored in the above section that have particular relevance to your program. What actions or activities might you want to engage in that could strengthen your organization's ability to engage in or improve program evaluation. What key takeaways do you want to ensure you'll remember? Document those items below:

Activity	By When

Program Evaluation Fundamentals

Program Evaluation Enables You To:



Part 2: Plan: Linking Program Actions to Outcomes

The purpose of this section of the toolkit is to help you plan your evaluation, building on the work of the previous chapter by developing the core logic and goals underlying your program activities—that is, why you do what you do. Making sure this part of your programming is strong provides a foundation on which to build your evaluation questions, desired outcomes and measures. This section includes the following:

- Establishing your theory of change
- Identifying program goals and objectives
- Linking your goals and objectives to resources invested and desired outcomes through the development of a logic model

Establishing Your Theory of Change

A **Theory of Change** is a specific and measurable description of a social change initiative that forms the basis for strategic planning, on-going decision-making and evaluation. It consists of identifying all the building blocks perceived to be necessary to bring about desired changes. It also identifies the assumptions which support the causal logic connecting building blocks to outcomes.

Linking Actions to Outcomes

Why create a theory of change? A Theory of Change can help you think through the impact you intend to have and solidify the thinking and logic behind your ideas. Your Theory of Change can become a compelling message you share with potential supporters, funders, Board members and community members to help them understand your purpose and outcomes. It also will help you identify the assumptions underlying your causal thinking. Identifying the kind of change you want to make within a charitable context will help you find partners, identify potential competitors, and build community support. Essentially, a Theory of Change serves as a road map between the activities you undertake and the results you expect—it defines why you do what you do!

How is a theory of change structured?

A theory of change puts your ideas into a framework of cause and effect or "if"___________, "then" ___________. The "if" refers to things your organization can do—activities undertaken, resources expended, process used—to achieve certain changes, defined in the "then" part of the equation—those anticipated outcomes may be things you have direct influence or control over, or they may be part of a larger movement or initiative of which you are one actor among others.

Assumptions are the underlying beliefs and relationships which support your Theory of Change. Assumptions are important to identify because they link the logic or the "why" you think your activities will lead to anticipated outcomes. Sometimes your assumptions are correct, other times they are not. Evaluation and research can help test these assumptions and enable you to make course corrections.

Organizational Example: Theory of Change

Here is an example of a theory of change developed in partnership with staff, board members and program participants of a Colorado youth activities program. It was designed to connect the organization's key activities and approach with desired program participant outcomes.

If "Youth Activities" Organization…

- Seeks youth out where they are
- Creates sports-related activities that develop participants physically, socially and academically
- Ties creative activities to core life skills and values
- Tailors programming to partners' needs
- Provides a continual presence of programming and support
- Develops and scales standardized curricula

Then…In the short-term, participants will:

Linking Actions to Outcomes

1. Experience increased physical activity
2. Gain life-long social skills
3. Gain confidence in all aspects of life
4. Exhibit improved behavior, anger management and attendance at school
5. Improve academically

And…In the long-term, participants will:

1. Be guided by the 9 core program values
2. Give back to their communities
3. Build and benefit from supportive relationships
4. Be more committed academically
5. Have increased awareness and interest in the game of xx
6. Articulate life goals
7. Exhibit improved interest in personal health and wellness, maintaining a more active lifestyle
8. Exhibit improved professional skills
9. Be less likely to engage in destructive behaviors

Key Assumptions and Conditions for Success:

- Program delivery is consistent
  - To ensure this:
    - Identify what makes delivery successful
    - Train others who deliver programming
    - Document and standardize curricula
- Programs can get to the youth
  - To ensure this:
    - Formalize partnership with school district
    - Identify and be able to communicate value-add to partners about programs
    - Link in school participants to summer program
    - Work with community partners
- Access to Facilities and Funding
  - To ensure this:
    - Focus on relationship-building/maintenance with key stakeholders
    - Be able to communicate value to stakeholders, based on their needs and interests
    - Maintain public facilities affiliations and develop private affiliations
    - Keep policy makers informed and invested

Linking Actions to Outcomes

- Solve problems/ change mindsets of those underinvested or against programming
- Build and communicate good will

Theory of Change Activity

Create a theory of change for your organization. Begin with your mission at the top, then identify all of the "ifs" you engage in programmatically that you believe are connected to the "thens" – the results you want to see in the world.

Mission:

If:

Then:

Linking Actions to Outcomes

Key Assumptions/ Conditions for Success:

(1)

(2)

(3)

What data supports your assumptions?

Are there any weak points in your theory of change? Areas where an alternative unintended outcome might exist?

Linking Actions to Outcomes: Program Implementation & Evaluation Process

Now that you have a sense of the causal thinking that relates your activities and intended impacts, how can you translate these relationships into testable, measurable ideas that can improve programming and outcomes?

Linking Actions to Outcomes

Here are some key steps in setting the foundation that we will explore in greater detail:

- Identify key problems related in the community you serve
- Identify what's needed to address those problems
- Identify what of those needs fall within the scope of your mission
- Identify what actions you can take to address those mission-specific needs
- Set Goals--broad statements about a long-term desired outcome that are clear, achievable and realistic.
- Develop objectives for each goal– objectives are measurable outcomes that will be achieved in a specific timeframe to help accomplish a desired goal.

Establishing Problem and Needs Statements

Overview

Establishing a clear problem statement that is specific to your community is an important first step. First, define the problem exactly as it exists in your particular community. Describe the nature and magnitude of the problem using valid, updated statistical data wherever possible. Once the problem is defined, you can identify what interventions are needed to address those issues.

