Process Evaluations

Overview

Evaluation is one strategy for knowing that a project has been implemented as it was planned and intended, and with what success. There are several types of evaluations including, but not limited to, outcome and process evaluations. These types of evaluations are conducted after project implementation, and each focuses on evaluating different areas of implementation. Outcome evaluations differ from process evaluations in that outcome evaluations seek to measure the program's effect on the target population by evaluating the progress in the outcomes the program was designed to achieve. [1] This document will highlight process evaluation, which is an evaluation type that focuses on the implementation of a project, process, or initiative, to determine how well the project followed the implementation strategy.[2]

What is a Process Evaluation?

The primary purpose of a process evaluation is to ascertain whether or not the project was implemented as originally designed. This is done by comparing the implementation with the project's logic model and checking for alignment. This is done by focusing the evaluation activities around the inputs, activities, and outcomes of the logic model.

Process evaluations can still be conducted for projects that were not implemented using a logic model. In these situations, the project goals, objectives, and activities are used in place of the logic model inputs, activities, and outcomes.

Process evaluations are important because they help organizational leaders reflect on how well the project was implemented and what goals, objectives, and activities were not completed and process evaluations also provides a deeper understanding of why. These lessons learned are valuable because they create formal documentation regarding the project's implementation and they can provide insight for future project planning.

Before starting a process evaluation, an evaluation plan must be created. Having a clearly defined evaluation plan is imperative because it will ensure that the evaluation remains focused and does not go beyond the scope of the evaluation.

Developing the Process Evaluation

Because the purpose of a process evaluation is to determine whether the project is being implemented in accordance with the logic model and/or project goals, objectives, and activities, the evaluation questions must be in alignment. The development of a meaningful and useful process evaluation will depend heavily on a well-defined logic model. While it will not be feasible to evaluate every area of a project, especially for very large projects, it is possible to evaluate the major areas.

While a process evaluation is not completed until after implementation is completed, it is highly recommended to take time in the planning phase to begin contemplating the process evaluation. One of the most important aspects of a process evaluation is data collection. Contemplating the process evaluation activities in the planning phase will ensure that the data necessary to perform the evaluation has been collected. Waiting until after the program has been implemented to start designing the process evaluation could result in an incomplete evaluation. This is due to missing or incomplete data being collected throughout the implementation phase. Some examples of data needed for a process evaluation include internal program records, general participant information (e.g., numbers served, basic demographic information, etc.), and types of activities completed. When developing a process evaluation, begin by reviewing the logic model and/or project goals, objectives, and activities to generate a list of the data necessary to determine if those goals, objectives, and activities were completed.

The development of strong evaluation questions is one way to ensure that the most important activities are evaluated because those activities typically impact other, smaller areas within a project. Limiting the evaluation to 5-7 questions is important to maintain the evaluation's focus toward key areas.

These foundational questions are a good starting point from which to develop more program-specific questions:

1. Were the program activities completed?
2. Was the program implemented with quality?
3. Was the program implemented in accordance with the budget?
4. Was the program scope maintained?
5. Was the program implemented within the set timeframe?
6. Is the program reaching its intended audience?
7. How satisfied are the participants/clients?

It is important to gather input from a diverse group of individuals, including the program's key stakeholders and anyone who participated in the development of the logic model. This is important because this group of individuals will have first-hand knowledge about the logic model and will be able to generate program-specific evaluation questions.

While this group will be instrumental in the development of the evaluation questions, they should also help to prioritize the questions and to ensure that the evaluation is tightly aligned with the program's goals and logic model.

Resources for Conducting a Process Evaluation

The cost of a skilled evaluator is often prohibitive for many non-profit organizations. While hiring an evaluator is not necessary, having someone who has evaluation experience on the team can be extremely beneficial. There are low-cost/no-cost options available. Below are a few resources for consideration:

The (NCJFCJ) – Contact the NCJFCJ to discuss the types of technical assistance available to assist with conducting evaluation activities.

Local Universities – Local universities can be great resources and can often provide research support free of charge. When contacting your local universities consider schools of social work, education, and law schools as possible partners.

Federal Agencies – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA), and the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW).

Additional Evaluation Resources:

The University of Kansas - Community Toolbox

Reach Evaluation - Life Cycle of a Project

National Science Foundation - Designing and Reporting Mixed-Method Evaluations –

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Types of Evaluation

Unite for Site - Evaluation of Global Health Programs Online Course –

Program Evaluation: An Introduction

Program Evaluation: An Introduction to an Evidence-Based Approach

Program Evaluation Standards: A Guide for Evaluators and Evaluation Users

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[1] Center for Disease Control: Types of Evaluation
[2] Unite for Site: Evaluation of Global Health Programs Online Course