How to Write an Evaluation Plan and Report

Overview for AmeriCorps Grantees

Office of Research & Evaluation
Session Purpose

• Provide a basic understanding of the key components of an evaluation plan and report
Session Overview

• What is an evaluation plan and why develop one?
• Key components of an evaluation plan
• What is an evaluation report?
• Key components of an evaluation report
What is an evaluation plan?

• A written document that details the program model being evaluated
• Describes and justifies the evaluation approach selected
• Provides instructions for the evaluation / a guide for each step of the evaluation process
Why develop a written plan in advance?

- Creates a shared understanding between CNCS, the grantee, and the evaluator (if applicable)
- Helps decide what information is needed to address the evaluation objectives
- Helps identify methods for getting the needed information
- Helps identify potential issues and think through strategies to overcome these challenges
- Helps determine a reasonable and realistic timeline for the evaluation
What are the key components of a plan?

I. Introduction
II. Description of intervention/impact theory (logic model)
III. Evaluation methods (design, data collection, analysis)
IV. Data analysis
V. Timeline
VI. Budget
I. Introduction

A. Overview of program model and problem definition

B. Existing research or practice grounded in evidence and practitioner knowledge about the program and/or similar programs

C. Purpose of current evaluation

D. Scope of current evaluation
I. Introduction (Continued)

A. Overview of program model and problem definition

- What is the problem or issue that your program is designed to address?
- Briefly describe the program model, including key information about:
  - Stage of development/program maturity
  - Target population or beneficiaries
  - Key components
  - Anticipated outcomes
I. Introduction (Continued)

B. Existing research or practice grounded in evidence and practitioner knowledge about the program and/or similar programs

• What is known about the program or similar interventions?

*Include information about:*
- When the study was done and who conducted it
- Program population involved in the study
- Evaluation approach or methods used
- Brief discussion of findings
- Performance data (outputs, outcomes)
- Field experience
I. Introduction (Continued)

C. Define the purpose of your evaluation

- What is the purpose of the evaluation?

*Consider the following:*
  - Who wants the evaluation?
  - Why do they want it?
  - How do they intend to use it?

- Example: Improve the design and performance of your program
- Example: Assess the effectiveness of your program
I. Introduction (Continued)

D. Define the scope of your evaluation

- What is the scope of your evaluation?
  
  * Define scope based on decisions about what the evaluation will cover such as:
    
    - What time period?
    - Which of the intervention’s activities?
    - Which of the program’s sites?
  
  * Consider the following:
    
    - What resources are available for the evaluation?
    - What is the purpose of the evaluation and what information is needed?
II. Description of intervention/program theory

Your Planned Work

What **resources** you need to implement your program and what **activities** you intend to do.

- **Resources/Inputs** include the human, financial, organizational, and community resources a program has available for doing the work.

- **Activities** are the processes, tools, events, and actions that are used to bring about the intended program changes or results.

II. Description of intervention/program theory (Continued)

Your Intended Results

All of the program’s desired results (outputs, outcomes, and impact).

- **Outputs** are the direct products of program activities and may include types, levels and targets of services to be delivered by the program.

- **Outcomes/Impacts** are the specific changes in program participants’ knowledge, attitude(s), and behavior(s).

- **Long-term goal** is the intended or unintended change occurring in organizations, communities or systems as a result of program activities over time.

Basic Theory of Change Components

- **Community Problem/Need**: Guides choice of intervention, supports cause-effect relationship
- **Specific Intervention**: Evidence includes:
  - Guides choice of intervention
  - Supports cause-effect relationship
- **Intended Outcome**: Statistics documenting the need

Chain of thought:
- Community Problem/Need → Specific Intervention → Intended Outcome
- Evidence supports cause-effect relationship and guides intervention choice.
- Statistics document the need.
II. Description of intervention/program theory (Continued)

- **Problem**: The issue being addressed by the program

- **Goal(s)**: intended aims or impacts over life of the program

**Rationale and Assumptions**: What are your underlying assumptions and rationale around the intervention and how it works

**External Factors**: what else might affect the program
III. Evaluation methods (design, data collection, analysis)

It should include detailed information about the following:

A. Evaluation questions
B. Evaluation design
C. Data collection methods
Core Evaluation Plans

Logic Model

Evaluation Plans:

Implementation

Outcomes

Data Collection
Method  Effort

Resources  Activities  Outputs  Outcomes

Activities  Outputs

Outcomes  Indicators

Data Collection
Method  Effort
A. Evaluation questions should be **clearly stated, measurable, and align** with your program’s **logic model**

- Example questions related to *process/implementation*:
  - Are the activities being performed as planned?
  - Is the project reaching the intended target population?
  - How satisfied are the participants with their involvement in this project?

- Example questions related to *outputs*:
  - Is the project reaching the intended number of participants?
  - Is the project providing the planned services?

