# Basic Guide to Program Evaluation

Written by Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD | Applies to nonprofits and for-profits unless noted

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(Much of the following information is adapted from the guidebook, Field Guide to Nonprofit Program Design, Marketing and Evaluation.)

This document provides guidance toward planning and implementing an evaluation process for for-profit or nonprofit programs -- there are many kinds of evaluations that can be applied to programs, for example, goals-based, process-based, outcomes-based, etc.

NOTE: Nonprofit organizations are increasingly interested in outcomes-based evaluation. If you are interested in learning more about outcomes-based evaluation, then see Outcomes-Based Evaluations in Nonprofit Organizations.

NOTE: Be sure to see Additional Resources and Related Library Links at the end of this document. Also, you might benefit from review of the Program Planning and Management. Lastly, use the Program Evaluation Planning Checklist to help you plan evaluations for your programs.

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*To Form Local Learning Communities to Design and Implement Evaluation Plans*
To Form Local Learning Communities, eg, to Learn This Topic

(at http://www.authenticityconsulting.com/pubs.htm)

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## A Brief Introduction ...

Note that the concept of program evaluation can include a wide variety of methods to evaluate many aspects of programs in nonprofit or for-profit organizations. There are numerous books and other materials that provide in-depth analysis of evaluations, their designs, methods, combination of methods and techniques of analysis. However, personnel do not have to be experts in these topics to carry out a useful program evaluation. The "20-80" rule applies here, that 20% of effort generates 80% of the needed results. It's better to do what might turn out to be an average effort at evaluation than to do no evaluation at all. (Besides, if you resort to bringing in an evaluation consultant, you should be a smart consumer. Far too many program evaluations generate information that is either impractical or irrelevant -- if the information is understood at all.) This document orients personnel to the nature of program evaluation and how it can be carried out in a realistic and practical fashion.

Note that much of the information in this section was gleaned from various works of Michael Quinn Patton.

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## Program Evaluation (by Carter McNamara, PhD; last revision: Feb 16, 1998)
### Some Myths About Program Evaluation

1.. Many people believe evaluation is a useless activity that generates lots of boring data with useless conclusions. This was a problem with evaluations in the past when program evaluation methods were chosen largely on the basis of achieving complete scientific accuracy, reliability and validity. This approach often generated extensive data from which very carefully chosen conclusions were drawn. Generalizations and recommendations were avoided. As a result, evaluation reports tended to reiterate the obvious and left program administrators disappointed and skeptical about the value of evaluation in general. More recently (especially as a result of Michael Patton's development of utilization-focused evaluation), evaluation has focused on utility, relevance and practicality at least as much as scientific validity.

2. Many people believe that evaluation is about proving the success or failure of a program. This myth assumes that success is implementing the perfect program and never having to hear from employees, customers or clients again -- the program will now run itself perfectly. This doesn't happen in real life.

Success is remaining open to continuing feedback and adjusting the program accordingly. Evaluation gives you this continuing feedback.

3. Many believe that evaluation is a highly unique and complex process that occurs at a certain time in a certain way, and almost always includes the use of outside experts. Many people believe they must completely understand terms such as validity and reliability. They don't have to. They do have to consider what information they need in order to make current decisions about program issues or needs. And they have to be willing to commit to understanding what is really going on. Note that many people regularly undertake some nature of program evaluation -- they just don't do it in a formal fashion so they don't get the most out of their efforts or they make conclusions that are inaccurate (some evaluators would disagree that this is program evaluation if not done methodically). Consequently, they miss precious opportunities to make more of difference for their customer and clients, or to get a bigger bang for their buck.

### So What is Program Evaluation?

First, we'll consider "what is a program?" Typically, organizations work from their mission to identify several overall goals which must be reached to accomplish their mission. In nonprofits, each of these goals often becomes a program. Nonprofit programs are organized methods to provide certain related services to constituents, e.g., clients, customers, patients, etc. Programs must be evaluated to decide if the programs are indeed useful to constituents. In a for-profit, a program is often a one-time effort to produce a new product or line of products.

So, still, what is program evaluation? Program evaluation is carefully collecting information about a program or some aspect of a program in order to make necessary decisions about the program. Program evaluation can include any or a variety of at least 35 different types of evaluation, such as for needs assessments, accreditation, cost/benefit analysis, effectiveness, efficiency, formative, summative, goal-based, process, outcomes, etc. The type of evaluation you undertake to improve your programs depends on what you want to learn about the program. Don't worry about what type of evaluation you need or are doing -- worry about what you need to know to make the program decisions you need to make, and worry about how you can accurately collect and understand that information.

