



How to Write an Evaluation Plan

Overview for AmeriCorps Grantees



Learning objectives



By the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

- Explain what an evaluation plan is and its purpose
- Identify key sections of an evaluation plan
- Identify what information to include in each section of an evaluation plan
 - Key sections
 - Contents of each section

What is an evaluation plan?

- Written document that details all of the evaluation steps and activities you plan to conduct
- Dynamic tool (i.e., a living document) that should be continually updated as you plan and develop each aspect of the evaluation
- Required component of your AmeriCorps application

Why develop an evaluation plan?

- Helps the evaluation team be more systematic and comprehensive in their evaluation efforts
- Increases efficiency of the evaluation
- Helps the evaluation team and/or program staff anticipate potential challenges and plan accordingly to avoid any missteps
- Creates a shared understanding of the purpose and use of evaluation results for program stakeholders
- Facilitates a smoother transition if staff turnover occurs
- Serves as a written understanding between the grantee and external evaluator(s), if applicable

What should your evaluation plan include?

Evaluation Plan Outline

- I. Introduction
- II. Program background
- III. Research questions
- IV. Evaluation design
- V. Data collection
- VI. Analysis plan
- VII. Timeline
- VIII. Budget and other

See *Frequently Asked Questions: Evaluation* document on the Knowledge Network for more details.



I. Introduction

The introduction is intended to establish the context of your planned evaluation.

It should explain:

- Your program model (brief overview)
- Purpose, scope, and timeframe of the evaluation
- Intended use and users of the evaluation results
- Who will be involved in planning and implementing the evaluation

II. Program background

- A description of the program and which specific program components the evaluation will focus on helps set the stage for understanding the evaluation approach.
- Your program background section should include:
 - Statement of need
 - Your program’s theory of change and supporting research evidence
 - Summary of previous evaluations (if applicable)
 - Narrative account of your program
 - Your program’s logic model
 - Description of which program components the evaluation will focus on

Logic model of a fictional homelessness prevention program

Process

Outcomes

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	Outcomes		
			Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
What we invest	What we do	Direct products from program activities	Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, opinions	Changes in behavior or action that result from participants' new knowledge	Meaningful changes, often in their condition or status in life
Funding Staff AmeriCorps members Non-AmeriCorps volunteers Research	Provide housing relocation and stabilization services Provide educational workshops	# families received relocation and stabilization services # families attended workshops Total # of program participants	Increase in # of families averting displacement Increased knowledge of responsible home owner or tenant practices/skills Increased knowledge of resources/services in community	Decrease in foreclosures and evictions Increased adoption of responsible practices/skills Increase in # of families in stable housing	Reduction in first-time homelessness in the community

