Program Ideas: HOW TO...

association for experiential education

...EVALUATE PROGRAMS

Evaluation is the **intentional act of measuring**, documenting, and/or understanding the impact of programs. This helps programs to reinforce learning, assess progress, improve efficacy, and guide future professional development of staff. Evaluation of staff performance is the most related form of program evaluation in EE.

Evaluation is **strengthened** by using multiple methods and collecting information (data) from a variety of sources, perspectives, and voices such as: clients, practitioners, administrators, and other supporters (parents, caregivers, peer groups, teachers, probation officers, and social workers). Many evaluations can be informal (reflection during group discussions) or formal (surveys or interviews held before and after an event). Most evaluations fall into 5 categories.

TYPES OF EVALUATION

While evaluations may carry a multitude of titles, most are organized according to where they fit into the program planning process.

1. **Needs Assessment** (during diagnosis): What are some key gaps between the existing situation and desired potential outcome that the program will fill? The answer is used to design and direct the program.
2. **Feasibility Study** (during design): Given the legal, political, funding, timing, and staffing constraints, can the program succeed? The answer is used to gauge program viability and direct the best use of limited resources.
3. **Process Evaluation** (in deliver and debrief): How is the planned program progressing? The answer is used to monitor development and modify the program for greater effect.
4. **Outcome Evaluation** (during departure): Were program goals and learning objectives achieved? The answer is used to determine the overall success of the program.
5. **Cost Analysis** (after program): Was the program financially worthwhile or valuable? The answer is used to decide whether to repeat or continue the program.

FACETS OF EVALUATION

No matter the type of evaluation and whether it is conducted for an individual client, group, facilitator, or entire program, evaluators should consider and decide upon this variety of facets. Plan each facet prior to evaluating. Seek expert advice from grad students or university faculty.

Methods: Data gathered by evaluation can be quantitative (about amounts or numbers) and qualitative (about features or characteristics). Methods can also focus on goals (achieved or not), processes (strengths or weaknesses), and outcomes (changes for the clients or society).

Measures: Tools used to collect quantities or qualities include instruments (surveys or tests), observations by trained evaluators or novice staff, noted verbal or written comments, and interviews of individuals or groups. Measures should have well-established trustworthiness, such as validity (measures what it claims to) and reliability (does so consistently in repeated use).

Analysis: Qualitative data (characteristics) are analysed by finding patterns in the content of client comments, interviews, and observations. Quantitative data (numbers) are analysed by statistics that describe averages or frequencies and infer differences or relationships. This time consuming step requires sufficient resources to complete. Consider experts to conduct analysis.

Reporting: Reports are written for stakeholder audiences (beneficiaries, collaborators, funders, clients, and others). Talk to them in advance to discern their interests and what they most want to learn from the evaluation. Reports typically include summaries of facets above, a purpose statement, an outline of procedures followed, results of data analysis, discussion of findings, and conclusion with recommendations.

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FURTHER RESOURCES

READING

Davidson, E. J. (2005). *Evaluation Methodology Basics: The Nuts and Bolts of Sound Evaluation*. Sage.

Markiewicz, A. & Patrick, I. (2015). *Developing Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks*. Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2011). *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use*. Guilford.

Podems, D. R. (2018). *Being an Evaluator: Your Practical Guide to Evaluation*. Guilford.

Priest, S. (2001). A program evaluation primer. *Journal of Experiential Education*, *24*(1), 34-40.

VIEWING

AmeriCorps: https://americorps.gov/grantees-sponsors/evaluation-resources

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): https://www.cdc.gov/evaluation/index.htm

Community Tool Box: https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/evaluate/evaluation

Institute of Museum & Library Sciences: https://www.imls.gov/research-evaluation/evaluation-resources

Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/program-managers-guide-evaluation

OTHER

Assessment tools: https://www.techlearning.com/how-to/formative-assessment-tools-and-apps

Assessment tools: https://www.edapp.com/blog/10-skills-assessment-tools/

More resources: https://fhop.ucsf.edu/resources-program-evaluation-and-performance-monitoring