

Step 6

Preparing the Evaluation Component

EVERYTHING YOU HAVE completed in the development of your organization's proposal (needs assessment, goals, objectives, and methods) naturally leads you to this component, as evaluation answers questions that both your organization and the funder have, such as

- Was the program successful?
- Did we do what we set out to do?
- What impact did the program have on the community or target audience?
- What did we learn from this experience that can be leveraged?
- What didn't work—and why or why not?
- What's different as a result of our program?

As you prepare the goals, objectives, and methods, it is now more important than ever to plan how your organization will evaluate what it proposes to do. In this step you will learn how to write an evaluation plan so that your organization can effectively demonstrate the success of its program and measure program impact—and also capture the lessons learned. An exercise will help you think about what your evaluation plan should contain.

Definitions

Impact. "The fundamental intended or unintended long-term change occurring in organizations, communities, or systems as a result of program activities."

Leverage. "A method of grantmaking practiced by some foundations. Leverage occurs when a small amount of money is given with the express purpose of attracting funding from other sources or of providing the organization with the tools it needs to raise other kinds of funds." Leverage may also be defined as building momentum from one effort to the next.

Purpose of the Evaluation Component

Evaluation is a process that determines the impact, effectiveness, and efficiency of a program. It reveals what worked and—equally important—what did not. Decisions made during this process can help the organization plan for the program’s future, and the process can produce an organized and objective report documenting the *return on investment* for funders and the realized benefits to the community the organization serves. How a program will be evaluated must be determined prior to implementation so that the organization can build evaluation measurements into the final program plan. Always keep in mind that funders expect to hear from organizations how they define and measure the success of a program.

Definition

Return on Investment (ROI). “The amount of benefit (return) based on the amount of resources (funds) used to produce it.”

Specific Virtues of Evaluation

First, a good evaluation component strengthens the proposal from the program officer’s perspective. You are asking potential grantmakers to invest in your project—and you are asking the program officer to be your advocate. You want the funding institution to bet on the fact that the world as your nonprofit sees it will be improved in some specific way as a result of the proposed program. Essentially, proposed programs serve to test a hypothesis—“If we do this, then that will happen.” A solid evaluation component in a proposal reassures a funder that the organization is interested, as the funder is, in learning whether this hypothesis is correct.

Second, through evaluation, your organization will learn about the program’s strengths and areas of weakness. The process alone of thinking through the evaluation design can strengthen a program before it’s even implemented. From there your organization can take the knowledge gained through an actual evaluation and share it with staff and volunteers to improve programs as they are being implemented—a strategy often referred

Definition

Hypothesis. “The assumed proposition that is tested in a research process.”

to as a midcourse correction. This knowledge may also be shared with others in the field so that they, too, can learn the lessons of the program's work.

The third benefit is to the public—the impact. Dollars granted from foundations and corporate giving programs are dollars dedicated to charitable good; therefore, with each grant you become a recipient of public trust once again. Because of that, your organization has an obligation to ensure that its programs are actually having a positive impact on the community as a whole or on the target audience that it purports to serve within the community. Evaluation is one of the strongest and most effective tools any nonprofit has to verify and document that it is indeed fulfilling its obligation to make a positive impact on the community it serves.

Internal or External Evaluation

Most foundations typically allow organizations to designate from 5 to 10 percent of the total program budget for evaluation. You need to consider what the most effective use of those funds would be. Some organizations will spend time up front, crystallizing their evaluation components and coming to feel confident that they have both the staffing and the expertise in place to objectively and thoroughly handle the evaluation internally. Other organizations will decide to engage an outside evaluator, for any number of reasons (lacking expertise among the staff and wanting the evaluation to be deemed as objective as it can be are two of the most common). In either case you should provide some background information in your proposal indicating which direction you intend to take.

Content of the Evaluation Component

The ability to fully understand both the big picture of your program and the individual pieces that make up that big picture is a must. Evaluation design requires dedicated thinking. First, you need to consider your organization's definition of success—the “so what?” factor. Then you must determine the relationship between the expected outcomes and the activities described in the proposal. Finally, you need to identify the most important aspects of the program, then identify why it is important to evaluate them.

Organizations conduct evaluations primarily to accomplish six purposes:

1. Find out whether or not the hypothesis was correct: Did what the organization originally proposed actually do what the organization expected that it would?

54 Winning Grants Step by Step

2. Determine if the methods that were specified were indeed used and the objectives met.
3. Determine if an impact was made on the need identified.
4. Obtain feedback from the clients served and other members of the community.
5. Maintain some control over the project.
6. Make midcourse corrections along the way to increase the program's chances of success.

When preparing the evaluation section of the proposal, answering the following questions will help you frame what you will say:

1. What is the purpose of your organization's evaluation?
2. How will the findings be used?
3. What will you know after the evaluation that you do not know now?
4. What will you do after the evaluation that you cannot do now because of lack of information?
5. How will the lives of the people or community you serve be better?

The focus of this workbook, as in previous editions, does not allow for detailed information on program evaluation methods. A free resource you should consider reviewing as an accompaniment to this workbook is the *W. K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook*, which can be found on the foundation's website (www.wkkf.org).

That said, here is a broad overview that can provide some assistance as you determine the parameters most appropriate for your project. Generally, there are two approaches to data collection: quantitative methods and qualitative methods.

