

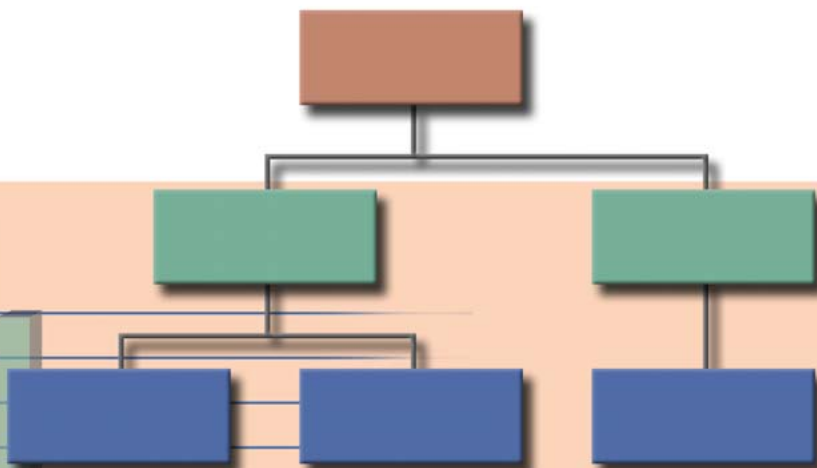
Building Evaluation Into Program Design

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How is evaluation built into program design?

Several key steps will help build evaluation steps into the program:

1. **Describe the action plan and expected outcomes.**
2. **Define the purpose for evaluation.**
3. **Identify who will use the results.**
4. **Prioritize evaluation questions and use them to sketch out an analysis plan.**
5. **Determine sources and methods to collect information.**
6. **Revise the plan according to available resources.**

Also, see the “evaluation tips to remember” sidebar on page 7 for ways to save time and resources as you build evaluation into a tobacco control action plan.

1. Describe the action plan and expected outcomes.

Use a logic model (or adapt its components) to clarify inputs, activities, target groups, and outcomes.

Why this step so important?

- ▶ Do coalition members and staff **understand** the plan in the same way? Do they **share the same vision** for how the program will change the community? If not, clarifying roles and expectations may prove difficult. The logic modeling process (or whatever process helps clarify resources, activities, target populations or organizations, and short, medium and long-term outcomes) should help staff and coalition members “get on the same page” about how activities will lead to outcomes.
- ▶ **Do the links between activities and outcomes seem reasonable?** Avoid unrealistic expectations by critically examining assumptions from the very beginning. Will three education sessions with middle school youth ultimately prevent them from beginning to smoke? The evidence around educational interventions says no. A better question: What needs to happen in the *community* to achieve that long-term outcome?
- ▶ What is the **evidence** activities will lead to the expected results (outcomes)? Are inputs (resources) adequate? If not, does the plan include strategies to secure additional resources? Is the time frame realistic?

Avoid unrealistic expectations by critically examining assumptions from the very beginning.

2. Clearly define the purpose(s) of the evaluation.

There are three principal reasons for evaluation:

- ▶ **Determine value (merit or worth).** *Funder:* Will we fund this program for another two years?
- ▶ **Improve processes.** *Program staff:* Are we reaching the target population? Is our program having the intended effects?
- ▶ **Generate knowledge.** *Colleagues who want to replicate the program:* How do outcomes of this approach compare to those of alternative approaches?

3. Identify who will use evaluation results.

- ▶ Ask users of evaluation results what they would like to know about the program BEFORE collecting the information. Sometimes a simple telephone conversation will do the trick. Other times, a group conversation can help people identify their own interests in the program. Either way, don't assume program staff have the same interests as funders, program participants, or members of the community.