What are specific issues that exist in your community or area of service?

What are specific interventions that can address the issues identified for your community?

Linking Actions to Outcomes

Of the interventions you've identified above, which are in line with your mission and scope of service? Look for connections established in your theory of change.

Needs Statement:

Problem Statement:

Use the interventions you've identified above to inform the development of your goals and objectives in the next section.

Setting Goals and Objectives

Goals: broad statements about a long-term desired outcome that are clear, achievable and realistic.

Objectives: specific, measurable statements of progress toward your goal that will be achieved in a specific timeframe.

Process Objective: an objective which details what you are doing, how you will do it, and for whom.

Outcome/ Impact Objective: an objective which details what changes in knowledge, behavior, and action you will achieve through your activities—what will change, for whom, by how much, by when?

Overview

Linking Actions to Outcomes

Setting your program's goals and objectives is a critical task in linking actions to outcomes, and ultimately measuring your impact. Funders are not looking for your overpromise in your goals—instead—what can you work towards that is CLEAR, ACHIEVABLE and REALISTIC for your program.

And how can you engage in actions that will help you achieve those goals that are SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE AND TIMELY?

Tip: When developing your goals for grants you should include all goals that relate to the mission and scope of your programming—even if you may not be receiving funding that supports all of those goals. This helps paint a comprehensive picture of what your organization is trying to achieve and how.

Example:

Problem Statement: Approximately 60% of DVP-grantees struggle to develop goals that are clear, achievable and realistic to their organization's programming. In addition, resulting objectives often lack the ability to be measured or are too vague to identify what types of actions that program might take to meet its goals.

Needs Statement: DVP-grantees need additional training and education around how to develop goals and objectives that both meet the DVP framework and serve as a useful tool to guide programs forward towards outcomes and impact.

GOAL

Increase participants' abilities to develop goals and objectives.

PROCESS OBJECTIVE

Provide training to enhance participants' knowledge and skills to develop program goals and objectives.

OUTCOMES OBJECTIVE

75% of participants in training will revise their goals and objectives to meet the DVP framework.

Linking Actions to Outcomes

Where Goals and Objectives Go Wrong

DVP reports the following challenges among grantees when submitting their grant applications:

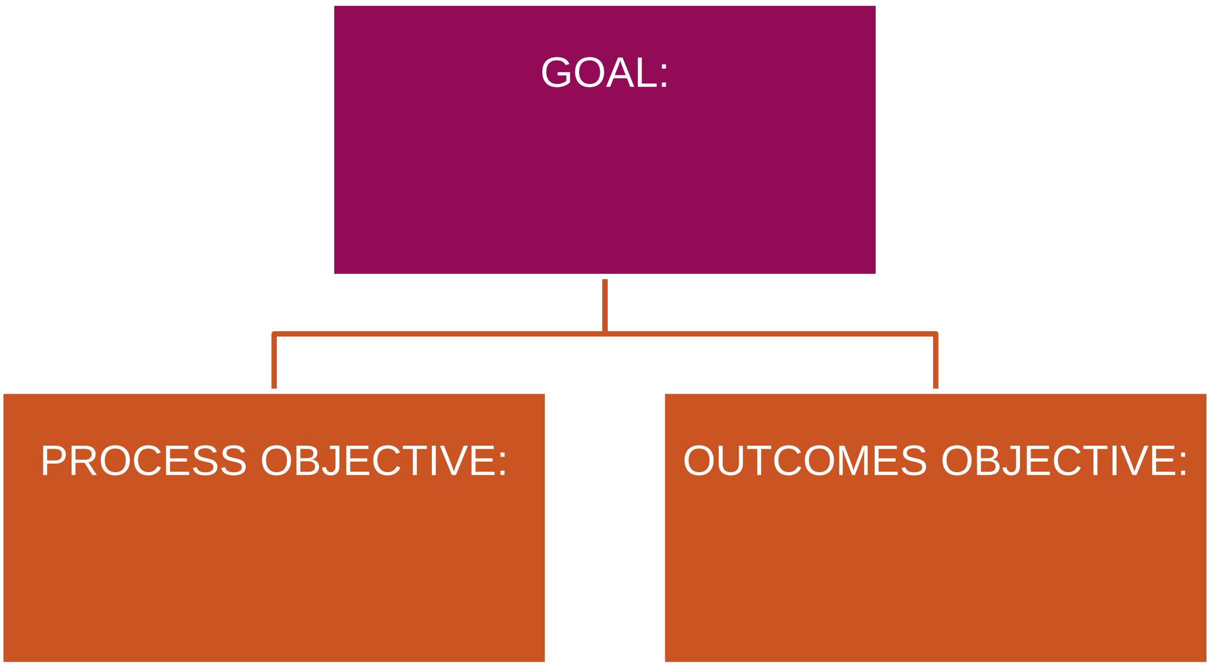
1. Goals are outside the scope of what is achievable for the organization: “End domestic violence in the United States”
2. Goals are too vague: “Improve survivor outcomes.”
3. Goals aren’t realistic for the organization: “Educate every Denver- metro community member about DV prevention strategies.”
4. Objectives can’t be measured: “75% of survivors will never experience domestic violence again.”
5. Objectives aren’t specific: “Help survivors improve their coping skills.”

Practice: Guiding Statements & Goals

Problem Statement:

Needs Statement:

Linking Actions to Outcomes



Goals & Objectives Checklist

Use the following checklist to review the goals and objectives you recently submitted to granting agencies. Are there ways they could be improved based on the information provided above?