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# Where Program Evaluation is Helpful (by Carter McNamara, PhD; last revision: Feb 16, 1998)
### Frequent Reasons:

Program evaluation can:

1. Understand, verify or increase the impact of products or services on customers or clients - These "outcomes" evaluations are increasingly required by nonprofit funders as verification that the nonprofits are indeed helping their constituents. Too often, service providers (for-profit or nonprofit) rely on their own instincts and passions to conclude what their customers or clients really need and whether the products or services are providing what is needed. Over time, these organizations find themselves in a lot of guessing about what would be a good product or service, and trial and error about how new products or services could be delivered.

2. Improve delivery mechanisms to be more efficient and less costly - Over time, product or service

delivery ends up to be an inefficient collection of activities that are less efficient and more costly than need be. Evaluations can identify program strengths and weaknesses to improve the program.

3. Verify that you're doing what you think you're doing - Typically, plans about how to deliver services, end up changing substantially as those plans are put into place. Evaluations can verify if the program is really running as originally planned.

*Other Reasons:*

Program evaluation can:

4. Facilitate management's really thinking about what their program is all about, including its goals, how it meets it goals and how it will know if it has met its goals or not.

5. Produce data or verify results that can be used for public relations and promoting services in the community.

6. Produce valid comparisons between programs to decide which should be retained, e.g., in the face of pending budget cuts.

7. Fully examine and describe effective programs for duplication elsewhere.

## Basic Ingredients: Organization and Program(s) (by Carter McNamara, PhD; last revision: Feb 16, 1998)

*You Need An Organization:*

This may seem too obvious to discuss, but before an organization embarks on evaluating a program, it should have well established means to conduct itself as an organization, e.g., (in the case of a nonprofit) the board should be in good working order, the organization should be staffed and organized to conduct activities to work toward the mission of the organization, and there should be no current crisis that is clearly more important to address than evaluating programs.

*You Need Program(s):*

To effectively conduct program evaluation, you should first have programs. That is, you need a strong impression of what your customers or clients actually need. (You may have used a needs assessment to determine these needs -- itself a form of evaluation, but usually the first step in a good marketing plan). Next, you need some effective methods to meet each of those goals. These methods are usually in the form of programs.

It often helps to think of your programs in terms of inputs, process, outputs and outcomes. Inputs are the various resources needed to run the program, e.g., money, facilities, customers, clients, program staff, etc. The process is how the program is carried out, e.g., customers are served, clients are counseled, children are cared for, art is created, association members are supported, etc. The outputs are the units of service, e.g., number of customers serviced, number of clients counseled, children cared for, artistic pieces produced, or members in the association. Outcomes are the impacts on the customers or on clients receiving services, e.g., increased mental health, safe and secure development, richer artistic appreciation and perspectives in life, increased effectiveness among members, etc.

## Planning Your Program Evaluation (by Carter McNamara, PhD)
*Depends on What Information You Need to Make Your Decisions and On Your Resources:*

Often, management wants to know everything about their products, services or programs. However, limited resources usually force managers to prioritize what they need to know to make current decisions.

Your program evaluation plans depend on what information you need to collect in order to make major decisions. Usually, management is faced with having to make major decisions due to decreased funding, ongoing complaints, unmet needs among customers and clients, the need to polish service delivery, etc. For example, do you want to know more about what is actually going on in your programs, whether your programs are meeting their goals, the impact of your programs on customers, etc? You may want other information or a combination of these. Ultimately, it's up to you.

But the more focused you are about what you want to examine by the evaluation, the more efficient you can be in your evaluation, the shorter the time it will take you and ultimately the less it will cost you (whether in your own time, the time of your employees and/or the time of a consultant).

There are trade offs, too, in the breadth and depth of information you get. The more breadth you want, usually the less depth you get (unless you have a great deal of resources to carry out the evaluation). On the other hand, if you want to examine a certain aspect of a program in great detail, you will likely not get as much information about other aspects of the program.

For those starting out in program evaluation or who have very limited resources, they can use various methods to get a good mix of breadth and depth of information. They can both understand more about certain areas of their programs and not go bankrupt doing so.

