

HandsOn Network: Evaluating Your Volunteer Program

Ten Steps to Developing a Volunteer Program Evaluation Plan

All volunteer programs should develop an evaluation plan in order to evaluate program operations, as well as services provided to volunteers, clients, and the community. Evaluation plans should outline the following ten steps:

Step 1. Define the Purpose of Your Evaluation.

Determine why you are conducting an evaluation and what decisions you want to make upon completion of the evaluation. Do you want to evaluate the program to determine the satisfaction of your volunteers or clients, or to identify whether or not the program is in fact achieving its goals? There are different types of program evaluation. In order to know what type of evaluation your program should use, you will need to clearly define your purpose.

Step 2. Ask Yourself What You Will Do With The Information.

Now that you have reminded yourself of the program goals and purpose, you should think about what you will do with the information that is collected.

- How you will use the information;
- Who you will communicate the information to; and
- How you will communicate the information to those identified stakeholders.

Step 3. Determine Your Audiences For Data Collection.

Different audiences can provide you with valuable information. Step three involves thinking about who you need to gather information from.

Step 4. Consider The Types Of Information You Need To Make Decisions and/or Share With Your Targeted Audiences.

Information can be collected about any and all aspects of a volunteer program so it is important to narrow your focus on information that could be beneficial to helping make data driven decisions, as well as tell the story about your volunteer program.

It is important to remember that information you collect can come in both qualitative and quantitative forms. Quantitative data comes in the form of numbers, while qualitative data is in narrative form. Qualitative data often comes from interviews, personal observations, and/or stories.

Step 5. Decide How You Will Collect The Information From Your Targeted Audience To Assess Program Effectiveness.

Once you have defined the types of information that you will collect and how it applies to your program, you can identify the most effective method of data collection. Data collection methods can include distributing questionnaires or survey, conducting interviews with stakeholders (i.e. staff, clients, volunteers, community members, etc.), examining existing documentation, and/or conducting focus groups among stakeholders.

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Step 6. Make a Timeline To Determine When You Need To Collect The Information.

It is important to create a timeline of when information will be collected, examined, and communicated. This timeline should be shared with stakeholders so that they are aware of when and how they fit into the evaluation process.

Step 7. Determine What Organizational Resources You Have to Collect The Information.

Evaluation requires the dedication of resources (i.e. time, money, and technology). It is important to determine what resources you have to use for your evaluation as this information will determine the limitations of your evaluation efforts. It may also indicate that you will need to be creative about ways to collect information.

Step 8. Conduct Evaluation.

In step five you identified the type of evaluation you will conduct. Now it is time to collect the data as planned.

Step 9. Analyze Results And Interpret Data.

Once you have collected your data, you will need to analyze your results. Before you begin this process you should remind yourself of your evaluation goals as they will provide a foundation upon which you can sort your data. The best data sorting, analyzing, and interpreting process will vary based on the type of data you have collected.

Once you have worked to tabulate, cluster, and sort your data you can put the information into perspective to interpret the results. After you have interpreted the results, you can begin to develop an action plan for how you will address some of the issues that were raised and work to improve the program in the future.

Step 10. Communicate with Constituents.

Your data has been analyzed now you can report results to key stakeholders outlined in step two. It is good practice to report the results back to those who provided you with information. This will ensure that they know their contribution was valued as learn about the action that will be taken to improve the program in the future.