

Planning Long-term Evaluation and Assessment Activities

Overview

Sustaining large-scale, system-wide changes will require planning, funding, creativity, and flexibility. Without evaluation and assessment activities planned from the project's onset, it is impossible to know whether a program is functioning well, where it may need improvement, and if the audience the program is intended to reach is benefiting from the program. Regular evaluation and assessment activities also provide stakeholders and the program leadership with the information necessary to make data-informed decisions.¹ During the sustainability phase of a project there are specific types of evaluation and assessment activities that can be completed to obtain this information. Evaluations conducted during this phase are referred to as summative evaluations, which assess the results of a program.

Impact evaluations are evaluations that measure the immediate effects of an intervention or service. For example, measuring an increase in knowledge before and after a training using a pre- and post-knowledge survey is an example of an impact evaluation. In this example, the evaluation is measuring the increase in knowledge or awareness as it relates to a specific topic.

Outcome evaluations are conducted to measure a program's effectiveness, usually over a longer period of time. Outcome evaluations seek to understand the changes the intervention has had over time. The goal of an outcome evaluation is to determine the impact of an intervention.

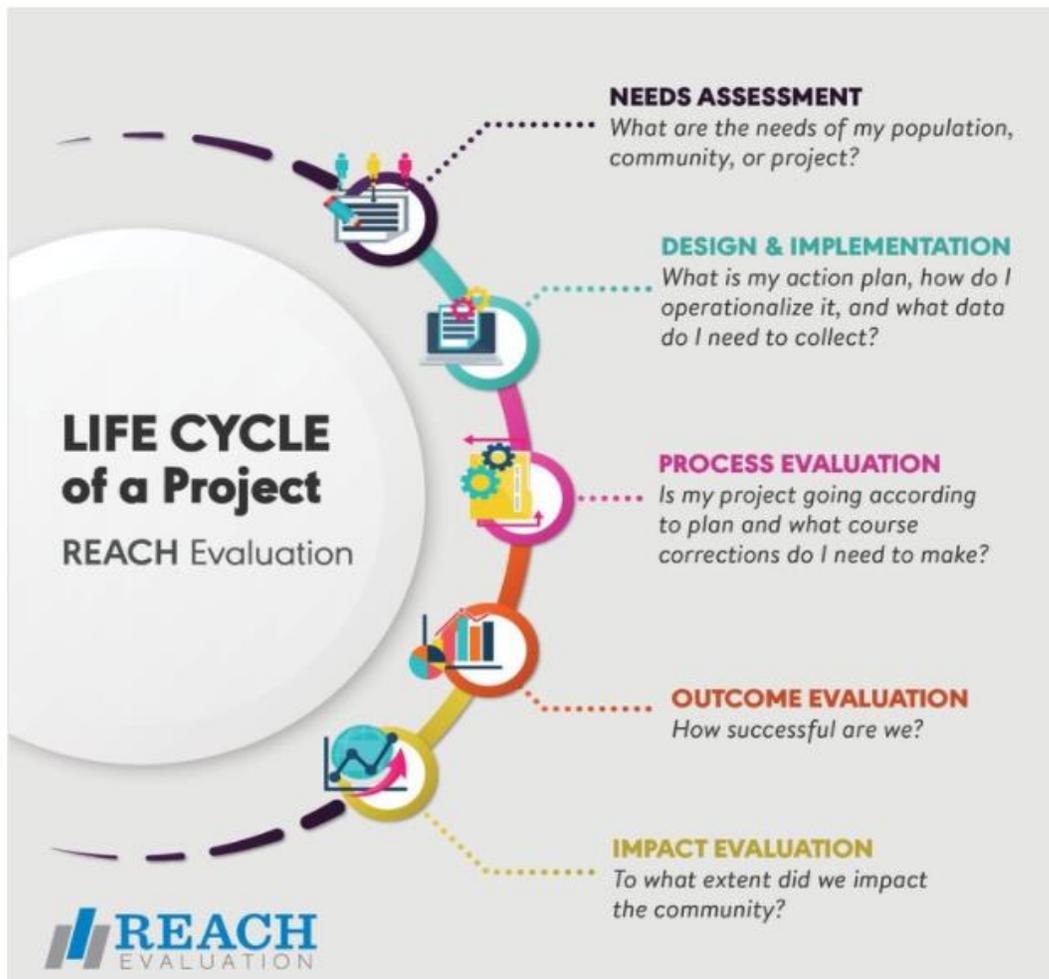
In both impact and outcome evaluations, the logic model is used to determine if the inputs and causal events of the intervention created a change in knowledge, awareness, or in practice. The timing and sequence of when these evaluations are conducted are what makes them related but also somewhat different.