*Key Considerations:*
Consider the following key questions when designing a program evaluation.
1. For what purposes is the evaluation being done, i.e., what do you want to be able to decide as a result of the evaluation?
2. Who are the audiences for the information from the evaluation, e.g., customers, bankers, funders, board, management, staff, customers, clients, etc.
3. What kinds of information are needed to make the decision you need to make and/or enlighten your intended audiences, e.g., information to really understand the process of the product or program (its inputs, activities and outputs), the customers or clients who experience the product or program, strengths and weaknesses of the product or program, benefits to customers or clients (outcomes), how the product or program failed and why, etc.
4. From what sources should the information be collected, e.g., employees, customers, clients, groups of customers or clients and employees together, program documentation, etc.
5. How can that information be collected in a reasonable fashion, e.g., questionnaires, interviews, examining documentation, observing customers or employees, conducting focus groups among customers or employees, etc.
6. When is the information needed (so, by when must it be collected)?
7. What resources are available to collect the information?

# Some Major Types of Program Evaluation (by Carter McNamara, PhD; last revision: Feb 16, 1998)

When designing your evaluation approach, it may be helpful to review the following three types of evaluations, which are rather common in organizations. Note that you should not design your evaluation approach simply by choosing which of the following three types you will use -- you should design your evaluation approach by carefully addressing the above key considerations.

## Goals-Based Evaluation (are your programs achieving their overall, predetermined objectives?)

Often programs are established to meet one or more specific goals. These goals are often described in the original program plans.

Goal-based evaluations are evaluating the extent to which programs are meeting predetermined goals or objectives. Questions to ask yourself when designing an evaluation to see if you reached your goals, are:
1. How were the program goals (and objectives, is applicable) established? Was the process effective?
2. What is the status of the program's progress toward achieving the goals?
3. Will the goals be achieved according to the timelines specified in the program implementation or operations plan? If not, then why?
4. Do personnel have adequate resources (money, equipment, facilities, training, etc.) to achieve the goals?
5. How should priorities be changed to put more focus on achieving the goals? (Depending on the context, this question might be viewed as a program management decision, more than an evaluation question.)
6. How should timelines be changed (be careful about making these changes - know why efforts are behind schedule before timelines are changed)?
7. How should goals be changed (be careful about making these changes - know why efforts are not achieving the goals before changing the goals)? Should any goals be added or removed? Why?
8. How should goals be established in the future?

## Process-Based Evaluations (understanding how your program really works, and its strengths and weaknesses)

Process-based evaluations are geared to fully understanding how a program works -- how does it produce that results that it does. These evaluations are useful if programs are long-standing and have changed over the years, employees or customers report a large number of complaints about the program, there appear to be large inefficiencies in delivering program services and they are also useful for accurately portraying to outside parties how a program truly operates (e.g., for replication elsewhere).

There are numerous questions that might be addressed in a process evaluation. These questions can be selected by carefully considering what is important to know about the program. Examples of questions to ask yourself when designing an evaluation to understand and/or closely examine the processes in your programs, are:
1. On what basis do employees and/or the customers decide that products or services are needed?
2. What is required of employees in order to deliver the product or services?
3. How are employees trained about how to deliver the product or services?
4. How do customers or clients come into the program?

5. What is required of customers or client?
6. How do employees select which products or services will be provided to the customer or client?
7. What is the general process that customers or clients go through with the product or program?
8. What do customers or clients consider to be strengths of the program?
9. What do staff consider to be strengths of the product or program?
10. What typical complaints are heard from employees and/or customers?
11. What do employees and/or customers recommend to improve the product or program?
12. On what basis do emplyees and/or the customer decide that the product or services are no longer needed?

## *Outcomes-Based Evaluation (identifying benefits to clients)*

Program evaluation with an outcomes focus is increasingly important for nonprofits and asked for by funders. An outcomes-based evaluation facilitates your asking if your organization is really doing the right program activities to bring about the outcomes you believe (or better yet, you've verified) to be needed by your clients (rather than just engaging in busy activities which seem reasonable to do at the time). Outcomes are benefits to clients from participation in the program. Outcomes are usually in terms of enhanced learning (knowledge, perceptions/attitudes or skills) or conditions, e.g., increased literacy, self-reliance, etc. Outcomes are often confused with program outputs or units of services, e.g., the number of clients who went through a program.

The [United Way of America](http://www.unitedway.org/outcomes/) (http://www.unitedway.org/outcomes/) provides an excellent overview of outcomes-based evaluation, including introduction to outcomes measurement, a program outcome model, why to measure outcomes, use of program outcome findings by agencies, eight steps to success for measuring outcomes, examples of outcomes and outcome indicators for various programs and the resources needed for measuring outcomes. The following information is a top-level summary of information from this site.