III: Evaluation research questions

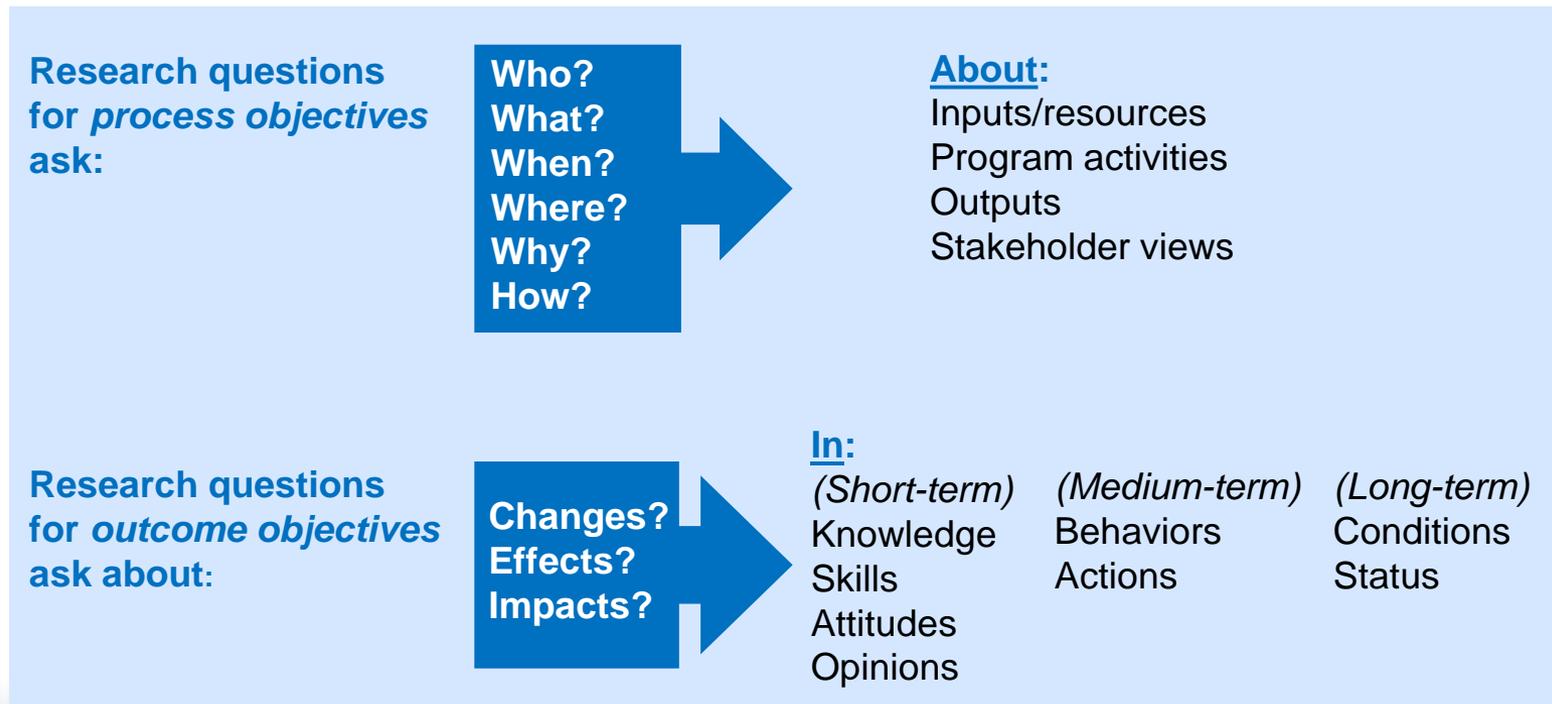
- Choosing research questions is key to defining exactly what it is the evaluation is trying to accomplish.
- What characterizes a good research question?
 - Clearly stated and specific
 - Aligns with your program's theory of change and logic model
 - Will lead to measurable or observable results
 - Realistic to answer given the resources, time, and experience of those doing the evaluation
 - Builds upon results from previous research and evaluations (if applicable)

Exercise #1 (see pg. 2 of handout)

- Discuss whether each research question is strong or weak, according to the criteria on the prior slide.
 1. How did the low-income families in the county benefit from participation in the homelessness prevention program?
 2. What impact did the homelessness prevention program have on beneficiaries' knowledge of healthy food practices?
 3. Did program beneficiaries increase their knowledge of housing, financial, and other types of services and benefits in the county as a result of participation in the program?
 4. Is the homelessness prevention program reaching its intended target population?
 5. Which family shelters and temporary housing have the best reputation?
 6. What do people in the county think about homelessness?

III: Evaluation research questions

Process and outcome objectives generate different kinds of research questions.





Exercise #2

Work in small groups to develop a few examples of strong research questions for an evaluation of the homelessness prevention program.

- Develop one question for a process evaluation
- Develop one question for an outcome evaluation

Exercise #2 Wrap-up (Optional slide)

Examples of process evaluation questions:

- Who did the homelessness prevention program reach in its first year of operation?
 - What are the demographic characteristics of those served?
 - To what extent did the program reach its target population?
 - How many families did it reach overall and by service activity?
- How well was the program delivered and received?
 - Was each activity implemented according to standards or protocol? Why or why not?
 - What facilitated and what were barriers to the implementation of each activity? What improvements are needed? Lessons learned?
 - How satisfied are the program's beneficiaries with the services they received?