Are Goals achievable by my organization?   Y / N

Are Goals within the scope of my organization’s mission?   Y / N

Are Goals clearly defined, not vague/ overly general?   Y / N

Are Goals realistic—meaning we have the resources and capabilities to make it happen?   Y/N

Are Goals specific and defined to our community?   Y / N

Are process objectives detailing what action we will undertake for whom, with what desired results? Y / N

Are outcomes objectives measurable with defined targets for changes in target audience behavior, attitude, skill or knowledge?   Y / N

Linking Actions to Outcomes

Are objectives time-specific and is that time frame realistic for the desired change (especially as it relates to outcomes? Y / N

Notes – How to improve my goals and objectives:

Develop your Logic Model

Logic models are critical tools in implementing evaluation efforts. The good news is you've already developed or revised many of the components in this toolkit—the problem and needs statements, the goals and objectives—now it's time to take the "logic" further—how the resources or inputs your program dedicates couples with the activities you engage in lead to the measurable impact you seek.

Logic models are flowcharts that depict program components. Models can include any number of program elements, showing the development of a program from theory to activities and outcomes. Program infrastructure, inputs, processes, and outputs are often included. The process of developing logic models can serve to clarify program elements and expectations for program stakeholders.

By depicting the sequence and logic of inputs, processes and outputs, logic models can help ensure that the necessary data are collected to make credible statements of causality (CDC, 1999). You've already identified your "theory" of causality in your theory of change, but logic models make explicit the ways you can test that theory to ensure your statements are evidence-based. Below is some helpful logic model terminology:

1. **Problem Statement** = what issue exists in your target community
2. **Needs statement** = what's needed to solve the problem listed in the problem statement
3. **Resources** = what your organization has to invest in delivering programming
4. **Activities** = what you do to carry out your programming (training sessions, case management)
5. **Outputs** = the products of your actions (number of people served, number of hotline calls)
6. **Outcomes** = the change you achieve relating to your mission (changes in knowledge,

behavior, conditions, etc.)

We've already explored the concept of outcomes a little bit thus far—we know that outcomes are changes achieved through actions or activities we engage in. Some outcomes are short or medium term, and over which your organization may have significant control. Some longer term outcomes may be the result of multiple factors and actors—where it would be difficult to isolate the specific role your organization played—like achieving a major shift in public opinion within the United States, when you serve a specific county in Colorado.

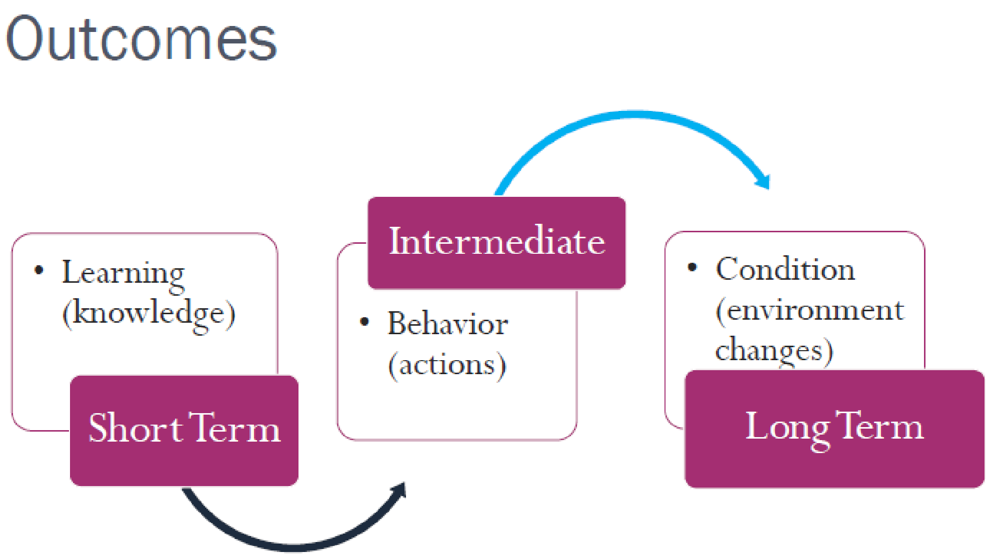
We tend to narrow outcomes to behavior, attitude, skills and knowledge change in individuals, as this is the level we can more easily measure and track. But as reference, there are a wide range of outcomes that might be achieved or to which your organization might contribute.

Outcomes mean changes in:

1. Knowledge
2. Skill
3. Behavior
4. Motivation
5. Decisions
6. Policies
7. Conditions
8. Individuals
9. Communities
10. Organizations
11. Systems
12. Processes

One way you can think of outcomes you might see as related to the passage of time are by looking at changes you may see in the short, medium and long term. Short term can be defined as immediately to up to 6 months, and you are most likely to achieve changes in knowledge and understanding. Medium term might be 3-9 months to a year, and you may be able to achieve measurable behavior change, different decision-making and application of skills. And long term extends beyond 9 months to years out—where changes in the community, policy or institutions might be observed.

Linking Actions to Outcomes



Finally, as reinforced early in the overview of objectives, it is important to be able to measure outcomes. Short and Intermediate outcomes are easier to measure and to attribute more directly to actions your organization is taking. In Outcomes-based evaluation, getting to outcomes that can be measured is often done through the development of indicators and indicator statements.

Indicators define what does success looks like? They focus on shared characteristics and are meaningful, direct, useful, and most importantly, practical to collect.