4. Prioritize evaluation questions.

- ▶ Now that it's clear why to evaluate and who will use the results, decide what is most important to know. Pare questions down to a short list of things the "evaluation audience" would like to know.
- ▶ Use the evaluation questions to determine an **analysis plan before collecting the data.** An analysis plan can be as simple as sketching out the types of tables the data will fill and deciding the software and skills necessary to summarize the data. Start

by listing each of the evaluation questions and pare down what to analyze. For example, do larger worksites have smoking policies more often than smaller worksites? Using this question as a guide, sketch out a table that lists worksite size along the left hand side and the type of smoking policy along the top.

Part of the analysis plan should also include who will analyze the data. If descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies (counts), averages) may adequately answer key evaluation questions. However, if in-house computer software skills don't exist, think about looking for outside assistance with a spreadsheet program (such as Excel) or a statistical software package (such as SPSS). Local businesses or universities – even a high school student – can use Excel to compile data using descriptive statistics.

- ▶ Often, stakeholders begin by asking very general questions: "How did our media campaign impact the community?" "Has our policy initiative progressed?" However, these types of questions are very difficult to measure. Take a look at an example of how to make evaluation questions more measurable.

5. Determine how to collect information to answer the questions.

- ▶ It is tempting to start the evaluation design process by choosing a method. Resist the temptation! We often fall into the trap of first identifying the methods we will use (also known as jumping on the survey bandwagon) and *then* asking what we can learn from all the data we have painstakingly collected. Unless there is a lot of extra time and a money tree in the courtyard, *don't start here.*

- ▶ Once steps 1 through 4 are complete, consider possible sources of information. These can include existing information, people or documents.
- ▶ After identifying possible sources for information (such as program staff or program participants), identify methods, such as surveys, interviews, document reviews, or observations, to collect information from those sources. Think about whether the methods will respect differences in culture, age and literacy among the target groups.

6. Revise the plan according to available resources.

- ▶ A rule of thumb: **Estimate about 10% of the total program budget for evaluation.** This is a generally accepted estimate for most federal and private grant programs in health and social services.

Including the staff time necessary to carry out the evaluation, will the proposed evaluation plan exceed 10% of the budget?

- ▶ In planning a random sample survey, ask if there someone available with the **skills** to analyze the data. If not, find someone at a local college or within a local business that might be able to help.
- ▶ What about the **time** needed to carry out the evaluation?

Sketch a timeline so that the evaluation plan is clear to both staff and coalition members. For example, avoid planning a key piece of the evaluation in the midst of scheduled contract negotiations.

Begin thinking about evaluation by ensuring that the action plan (inputs, activities, target groups, outcomes) is clear to staff and stakeholders.

Evaluation tips to remember:

Building evaluation into a tobacco control action plan can save valuable time and resources. To build evaluation into the planning process, do **not** begin by saying, “We want to survey youth. We want to interview community members. We want to conduct focus groups with parents. We want to conduct a household survey.”

Instead, begin thinking about evaluation by ensuring that the action plan (inputs, activities, target groups, outcomes) is clear to staff and stakeholders. Then, use this common understanding to clarify evaluation questions:

- How have our activities influenced community norms around tobacco use?
- What needs to happen before those norms change in our community?
- How will we know that change is occurring?
- How can we measure some of those short-term and intermediate changes?

Determine how specific data might help answer these questions, and sketch out an analysis plan to avoid getting stuck with data no one is equipped to analyze. Next, choose appropriate sources and methods to collect information, and consider whether they are appropriate for the population. Finally, determine whether resources will allow the coalition to carry out the plan or whether additional resources will help ensure a more useful evaluation.

- Evaluation is flexible.
- Evaluation involves choices.
- Begin with a clear understanding of the action plan, and other choices will more easily follow.
- Do not collect data just because it seems “interesting.” Always ask whether someone will truly **use** the information collected.
- Ask who will use the information and how they will use it **before** collecting it.
- Keep in mind that evaluation will require time and resources. Choose methods and sketch an analysis plan based on available resources. Coalitions should enlist data analysis resources of community partners.



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