

What is evaluation?

Evaluation is the process of judging the worth of something. It can determine if an intervention worked, help decide if it should continue, and provide evidence of effectiveness to obtain additional funding. This issue of **Research Bites** looks at some of the basic principles of evaluation.

Why evaluate?

Evaluation is an important part of good practice for program and project implementation. A good program evaluation will tell you and others:

- what your program has done;
- how well it has contributed to the goal, met the objectives and undertaken the strategies;
- what worked well and what

For example...

A new program is being conducted in the AHS involving group exercise and education sessions for people with CVD recently discharged from hospital, and sharing information with GPs about the management and progress of these patients. The evaluation plan might include:

- **purpose:** *determine whether the objectives have been met and decide whether to continue to support it;*
- **scope and scale:** *focus is on changes in readmission rates for participating patients and transfer of information about these patients to their GPs;*
- **methodology:** *survey of GPs, patient interviews, control group from another hospital;*
- **how it will be conducted:** *patients followed up six weeks and again three months after recruitment to look at readmission; GPs surveyed after four weeks to look at transfer of information.*

Useful resources

South Australia Community Health Research Unit – Planning and Evaluation Wizard (PEW): <http://www.sachru.sa.gov.au/PEW/index.htm>
National Mental Health Strategy – Evaluation: A guide for good practice: <http://www.health.gov.au/hsdd/mentalhe/resources/evaluation.htm>
NSW Health – Program management guidelines for health promotion: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/health-promotion/pdf/prog_manage/prog_manage.htm
Hawe P, Degeling D, Hall J (1990) *Evaluating Health Promotion*, MacLennan & Petty, Sydney.
Wadsworth Y (1997) *Everyday evaluation on the run*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards.

- didn't, and why;
- whether there were any unintended outcomes; and
- what can be learnt from the program to improve practice and inform other programs.

When should evaluation occur?

Evaluation should run in parallel to the planning and implementation of your program. It should become part of a continual development process by providing feedback about progress, encouraging reflection about outcomes and providing a basis for considering future strategies.

What steps are involved in evaluating a program?

There are three broad tasks involved in evaluating a program:

- developing an evaluation plan;
- assessing the results;
- communicating the results and recommendations.

What should be in an evaluation plan?

Developing an evaluation plan involves:

- clarifying the purpose;
- selecting the scale and scope;
- determining the methodology;

- organising how the evaluation will be conducted.

What types of evaluation are there?

Formative and summative

Formative evaluation:

- conducted early in the implementation of a program;
- aims to identify problems that arise during development and allows modification.

Summative evaluation:

- conducted at the end;
- looks at effects or impact;
- helps to decide what to do next.

Process, impact and outcome

Process evaluation:

- focuses on how the program has been implemented;
- assesses whether activities were conducted as planned.

Impact evaluation:

- focuses on the immediate effects of the program;
- judges how well the objectives were met.

Outcome evaluation:

- focuses on the longer term effects of the program;
- judges how well the goal has been achieved.

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Next issue: How to formulate research questions