Indicator statements translate indicators into specific measurable statements and answer how much, who, what and when.

Outcomes	Indicator Statements
New mothers increase their knowledge of child development.	75% of new mothers in the program satisfactorily complete a short survey about child development at the end of the course.
Target audiences increase knowledge about the signs of child abuse/neglect.	50% of community focus group members can identify the signs of abuse/neglect six months after education campaign.

Logic Model in Practice

There are a variety of logic model templates out there. We have included the DVP template in this toolkit. Make sure outcomes are specific and measurable!

Linking Actions to Outcomes

Colorado Department of Human Services - Domestic Violence Program

2012 - 2013 Application for Funding - Logic Model

Applicant Name:

Problem and Needs Statement:

	Outputs/Process Outcomes		Impact Outcomes		
Inputs and Resources	Activities	Participation	Short-Term Impact	Medium-Term Impact	Long-Term Impact

Remember, inputs and resources detail the staff, volunteers, money, training and other investments your organization makes to support the program activities you undertake.

Activities detail specifically what you will do—the number of trainings you might provide, the type and amount of educational materials you plan to distribute, the availability of your crisis line, or hours of case management you plan to invest in. Participation says who and how many will benefit from a particular activity (e.g. 6 schools will distribute materials to 1000 students).

Now use what you've learned in developing your outcomes objectives couples with the information on outcomes (short-term, medium-term, and long-term) you've learned above to develop impact you might expect to see. For example, in the short-term (end of day) 60% of students receiving educational materials will demonstrate increased awareness of domestic violence issues as demonstrated through pre & post-testing; in the medium term (6months to a year), 4 of 6 schools will report decreased incidences of student partner abuse (girlfriend/boyfriend or other) and in the long-term (1-2 years) school-related domestic violence in X community will have decreased by 30%.

My Key Takeaways from Linking Actions to Outcomes

Use the space below to identify information or ideas explored in the above section that have particular relevance to your program. What actions or activities might you want to engage in that

Linking Actions to Outcomes

could strengthen your organization's ability to link actions to outcomes through the development of a theory of changes, problem and needs statements, goals and objectives and logic model. What key takeaways do you want to ensure you'll remember? Document those items below:

Activity	By When

Implement: Design to Delivery

Part 3: Implement: Design to Delivery

Now that you've really thought through and documented the relationships between the goals you program has, the resources you invest and the actions you take to achieve the outcomes you want, how do you design your evaluation methods and implement your plan. Some of you may be looking to expand evaluation methods and others may simply want to refine the methods you already have.

Planning for Your Evaluation

Here are some steps in planning for an evaluation effort, whether small or large. After each step, we've provided space for you to document whether you've done this step and if not, what would you need to do to implement:

Complete?	If No, How Achieve?

1. What can you learn from others? Examine the literature and online resources related to your topic and program.

2. Finalize the key questions you want to answer—do you have a master list of questions? Use your logic model to develop your questions and pull your ideas from Part I of this toolkit—the 3-5 things you want to learn through evaluation.

Complete?	If No, How Achieve?

3. Determine the methodology (tools and techniques you will use to gather information needed to answer your key questions). [Some resources follow to help you think through collection methods.]

Complete?	If No, How Achieve?

Implement: Design to Delivery

4. Engage a subcommittee of staff and stakeholders to design the evaluation process (how will you implement–look for specific ways to incorporate evaluation efforts into existing systems and work).

Complete?	If No, How Achieve?

5. Develop a written description of the evaluation and communicate to others involved: Include Purpose, Process, Responsible parties, Data collection and tools and Timeline

Complete?	If No, How Achieve?

Here are some things to consider as you select methods you will use to collect data that answers the evaluative questions you've posed and supports your process/outputs and outcome statements described in your logic model. If you determined 65% of participants will have a change in knowledge or will demonstrate a new skill, how can you measure participants' change in knowledge?

The overall goal in selecting evaluation method(s) is to get the most useful information to key decision makers in the most cost-effective and realistic fashion.

- Which methods will be least disruptive to your program? To those you serve?
- Which methods can you afford?
- Which methods do you have the resources and skills to implement well?
- Considering cultural appropriateness and other contextual issues, which methods are best suited to obtaining the information you need?
- How can you minimize your collection methods while maximizing information gathered?

Implement: Design to Delivery

- What information can be collected and analyzed in a low-cost and practical manner, e.g., using questionnaires, surveys and checklists?
- How accurate will the information be?
- How can the information be analyzed?

Here are some potential ways you might collect data that can provide impact measurement (resource developed by and available on managementhelp.org):

Method	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Questionnaires, surveys, checklists	When need to quickly and/or easily get lots of information from people in a non-threatening way	-can complete anonymously -inexpensive to administer -easy to compare and analyze -administer to many people -can get lots of data -many sample questionnaires already exist	-might not get careful feedback -wording can bias client's responses -are impersonal -in surveys, may need sampling expert - doesn't get full story
Interviews	When want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires	-get full range and depth of information -develops relationship with client -can be flexible with client	-can take much time -can be hard to analyze and compare -can be costly -interviewer can bias client's responses

