

OTHER WAYS TO COLLECT EVALUATION DATA

Creative expression

Various forms of creative expression can be used in evaluation as a means for individuals and groups to represent their ideas and/or feelings. They can generate rich data containing many subtleties that may not be uncovered in other ways. These methods do pose interpretation challenges, but getting a group to work through interpretation can provide yet more useful insights. Creative expression forms include: drawing, stories, drama, role-playing, music, found objects, and collages. When considering creative expression, be careful to choose an art form that feels comfortable to participants. Creative expression is not always appropriate or culturally sensitive. Check references for help about how to structure and implement the following:

1) Drawings. Asking participants to draw may provide deeper insights into their perspective on processes and outcomes than verbal discussion alone can. Individuals could be asked to draw pictures, charts, maps, timelines, abstract shapes, social interaction networks, or diagrams or make collages. Discussing and interpreting the pictures provides another way to collect meaningful data. The key to any drawing exercise is the process of discussing the ideas expressed and learning from them.

2) Drama. Like drawings, drama may be used in many ways. People can act out before and after stories, provide different perspectives on the same issue through different characters, or depict a critical incident or outcome. Drama can be used to recall and describe what happened during the program, what resulted, who benefited, and why. It also becomes a convincing communication strategy for sharing program results with funders and key stakeholders.

3) Role-playing. Role-playing is a creative way to help people see an issue or problem from someone else's perspective. It is also a way to clarify potential and actual outcomes for different participants or in different situations. Assigning individuals to play different roles than they hold themselves may help everyone learn.

Personal stories or testimonials

Personal stories may be either written or oral. They can be a fun and relaxed way to reveal the impressions people have of certain events, processes, and outcomes. For example, you might ask participants to write a story about their personal experience in the program, what they gained by participating, or how the program has helped them. Rather than individual questions on a questionnaire, the participant is asked to "write a story." A set of questions may be used to help stimulate the thinking and story writing, but the focus is the "story," not answers to questions. Or, rather than soliciting stories or testimonials, collect people's stories and testimonials about your program as you hear them. Record the date, place, and context of the story/testimonial to provide documentation of the narrative.

See *Storytelling* [Krueger (n.d.)] <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/story.html>

Video taping or photography

Using a video recorder or camera is another way to collect data. Before and after photos can provide powerful data. Taking photos over a course of a program's life can provide longitudinal data for assessing process and outcomes. Someone may be selected as the "documentarian," or participants themselves may be given a camera or asked to photograph program processes, program life, or outcomes. Reviewing, discussing, and interpreting the resulting video or photos as a group broadens and deepens understanding.

Expert review

There may be people who hold special knowledge about your program and its activities. Inviting these "experts" to review the performance of your program can provide useful answers to many evaluation questions. Such experts could be key stakeholders, people involved in similar programs or from a similar community, or educators from a local school or university.

Adequate preparation for an expert review is paramount. As you plan for an expert review, consider:

- *Who* is best qualified to evaluate the program? Who will be seen as credible? How many will be included?
- *When* will the "experts" conduct the review? How long will the review take? What dates are most appropriate?
- *What* will the "experts" be expected to look at? What questions might they answer?

Diaries and journals

Diaries and journals are records of events and processes that occur over time. Not only do they record events and processes, they are also useful for recording problems that arise along with peoples' feelings and thoughts about what transpired.

Diaries and journals provide a personal perspective on a program and/or its results and sometimes can show how results came about. Diaries and journals can be kept by participants, volunteers, program staff, or others involved in the program. The written record reveals the personal perspective of the person doing the writing. The writer controls what data is recorded and shared.

Each individual may keep a diary or journal. Or, you may start a "program diary" to monitor activities, outcomes, and people's perspectives over time. In the case of one collaborative working together, the collaborative rotated the diary monthly — each month a different member wrote the entry. Annually, the entries were analyzed and used to facilitate discussion on the collaborative's performance. Among other things, diary material may be useful for:

- Recording and examining involvement, reactions, likes and dislikes, and tracking program activities and reactions to them

- Identifying major turning points or problem areas
- Identifying changes and accomplishments

Logs

Logs also are records of events and/or processes. They include chronological entries, but they are briefer and more factual than diaries and journals and usually do not include reactions and thoughts. Logs record times, dates, and brief narrative comments related to programs. Keeping logs and then using the information to supplement your evaluation is easy and practical. Some examples of logs include: telephone logs, attendance logs, activity logs, resource logs, and media logs, which record dates, length, and content of media work.

Case study

An evaluation method that provides comprehensive information about a single case is called a *case study*. You may want to use this method to obtain a complete picture of your program; one facet of the program; or the experience of one person, family, business, or community that is participating. A case study can help determine what happened and why by extending over a period of time and focusing on in-depth data collection and analysis.

“A case study is a method for learning about a complex instance based on a comprehensive understanding of that instance obtained by extensive description and analysis of that instance taken as a whole and in its context.” [United States General Accounting Office (1990)]

Case studies use multiple information sources and multiple methods. A case study involves keeping and building a complete file about the “case.” For example, in a case study of a community collaborative to assess what it has achieved, how, and why; a case study might include the following: an on-going log of the collaborative’s work and collection and analysis of media releases, minutes, committee reports, periodic reviews, etc. You might interview and conduct a survey of collaborative members, community members, and/or other stakeholders to assess outcomes. Finally, you would be able to supplement all these types of evaluative information with your own personal observation. The result is an in-depth description of the collaborative and its performance. Data collection and analysis often occur simultaneously so that as you learn more about the case, you can refine and add to the data collection.

Additional resource

United States General Accounting Office (GAO), Program Evaluation and Methodology Division. (1990). *Case study evaluations* (Transfer paper 10.1.9). Washington, D.C.: United States General Accounting Office. Retrieved March 13, 2008, from http://www.gao.gov/special.pubs/10_1_9.pdf