

Here is a checklist on steps and standards which, together, can form a Framework for Program Evaluation.

### Step 1: Engage Stakeholders

#### Essential Elements

Identify and engage three principal groups of stakeholders with an interest or investment in the evaluation and how the information will be used:

- Those involved in program operations** (e.g., donors or sources of funds; program administrators, managers, or personnel engaged in planning or implementation)
- Those served or affected by the program directly or indirectly** (e.g., participants and their family members; community organizations; elected officials; professional associations or organizations relevant to the program or populations served)
- Primary users of the evaluation** who will do or decide something regarding the program based on the evaluation

#### Clarifications and Considerations

- Stakeholders' perspectives and understandings regarding the program and the evaluation must inform work in each of the steps to follow.
- The nature and degree of stakeholder participation in the evaluation will vary by context or setting, individual, and organization (e.g., participation limited to receipt of information or periodic updates, direct involvement in design and implementation, assist or facilitate resolution of disagreements regarding the work).
- The primary users of the evaluation should be identified at the earliest stages of planning and engaged throughout the evaluation to understand and meet their information needs.

### Step 2: Describe the Program

#### Essential Elements

Describe aspects of the program in sufficient detail to ensure shared understanding of the evaluation (i.e., the program or components of the program to be evaluated):

- Need:** the nature and magnitude of the problem or opportunity the program aims to address
- Expected effects:** what the program must accomplish or achieve to be considered successful
- Activities:** what the program does to create or contribute to change presented in a logical progression or sequence

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- Resources:** assets available to plan and conduct activities (e.g., human and fiscal resources, information or evidence relevant to the program)
- Stage of development:** the maturity of the program
- Context:** setting and environmental influences relevant to the program or evaluation (e.g., social or economic conditions, efforts of other organizations to address the same or similar needs)
- Logic Model:** picture or summary of the program's mechanism of change (i.e., the progression from program processes to benefits or results), including how and why we expect the inputs, activities, and outputs of the program to cause or contribute to the intended outcomes (i.e., the knowledge or evidence used to inform program design)

#### Clarifications and Considerations

- The quality of the description of the program will be improved through consultation with diverse stakeholders regarding their understandings of the program or direct observation of activities.

## Step 3: Focus the Evaluation Design

### Essential Elements

Not all options for the design of the evaluation result in usable information that meets the needs of stakeholders. To establish important parameters for the evaluation, define all of the following:

- Purpose:** common purposes of program evaluation include improve knowledge or understanding of the program, provide data or information to improve the program, determine the effects of the program, or affect change among participants in the program or the evaluation
- Users:** the specific persons expected to receive the evaluation findings for consideration or action
- Uses:** the specific ways in which information from the evaluation will be applied to meet the purposes of the evaluation
- Questions:** define precisely which aspects of the program will be addressed
- Methods:** how credible information will be collected to achieve the purpose of the evaluation, address the evaluation questions, and meet the intended uses
- Agreements:** summarize the procedures and responsibilities relevant to conduct of the evaluation (e.g., procedures or safeguards to protect human subjects, how resources will be used, timeline for implementation or reporting)

### Clarifications and Considerations

- The importance of discussions with stakeholders to clarify the purpose of the evaluation, intended users and uses, specific evaluation questions, methods, and agreements cannot be overstated.
- Each method has its own biases and limitations; in many cases, using mixed-method designs (i.e., the use of multiple data collection methods to address the same evaluation question) enhances the quality or richness of the inquiry.

## Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence

### Essential Elements

The Framework includes five items likely to influence perceptions of the credibility of evidence collected as a part of the evaluation: select indicators that yield reliable and valid information relevant to the evaluation questions.

- Sources:** use multiple sources of evidence to incorporate different perspectives or understandings of the program being evaluated; criteria used to select sources should be made explicit to inform assessments of the credibility of evidence
- Quality:** data or information collected should meet stakeholders' expectations and thresholds for credibility (e.g., appropriateness and integrity of information)
- Quantity:** estimate the amount of data or information needed and assure that all data to be collected is matched to a pre-determined intended use
- Logistics:** the infrastructure and methods used to collect and handle data or information

### Clarifications and Considerations

- To avoid or limit concerns regarding data quality or errors of inference, consult experts or specialists in evaluation methodology.
- A sound logic model of the program may be used to help identify a range of indicators from inputs and activities to the intended outcomes or results.
- Cultural factors may dictate acceptable or appropriate ways of completing work in this step of the Framework and others.
- The dangers associated with using indicators as the sole basis for decision making regarding the program are well-documented and should be considered at the earliest stages of planning.

## Step 5: Justify Conclusions

### Essential Elements

Conclusions must be well-linked to the evidence and reflect the standards or values agreed upon with stakeholders. The Framework includes five elements necessary to justify conclusions:

- Standards:** when operationalized, standards establish the criteria or norms against which the program will be judged (e.g., the items used to determine whether a program is successful or unsuccessful)
- Analysis and Synthesis:** whether isolating key findings (analysis) or combining data sources to reach larger conclusions about an evaluation (synthesis), all decisions regarding organization, classification, determining interrelationships or comparisons of data, and display of information should be guided by the questions the evaluation was designed to address, the types of data collected, and input from stakeholders
- Interpretation:** the work of figuring out what the findings mean; data collection and analysis is not sufficient to draw conclusions regarding the program
- Judgments:** statements regarding the merit, worth, or significance of the program or components of the program; consider the findings, and interpretations of findings, against standards agreed upon with stakeholders
- Recommendations:** the specific actions that should be considered based on the evaluation; preparing these recommendations requires information beyond what is needed to make judgments regarding the merit or worth of the program

### Clarifications and Considerations

- Techniques for analysis and synthesis of data, as well as interpretation of findings, should be discussed and determined before data collection begins.
- Disagreement regarding the quality or value of the program may indicate that stakeholders are using different standards as a basis for judgment and provides an opportunity for clarification or negotiation among stakeholders.
- Providing recommendations for action that lack sufficient evidence can undermine the credibility of the evaluation.

### Step 6: Ensure Use and Share Lessons Learned

#### Essential Elements

Preparing for use of the evaluation requires deliberate action and begins at the earliest stages of planning. The Framework includes five elements to prepare for and promote use of the evaluation:

- Design:** how the evaluation questions, methods, and processes are constructed to achieve the desired uses
- Preparation:** provide time and opportunities for primary users to anticipate how evaluation findings may be received or used; this activity gives stakeholders time to explore positive and negative implications of potential results and identify options for program improvement.
- Feedback:** the communication that occurs among all parties to the evaluation; this exchange aids in building trust among stakeholders and keeping the work on track
- Follow-up:** the emotional and technical support that users need during the evaluation and upon receipt of findings or recommendations; active follow-up with users may be required to remind stakeholders of planned uses, prevent lessons learned from being overlooked, or prevent misuse of information (e.g., information taken out of context or used in ways other than what was agreed to among stakeholders)
- Dissemination:** the process of communicating the procedures or lessons learned from an evaluation to relevant audiences in an appropriate fashion; the content and format of this information should be discussed with stakeholders well in advance of release
- Additional Uses:** changes in thinking or behaviour (among individuals or within organizations) that occur as a result of participation in the evaluation (e.g., personnel clarify or establish a shared understanding of program goals, more attention to decisions based on data or information from a systematic inquiry)

#### Clarifications and Considerations

- The design should include explicit information regarding how the findings will be used and by whom.
- A formal evaluation report is not always the most appropriate product of the evaluation; options for dissemination should be explored with stakeholders as a component of preparing for and promoting use.

**Source: Western Michigan University – The Evaluation Centre**

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