Documentation review	When want impression of how program operates without interrupting the program; is from review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc.	-get comprehensive and historical information -doesn't interrupt program or client's routine in program -information already exists -few biases about information	-often takes much time -info may be incomplete -need to be quite clear about what looking for -not flexible means to get data; data restricted to what already exists
Observation	To gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes	-view operations of a program as they are actually occurring -can adapt to events as they occur	-can be difficult to interpret seen behaviors -can be complex to categorize observations -can influence behaviors of program participants -can be expensive
Focus groups	Explore a topic in depth through group discussion, e.g., about reactions to an experience or suggestion, understanding common complaints, etc.; useful in evaluation and marketing	-quickly and reliably get common impressions -can be efficient way to get much range and depth of information in short time - can convey key information about programs	-can be hard to analyze responses -need good facilitator for safety and closure -difficult to schedule 6-8 people together
Case studies	To fully understand or depict client's experiences in a program, and conduct comprehensive examination through cross comparison of cases	-fully depicts client's experience in program input, process and results -powerful means to portray program to outsiders	-usually quite time consuming to collect, organize and describe -represents depth of information, rather than breadth

Resource from http://managementhelp.org/evaluation/program-evaluation-guide.htm#anchor1585345

Developing Your Evaluation Plan

You've thought through the questions you want to answer, the resources and skills you have to commit to evaluation and how the information will be used. Documenting your evaluation plan in a way that can quickly be shared with others is an important next step. It also addresses some of the key process issues around who will do what—a key part of ensuring follow through and accountability.

Implement: Design to Delivery

If you are not already operating from a documented evaluation plan, we've provided a template for you to develop one. You may be filling in the chart below based on evaluative practices in which you are already engaged or you may be starting from scratch. Use your answers developed as part of this section to inform your content. The template starts on the following page.

Implement: Design to Delivery

Evaluation Plan

Organization: ______________________

Program: _________________________

Purpose of Evaluation:

Program/ Service Description:

Overview of Evaluation Process:

Evaluation Team:

Summary of Data Collection Methods:

Timeline:

Implement: Design to Delivery

Collecting Your Data: Process to Practical

Identifying the best ways to collect the information you need only gets you so far. How do you develop a process for data collection that staff can implement? Here are some ways to institutionalize data collection as part of your programming activities. Clear responsibilities, expectations, accountability and processes are key.

Process Design

Review Person	Perspective / Insight	By When
1.		
2.		
3.		

- Have your outcomes and indicators reviewed by others:
- Identify 3 people who can provide feedback on your outcomes and indicators.

- For each indicator, identify what information you will need to collect and measure. Indication

Outcome/Indicator	Information Needed	Method of Collection

your method for collection:
- If you haven't already documented elsewhere, list all of your indicators below and the specific information you will need to collect.

- Determine who will collect the data you've identified above.
- Write up a brief procedure:
  - What data?
  - Who collects?

- When to collect?
  What to do with collected data?

Please find below a sample data collection process is provided as presented in “Outcome Evaluation Strategies for Domestic Violence Service Programs Receiving FVPSA Funding” by Eleanor Lyon, Ph.D. & Cris M. Sullivan, Ph.D.

CREATING A PLAN WITH STAFF
FOR COLLECTING OUTCOME EVALUATION DATA

1. Meet with key staff to explain the need for the evaluation and how it can be useful to the organization.

2. Decide with staff who will collect the data, how often, and from whom

3. The importance of *sampling* clients
   a. Do not collect data when clients are in crisis
   b. Collect data often enough that you don't miss those clients who receive short-term services, BUT not so often it's a burden to clients
   c. Sampling shelter residents:
      - Ideally, try to ask every shelter resident to participate as they get closer to shelter exit (other than those in crisis).
   d. Sampling support group participants:
      - Ideally, every 3-4 weeks pass out forms to all group members at the end of a meeting, and invite them to stay an extra 5 minutes to complete the form. Pens or pencils should be provided, a locked box or sealed envelope should be provided, and the facilitator should leave the room.
   e. Sampling advocacy program participants:
      - Ideally, after 2 contacts with the advocate unless the advocate believes they'll see the client again. You want to allow enough time for change to occur, but not miss those clients receiving short-term advocacy.

4. The key to sampling is that you must make sure that the people you include are as much like ("representative of") the whole group of people who receive your services as possible.
   a. Survivors from all ages, races and cultural groups, sexual orientations, religious preferences, and abilities must be included.
   b. Dissatisfied as well as satisfied clients need to be included.

5. Copy enough blank forms that they are readily available to staff; they should be in a visible area that will remind staff to use them.

6. Design a way that clients can return completed forms in an anonymous way. You can make or buy a locked box with a hole in the top, or can provide envelopes that clients can seal themselves and place in a safe place. Consider:
   a. Clients need to feel that no one will look at their form in the near future.
   b. Clients need to feel that they will not be identified by their survey.
   c. Before you begin, you could ask some clients what place or approach would feel best to them.
   d. You might need to figure this out through trial and error.

7. Decide with staff how often to discuss how the data collection is going; this should be quite often in the beginning while staff is getting used to the new procedures and to decide together what strategy works well and what doesn't.

8. All staff who might invite clients to participate in completing a survey should have a copy of the "*Directions for inviting clients to participate in outcome evaluation.*"

FVPSA Outcomes Evaluation: A Practical Guide *page 52*

Implement: Design to Delivery

Evaluation Implementation Chart: Summary Document

Evaluation Outcome/Indicator	Data Collection Sources	Data Collection Method	Responsible Parties	Timeline for Completion

Implement: Design to Delivery

Implement: Design to Delivery

Storing Your Data

The first question, before deciding how to analyze your data, is: how and where will you *store* your data? We strongly recommend investing in a computerized database, or computer program designed for storing and organizing data. The database should be as simple as possible while still allowing you to meet your data analysis needs. In short, it should be capable of organizing your data for you in a simple, manageable way. Likely, your program has access to common spreadsheet programs, such as Excel that you may already be using for budgeting and other purposes, and you may also have Microsoft Access which allows for easier data entry and more complex analysis.