To accomplish an outcomes-based evaluation, you should first pilot, or test, this evaluation approach on one or two programs at most (before doing all programs).

The general steps to accomplish an outcomes-based evaluation include to:
1. Identify the major outcomes that you want to examine or verify for the program under evaluation. You might reflect on your mission (the overall purpose of your organization) and ask yourself what impacts you will have on your clients as you work towards your mission. For example, if your overall mission is to provide shelter and resources to abused women, then ask yourself what benefits this will have on those women if you effectively provide them shelter and other services or resources. As a last resort, you might ask yourself, "What major activities are we doing now?" and then for each activity, ask "Why are we doing that?" The answer to this "Why?" question is usually an outcome. This "last resort" approach, though, may just end up justifying ineffective activities you are doing now, rather than examining what you should be doing in the first place.
2. Choose the outcomes that you want to examine, prioritize the outcomes and, if your time and resources are limited, pick the top two to four most important outcomes to examine for now.
3. For each outcome, specify what observable measures, or indicators, will suggest that you're achieving

that key outcome with your clients. This is often the most important and enlightening step in outcomes-based evaluation. However, it is often the most challenging and even confusing step, too, because you're suddenly going from a rather intangible concept, e.g., increased self-reliance, to specific activities, e.g., supporting clients to get themselves to and from work, staying off drugs and alcohol, etc. It helps to have a "devil's advocate" during this phase of identifying indicators, i.e., someone who can question why you can assume that an outcome was reached because certain associated indicators were present.

4. Specify a "target" goal of clients, i.e., what number or percent of clients you commit to achieving specific outcomes with, e.g., "increased self-reliance (an outcome) for 70% of adult, African American women living in the inner city of Minneapolis as evidenced by the following measures (indicators) ..."

5. Identify what information is needed to show these indicators, e.g., you'll need to know how many clients in the target group went through the program, how many of them reliably undertook their own transportation to work and stayed off drugs, etc. If your program is new, you may need to evaluate the process in the program to verify that the program is indeed carried out according to your original plans. (Michael Patton, prominent researcher, writer and consultant in evaluation, suggests that the most important type of evaluation to carry out may be this implementation evaluation to verify that your program ended up to be implemented as you originally planned.)

6. Decide how can that information be efficiently and realistically gathered (see Selecting Which Methods to Use below). Consider program documentation, observation of program personnel and clients in the program, questionnaires and interviews about clients perceived benefits from the program, case studies of program failures and successes, etc. You may not need all of the above. (see Overview of Methods to Collect Information below).

7. Analyze and report the findings (see Analyzing and Interpreting Information below).

## Overview of Methods to Collect Information (by Carter McNamara, PhD; last revision: Feb 16, 1998)

The following table provides an overview of the major methods used for collecting data during evaluations.

| 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<br>-inexpensive to administer<br>-easy to compare and analyze<br>-administer to many people<br>-can get lots of data<br>-many sample questionnaires already exist | -might not get careful feedback<br>-wording can bias client's responses<br>-are impersonal<br>-in surveys, may need sampling expert<br>- 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<br>-develops relationship with client<br>-can be flexible with client | -can take much time<br>-can be hard to analyze and compare<br>-can be costly<br>-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<br>-doesn't interrupt program or client's routine in program<br>-information already exists<br>-few biases about information | -often takes much time<br>-info may be incomplete<br>-need to be quite clear about what looking for<br>-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<br>-can adapt to events as they occur | -can be difficult to interpret seen behaviors<br>-can be complex to categorize observations<br>-can influence behaviors of program participants<br>-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<br>-can be efficient way to get much range and depth of information in short time<br>- can convey key information about programs | -can be hard to analyze responses<br>-need good facilitator for safety and closure<br>-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<br>-powerful means to portray program to outsiders | -usually quite time consuming to collect, organize and describe<br>-represents depth of information, rather than breadth |

## Also see
[Appreciative Inquiry](#)
[Survey Design](#)

## *Ethics: Informed Consent from Program Participants*
Note that if you plan to include in your evaluation, the focus and reporting on personal information about customers or clients participating in the evaluation, then you should first gain their consent to do so. They should understand what you're doing with them in the evaluation and how any information

associated with them will be reported. You should clearly convey terms of confidentiality regarding access to evaluation results. They should have the right to participate or not. Have participants review and sign an informed consent form. See the sample informed-consent form.