Quantitative methods are, as their name implies, methods to quantify (measure or count) data. They directly answer the question, "How much did we do?" Using this method, you collect data that you can analyze statistically, using averages, means, percentiles, and the like. These analyses allow you to make statements about cause-and-effect relationships. Employ quantitative methods for questions focused on

- Understanding the quantities or frequency of particular aspects of a program (such as number of enrollees or number of dropouts)
- Determining whether a cause-and-effect relationship is present

- Comparing two different methods seeking to achieve the same outcomes
- Establishing numerical baselines (through such means as pretests, posttests, and quarterly or yearly follow-ups)

Qualitative methods, in contrast, are based on direct contact with the people involved with a program. These methods consist of interviews (group or individual), observation (direct or field), and review of selected documents. According to the Nonprofit Good Practice Guide Glossary (www.npgoodpractice.org/Glossary), this approach “implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are rigorously examined, but not measured in terms of quantity, amount, or frequency.” Employ qualitative methods for questions focused on

- Understanding feelings or opinions about a program among participants, staff, or community members
- Gaining insight into how patterns of relationships in the program unfold
- Gathering multiple perspectives to understand the whole picture
- Identifying approximate indicators that clients are moving in the “right” direction

In other words, pretests and posttests are not the only measures of success. By taking the time to think clearly and strategically up front, an organization can come up with a creative and valuable evaluation design that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods. For example, Some City Senior Center staff might use a pretest and posttest (quantitative method) to measure each new Spanish-speaking member’s individual success in grasping the new diabetes management protocols being taught in the new diabetes management classes, and they might also observe the classroom and the facility in which the curriculum is taught to better understand each member’s experience (qualitative method).

The evaluation component should highlight the data collection methods you plan to employ for the program. Like every other component of the proposal, the evaluation should connect directly with both the objectives and the methods. If your objectives and methods were crafted as recommended—meaning they are measurable and time-specific—that will make the task of preparing a good data collection plan and proposal evaluation much easier.

Take a look at the Sample Evaluation Component prepared for the Senior Latino Community Outreach Pilot Project.

Sample Evaluation Component

Our formal referral system and feedback mechanism will serve a dual purpose. First, we can track all referrals of new Latino seniors, which services we are able to provide, and where the referrals are coming from. Second, our feedback loop will allow us to gather information about member satisfaction with our services, which we will review every other month. This is of particular importance since one of our objectives with the program is to grow and institutionalize our collective cultural competence. The satisfaction reports will allow us to fine-tune our outreach and newly developed Spanish language program offerings.

Specific to our diabetes self-management class, we will employ a combination of evaluation tools. We will use pretests and posttests with every new monolingual Spanish-speaking senior who participates in the classes. We will also take the blood sugar level of each new senior at the beginning of the classes, and monitor each senior's blood sugar level once weekly for three months upon completion of the classes. This monitoring will be done by the nurse, who will use a glucometer to measure each participant's levels. The medical readings will be documented in the client's file every week for three months to determine whether participation in the self-management classes has an effect on the seniors' ability to successfully manage their blood sugar levels and therefore effectively manage their diabetes.

Answer the questions in Worksheet 6.1A to begin planning your evaluation section. The sample answers in Worksheet 6.1B will help you get started. Be sure to refer to the Sample Evaluation Component before writing the organization's evaluation section. When you complete your evaluation section, review it with the Evaluation Review Questions.

WORKSHEET 6.1B: Evaluation Planning Questionnaire Example

1. What questions will the program's evaluation activities seek to answer?

Are the objectives of the program being met?

Is the Latino community responding to our outreach?

Are we becoming more culturally competent as an organization?

2. What are the specific evaluation plans and time frames?

- a. What kinds of data will be collected?

Numbers of Latino seniors in our service area coming to our center for the first time

Numbers of monolingual Spanish-speaking seniors accessing our new language and culture-appropriate programming

Satisfaction levels of those participating in our new programming

Key health indicators

- b. At what points?

Weekly for some; monthly for others

- c. Using what strategies or instruments?

Pretests and posttests

Database tracking systems

Our formal feedback mechanism

Medical records

Interviews and focus groups

- d. Using what comparison group or baseline, if any?

Last year's numbers of clients served

Medical records

WORKSHEET 6.1B: Evaluation Planning Questionnaire Example (Continued)

3. If you intend to study a sample of participants, how will this sample be constructed?

N/A

4. What procedures will you use to determine whether the program was implemented as planned?

Monthly review of our detailed program implementation timeline, which incorporates all our specified methods

5. Who will conduct the evaluation?

The program assistant, with support from the cultural competency consultant

6. Who will receive the reports?

All staff

Referring partners

Our board

Our funding partners

7. How are you defining success for this program or project?

Meeting our objectives as outlined in the proposal will be our initial definition of success. Beyond the first year, the center will define success as continuing referrals from our partnering organizations; positive feedback from our Latino members via our formal feedback mechanism; and incorporation of this project into our operating budget.

Evaluation Review Questions

1. Does the evaluation section focus on assessing the project results?
2. Does it describe how the evaluation will assess the efficiency of program methods?
3. Does it describe who will be evaluated and what will be measured?
4. Does it state what information will be collected in the evaluation process?
5. Does it state who will be responsible for making the assessments?
6. Does it discuss how the information and conclusions will be used to improve the program?
7. Does it provide the organization's definition of success?

If the program is successful and you are able to document that success through evaluation, you are probably going to want that program to continue. Step Seven addresses the need to plan now for program sustainability beyond the initial funding.