



R2P Toolkit Series, August 2002, Issue 1

Child Welfare League of America • National Center for Research and Data • Research to Practice (R2P) Initiative

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Keeping Child Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being at the Forefront

Using Program Evaluation and Outcome Measurement

This guide offers pointers gathered through field-based research and evaluation practice and a sampling of the many useful websites available to inform your planning and extend your learning.

Evaluation will help you:

- Deliver high quality practices and programs
- Achieve measurable outcomes that attract funding and merit support
- Refine current programs
- Implement responsive new programs
- Strengthen anecdotal evidence with empirical findings
- Increase accountability and improve credibility
- Recruit and retain staff and volunteers who are committed to excellence
- Demonstrate your commitment to child well-being

An evaluation plan will help you:

- **Consider a Program from Beginning to End**
 - Concept...Why and how is the program supposed to make a difference?
 - Operations...Does the program work as designed?
 - Output...Does the program provide the services it expects to deliver?
 - Outcomes...Does the program make a difference in the short term?
 - Impacts...Does the program make a difference in the long run?
- **Specify Level of Analysis**
 - Individual
 - Family
 - Program/Community
 - System
- **Distinguish Types of Results**
 - Descriptive...Focus on measures of program success, including client satisfaction (posttest only)
 - Client Change...Focus on measures of how clients are different after services are received (pretest and posttest)

Effective research practices

- Invest community members and service recipients in working with you to achieve results
- Involve staff from the outset to make clear that everyone contributes to good outcomes
- Seek advisory and technical research partnerships with external public or private resources
- Present outcome priorities and gain the consensus of staff, administrators, boards of oversight, and funders
- Establish a timeline for performing research activities and allocating resources
- Tie program evaluation into existing agency structures, for example, continuous improvement and supervisory expectations
- Enlist a coordinator for each unit that is collecting and using data
- Choose measures that have meaning and practical significance
- Return data to staff for discussion and use as soon as possible
- Start small and build a body of work

Research practices to avoid

- Establishing outcome priorities based solely on funding opportunities
- Evaluating programs that are too new
- Choosing methodologies without agency input
- Collecting data without sufficient staff support and training
- Measuring selectively (i.e., including only the healthiest clients who have the best chance of success)
- Reporting selectively to highlight the positive and omit the negative
- Doing nothing with results
- Being content to just churn out numbers
- Presenting results without an appropriate comparison

Visit These Websites

Administration for Children and Families, DHHS

http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs_reports/prog_mgr.html

This program manager's guide to evaluation explains the evaluation process and provides information on how to use results effectively. Includes a comprehensive glossary.

Best Practice Evaluation Guidelines, OECD

<http://www.oecd.org/puma/pac/pubs/evaluation.pdf>

These public management (nonmethodological) guidelines address key issues and practices for any results-oriented environment. Included are ways to design effective evaluations, create an evaluation culture, and get the most from an evaluation.

CDC Evaluation Working Group Resources

<http://www.cdc.gov/eval/recources.htm>

This is an extensive list of resource and evaluation links, including research and evaluation journals and online reviews.

Outcome Measurement Resource Network, United Way

<http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes>

This site is the entry point to a number of evaluation resources developed for use by United Way organizations. It is often referenced in discussions of how to evaluate multiagency efforts.

Program Evaluation Development, NNFR

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/nnfr>

This interactive workbook site uses family intervention examples to approach the planning essential for a good evaluation.

Results-Based Decisionmaking Resources

<http://www.financeproject.org/results.html>

This site provides a set of basic concepts and terminology to assist service agencies and providers with shifting measurement and reporting from "What do we do?" to "Do we make a difference?"

Standards and Topical Interest Groups, American Evaluation Association

<http://www.eval.org>

Offers both beginners and experts opportunities to present and learn from recent studies. EVALTALK Listserv promotes discussion of a broad range of human service topics, study issues, and methods; suggestions are shared among experienced researchers and evaluators.

University of Wisconsin, Cooperative Extension

http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/Evaluation/evaluation_core.htm

This collection of documents and instruments includes planning evaluation that begins with focusing the evaluation and continues through data collection and use. The helpful, easy-to-read, printable resources focus on basics, including using logic models, designing a questionnaire, analyzing quantitative data, and evaluating collaborations.

Western Michigan University, Stufflebeam Checklist Project

www.wmich.edu/evalctr/evalcontract.pdf

www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklist/values_criteria.pdf

This project assists with two important issues when starting an evaluation: what to expect when contracting for evaluation, and how an organization's values can support sound evaluation.



"To accelerate the rate at which communities and agencies prepare for and adopt the most effective known practices in support of a comprehensive system for ensuring healthy child, youth, and family development."



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