Exercise #2 Wrap-up (Optional slide)

Examples of outcome evaluation questions:

- Did those served by the program increase their knowledge of responsible home ownership or tenant practices and skills?
 - How does their change in knowledge compare to a matched comparison group of individuals who did not participate in the program?
- Did those served by the program adopt more responsible home ownership or tenant practices and skills?

IV: Evaluation design



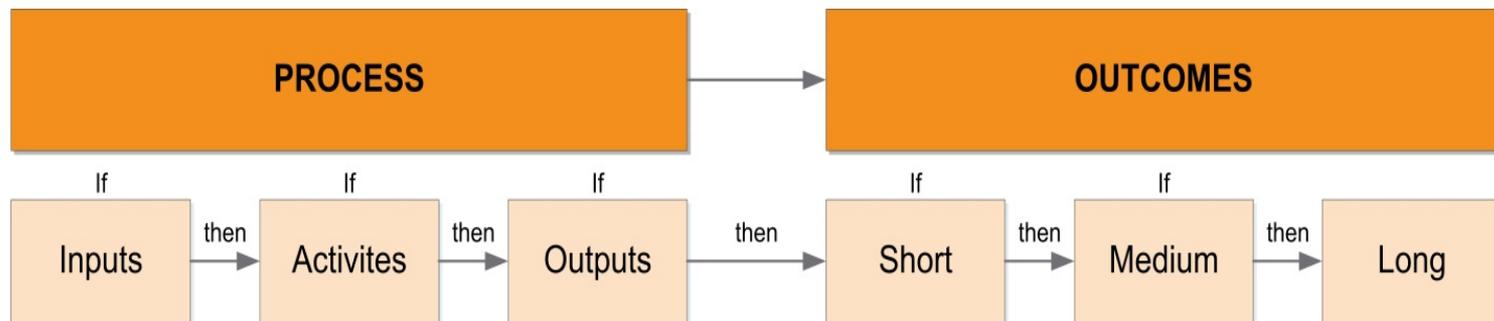
- Evaluation design is the structure that provides the information needed to answer each of your evaluation questions.
- Your intended evaluation design should be based on and aligned with the following:
 - Your program’s theory of change and logic model
 - Primary purpose of the evaluation and key research questions
 - Funder’s evaluation requirements
 - Resources available for the evaluation

IV: Evaluation design



What type of evaluation design will be used?

- The two “sides” of a program’s logic model align with the two types of evaluation designs: process evaluation and outcome evaluation.



IV: Evaluation design



Process evaluation

- Focuses on a program's inputs, activities, and outputs
- Documents what the program is doing and the extent to which the program has been implemented as intended
- Informs changes or improvements in the program's operations
- Includes qualitative and quantitative data collection
- Does not require advanced statistical methods
- Does not require a comparison or control group

IV: Evaluation design



Non-Experimental Outcome Evaluation Design

- Outcomes are only tracked for the intervention group.
- There are several variations within the category of non-experimental outcome designs, differing only in number and timing of outcome measurement points:
 - a) Single group post-test
 - b) Single group pre- and posttest

Intervention Group

	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
a) Single group post-test		X	0
b) Single group pre- and posttest	0	X	0

X = intervention is administered

0 = measurement is taken

IV: Evaluation design

Quasi-Experimental Evaluation Design

- Defined by collecting data on two or more study groups – an intervention group and a comparison group.
- The intervention and comparison groups are identified from pre-existing or self-selected groups and are not formed through a random assignment process.

	Pre-test	Treatment	Posttest
Intervention Group	0	X	0
Comparison Group	0		0

X = intervention is administered

0 = measurement is taken

- Pre-existing differences between the intervention and comparison groups at the outset of the intervention may lead to inaccurate estimates of the program's effects.

IV: Evaluation design

Experimental Evaluation Design (Randomized Controlled Trial)

- Defined by collecting data on two or more study groups – an intervention group and a control group.
- Random assignment techniques (e.g., lottery draw) are used by the evaluator to assign study participants to either the intervention or the control group.

