Key Tasks for Successful Evaluation

Task 1: Establish evaluation capacity and engage stakeholders in the evaluation

Collaborative evaluation relies on an evaluation team that is made up of program staff, stakeholders and at least one individual specifically trained in evaluation. All members of the evaluation team should be involved throughout the evaluation process, from determining the research question(s) to interpreting and presenting the research outcomes. Collaborative evaluation ensures that the evaluation fits well with the community that is being served and that the evaluation answers the questions that are important to program staff and key stakeholders.

TIPS

- Ensure that the evaluation Capacity/ Infrastructure is adequate; The evaluation team should involve at least one individual with expertise in the evaluation of substance abuse prevention programs.
- Ensure that you have enough staff available to perform necessary aspects of ongoing evaluation efforts.
- Define the evaluation team roles and functions while you begin evaluation planning. Set clear guidelines on expectations and boundaries for the team.
- Consider the workforce and system capacity to collect, safeguard, and analyze data before beginning the evaluation plan.
- Ensure that the evaluation team is culturally competent to work with the target population, and that the team understands the community's cultures, strengths, challenges, etc.
- Identify stakeholders – those individuals who might be affected (positively or negatively) by your evaluation.
- Engage critical stakeholders, including:
  - Those involved in program management, funding, or operations (e.g., funders, administrators, and staff)
  - Those served by the program (e.g., clients, community groups, k-12 or higher education, elected officials, advocacy groups). Remember: Stakeholders should represent and reflect the target population.

Additional Resources

- Hiring an Evaluator: Education Development Center, National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, http://www.promoteprevent.org/publications/prevention-briefs/hiring-evaluator
- Sample Glossary of Research and Evaluation Terms from NREP: http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/AboutGlossary.aspx

This was developed under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies contract. Reference # HHSS277200800004C. For training use only.

Task 2: Describe the program

Before establishing an evaluation plan, you must articulate what it is you will be evaluating. This involves establishing a logic model, or a "map" of a project or strategy's goals, objectives, activities, and outcomes. See "Planning" for steps on creating a logic model. In addition, you should:

TIPS

- Decide on whether the state will enforce a consistent logic model structure across communities, or if communities will be allowed to select their own logic model structure. State-selected formats allow for easier integration at the state level, while community-selected formats allow for the creation of logic models that reflect unique community conditions.
- Ensure that state, community, and provider-level logic models have been integrated.
- Ensure that state, community, and provider-level logic models clearly identify needs, resources (and barriers), activities, and short, intermediate and long-term outcomes.

Additional Resources

W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Logic Model Development Guide: http://captus.samhsa.gov/access-resources/developing-logic-models

Task 3: Focus the evaluation design

The evaluation design is developed after the project goals, objectives, activities, and expected outcomes are clearly presented.

TIPS

- Establish the purpose of the evaluation (e.g., Are you assessing long-term outcomes? Are you interested in message reach?)
- Establish what you will be evaluating (e.g., What specific aspects of the program/strategy will be considered? The entire program/strategy? Part of the program/strategy?)
- Consider timelines (e.g., If you intend to use NSDUH or other national survey data, consider publication time)

This was developed under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies contract. Reference # HHSS277200800004C.
For training use only.

- The evaluation plan should be sensitive to stakeholder needs. The purpose of the evaluation should be clearly articulated to stakeholders, who should have the opportunity to review the research questions that will (and will not) be answered by the evaluation.
- Think about process questions related to fidelity, such as:
  - Did the plan match the implementation?
  - What types of changes to the plan were made during implementation?
  - Why was the original plan changed during implementation?
  - How did changes to the plan affect the intervention?
- Think about process questions related to service delivery, such as:
  - Which/how many program staff provided the services?
  - What services were provided (including information on the duration and intensity of these services)?
  - To whom were the services provided (e.g., demographics)?
  - What was the context in which the services were provided (e.g., environmental characteristics like the political climate, the community's readiness to support the services)?
  - How much resourcing was required for service delivery (e.g., staffing, money, equipment)?
- You may also want to consider the following types of process evaluations:
  - Around Capacity: How will you continuously assess workforce capacity? How will you determine whether capacity building plans being are implemented? Do your partners understand how to correctly use data management systems?
  - Around Accountability: How will you ensure that process and outcome data are being collected by your partners to ensure accountability?
  - Around Implementation Monitoring: How will you track implementation delays? How will you track implementation quality? How will you track program fidelity? How will you track program exposure?
- Traditional outcome measures can seek to answer questions like:
  - What goals were achieved by the intervention?

This was developed under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies contract. Reference # HHSS277200800004C. For training use only.

- How did various programmatic, contextual, and participant factors influence these outcomes?
- How long did these outcomes last?