### How to Apply Certain Methods
Purposes and Formats of Questions
Developing Questionnaires
Conducting Interviews
Conducting Focus Groups
Developing Case Studies

## Selecting Which Methods to Use (by Carter McNamara, PhD; last revision: Feb 16, 1998)
### Overall Goal in Selecting Methods:
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. Consider the following questions:
1. What information is needed to make current decisions about a product or program?
2. Of this information, how much can be collected and analyzed in a low-cost and practical manner, e.g., using questionnaires, surveys and checklists?
3. How accurate will the information be (reference the above table for disadvantages of methods)?
4. Will the methods get all of the needed information?
5. What additional methods should and could be used if additional information is needed?
6. Will the information appear as credible to decision makers, e.g., to funders or top management?
7. Will the nature of the audience conform to the methods, e.g., will they fill out questionnaires carefully, engage in interviews or focus groups, let you examine their documentations, etc.?
8. Who can administer the methods now or is training required?
9. How can the information be analyzed?

Note that, ideally, the evaluator uses a combination of methods, for example, a questionnaire to quickly collect a great deal of information from a lot of people, and then interviews to get more in-depth information from certain respondents to the questionnaires. Perhaps case studies could then be used for more in-depth analysis of unique and notable cases, e.g., those who benefited or not from the program, those who quit the program, etc.

### Four Levels of Evaluation:
There are four levels of evaluation information that can be gathered from clients, including getting their:
1. reactions and feelings (feelings are often poor indicators that your service made lasting impact)
2. learning (enhanced attitudes, perceptions or knowledge)
3. changes in skills (applied the learning to enhance behaviors)
4. effectiveness (improved performance because of enhanced behaviors)

Usually, the farther your evaluation information gets down the list, the more useful is your evaluation. Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to reliably get information about effectiveness. Still, information about

learning and skills is quite useful.

# Analyzing and Interpreting Information (Carter McNamara, PhD; last revision: Feb 16, 1998)

Analyzing quantitative and qualitative data is often the topic of advanced research and evaluation methods. There are certain basics which can help to make sense of reams of data.

### Always start with your evaluation goals:

When analyzing data (whether from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, or whatever), 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.

### 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.
4. Keep all commentary for several years after completion in case needed for future reference.

### Interpreting Information:

1. Attempt to put the information in perspective, e.g., compare results to what you expected, promised results; management or program staff; any common standards for your services; original program goals

(especially if you're conducting a program evaluation); indications of accomplishing outcomes (especially if you're conducting an outcomes evaluation); description of the program's experiences, strengths, weaknesses, etc. (especially if you're conducting a process evaluation).

2. Consider recommendations to help program staff improve the program, conclusions about program operations or meeting goals, etc.

3. Record conclusions and recommendations in a report document, and associate interpretations to justify your conclusions or recommendations.

## Reporting Evaluation Results (by Carter McNamara, PhD; last revision: Feb 16, 1998)

1. The level and scope of content depends on to whom the report is intended, e.g., to bankers, funders, employees, customers, clients, the public, etc.

2. Be sure employees have a chance to carefully review and discuss the report. Translate recommendations to action plans, including who is going to do what about the program and by when.

3. Bankers or funders will likely require a report that includes an executive summary (this is a summary of conclusions and recommendations, not a listing of what sections of information are in the report -- that's a table of contents); description of theorganization and the program under evaluation; explanation of the evaluation goals, methods, and analysis procedures; listing of conclusions and recommendations; and any relevant attachments, e.g., inclusion of evaluation questionnaires, interview guides, etc. The banker or funder may want the report to be delivered as a presentation, accompanied by an overview of the report. Or, the banker or funder may want to review the report alone.

4. Be sure to record the evaluation plans and activities in an evaluation plan which can be referenced when a similar program evaluation is needed in the future.

### Contents of an Evaluation Report -- Example

An example of evaluation report contents is included later on below in this document. Click Contents of an Evaluation Plan but, don't forget to look at the next section "Who Should Carry Out the Evaluation".

## Who Should Carry Out the Evaluation? (by Carter McNamara, PhD; last revision: Feb 16, 1998)

Ideally, management decides what the evaluation goals should be. Then an evaluation expert helps the organization to determine what the evaluation methods should be, and how the resulting data will be analyzed and reported back to the organization. Most organizations do not have the resources to carry out the ideal evaluation.

Still, they can do the 20% of effort needed to generate 80% of what they need to know to make a decision about a program. If they can afford any outside help at all, it should be for identifying the appropriate evaluation methods and how the data can be collected. The organization might find a less expensive resource to apply the methods, e.g., conduct interviews, send out and analyze results of questionnaires, etc.