If you are working from paper surveys and written notes, it is important to enter your data into your system as soon as possible to ensure paper copies aren't misplaced or important information forgotten. In addition, it is extremely important to back up your data in several places, to avoid corrupting or deleting your data files.

Analyzing Your Data

Let's begin with understanding the difference between the type of data you're collecting: qualitative vs. quantitative. Witte & Witte (2009), in their statistics textbook, present the distinction simply:

Quantitative Data: "When, among a set of observations, any single observation is a number that represents an amount or a count, then the data are quantitative."

Qualitative Data: "When, among a set of observations, any single observation is a word, or a sentence, or a description, or a code that represents a category then the data are qualitative."

Much of the data you collect through focus groups, interviews, demographics and surveys is qualitative in nature. Each has an important part to play—qualitative data often adds richness and insight. Quantitative data lends itself to statistical analysis.

Here is some useful information from the W.K. Kellogg handbook on evaluating data, modified to include:

Always start with your evaluation goals:
When analyzing data (whether from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, or other), always start from review of your evaluation goals, i.e., the reason you undertook the evaluation in the first place. This will help you organize your data and focus your analysis. For example, if you wanted to improve your program by identifying its strengths and weaknesses, you can organize data into program strengths, weaknesses and suggestions to improve the program. If you wanted to fully understand how your program works, you could organize data in the chronological order in which clients go through your program. If you are conducting an outcomes-based evaluation, you can categorize data according to the indicators for each outcome.

Implement: Design to Delivery

Basic analysis of "quantitative" information (for information other than commentary, e.g., ratings, rankings, yes's, no's, etc.):

1. Make copies of your data and store the master copy away. Use the copy for making edits, cutting and pasting, etc.
2. Tabulate the information, i.e., add up the number of ratings, rankings, yes's, no's for each question.
3. For ratings and rankings, consider computing a mean, or average, for each question. For example, "For question #1, the average ranking was 2.4". This is more meaningful than indicating, e.g., how many respondents ranked 1, 2, or 3.
4. Consider conveying the range of answers, e.g., 20 people ranked "1", 30 ranked "2", and 20 people ranked "3".

Basic analysis of "qualitative" information (respondents' verbal answers in interviews, focus groups, or written commentary on questionnaires):

1. Read through all the data.
2. Organize comments into similar categories, e.g., concerns, suggestions, strengths, weaknesses, similar experiences, program inputs, recommendations, outputs, outcome indicators, etc.
3. Label the categories or themes, e.g., concerns, suggestions, etc.
4. Attempt to identify patterns, or associations and causal relationships in the themes, e.g., all people who attended programs in the evening had similar concerns, most people came from the same geographic area, most people were in the same salary range, what processes or events respondents experience during the program, etc.
5. Keep all commentary for several years after completion in case needed for future reference.

In addition to the W.K. Kellogg evaluation handbook, we also find that good data analysis suggestions are available at the following website:

Nonprofit & Philanthropy Good Practice

http://www.npgoodpractice.org/category/guide-categories-and-concepts/nonprofit/evaluation/data-collection-and-analysis

Practical Considerations

When Interpreting Your Data

The following insights are taken directly from the W.K. Kellogg Evaluation Handbook. We think their advice is good and well-said, and it is replicated in full below.

Things to Remember . . .

While analyzing and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data, be careful to avoid the following pitfalls:

- Assuming that the program is the only cause of positive changes documented. Several factors, some of which are unrelated to project activities, may be responsible for changes in participants or in a community. It is usually not possible to isolate impacts, and the evaluation report should at least acknowledge other factors which may have contributed to change.
- Forgetting that the same evaluation method may give different results when used by different people, or that respondents may tell the evaluator what they believe he or she wants to hear. For example, two interviewers may ask the same questions but receive different answers because one was friendlier or more patient than the other. Real problems or difficulties may be ignored or hidden because people want the project to succeed or appear to be succeeding.
- Choosing the wrong groups to compare or comparing groups that are different in too many ways. For example, gender, age, race, economic status, and many other factors can all have an impact on project outcomes. If comparisons between groups are important, try to compare those with similar characteristics except for the variable you are studying.
- Claiming that the results of a small-scale evaluation also apply to a wide group or geographic area. For example, it is misleading to evaluate participants' responses to a particular intervention in one city and then claim that the results apply to the U.S. as a whole. While this may well be the case, an evaluation report should reflect only the data analyzed.

Process & Implementation: When Things Go Wrong

Implementing evaluation efforts is hard work and there are always setbacks—including surveys you administer that don't get returned, difficulty in securing open responses from clients, inadequate databases for tracking and analyzing information to plain old human error. It's important to keep going and to seek continuous improvement.

Maintain a "Failure" Log

No one likes the word failure, but a learning organization seeking to improve benefits greatly from documenting where things go wrong. In the evaluation world, it's especially important. When discussing findings with staff and stakeholders, documenting any concerns about process or data can used to inform strategy and decision-making.