- Consider the following types of intermediate outcomes
  - How will you measure changes in risk and protective factors (state-wide, community-wide)?
  - Are there significant differences in intermediate-level outcome changes between various sub-groups?
- Consider the following long-term outcomes:
  - How will you assess the individual impact of prevention strategies or programs on state and community outcomes?
  - What outcomes must be achieved for the strategy or program to be considered a success?

Task 4: Select appropriate data collection methods and Justify Conclusions

TIPS

- Consider the pros/cons of qualitative vs. quantitative data collection and analysis (see National Science Foundation resource below). Consider triangulation of approaches:
  - Multiple types of data
  - Multiple sources of data
  - A team of investigators with a variety of perspectives
  - Multiple guiding theories

- Consider the following questions:
  - Methods – What type of design should be used to evaluate the effects of the strategy/program? How will the data be collected? (e.g., Key informant interviews? Student Surveys?)
  - What precautions have been developed to safeguard participants and participant data?

- Analysis plan should be clearly defined and carried out with appropriate statistical techniques. Consider the following questions:
  - Who will gather the data, by when, from what sources? Has the target population been clearly identified and recruited? Who will analyze the data? By when? In what way?

- When a state or community is planning to use data from national datasets (e.g., YRBS) to assess intermediate or long-term outcomes, it is important to consider the following:

  - Can the national data be disaggregated in a way that reflects the community's true identification? For example, when national data is disaggregated, a sub-state is defined solely by geographical considerations, which may not always correspond to the community's identification of its borders and its population. Further, sub-state data may sometimes need to be combined to generate stable numbers for analysis.

  - National data is collected, analyzed and disseminated according to a timetable that does not always correspond neatly to grant funding cycles (e.g., YRBS). This consideration may be particularly critical for grants with shorter funding cycles (e.g., 3 years or less) and/or for outcome measures that must be reported on an annual basis.
  - The current fiscal environment means that some states are choosing to downsize or eliminate student surveys and optional data collection modules. When selecting a data collection method, assess funder commitment to that collection method before relying on it for outcomes.

- If you are creating a sub-state survey yourself, try to create/craft items that parallel (or directly mimic) the national surveys to allow some comparability of results, especially if the national survey is used as a baseline measure.

- Whenever possible, use standard measures with established reliability and validity. Also consider the following: Are the measures sensitive enough? Is the sample size appropriate? Are the measures culturally appropriate?

- Assess the feasibility of the evaluation plan, considering whether it is practical, politically feasible (anticipating conflict from opposing groups), and cost-effective.

Additional Resources

This was developed under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies contract. Reference # HHSS277200800004C.
For training use only.

- Evaluating Environmental Strategies: http://captus.samhsa.gov/access-resources/environmental-strategies-online-course
- Conducting Key Informant Interviews: http://captus.samhsa.gov/access-resources/tips-conducting-key-informant-interviews
- Decision Tree on Compliance with 45 CFR 46, Human Subjects: http://www.samhsa.gov/grants/SAMHSA_45CFR46.pdf
- National Science Foundation, Section III: An overview of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02057/nsf02057_4.pdf

Task 5: Ensure that evaluation findings are used and that lessons are shared

In order to sustain effective programs/strategies, outcomes must be shared with key stakeholders. Evaluation results can also help determine how a state or community might readjust resources to expand or replace a strategy or program.

TIPS

- Consider the following questions:
  - What is the dissemination plan? How will you assess adequacy of system-level communication around evaluation findings?
    - How can you best profile program/strategy successes?
    - Who should receive information about evaluation outcomes, and which outcomes should be reported?
    - What are the channels for reporting out results?

- What is the process that the state follows for realigning resources to Improve/replace/augment strategies or programs based on evaluation results?
  - How will you ensure that providers use the data for continuous quality improvement?
  - How can the state or communities use data to redefine priorities (e.g., a state sees new spike in heroin use after NMUPD activities are implemented)?
  - Is the information being delivered to hard-to-reach populations? Are the evaluation reports culturally appropriate?

- Consider the development or re-configuration of a quality assurance and review group. The group should meet regularly to review performance and outcome data and to look at ways to more effectively use the data for decision-making.

Additional Resources

- Tips for Writing Evaluation Reports: http://captus.samhsa.gov/access-resources/tips-writing-evaluation-reports

References and Other Resources

- *Evaluation Tools and Resources from the CAPT: http://captus.samhsa.gov/access-resources/evaluation-tools-and-resources*
- *CDC's Framework on Program Evaluation in Public Health: http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr4811a1.htm*
- *How to ensure cultural competency in SPF Step 5: http://captus.samhsa.gov/access-resources/infusing-cultural-competence-spf*

This was developed under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies contract. Reference # HHSS277200800004C. For training use only.