

# Key Concepts of Evaluation

SAMHSA defines evaluation as the “systematic collection and analysis of information about program activities, characteristics, and outcomes to reduce uncertainty, improve effectiveness, and make decisions.” Successful state and community evaluations involve assessment of all five components of the SPF-planning process, along with the incorporation of sustainability and cultural competence.

Evaluation is useful for the following reasons:

- Helps to assess the progress of an intervention
- Identifies what does and does not work in a particular setting
- Can be used to build community capacity and influence decision-makers
- Strengthens accountability
- Supports sustainability

## Types of Evaluation

An evaluation can be used to collect both process and outcome evaluation data. *Process* evaluation occurs during the implementation of an intervention; *outcome* evaluation occurs after the intervention has been implemented. Collecting these types of data will help you do the following:

- Monitor implementation
- Improve implementation and performance
- Determine which interventions and outcomes should be sustained

**Process evaluation** documents all aspects of the implementation of an intervention. It describes how the intervention was implemented—that is, if the same material was presented in the same number of sessions over the same timeframe using the same methods. Process evaluation answers the question: “Did we do what we said we would do?”

Process evaluation data can help you determine the following:

- Were interventions implemented as planned?
- Who participated and for how long?
- What adaptations were made?
- Were the resources sufficient?
- What obstacles were encountered?

**Outcome evaluation** documents whether the intervention made a difference, and if so, what changed. It documents effects achieved *after* the intervention is implemented, such as short- and long-term changes in a population group’s knowledge, attitudes, skills, or behavior as a result of the intervention. Outcome evaluation answers the question: “Did our intervention make a difference—did it impact the risk factors and problem we wanted to address?”

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Outcome evaluation data can help you determine the following:

- What changes actually occurred
- How these changes compare to what the intervention was expected to achieve
- How these changes compare with those not exposed to the intervention

## Outcomes

A community will need to identify the short-term and long-term outcomes it hopes to achieve with its overall comprehensive prevention plan, as well as for each intervention it implements. Remember that if the intervention does not address the underlying risk and protective factors that influence the targeted problem, then it is unlikely to produce positive outcomes or changes in that problem.

### Short-term Outcomes:

- Short-term outcomes are the immediate effects that the intervention is expected to achieve. These outcomes are expressed as changes in knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the focus population at the end of the intervention.
- Short-term outcomes tend to be connected to changes that occur in the risk or protective factor.
- Be aware that how well the intervention is implemented can have an impact on short-term outcomes.

### Long-term Outcomes:

- Long-term outcomes are the ultimate effects of the intervention at some point after the intervention is completed, maybe six months to a year later.
- Long-term outcomes depend on the short-term outcomes because short-term changes in knowledge, attitudes, or skills can lead to long-term behavior change.
- Long-term outcomes tend to be connected to the ultimate behaviors and related problems that you are trying to change.