

EVALUATION: HOW IT CAN WORK FOR YOU

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

EFFECTIVENESS: the degree to which the objective and goals of an activity are realized, measured by comparing real results with expected results.

EFFICIENCY: the rate and cost of achieving the actual results of an activity. A test of efficiency determines whether the cost of producing the results was reasonable.

EVALUATION: process by which one attempts to measure the degree to which a project is accomplishing its purpose.

EVALUATION RESEARCH: the systematic collection and analysis of information about a project or program, leading to judgements about the project or program.

GOAL: a measurable statement of what one wishes to accomplish within a specified period of time.

OBJECTIVE: the essential purpose that motivates undertaking a project or program; what one wishes to accomplish.

1) WHY EVALUATION

The Secretary of State has received a number of requests from citizen groups for help with evaluating their projects. These groups have wanted to find ways of taking a look at their objectives and activities that would help them improve their efforts. This paper was developed in response to these requests.

Groups consider evaluation an important means of determining whether they are achieving what they set out to do, or whether they need to rethink their methods. The Secretary of State department asks groups to evaluate their programs in order to determine whether public funds are being spent in the most effective way possible. Good evaluation reports can also assist other groups who may plan similar projects in the future.

2) INTRODUCTION

Projects initiated by citizen groups are usually limited in duration, and started without any commitment from the funding agencies to their long-term continuation. The funding agencies often see the project as an opportunity for innovation, for trying out new ideas, new strategies, or new structures. Citizen groups, on the other hand, tend to perceive their projects as providing a needed service, as solving a pressing problem, or as resolving an urgent issue. These are two very different perceptions of the same project.

The explanation of evaluation research in this paper is based on two considerations:

- Projects initiated by citizen groups should be viewed both as providing a needed service (solving a pressing problem,...) and as an opportunity for producing useful information about the needs for such a service, the nature of the problems being tackled, the difficulties with implementing certain strategies,... In other words, the projects should be seen as action research.
- Evaluation research is a tool which can both improve the project as it develops, and produce a final report telling what has been learnt through the project. It can also be used to make a case for further funding. A good evaluation report allows a funding agency to rely on a more balanced analysis than can be presented through statistics, or a financial report.

3) WHAT IS EVALUATION RESEARCH?

Evaluation is the process whereby you find out if you have accomplished or are accomplishing what you set out to do. Evaluation research is the systematic collection and analysis of information concerning a project or program, leading to judgements about the project or program.

A key step in setting up an evaluation process is to define clearly and accurately what you wish to accomplish (the *objective*). In order to evaluate your progress you will probably need to translate objectives into a number of more short-term, specific *goals*. Defining your objectives and goals clearly can be a time consuming process but it is essential to carrying out a good evaluation. The process can also be very useful in the day to day management of your project or program.

The process of evaluation, based on clearly defined objectives and goals, will enable you to judge the *effectiveness* and *efficiency* of your project or program. *Effectiveness* is the degree to which the objective and the goals are being realized. This is measured by comparing the real results of the project or program with its expected results. *Efficiency* is the rate and the cost of achieving the results. A test of efficiency determines whether the cost of producing the results was reasonable.

There are two main types of evaluation research:

Outcome evaluation compares the actual result of the project or program with its stated objective.

Process evaluation measures how well you are progressing toward the objective, as a means of helping the day to day decision making of the project. This type of evaluation concentrates on describing the various activities of the project, and their effects, and on making judgments about the effectiveness of these activities.

4) WHAT ARE THE USES OF EVALUATION RESEARCH?

Evaluation research has been used for many purposes, to answer different questions. For example:

- to demonstrate to others that a project is worthwhile.
- to justify past or projected expenditures.
- to support project continuation, expansion, or redirection.
- to compare different types of programs and program methods.
- to determine whether the needs for which a project was designed are being met.
- to determine whether the initial objectives were realistic.

There are at least four possible uses of evaluation from the perspective of citizen groups:

a) To Help Seek Further Funding

Citizen groups spend a great deal of time and energy looking for further funding. Some of this time and energy could be saved, and the chances of success increased, if the project is structured to collect and analyze the information which funding agencies require, as the project proceeds.

Note that funding agencies may view the project differently from those who initiated the project. The funding agencies have to view the project within the context of their own programs, objectives, and priorities. One way of finding out what information funding agencies require is to look at their application forms. It might be useful to do this at the beginning of a project, long before further funding is necessary.

b) To Manage the Project Effectively

It is extremely easy to become caught up in the day-to-day activities of a project, squeezed between overwhelming demands on limited resources and initially idealistic objectives. There is little time for reflection about what is being achieved, or where the project is headed. Evaluation research can be used as a tool to collect information that would help project staff (and board members) regularly take a look at what they have been doing and what they have achieved. Perhaps the most important outcome of this approach would be a continuous refinement and modification of the objectives of the project, making them more feasible and specific, and easier to accomplish within the time frame.

c) To Obtain Feedback From Those Affected by the Project

The success of a project or program quite often depends on its acceptance by the people it is designed to assist. Evaluation research, by regularly publishing an overall picture of the project (through a newsletter, for example), could make communication between staff and consumers easier.

d) To Produce a Final Report that Other Groups Could Use

This report should describe the history of the project, the objectives and the ways in which they were modified, the activities and the ways in which they were altered, the effects (good and bad, expected and unexpected), the obstacles encountered, the environment of the project. Thus, other groups who are interested in pursuing objectives similar to yours will be able to use your experience.

