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Clearer insights, greater impact: A program evaluation toolkit

Knowledge Institute
on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions

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About this toolkit

What is this toolkit?

This resource is an updated version of the Knowledge Institute's program evaluation toolkit published in 2009. In this document, you will find:

- An overview of key terms and concepts in program evaluation.
- Guidance and resources for planning, carrying out, and using findings from program evaluations.

Evaluation is an important step in ensuring your programs are effective in supporting the best outcomes for children, young people, and families. It helps identify what works well and what needs improvement, so your organization can provide the best possible care.

Our toolkit is an introduction to program evaluation. The materials in this resource can help you focus on what is important and feasible as you plan and implement your evaluation project.

Who should use this toolkit?

The toolkit is intended for anyone embarking on the process of program evaluation, especially those working in Ontario's child and youth mental health and addictions sector.

What is evaluation?

Evaluation involves systematically collecting and analyzing information to see whether a program or project is doing what it set out to do (Whitman & Wadud, 2013). In the child and youth mental health and addictions sector (the sector), program evaluation is used to assess the effectiveness of programs and identify areas for improvement. Program evaluation helps your organization better understand how and why programs achieve their objectives, while also identifying areas where the program does not meet its objectives.

Program evaluation may look different for each community or program. Your evaluation plan will be tailored to your community, the population served, your service delivery approach, and the intended outcomes of your program.

Every program evaluation has common elements that ensure strategies lead to improved practices. These include (Patton, 2021):

- Planning your evaluation.
- Collecting and analyzing information about program activities and outcomes.
- Using the evidence to improve program effectiveness.

Our program evaluation toolkit describes these common elements in detail in Phases 1, 2, and 3.

Why do we evaluate?

Evaluation can help you learn more about the services offered by your organization and provide insights into their effectiveness (American Evaluation Association [AEA], n.d.). Gaining clear insights into your program gives you the information you need to make improvements and have a greater impact. Evaluation is a vital component of program planning and implementation for several reasons:

- **It paves the path to improvement**. Evaluation can help you identify areas where the program does not meet its objectives. It allows you to make evidence-based decisions to improve program design and delivery and offer quality services that meet the needs of your community (AEA, n.d.).
- **It provides ongoing feedback**. The success of a program often relies on being open to ongoing feedback and adjusting the program accordingly. Evaluation offers this type of feedback, as each evaluation leads to changes in practice, which then raises further evaluation questions, which leads to further evaluation, and so on (Patton, 2016).
- **It ensures accountability and helps to secure funding**. Program evaluation can show if your program is meeting its goals and creating an impact. Evaluation findings generate credibility and demonstrate the value of the program to your community and program funders (Metz, 2007). In many cases, program funding is contingent upon the results of an evaluation (Mayhew, 2011).

What are the types of evaluation?

While there are many types of program evaluation, evaluations are typically divided into two categories: **process** and **outcome**.

- **Process evaluation** tells you how well your program is being delivered. This type of evaluation is often done when a program is new. It can help you determine whether your program activities are being carried out as planned and if you need to make any improvements (Wadsworth, 2011).
- **Outcome evaluation** helps you understand the impact or results of your program. It also helps you determine whether your program has reached its intended goals. Outcome evaluation occurs once your program is complete (Wadsworth, 2011).

When planning your evaluation, consider how you can evaluate both the way your program is being implemented (process) and the changes you expect to see as a result of the program (outcome). This approach will provide a comprehensive view of your program's strengths and areas for improvement.

Interested in learning more? Check out this resource on the [Types of evaluation.]()

Is there more than one way to do an evaluation?

There are many different ways to carry out a program evaluation. The approach you use may shape how you plan, implement, and share your evaluation (Owen, 2006). Various evaluation approaches can be combined to create a more comprehensive and tailored evaluation strategy. Here we highlight some approaches relevant to the work we see happening across the sector.

For more information and advice on choosing an evaluation approach, see Evaluation approaches.

Participatory evaluation

Participatory evaluation is a collaborative and inclusive way to conduct program evaluations. This approach is grounded in meaningful engagement where all partners, including providers, families, and those who use the program, are actively involved in all stages of the evaluation process (Chouinard, 2013).

Participatory evaluation can be especially beneficial in evaluating community mental health and addictions services, as it incorporates the perspectives of children, young people, and families. These groups are in the best position to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the programs and identify areas for improvement (Gilmore et al., 2014; Halsall et al., 2021).

To learn more about engaging young people and family members in your program or initiative, see:

- Our quality standards for youth engagement and family engagement.
- Walking the talk: A toolkit for engaging youth in mental health.

Culturally responsive evaluation

Culturally responsive evaluation is fundamental to program evaluation. It recognizes that culture is critical in shaping people's experiences, beliefs, values, and behaviours (Hood et al., 2015). Culturally responsive evaluation ensures program evaluation is meaningful, relevant, and useful to the community and people it serves (Askew et al., 2012). It promotes equity and inclusiveness in all stages of the evaluation process, from planning to sharing the results (Hood et al., 2015; Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017).

Culturally responsive evaluation helps service providers enhance their cultural competence and consequently develop and offer culturally appropriate programs that meet the unique needs of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration, 2014).