	Pre-test	Treatment	Posttest
Intervention Group <i>Randomly assigned</i>	0	X	0
Control Group <i>Randomly assigned</i>	0		0

X = intervention is administered

0 = measurement is taken

- Random assignment ensures the study groups are equivalent prior to intervention, thus experimental designs are often considered the most credible design in regards to producing evidence of program impact.

IV: Evaluation design



Describe your evaluation study group(s)

- The evaluation design section of your plan should provide a description of each study group.
- Explain how each study group will be identified.
 - Define the target population from which you will recruit your study group participants.
 - Describe how you will access or recruit participants for each study group.
 - Specify any applicable eligibility criteria for each study group (e.g., study participants from your target population must be within a certain age range, hold a certain degree type).

IV: Evaluation design



Type of Outcome Evaluation Design	Control or Comparison	Ability to produce causal evidence about a program
Which one?	Randomly assigned intervention and control groups	
Which one?	Statistically matched intervention and comparison groups	
Which one?	Not statistically matched groups or group compared to itself	



V: Data collection

- This section focuses on the data you plan to collect to answer your key research questions.
- Describe how you plan to answer each research question by specifying:
 - What information will be collected (i.e., data indicators)
 - Who/what will be the source of data
 - Data collection tools/instruments
 - When the data will be collected and by whom
 - Sampling methods (if any)



V: : Data collection

- Indicators (or variables) help define exactly what information will be used to answer your research questions.
 - Specific, observable, and measurable sources of information
- Indicators can be quantitative (numerical) or qualitative (non-numerical).
- There can be more than one indicator for each activity or outcome you choose to measure.

V: Data collection



Example indicators

Research Question	Indicator(s)
<p><i>(Process-oriented)</i> Were the educational workshops consistently implemented across the four program sites?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Members received training on how to deliver curriculumb) Topics covered during workshopc) Duration of each workshopd) Total number of workshop participantse) Characteristics of workshop participants
<p><i>(Outcome-oriented)</i> Did program beneficiaries increase their knowledge of responsible home ownership practices?</p>	<p>Beneficiaries show an increase in knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Refinancing optionsb) Credit repair and recoveryc) Money saving strategies



V: Data collection

- Identify your data sources.
 - Existing data (e.g., administrative records, program databases, external datasets, program documents)
 - Beneficiaries, comparison/control group individuals, program staff, AmeriCorps members
- Identify your data collection tools/instruments.
 - Surveys
 - Interview protocols
 - Focus groups guides
 - Observation templates

V: Data collection



	Quantitative Methods	Qualitative Methods
Scope	Less in-depth data across a larger number of study participants	More in-depth data on fewer study participants
Data collection	Collect data using structured instruments (closed-ended survey items and rating scales)	Collect narrative data using semi- or unstructured instruments (open-ended survey items, interviews, observation, focus groups)
Data format	Numeric	Non-numeric (text-based)
Data analysis	Statistical (e.g., frequencies, means, crosstabs, regression models)	Non-statistical (e.g., content analysis)
Results	More objective; more generalizable to a larger population; able to provide evidence of program impact	More subjective; less generalizable to a larger population; NOT able to provide evidence of program impact

Combining qualitative and quantitative data methods may provide more in-depth answers to your research questions



V: Data collection

- Specify the start and end date and frequency of data collection.
 - Single measure (e.g., after the intervention only)
 - Pre- and post-measures before and after the intervention
 - At various times or continuously during the course of the intervention
 - Over time (longitudinal)
- Specify who will be responsible for collecting the data.
 - Internal program staff or AmeriCorps members
 - External evaluator
- Describe your approach to managing and securing the data.



V: Data collection

Specify whether a sample will be drawn.

- Will you collect data on the entire population that you intend to study or will a sample of study participants be drawn?
- If selecting a sample, include information on:
 - The population from which your sample will be drawn
 - Selected sampling techniques
 - Expected sample size
- Sampling is a complex process and should be determined by an experienced evaluator.



VI: Analysis plan

This section explains the analytic techniques you plan to use in the evaluation.

