

# AN INTRODUCTION TO PROGRAM EVALUATION

FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES



PRODUCED BY: BREAK THE CYCLE &  
THE LOVE IS ADVOCACY YOUTH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TEAM  
WITH SUPPORT FROM





Evaluation is not only for the purpose of fulfilling grant outcomes! However, it is a vital part of any successful prevention program. Effective, age-appropriate evaluation allows us to understand what is succeeding in the program, what is not, and if we are truly meeting our goals. Even though working with youth within a rural setting may create unique challenges, it is nothing that can't be overcome with strong planning and support from partners. It is important that you work with your evaluator to map out an evaluation process that works for your community. In this resource, you will find general guidelines to help you begin developing your own prevention programming evaluation, especially if you are working within a youth-focus and rural context.

Before you begin, listed below are four key factors to consider when developing any type of evaluation:

### **Timing**

- When do you want to do your evaluation? Are you wanting to get data at the beginning of your program to compare to the end results of your program?
- Are you giving your participants enough time to fully complete the evaluation?

### **Method**

- What method works best for you to capture the information you need from your participants? Do you need to give them surveys that will produce hard data to compare, or would a casual focus group give you better results (for example, if you were trying to get feedback for program improvements)?

### **Wording**

- Are your questions age-appropriate? Not just vocabulary, but are your references and comparisons relevant to your program participants? Will they fully understand the questions you're asking?

### **Intention**

- Have you discussed the true purpose or desired outcome of this evaluation with your organization? Did you formulate questions to match those goals?
- What are you going to do with this data? Is this to create a snapshot for your funders, to share successes with your partners, or to document programmatic changes needed?

## **EVALUATION TYPES**

Many kinds of evaluations serve different purposes. In general, evaluations are typically used to:

- Define the scope of a problem or issue: Needs Assessment
- Determine where the problem is: Needs Assessment
- Choose programs that will address the problem(s): Goals/Planning
- Know how a program is being implemented: Process Evaluation
- Determine if the program worked: Outcome Evaluation
- Provide information used to improve programming and continuous quality improvement: Outcome and Process Evaluation



## OUTCOME EVALUATION VS. PROCESS EVALUATION

Outcome and process evaluation are part of a continuous and dynamic process. The most successful evaluations include both process and outcome evaluations, and connect both types of findings to the improvement of your implementation programming (Siebold, 2016. p.21).

**Process Evaluation** is about understanding how your program worked. It addresses three main questions:

- What is the purpose of the program?
- How was the program implemented?
- Was the program implemented as planned?

**Outcome Evaluation** assess the effects of a program. Outcomes measure **change**.

Outcome evaluation asks is your program changing what you expected it to?

- What were you trying to impact or change?
- What are your goals and outcomes?
- What is the path/logic between the program and your goals/outcomes?
- Did program participants increase their knowledge and/or skills?
- Did participants' behavior change as a result of the program?
- As a result of your program, did you meet your outcomes?

Keep in mind, whatever evaluation you do should be practical, feasible, and conducted within the confines of resources, time, and current cultural context. Moreover, it should serve a useful purpose, be conducted in an ethical manner, and produce accurate findings. Evaluation findings should be used to make decisions about program implementation and improve your program effectiveness. Program evaluation is all about being proactive. The better the measures you put in place in the beginning of your programming the better the outcomes in the end.

*Citation: Siebold, Wendi. (2016). Prevention Programming Planning & Evaluation Workbook. Seattle, WA: Strategic Prevention Solutions.*

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