FREQUENTLY ASKED EVALUATION QUESTIONS

General

What resources does the *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps* program have to help with evaluation? What other resources do you recommend?
Check out our *Roadmaps to Health* Action Center Evaluate Actions guide. You can also contact our *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps* team here.

What is the most important thing to remember about evaluation in general?
What's most important is that when you're planning, visualize having the information you've gathered, and ask yourself whether that information is going to help you make decisions moving forward. How you are going to USE the evaluation results is what should drive the entire evaluation.

What is the difference between program evaluation and policy/advocacy evaluation?
Because changing policy is complex, multi-step, and incremental, what you measure and the evaluation tools used for policy/advocacy evaluation are different from program evaluation. Advocacy/policy efforts are measured in large part by their ability to adapt to changing circumstances, while program evaluation focuses on the ability to deliver according to a predefined track. For more guidance on policy/advocacy evaluation, see the Handbook of Data Collection Tools: Companion To "A Guide To Measuring Advocacy and Policy" (from Organizational Research Services). To learn more about program evaluation see Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation (from the Department of Health and Human Services).

What is the relationship between program evaluation and quality improvement (QI)?
The concepts of QI and evaluation are very similar, which can be confusing. QI is about taking a specific process that you know is essential or works well and making it work better. QI may involve making a major process improvement or simply "tweaking" the process to improve it. Evaluation involves taking a more comprehensive look at an entire program to generate information so you can inform the design of a program or improve program delivery. While evaluation may result in making just a few "tweaks" to the program, it's a bigger picture look at all the processes involved in making the program work.

Another distinction can be made between evaluation, research, and QI. Program evaluation is typically done for things that you already know or believe will work, so the underlying question is "this program works; how or how well does it work for us?" In research the underlying question is "does this work?" The relevant QI question is "how can we make processes associated with this program work better or more efficiently?"

Engaging Others

How can we help engage program staff/leadership in evaluation? How can we "sell" its value to the groups tasked with action planning?

There are a number of options, depending on your **circumstances**:

- Keep it simple and create small "wins" to build trust between evaluators and program leadership, then work into more intensive evaluation gradually.
- Work intensively with a small number of people who are willing to build evaluation into their work; cultivate an "evaluation champion" within the program.
- Use evaluation resources in support of administrative/programmatic efforts (e.g., make graphs of budgets and help with grant/contract reporting mechanisms), with the longer-term vision that program leaders will view evaluators as useful, trustworthy people to work with.
- Have honest conversations about people's fears and specific things that would be useful to them from evaluation. Even reluctant program staff and leaders have ideas about some things they would like from an evaluation (e.g., a report to share with their bosses, an honest desire to improve).

How can we engage community members in creating logic models? We know it's important to be clear about intended impact, but logic models can be intimidating and time-consuming.

The Tearless Logic Model breaks down the logic model process into a series of manageable, jargon-free questions. The terms logic model, outcomes, outputs, or inputs aren't used until the energizing activity is completed. Through this process, organizations and community-based groups can receive the benefits of completing a logic model process without the intimidation factor.

Evaluating Partnerships

When cross-sector, cross-organizational partnerships are essential and require a change in mindset from competition to sharing credit, from attribution to contribution, how do we ascertain the effectiveness of actions by any individual partner toward the greater whole?

This is a common concern when there are multiple sectors involved and you want to encourage collaboration and community. Encourage all partners to sit down together and reflect on what they're trying to accomplish. Identify what you want to accomplish as a group and what individual organizations want to accomplish.

As a group, discuss:

- What are we agreeing to as a large group and as individuals?
- How will we know we've done this--how will we measure progress?
- What would it look like if each individual organization was making an effective contribution?

This dialogue will build shared responsibility, getting the buy-in up front. It will also help each organization think through what they're already doing to contribute to the effort and encourage documentation of efforts going forward so that progress can be celebrated and you can share "lessons learned" with other communities.

How do we evaluate the effectiveness of a community health partnership?

There are some great tools in our Evaluate Actions guide in our *Roadmaps to Health* Action Center, including:

- Are You Ready to Evaluate Your Coalition? (PDF from Coalitions Work) asks 15 questions to help you decide whether your coalition is ready to evaluate itself and its work.
- Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide (PDF from Prevention Institute) provides a helpful framework for renewing a coalition, including Making Improvements Through Evaluation.
- Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (from Wilder Research) is a free online questionnaire that can help you assess how your coalition is functioning generally.
- Coalition Member Survey (PDF from Coalitions Work) is a 45-item survey for members to rate the coalition on aspects related to planning, implementation, leadership, local and statewide involvement, communication, participation, progress and outcomes.

Evaluation Methods

What are some low or no-cost approaches to doing process evaluation?

If you are measuring individual-level changes in behaviors or predictors of behaviors for the population served by interventions/programs, some ideas to consider:

- *Online surveys* of individuals. If you do an online survey, be sure to consider:
  - How you will assure that you will get representation from your population and a good response rate.
  - That the questions really capture what you want to measure.
  - That the format is user-friendly.