Documenting Issues for Evaluation

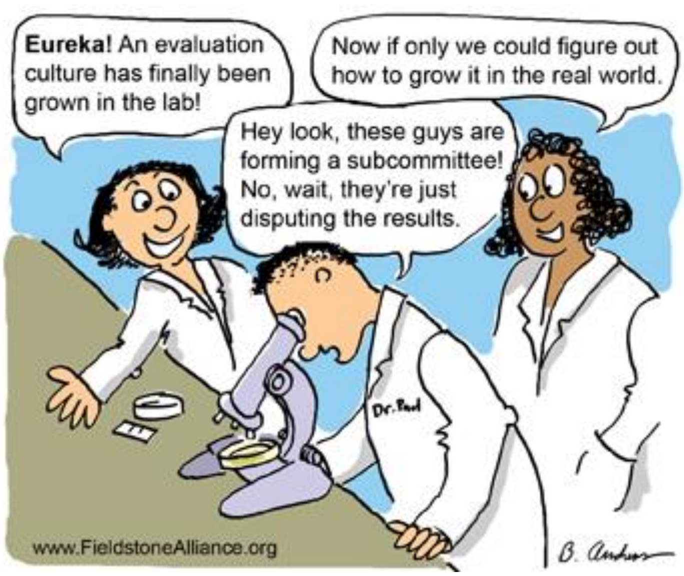
Documenting does not need to be time consuming process. When you have a concern or a challenge related to the evaluation, jot it down. You can use the format below:

Issue Identified	Perceived Impact	How Address Now	How Address for Future

Implement: Design to Delivery

Design to Delivery

The purpose of this section is to provide useful information about designing and implementing your evaluation using the foundational goals, objectives and outcomes defined in section 2. General data collection and analysis tips have been provided here but we know we have only scratched the surface. There are many useful web-based resources out there that can assist with customizing your analysis. Often your funders are the best place to start as many provide tools and resources to assist with this aspect of your programming. The following and last section focused on using your findings with your organization to improve, inform strategy and decision-making and to better meet the need of your community.



Part 4: Utilize: Strengthen Programming

One of the key areas identified in the DVP assessment discussed in the introduction section of this toolkit where grantees struggled was in the process of translating the information collected into action. Based on the results of your evaluation, what might you do differently as an organization? Even after all the effort of collecting and analyzing data, it is surprisingly common in ALL organizations to then not use that information to inform programming, resource allocation and strategy. This is section is dedicated to helping you think through how you can use information with your organization.

Before we move forward, please take a moment to reflect and document how you've used evaluation findings to change how you did things in your organization in the past:

What we learned	What we did as a result	What changed

Once again, presenting work from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Evaluation Handbook, here are some thoughts about how you might use evaluation results with in your organization:

Using Evaluation Findings

Specific uses will depend on the overall purpose of your evaluation and the questions you are attempting to address. The following highlights several specific uses of evaluation findings:

Improving Your Program

A goal of every evaluation should be to improve the program, and evaluation findings should support decisions and actions about how best to do so. Specific findings might be used to identify strengths and weaknesses of your program or provide strategies for continuous improvement. You may decide to focus evaluation questions on organizational issues. In this case, findings could lead to strategies that would help staff manage more effectively, improve organizational culture or systems, or improve staff interactions and relationships with clients.

Utilize: Strengthen Programming

Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Program:

In cases where the primary purpose of evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the program, evaluation findings should support decisions around accountability and quality control. In some cases, findings might be used to decide a program's future, determine the likelihood of continued funding, or make decisions about program expansion.

Generating New Knowledge:

Another potential goal of evaluation is to discover new knowledge about effective practice. In particular, the Kellogg Foundation advocates focusing evaluation questions on how and why programs work, for whom, and in what circumstances. Findings and insights from addressing these types of evaluation questions provide important information about general principles of effective practice, cross-cutting themes, connections between underlying theories and practice, and sometimes lead to new and enhanced theories about human and organizational development. In addition, these types of findings can be used to collaborate, share, and learn across programs and initiatives with common themes and principles. They are often at the heart of policymaking decisions, as well.

Being Intentional: Planning to Use Your Results

Sometimes it's useful to stop and reflect on how your organization gets things done—who are the decision-makers and how are decisions made. Working with in the systems of how your organization operates is essential to actually using your evaluation results to galvanize change. Based on the categories presented above of areas likely to be influenced through evaluation and the types of changes that may result, how can you support those changes? Here are a few activities and questions, presented with room for you to include your own planning.

Review your evaluation plan and goals with your team-- articulate (in writing) how you and your evaluation team intend to utilize evaluation results. Be as specific as you can and revise as you go through the process. Once you've identified these uses, prioritize them in order of importance, with 1 being the most important. Assign someone who can champion for this use, once data is in.

How Use Results	Priority to Organization	Why Important	Champion (name)

Utilize: Strengthen Programming

Using Your Results: Thought Questions

- Who will make the decisions using the priorities above and when?
- What are the different challenges and issues that are likely to surface related to these decisions?
- How are decisions made in this organization? Who will need to be kept in the loop?
- What other factors may impact our decision-making process and ability to implement our findings in actionable ways?
- How will we know if we used the evaluation results and process as we planned? What are some key milestones or check-ins we can set?

Here are several simple things you can do to utilize results:

Utilize: Strengthen Programming

1. Build in time at staff meetings on a quarterly basis to discuss how evaluation is going and any results. Gather staff's feedback on how to use the results.
2. Build evaluation review and application into your operational plan for the year.
3. Use the priorities you've identified for key evaluation results in informing your actions—even making one small change in how a service is delivered could be useful. To that end:
4. Cultivate and celebrate small wins--- don't try to change everything at once, pick something that is doable and that you can measure the change and give it a try!

