

# **Needs Assessments and Evaluations**

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# Needs Assessments

Needs Assessment Resources:

- State and local planning reports
- Local Planning Agency/Council of Governments
- United Way
- Libraries

Reference section, newspaper and magazine searches, census information

- Do your own "needs assessment"

Look at other needs assessment designs and adapt to your own, use interns for surveys etc.

- Contact similar types of organizations and request copies of their needs assessments
- Newsletters in your specialization
- Web resources

## **Data Collection Techniques and Sources**

### Techniques

- Written surveys
- Face to face interviews
- Telephone interviews
- Focus groups
- Observations
- Document review

### Sources

- People
  - clients/families
  - professionals/helpers
  - Third party/evaluator
- Documents
- Computer data

## **Advantages and Disadvantages of Techniques**

### Written Surveys

- + Low cost
- + Minimal staff and facilities
- + Access to widely dispersed samples
- + Respondents have time to think about answers
- Cooperation left to recipients
- Management of mailing addresses
- Inability to explain questions

### Face to face interviews

- + Enlists cooperation
- + Allows probes and follow up questions
- + Rapport and confidence building
- Cost
- Requires trained staff
- Longer data collection period

## Telephone interviews

- + Lower cost than personal interviews
- + Allows probes and follow up questions
- + Potential for follow up
- + Potential for short data collection period
- People may not have phones
- Requires trained staff
- Best time may be after hours

## Observations

- + Measures behavior rather than words
- + Can show progress if repeated
- + Can be highly detailed
- High cost
- Requires trained observers
- Small sample

## Document review

- + Potentially large numbers
- + Potentially less costly depending upon document size
- + Can be done at reviewers' convenience
- Limited by data already recorded
- Need trained reviewers
- Potential for mistakes in recording and interpreting information

## Focus Groups

- + High cooperation
- + Detailed information
- + Group support
- + Group leads response
- High cost
- Small sample
- Lengthy analysis

## **Understanding Focus Groups**

### Purpose:

- To gather experience and perspective of a small group of people on a particular topic.
- Goal is not to reach consensus, provide recommendations or make decisions.
- Rather, it is to elicit opinions through open-ended questions.

### Developing Questions:

- Use only 5 or 6 questions.
- Arrange questions in logical sequence, from general to specific.
- Ask "what" or "how" rather than "why" questions.
- Present questions in context, why you are asking.

### Size:

- 6 to 10 participants

### Staff:

- Moderator and recorder

### Time:

- Couple of hours

## Question Types

Objectives and Subjective Measures:

Objective  
Subjective

Standards lie outside questions  
Standards implicit within questions

Open-ended and Fixed Responses:

Open-ended      Allows respondent to give any answer they choose

- + Permits unanticipated answers
- + Permits respondent to use his/her own words
- + Describes real view of respondent
- Harder to complete
- Harder to analyze

Fixed      Makes respondent choose from pre-selected responses

- + More reliable responses
- + Easier to interpret and analyze
- + Avoids rare, one-of-a-kind answers
- Locks people into predetermined ideas
- Frustrates respondents when feelings don't fit answers

## Needs Assessment and Evaluation Executive Summary

Information to include in the Executive Summary:

- Purpose: Always
- Literature Search: Briefly
- Methodology: Briefly
- Findings: Always, including Graphs/Tables
- Recommendations: Always

Length:

- Depends on topic

### Summary Topics

Historic

- What are the historic patterns? Is a problem increasing dramatically over time

Comparative

- How does this state, community or agency's situation compare to that of another state, community or agency?

Absolute

- How does this state, community or agency compare to a pre-established standard? ( 90 percent of all graduates will pass a competency test.)

What kinds of decisions do we hope to make with the information we collected?

Expand, delete or modify a program or service

Modify a delivery method or modify a target group

# Evaluation

Although your funders and stakeholders usually require an evaluation, there are many reasons for including an evaluation design in your planning process:

1. The funding source's acceptance of your evaluation plan reduces the chance the grantor will conduct its own evaluation of your program in ways for which you are not prepared.
2. Designing a product evaluation forces you to examine the clarity of your objectives, the ease with which they can be measured and the possibility of achieving the goals. For this reason, you need to consider the concept of program evaluation at the beginning of and throughout the program planning process.
3. Process evaluation may allow you to achieve economies in the conduct of your programs. You can examine the costs and benefits of its different aspects.
4. Process evaluation helps you to redirect your efforts if you determine elements of your methodology have or do not have the desired results.
5. Evaluation can provide administrators with data on which to base program decisions.
6. Evaluation can provide staff with data to reinforce their efforts or to recommend new directions in which to move.
7. Evaluation can be used by policy makers as a tool in directing the agency into productive channels.
8. Evaluation, when it shows evidence of the strengths of your programs, can provide motivation agency support.
9. Evidence of the evaluation of prior efforts reassures current and future funding sources of the diligence and sincerity of the applicant.
10. Evaluative data is a powerful instrument for an agency's public and community relations program.
11. Evaluations can help others in your field to anticipate problems in implementing similar programs and provide yardsticks against which they may measure their success.



## **Outcome and Process Evaluations**

Evaluations generally have two components, one evaluates the outcomes and the other evaluates the conduct of your program.

### **Outcome Evaluation**

(Product, Program, Impact Evaluation)

Procedures that determine:

The extent to which the program has achieved its stated purpose

The extent to which the accomplishment of objectives can be attributed to the program

### **Process Evaluation**

Procedures that determine:

Whether the program has been conducted in a manner consistent with the plan

The relationship of different program activities to the effectiveness of the program

**This is an administrative review process for a long range plan. This type of evaluation can be helpful as a process to review all or selected organizational programs and projects. This was used by a social service agency that had implemented a major organizational change.**

## **Evaluation Plan**

### **Agency Programs and Strategic Plan**

- I. Board of Directors Monthly Meeting:**
  - A. Receives individual program oral report (10-15 minutes) each month from executive director**
  - B. Written Summary of monthly agency progress through Executive Director's report**
  - C. Receive Program Planning and Evaluation Committee report**
  - D. Reviews and comments on internal and external publications, each contains individual program reports**
- II. Each quarter, Board of Trustees will review Senior Management Team report on progress on Long-Range Plan**
- III. Board of Directors will:**
  - A. Review staff-developed new objectives for Long-Range Plan**
  - B. Evaluates Executive Director Performance Objectives**
    - 1. Mainly directed to internal goals**
    - 2. Over-all responsibility for external goals**
    - 3. Assessment Recommendations**
  - C. Reviews progress in meeting annual objectives**
  - D. Consider modification of Long-Range Plan**

**IV. Program Planning and Evaluation Committee (Sub-committee of board of directors)**

**A. Develop two-year schedule to:**

- 1. Assess current programs per Mission Statement and goals in Long-Range Plan**
- 2. Plan, review funding source evaluations and assessments for program effectiveness**

**B. Develop evaluation tools to:**

- 1. Assess self-help, direct service, advocacy and coalition building aspects of programs**
- 2. Assess program compliance with external long-range goals (1-6)**

**V. Executive Director**

- A. Monitors compliance with recommendation of funding source program evaluations/assessments**
- B. Evaluates performance of Senior Management (possible development of Performance Objectives as evaluation tool)**
- C. Monitors all employee evaluations**
- D. Leads Senior Management Team meetings**

**VI. Senior Management Team**

- A. Quarterly monitor of progress in meeting one-year objectives of Long-Range Plan**
  - 1. Component Directors will assign and monitor components one year objectives within their individual components**
  - 2. Cross-component (Agency-Wide) objectives will be monitored by the Development Director and reviewed by Senior Management Team**