  For more information about survey design see Conducting Surveys (from Community Tool Box).
- *Observations* (e.g., setting up choices about healthy/unhealthy foods and watching which choices people make over time, measuring number of cigarette butts on the grounds outside buildings, counting numbers of walkers on a trail at different times).
- Ongoing interviews with a handful of people who are willing to talk over a period of time about their behaviors and what influences their decisions, including your program/intervention. (Note that the more you interact with these people, the more biased their responses become since ongoing interviews raises their awareness.)
- *Proxy measures* where you talk with those familiar with the target population about their perceptions of an intervention's impact (e.g., with a child-focused intervention, ask parents how much their children have talked about it, or ask teachers or case workers how often their students/clients are talking about issues relevant to the intervention/program or what behaviors they see them doing).

We want to conduct outcome evaluations on reducing obesity of young people in our community but are unable to obtain baseline health data. How can we address this issue?
Not having outcome data is often a problem because it's hard to access the data or resources aren't available to collect the data. Plus, many interventions/programs aren't long enough to realistically contribute to population-level change, so we should be cautious about focusing on this type of outcome data. Depending on your resources, it's probably more realistic to go "upstream" to measure success of your efforts. Focus more on measuring systems-level or environmental-level indicators. For example, with obesity-focused interventions you could focus on: foods available for purchase in vending/student stores at schools (nutrition quality, portion size, price), kinds of physical education requirements in schools (number of classes, length of classes, quality of classes), school procedures for promoting physical activity at recess/breaks, sports/recreational exercise options, etc.

I am a bit scared about evaluating community participation. I think if we make this a must for all the hundreds of people that do any community events/projects, we'll see engagement drop in those events/projects. Evaluation has "work" written all over it.
It's important to realize that evaluation doesn't always have to be a participant survey! You should only do a survey of individual participants if there is something really important that you need to ask them.

If you do need to collect individual participant feedback, there are a number of different options:

- *Staff or team feedback* (e.g., what do your staff/team think worked well about planning and implementation; what parts of the program seemed to go well/not well).
- *Observation* – observers monitor the event and take notes about what they see/hear.
- *Focused interviews* – talk to a few people to ask them what they think about the event.

We are currently conducting a community needs assessment using surveys, convenience sampling, and focus groups. If the results show the priorities in the community are those being targeted by the community partnership, can that be used as confirmation that the partnership is on the right path?
A simple answer is yes, you are probably on the right path if the data show you're working on the "right" greatest areas of need. You can also assess changes in community perceptions using the Handbook of Data Collection Tools: Companion To "A Guide To Measuring Advocacy and Policy" which includes tools for measuring shifts in social norms (e.g., changes in awareness and prioritization, p. 2).

What are some examples of evaluation questions and the outcomes collected?
Example: Evolving workplace physical activity promotion campaign

- Year 1 evaluation question: Do people think this is a beneficial activity?
  - Measure: Number of participants
  - Measure: Evaluation survey question (e.g., *Do you think this is a beneficial activity for our workplace?*)

- Year 2 evaluation question: Does participation change behaviors in longer-term?
  - Measure: Evaluation survey question (e.g., *How many days per week do you exercise for at least 30 minutes?*). Asked as baseline measure relative to pre-program, during program and two months post-program.
- Year 3 evaluation question: Who is participating and why?
  - Measure: Participants from specific demographic groups (program registration) vs. numbers of employees in demographic groups
  - Measure: Evaluation survey questions (e.g., *Which of the following made you want to participate? Response options: Personal interest, co-worker support, competition, prizes*; *Agreement that my manager supported my participation and my co-workers supported my participation. Response options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree*).
- Year 4 evaluation question: How does participation influence productivity?
  - Measure: Evaluation survey question (e.g., Do you think this program helped you feel more productive at work?)

What type of evaluations seems most effective – computer generated, paper and pen, interview style, etc.?

The most useful evaluation is one that provides information that helps you make your program better. That could be using surveys, just counting noses, or interviewing a few people.

- ***Interviews:*** If you need a lot of detailed or subjective information, focus on interviewing a few people. Interviews work best if you need general opinions, or if you have a lot of questions about something, especially how people feel about things, what they are thinking when they see/feel/hear/do something (all hard to capture in a survey).
- ***Surveys:*** If you need just a little information from a lot of people, then a survey is good – either via a computer/online, paper, or even just having someone with a clipboard at your event asking a question or two and tallying as they go.

Is it easier to have a user-friendly database for multiple users to use throughout the program or one data entry person/program?

There's no one "right" answer to this, but here are some questions to consider:

- Do you have software or database that multiple users can easily use?
- What will motivate users to keep up with data entry?
- Will you get the quality of data you need with multiple users?

Thanks to our October 2012 webinar presenters, Julia Dilley, senior research scientist/epidemiologist at Multnomah County Health Department, Dr. Candace Peterson, and Penny Black, assistant researcher at the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, for their assistance with these questions and answers.

If you missed or would like to review our Oct. 9th, 2012 Evaluate Actions webinar, you can watch a recording here.

For more information on the *County* Health *Rankings & Roadmaps* visit our website: www.countyhealthrankings.org