Finally, we want to end with some useful advice specific for using your findings, as detailed and quoted directly below from the resource:

Outcome Evaluation Strategies for Domestic Violence Service Programs Receiving FVPSA Funding"

Using Your Findings Internally

If you are not already doing so, we would recommend setting aside specific times to review the outcome information you've gathered as a staff. This sends a message that these outcomes are important, and gives you an opportunity to discuss, as a group, what is working and what needs improvement. It would also be helpful to invite volunteers and service recipients to share in these discussions and brainstorming sessions. As improvements are made in response to the data you've gathered, broadcast these changes through posters on walls, announcements, and word-of-mouth. As staff, volunteers, and service recipients see that your agency is responsive to feedback, they will be more likely to feel invested in and respected by your organization.

Using Your Findings Externally

It is important to give careful thought to how you want to present outcome findings to the public and to funders. Some words of advice:

- Keep it positive
- Keep it simple

Keep it Positive, Unless…

Just like a glass is half empty when it is also half full, outcome findings can be presented in both negative and positive lights. So keep it honest, but keep it positive!

First, don't hesitate to let others know about the great work you are doing. Contact media sources (television, radio, newspapers) when you develop new programs, help pass legislation, and in the case of outcome evaluation, when you have numbers to back up your successes.

Utilize: Strengthen Programming

[<u>Toolkit Author's addition:</u> Here is the "unless"-- If you have results that are particularly concerning or not positively reinforcing your efforts—are there alternative explanations? If not, and it is a critical program being funded, don't sweep this under the rug! Work closely with your funder to determine an alternative path—a way you can change the program or service to try something new—this is worth an in person meeting or phone call, not a written report. Sit down with them and come to the table with suggestions, SUPPORTED BY BEST PRACTICE, that you believe you could implement to improve outcomes.]

Keep It Simple

When presenting your findings for public consumption it's very important to keep it simple. If you are talking to the television or radio media you will be lucky to get 30 seconds of air time, so learn to talk in sound bites. Remember, people are not likely to remember specific numbers but they are likely to remember phrases like "most of," "the majority," "all" and "none." So instead of reporting:

> "87% of the women using our legal services were able to get their needs addressed"

you could say:

> "the vast majority of the women using our legal services were able to get their needs addressed"

Another way to keep it simple when presenting your findings is to pick and choose what to share with others. You will be gathering quite a bit of information about your programs and you certainly can't present it all. Decide on the top two or three findings that would be of most interest -- and that would present you in a positive light -- and focus on those.

How to Share the Information with Others

There are a number of different ways to visually present your data to others. You can create **fact sheets** and **informational brochures** that include some of your evaluation findings, and you can also use **line graphs**, **tables**, **bar charts**, and **pie charts** to display your data more graphically. Consider the data you are presenting as well as the audience when deciding how to present your findings.

When Your Findings are "Less than Positive"

So what do you do when your findings are not as positive as you had hoped or if your findings show your program was not as successful in certain respects as you had expected?

Again the same principles apply: **keep it positive** and **keep it simple**. Avoid using negative words like:

- *problem*
- *mistake*
- *error*
- *failure*

and instead use words like:

- *obstacle*
- *difficulty*
- *challenge*
- *unexpected*
- *complication*

Remember, one person's "failure" is another person's "obstacle to be overcome!" If you have to present negative findings to the public, don't just leave them hanging out there. Discuss how you addressed the obstacle or how you plan to address it in the future. What valuable lesson did you learn and how will you incorporate this knowledge into your program in the future? Presented correctly, even "negative" findings can be used to enhance your image with the public. They will also add credibility to your more "positive" findings.

Using Your Findings to Support the Continuation of Current Programs

One of the problems we hear agencies complain of repeatedly regarding funders is that many funding sources want to give money to "new, innovative" programs instead of to current day-to-day activities. When this is the case for your organization, you might try using your outcome data to justify the need for your current operations. Let the funder know how worthwhile and important your *current* services are instead of always adding new services that stretch staff to the breaking point.

Using Your Findings to Justify Creating New Programs

There are of course also situations when you will *want* to use outcome findings to request funds for a new program. Say for example that your current "Support and Education Program for 7-10 Year Olds" has demonstrated some positive results. The majority of the children who have attended the group have reported that they (1) enjoyed the program, (2) appreciated having a safe place to discuss their feelings, (3) learned about keeping themselves safe, and (4) learned that they were not to blame for the violence happening. You could use these findings to justify the need for creating another similarly structured group for either adolescents or for pre-schoolers.

You could also use your positive findings to justify expanding a popular program. Perhaps your current Housing Advocate is doing a terrific job but cannot handle the heavy caseload. Having data that illustrate for the funder (1) how many people currently use your program, (2) how many are turned away due to lack of personnel, and (3) how effective service recipients find the program to be can be an effective strategy for securing additional funds for expansion.

Closing Thoughts

We hope you have found the resources and exercises contained within this toolkit to be useful, practical and applicable to your program. Our closing advice is focus on creating a culture within your organization that values evaluation and sees is as more than a requirement of funding, planning ahead for ways you can use your evaluation results to make improvements to your programming and services, and starting small and building on success until you can increase the capacity of your organization to meet your full evaluation needs.

We wish you all the best—Happy Evaluating! And more importantly keep up the amazing work you are doing in our communities.

Links & Resources

Links and Resources

Books, Articles, and Reports

Evaluation Toolkit and Logic Model Builder

Evaluation Toolkit | W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF)

Websites

Outcome Measurement Resource Network | United Way

The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation | Administration for Children & Families

Tools and Resources for Assessing Social Impact (TRASI) | Foundation Center