- Example questions related to *outcomes/impacts*:
  - Did the participants experience any changes in their knowledge, attitude(s), and behavior(s)?
  - What are the effects of the project on the organization (e.g., organizational pride, enhanced networking, and partnerships)?
III. Evaluation methods (Continued)

B. The type(s) of evaluation design selected

• The evaluation design that is selected should be based on and aligned with the following:
  – **Objectives** and **priorities** of the project
  – **Purpose** of the evaluation and the evaluation questions
  – **Time frame** for conducting the evaluation (i.e., during or after the project)
  – **How**, and by whom, the **results** will be **used**
  – **Budget** for the evaluation

• Common types of evaluation design are:
  – *Process/Implementation designs* which examine how well the program matches the theory behind its creation, and what the program actually does on the ground.
  – *Outcome/Impact designs* address how a program is related to changes in its participants or beneficiaries, and ideally provide evidence about whether the program causes the observed changes.
III. Evaluation methods (Continued)

C. Data collection methods

• Each of your evaluation questions, should address the following:
  – What will be collected?
  – How collected? Instrumentation?
  • Surveys
  • Interviews/focus groups
  – From whom collected? Who or what provides information?
  • Program participants
  • Program staff and stakeholders
  • Comparison/control group
  • Existing datasets / administrative data
III. Evaluation methods (Continued)

C. Data collection methods (Continued)

- Each of your evaluation questions, should address the following:
  - When collected and by whom?
    - Specific dates, times, persons?
  - How data are to be analyzed?
    - Statistical analysis for quantitative data (mean, median, chi-square, t-test, ANOVA, regression)
    - Content analysis for qualitative data (cross-site analysis, case study analysis)
IV. Timeline

- Key activities to consider in developing a timeline:
  - Study planning;
  - Institutional Review Board (IRB), if applicable;
  - Sampling/comparison group identification;
  - Data collection instrument creation;
  - Data collection;
  - Analysis;
  - Report writing; and
  - Report deadlines
V. Budget

• Common cost categories for creating a program evaluation budget are:
  – Staffing
  – Materials and supplies
  – Equipment
  – Travel

• What resources are needed to conduct the evaluation? Consider the following:
  – Who will conduct the evaluation?
    • If an external evaluator, consider what services are and are not included in their cost/budget
    • If your own staff, consider the costs of time spent on the evaluation in relation to their programmatic tasks
  – What will the evaluation include and how will it be conducted?
  – When and where will the evaluation take place?
Any questions regarding how to develop an evaluation plan?
What is an evaluation report?

• A written document that objectively describes all of the steps involved in completing the evaluation
  – Program background
  – Evaluation purpose, methods and procedures
  – Evaluation results
  – Programmatic achievements
  – Lessons learned

• Provides a transparent basis for:
  – Understanding the program’s accountability to its theory of change
  – Decision-making on policies and programs
  – Drawing lessons for program improvement
Key Components of a Report

I. Executive summary
II. Background and purpose
III. Evaluation methods (design, data collection, analysis)
IV. Results
V. Conclusions and recommendations
VI. References and appendices
I. Executive Summary

• The executive summary is a short section, usually two pages or less at the beginning of the report.

• It is a condensed version of the report and should provide a brief understanding of the purpose of the evaluation and the key findings.
II. Background and Purpose

III. Evaluation Methods

• For these sections of the report, you should be able to draw on the write-up of the corresponding sections of the evaluation plan, editing it to reflect changes in methods used as necessary.

• Your report should contain sufficient detail to enable others to replicate the evaluation approach and objectively understand the findings.
IV. Results

A. Basic guidelines in reporting evaluation results

– Organize results such that they clearly answer each evaluation question/objective
– Present objective (unbiased), clear, and factual results
– Consider using tables or charts to present quantitative results if easier to interpret
B. Acknowledge limitations of the study

- Specify the main limitations of the evaluation design and methods and a rationale for why
  - How reliable are your results based on the design you used?
- Explain the implications of each limitation and how it affects interpretation of the evaluation results
- Connect the study’s limitations to suggestions for further research
  - Explain how you might want to address any unanswered questions in a future study
V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Basic guidelines in reporting conclusions and recommendations:

• Answer the evaluation questions/objectives
  – Explain which program objectives were and were not met
  – Give possible reasons why

• Support conclusions with factual evidence from study results

• Recommend future program improvements
VI. References and Appendices

• References
  – Provide complete citations of any reports or publications cited in the body of the report

• Appendix
  – Provide a copy of all data collection tools (e.g., questionnaires and interview protocols)
  – Detailed documentation about the program (e.g., copy of program logic model)
  – Detailed documentation about the evaluation methodology (e.g., power analysis calculations, statistical models)
Any questions regarding how to write an evaluation report?
Resources

- The American Evaluation Association
  - http://www.eval.org
- The Evaluation Center
  - http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/
- Innovation Network’s Point K Learning Center
  - http://www.innonet.org
- Digital Resources for Evaluators
  - http://www.resources4evaluators.info/CommunitiesOfEvaluators.html
Session Feedback Form

http://www.flickr.com/photos/77shots/5703602800/
Thank you for your participation!