What Does Evaluation Mean for a Community?

What is Evaluation?

Evaluation is a systematic process to understand what a program does and how well the program does it. Evaluation results can be used to maintain or improve program quality and to ensure that future planning can be more evidence-based. It looks at original objectives, at what was accomplished and how it was accomplished. It is also a mechanism for collecting interpreting and sharing program information that shows what has been accomplished. In the end, evaluation is about these questions: Was it successful? How effective was it?

Why Evaluate?

Evaluation will provide you with information to modify your program to better meet your community needs and interests. Evaluating your program will also help you decide if you are implementing the right strategies and activities and thus spending your dollars wisely.and to determine the quality of the program or plan.

Program evaluation gives you very helpful information

1. It can tell you if activities or services are happening the way they are supposed to.
2. It can tell you how to improve the program as you go along.
3. It can tell you if your program did what it was supposed to do.
4. It can tell you if your program helped people.

Evaluation constitutes part of an ongoing cycle of program planning, implementation, and improvement. You can use this information to show your community, your funding sources and your program's leaders why they need to support your program.

What Type of Evaluation?

Evaluation falls into one of two broad categories: formative (1-3) and summative (4-5). Formative evaluations are conducted during program development and implementation and are useful if you want direction on how to best achieve your goals or improve your program. Summative evaluations should be completed once your programs are well established and will tell you to what extent the program is achieving its goals.

Different types of evaluation may include:

1. Formative Evaluation- Conducted during program development and implementation to test pieces of a program before they are fully in place. This is useful if you want direction on how to best achieve your goals or improve your program. The question is: Would this activity, service or material work for our program?

2. <u>Process Evaluation</u>- Assesses how an ongoing program functions by measuring effort and direct outputs of programs– what and how much was accomplished (i.e., exposure, reach, knowledge, attitudes, etc.) and whether it is operating as planned. Results are used to improve the program/intervention. The question becomes: Is the program happening the way it is supposed to?

3. <u>Needs Assessment.</u> Determines what the needs are, who has the needs, how great the need is, and what can be done to best meet the need. The question derived is: Are we able to meet the needs?

4. <u>Summative or Outcome-Based Evaluation</u>. Measures effect and changes that result from the campaign. Investigates outcomes (short and mid term results) that result directly from the project such as new knowledge and awareness, attitude change, beliefs, social norms, and behavior change, etc. Also measures policy changes. The question is then: What happened differently because of this program?

5. <u>Impact Evaluation</u>. Measures community-level change or longer-term results (i.e., changes in disease risk status, morbidity, and mortality) that have occurred. These impacts are the net effects, typically on the entire school, community, organization, society, or environment.

Evaluation How-To 101

1. <u>Feasibility</u>. What resources do you have for evaluation? How much money, time and effort should be put into this? As you plan your evaluation, think about how much staff-time would be needed for each part, how much experience and skill in data collection/analysis you have available, and how easy it would be to obtain information from your possible sources.

2. <u>Propriety and accuracy.</u> Who needs to be involved in the evaluation for it to be ethical and accurate?

3. <u>Decide before you start:</u> Exactly what you are evaluating, how success by the program you are evaluating would be defined, and what information or data you have or could get that would show how successful you have been.

4. <u>Know your audience</u> – Who will use the results of the evaluation? Find out what they need, and make sure the evaluation has that information.

5. <u>Feedback</u>. Important for development of ongoing evaluations and course correction, and for continuous quality improvement.

6. <u>Who will do the evaluation.</u> Sometimes programs do a self-evaluation, and sometimes the evaluator comes from outside. This choice depends partly on program resources and staff skills.

7. <u>Evaluation can and should happen throughout a project's evolution</u>. The evaluation experience is likely to be more positive and its results are likely to be more useful if you build evaluation in from the start and make it an ongoing activity.