- Quantitative data analysis techniques
 - Statistical analysis (mean, median, chi-square, t-test, ANOVA, regression, etc.)
- Qualitative data analysis techniques
 - Content analysis (cross-site analysis, theme identification, case study descriptions)

VI: Analysis plan



Process Evaluation of a Homelessness Prevention Program for Low-income Families

Research question	Indicators	What is collected and how?	From whom / data sources?	When collected and by whom?	How will you analyze the data?
Is the program's activity – educational workshops - being implemented as designed?	<p>a) Duration of workshops</p> <p>b) Participant workshop attendance rates</p> <p>c) Topics covered by member</p> <p>c) Members delivery of program curriculum during workshops</p>	<p>a, b, and c) Members report details about workshops in logs with pre-defined categories of reporting</p> <p>a and b) observations of workshops</p>	<p>a, b, and c) Member logs</p> <p>a and b) Evaluator observes members delivery of curriculum</p>	<p>a, b, and c) Evaluator collects the workshop logs quarterly</p> <p>a) Quarterly observations by the evaluator(s) using structured observation guides</p>	<p>a, b, and c) Generate average duration of workshops; average rate of workshop attendance; and frequencies on use of curriculum;</p> <p>c) Generate frequencies and averages on quantitative data (e.g., ratings scales, frequency scales) and thematically code and analyze open-ended comments/notes</p>

VI: Analysis plan



Impact Evaluation of a Homelessness Prevention Program for Low-income Families

Research question	Outcome of interest	What is collected and how?	From whom / data sources?	When collected and by whom?	How will you analyze the data?
What impact does the homelessness prevention program have on beneficiaries' ability to hold a stable tenancy relative to a comparison group?	Tenancy status of low-income families at risk of homelessness	Low income families' housing stability is measured with a survey.	<p>a) Low-income families participating in the program serve as the intervention group.</p> <p>b) Low-income families facing an immediate housing crisis that do not participate in a homelessness prevention program serve as the comparison group.</p>	<p>The evaluator administers the survey at two time points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - before the homelessness prevention program begins - 1 year after the homelessness prevention program is implemented 	Calculate the difference in average outcome in the intervention group minus the difference in average outcome in the comparison group before and after treatment (difference in differences method)

VII. Timeline



- Include a timeline of when you expect to carry out each of your key evaluation activities specified in your plan.

Evaluation Activities Q1: Sept-Nov; Q2: Dec-Feb; Q3: Mar-May; Q4: Jun-Aug	Example of Timing of Activities for Grant Year 1 – Grant Year 3											
	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Develop/refine logic model	+											
Hire/identify evaluator	+											
Develop evaluation plan and data collection tools		+	+									
Recruit study participants				+								
Data collection					+	+	+	+				
Analysis/ interpretation									+			
Report/ dissemination									+	+		

VIII. Budget and other



- Include an estimated budget for your evaluation. Common cost categories:
 - Staff time
 - Materials, equipment, and supplies
 - Travel
 - Data collection
- Include any other relevant information that is not in other sections of your evaluation plan:
 - Institutional Review Board (IRB) clearance

Appendix



- References

- Provide complete citations of any reports or publications cited in the body of the plan

- Copies of data collection tools or instruments you plan to use

- Surveys

- Interview protocols

Exercise #3



- Read the example evaluation plan on page 5 of your handout packet.
- Use the Sample Evaluation Plan Checklist to critique the example evaluation plan.

Things to remember



- Developing an evaluation plan should be a collaborative process that takes place over time.
- An evaluation plan is a dynamic tool and can change and be refined as you make decisions about how best to evaluate your program.
- An evaluation plan facilitates the process of keeping diverse stakeholders on the same page with regards to the actual implementation of the evaluation.

Any questions?



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>
- SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices: Non-Researcher's Guide to Evidence-Based Program Evaluation
 - http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/Courses/ProgramEvaluation/NREP_P_0401_0010.html
- CNCS's Knowledge Network
 - <https://www.nationalservicerresources.gov/evaluation-ameriCorps>



Thank you for your participation!