When to Conduct an Impact or Outcome Evaluation

The timing for when these types of evaluations are conducted is critical. If either of these evaluations is conducted too soon or too late, it will produce unreliable results. If

the evaluation is conducted before the prescribed intervention has the appropriate time to create a change in knowledge or awareness, the results could demonstrate no change. Knowing when to conduct these types of evaluations will depend on the program, its interventions, and expected outcomes. A well-structured evaluation plan can provide guidance on the timing of evaluations and many other steps in the evaluation process.

The project life cycle below is a helpful tool to determine when to conduct evaluation activities and the types of questions each evaluation is designed to answer.



Life Cycle of a Project/Reach Evaluation²

Developing the Evaluation Plan

Developing an evaluation plan takes time. Beginning the planning process early is important to allow enough time to assess the focus, time, resources, individuals, and expertise needed to conduct the evaluation. The evaluation plan should be thought of

as a roadmap that will guide the process from start to finish. Therefore, it is important to invest the time into developing the evaluation plan and designing a plan that incorporates as many details as possible.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a comprehensive guide entitled “Developing an Effective Evaluation Plan”³ that outlines the steps for developing an evaluation plan and provides exercises for the planning phase. The guide outlines the following six steps to evaluation planning:

1. **Engage Stakeholders:** Involving the program’s key stakeholders is important because this group will have first-hand knowledge about the program and its desired outcomes and will be able to help set the priorities for the evaluation. Engaging the stakeholders will also foster collaboration and relationship building, which is especially important when building a well-connected, community-based, victim-centered network.
2. **Describe the Program:** Having the stakeholders create a program description will help to clarify the purpose of the program and related activities, and it will ultimately provide the group with a shared understanding to guide both the planning and execution of the evaluation.
3. **Focus the Evaluation:** Defining the scope of the evaluation is a key step in developing an evaluation plan. It is during this phase of evaluation planning that the focus of the evaluation is established, questions are developed, data collection methods are determined, and necessary resources are outlined. Failing to focus the evaluation may result in an evaluation that does not produce useful results or answer the intended questions.
4. **Planning Data Collection:** Central to all evaluations is the collection of data as the data will ultimately be used to answer the evaluation questions established. One of the most important segments of an evaluation plan is the data collection plan. This part of the plan should include every evaluation question along with the type(s) of data needed to answer the question and the location for where the data can be found.
5. **Planning Data Analysis:** The data collection and analysis plan are closely linked. Making a determination for what data to collect will inform how the data will be analyzed. Being sure to include ample time for the data analysis is critical, as it often takes much longer to clean and prepare the data for analysis than expected. It is also recommended to include time for the stakeholders to review the data once analyzed. This will help to inform how to present the findings and develop the final evaluation report for dissemination.
6. **Dissemination Planning:** This planning step is often overlooked and can result in missed opportunities. Asking the stakeholders to provide input for the dissemination plan can provide additional opportunities to foster relationships

and engage other community partners. Taking the time during the planning for the evaluation to decide how the report will be shared and with whom is an opportunity to make strategic decisions for sharing the evaluation results. Including local, state, and federal government officials, community partners, funding sponsors, and other leaders as recipients of the evaluation report is a way to raise awareness and increase the visibility of the program.

Additional Evaluation and Assessment Resources:

Office for Victims of Crime: [Guide to Performance Measurement and Program Evaluation](#)

REACH Evaluation: [Life Cycle of a Project](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [Types of Evaluation](#)

Unite for Site: [Evaluation of Global Health Programs Online Course](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [Developing an Effective Evaluation Plan](#)

The University of Kansas: [Community Toolbox](#)

[Program Evaluation: An Introduction](#)

[Program Evaluation: An Introduction to an Evidence-Based Approach](#)

[Program Evaluation Standards: A Guide for Evaluators and Evaluation Users](#)

¹ [Chapter 36. Introduction to Evaluation | Section 1. A Framework for Program Evaluation: A Gateway to Tools | Main Section | Community Tool Box \(ku.edu\).](#)

² [Life Cycle of a Project — REACH Evaluation](#)

³ [Developing an Effective Evaluation Plan: Setting the Course for Effective Program Evaluation \(cdc.gov\).](#)

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