If no outside help can be obtained, the organization can still learn a great deal by applying the methods and analyzing results themselves. However, there is a strong chance that data about the strengths and

weaknesses of a program will not be interpreted fairly if the data are analyzed by the people responsible for ensuring the program is a good one. Program managers will be "policing" themselves. This caution is not to fault program managers, but to recognize the strong biases inherent in trying to objectively look at and publicly (at least within the organization) report about their programs. Therefore, if at all possible, have someone other than the program managers look at and determine evaluation results.

## Contents of an Evaluation Plan (by Carter McNamara, PhD)

Develop an evaluation plan to ensure your program evaluations are carried out efficiently in the future. Note that bankers or funders may want or benefit from a copy of this plan.

Ensure your evaluation plan is documented so you can regularly and efficiently carry out your evaluation activities. Record enough information in the plan so that someone outside of the organization can understand what you're evaluating and how. Consider the following format for your report:

1. Title Page (name of the organization that is being, or has a product/service/program that is being, evaluated; date)
2. Table of Contents
3. Executive Summary (one-page, concise overview of findings and recommendations)
4. Purpose of the Report (what type of evaluation(s) was conducted, what decisions are being aided by the findings of the evaluation, who is making the decision, etc.)
5. Background About Organization and Product/Service/Program that is being evaluated
a) Organization Description/History
b) Product/Service/Program Description (that is being evaluated)
i) Problem Statement (in the case of nonprofits, description of the community need that is being met by the product/service/program)
ii) Overall Goal(s) of Product/Service/Program
iii) Outcomes (or client/customer impacts) and Performance Measures (that can be measured as indicators toward the outcomes)
iv) Activities/Technologies of the Product/Service/Program (general description of how the product/service/program is developed and delivered)
v) Staffing (description of the number of personnel and roles in the organization that are relevant to developing and delivering the product/service/program)
6) Overall Evaluation Goals (eg, what questions are being answered by the evaluation)
7) Methodology
a) Types of data/information that were collected
b) How data/information were collected (what instruments were used, etc.)
c) How data/information were analyzed
d) Limitations of the evaluation (eg, cautions about findings/conclusions and how to use the findings/conclusions, etc.)
8) Interpretations and Conclusions (from analysis of the data/information)
9) Recommendations (regarding the decisions that must be made about the product/service/program)
Appendices: content of the appendices depends on the goals of the evaluation report, eg.:
a) Instruments used to collect data/information
b) Data, eg, in tabular format, etc.

c) Testimonials, comments made by users of the product/service/program

d) Case studies of users of the product/service/program

e) Any related literature

## Pitfalls to Avoid (by Carter McNamara, PhD; last revision: Feb 16, 1998)

1. Don't balk at evaluation because it seems far too "scientific." It's not. Usually the first 20% of effort will generate the first 80% of the plan, and this is far better than nothing.

2. There is no "perfect" evaluation design. Don't worry about the plan being perfect. It's far more important to do something, than to wait until every last detail has been tested.

3. Work hard to include some interviews in your evaluation methods. Questionnaires don't capture "the story," and the story is usually the most powerful depiction of the benefits of your services.

4. Don't interview just the successes. You'll learn a great deal about the program by understanding its failures, dropouts, etc.

5. Don't throw away evaluation results once a report has been generated. Results don't take up much room, and they can provide precious information later when trying to understand changes in the program.

## Additional Resources

Additional Resources, Guides for many types of evaluation

## Related Library Links

Controlling / Coordinating Implementation of Plans

Evaluation Activities in Organizations (many kinds of evaluations and documents), including

- - - User-Friendly Handbook for Mixed Method Evaluations

- - - Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation

- - - Analytical Methods in Maternal and Child Health

- - - General Accounting Office Policy and Guidance Publications (many free evaluation pulications)

Organizing (many kinds)

Planning (many kinds)

Quality Management

Research Methods (Basic Business, e.g., focus groups, surveys, questionnaires, etc.)

## On-Line Discussion Groups, Newsletters, etc.

There are a large number of on-line discussion groups, newsletters (e-zines), etc. in the overall areas of management, business and organization development. Participants, subscribers, etc., can get answers to their questions and learn a lot just by posing the questions to the groups, sharing insights about their experiences, etc. Join some groups and sign up for some newsletters!

References to major egroups, newsletters, etc.

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