5) HOW DO YOU EVALUATE ?

Some important questions should be answered before starting an evaluation:

Why do you want to evaluate ? Like any project, an evaluation needs a clear statement of objectives and goals in order to succeed.

For whom are you producing the evaluation report ? Information that you may find useful for the day-to-day management of the project may not necessarily meet the needs of a funding agency.

What are you going to evaluate ?

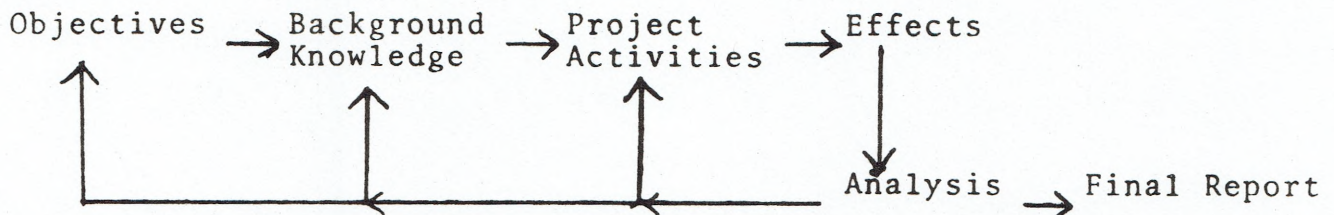
When should a report be available ?

What resources will be needed to carry out an evaluation ?

How much will the evaluation cost ?

6) WHAT NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED IN SETTING UP AN EVALUATION

An evaluation should determine whether a project or program is achieving the results it was designed to achieve. In order to carry out an evaluation a number of factors must be considered: the objectives of the project, its environment, the project activities, and the ultimate effects. These lead to an analysis and a final report. The diagram shows how information flows from one area to another.



a) Objectives

- What are the project's objectives ?
- Can they be clearly stated at this stage ?

- Are the objectives measureable in any way ?
- Can the overall objectives be translated into goals for specific periods of time ?
- Do the objectives appear realistic given the resources (staff, time, energy, money, facilities) of the project ?
- Are some objectives more important than others ? If so, how is this being taken into account in the operation of the project ?
- What specific effects or changes are considered desirable ?
- Who is supposed to be affected by the project ?

b) Background knowledge

- What is known about the nature of the problems being tackled ?
- What is known about the community in which the project is operating ?
- What assumptions are being made about the way people, groups, or organizations change ?
- If the project has a previous history, what can be learned from it ?
- What can be learned from similar projects carried out elsewhere ?
- What is the general environment: geographic, social, political and economic of the project ?

c) Project activities

- Is the project aimed at individuals, groups, communities, organizations or the entire society ?
- What are the various project activities ?
- How are these activities supposed to further the objectives ?
- Who is carrying out these activities ?
- What skills do project staff need ?
- What attempts are being made to help project staff develop these skills ?

d) Effects

- Who is/was affected by the project ?
- How are/were they affected ?
- Are there long-term effects ?
- What unexpected effects (good or bad) are occurring ?

e) Analysis

- Is the project proceeding as planned ? If not, what changes have been made and why ?
- Are the resources of the project being allocated according to the priorities agreed upon ?
- Are the expected effects being achieved ?
- Are the objectives being achieved ? If not, is this because the assumptions underlying the project (connecting activities to objectives) are not valid ?
- Is the project reaching the people it was supposed to reach, and does the project have their support ? If not, why not ?
- Where the initial understandings and estimates of the problems that the project is supposed to tackle accurate ?
- Is the project trying to do too much ? If so, which activities and objectives need to be given top priority, and which can be left for the future ?
- Are undesirable effects occurring ?
- Are there factors, not under the control of the project, that are affecting the success of the project ?
- What obstacles are being encountered, and what steps are being taken to overcome them ?

7) SUGGESTIONS FOR COLLECTING INFORMATION

a) Project historian

It is probably useful for one person in the project, as

part of their job, to take on the role of project historian: to take responsibility for the collection, analysis, and reporting of information.

b) Logbooks

One means of ensuring that an accurate and full description of the project activities is kept is for each staff person to fill out a daily logbook, describing their day's activities, the accomplishments, the obstacles encountered, the people contacted, etc.

c) Data collection sheets

In those projects which have a great deal of regular contact with people outside the project, it is useful to develop a standardized data sheet, which can be filled out for each contact. The sheet should be as simple as possible, detailing the purpose of the contact, the date, the outcome, any need for further action.