The Knowledge Institute has developed An overview of culturally adapted programs and A guide to culturally adapting mental health and addictions programs. These resources provide recommendations to help agencies create, scale, and implement evidence-based, culturally responsive programs.

Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation

Culturally Responsive Indigenous Evaluation (CRIE) is an approach focused on conducting evaluations in a manner that respects and reflects the cultural context, traditions, and knowledge of Indigenous communities (Bowman, 2020; Bremner & Bowman, 2020; Waapalaneexkweew, 2018). CRIE uses decolonizing practices and strong community engagement to carry out evaluations that honour cultural sensitivities. This approach acknowledges the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism and seeks to address the resulting intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous Peoples (Hayward et al., 2021; Waapalaneexkweew, 2018). It fosters a reciprocal learning process valuing Indigenous perspectives, leading to evaluations that promote collaborative and respectful relationships with Indigenous communities (Hayward et al., 2021; Waapalaneexkweew, 2018).

CRIE integrates the Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP®) principles to guide how evaluation data is collected, protected, used, and shared. OCAP® principles emphasize the authority of Indigenous communities over their information and uphold their rights in evaluation processes (Government of Canada, 2022; Schnarch, 2004).

CRIE strives to establish equal and active partnerships with Indigenous communities through shared leadership and decision-making. This collaborative approach aims to produce meaningful outcomes, both for Indigenous communities and the broader field of evaluation (DeLancey, 2020; Waapalaneexkweew, 2018).

In Canada, evaluators who practice CRIE may contribute to truth and reconciliation efforts (Bremner, 2019). For example, CRIE empowers Indigenous communities to take ownership of their health data, guide evidence-based policy decisions, secure program funding, and tailor program planning to their specific needs (DeLancey, 2020; First Nations Health Authority, 2022; Hayward et al., 2021).

For more information about Indigenous approaches to program evaluation, see these resources:

- Culturally competent evaluation for Aboriginal communities: A review of the empirical literature.
- Indigenous approaches to program evaluation.
- Keeping track: A toolkit for Indigenous youth program evaluation.
- Indigenous evaluation toolkit.

Developmental evaluation

Developmental evaluation is an approach used to assess programs as they develop within complex or dynamic environments. Developmental evaluation emphasizes learning and adaptation in real time. It recognizes that programs are part of a larger system and that changes in one part of the system can lead to changes throughout the program (Patton, 2010; Patton, 2016).

In community mental health and addictions services, developmental evaluation can help when implementing new and innovative approaches. It can help your organization better understand the needs of your community, identify gaps in services, and adapt programs as they are being developed. It can also help establish and promote a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

Phase 1. Planning

What steps will you take in your evaluation?

In your evaluation journey, you will:

1. Engage key partners.
2. Develop a program logic model.
3. Identify evaluation questions.
4. Identify indicators and measures.
5. Develop an evaluation framework.
6. Collect and analyze data.
7. Share and implement your results.

Getting started

Embarking on the evaluation process can be intimidating. At times, it may feel that evaluating a program will lead to more work or disruptions of key activities within your organization. However, with adequate preparation, you can set yourself up for success. Take a moment to reflect on what you want to learn about your program and how it impacts the participants. Do you have a clear understanding of the purpose of your evaluation? Do you have the necessary resources and support to evaluate all its steps? Keep in mind that evaluation thrives within an organizational culture of learning and inquiry and requires support from leadership to succeed.

Phase 1. Planning

To assess your readiness for evaluation, consider the following questions (adapted from Fraser Health Authority, 2009; Taylor-Powell et al., 1996):

- What program or service will be evaluated? Does the program have clear objectives?
- Does the evaluation have active support and approval from senior management? Does it have approval and support from your board?
- What is the purpose of this evaluation? What is the information you want to gather and how are you going to use that information?
- What kind of evaluation are you planning to undertake?
- Who is this evaluation intended for? How will they use the information from the evaluation?
- Who are your key partners and who should be engaged in the advisory committee or working group? How are young people and family members involved in the evaluation?
- Are funders aware of the evaluation and are they invited to participate in the process?
- What resources and budget are available to you to complete the evaluation?
- Do any staff or partners have knowledge and expertise in evaluation? Are there team members with particular skills related to evaluation, such as planning and managing evaluation, analyzing data, writing reports, and mobilizing findings?
- Is there someone within your organization willing to invest the necessary time to lead and manage this evaluation?
- Are the relevant documents assembled and ready for each step in the process – for example, terms of reference and project proposal?
- What expenditures do you need to consider in developing the budget for the evaluation?

To learn more about developing an evaluation budget, see Checklist for developing and evaluating evaluation budgets.

To assess beliefs and attitudes about evaluation, use Assessing your readiness for evaluation.

Next, gather information to develop a clear description of the program, including the following key elements (Alkin & Vo, 2018; Rural Health Innovations, 2016):

- Origin and history of the program.
- Program's mission, vision, goals, and objectives.
- Program's design and structure.
- Major service activities and program components.
- Clients who receive services through the program.
- Service providers, staff, and others involved.
- Funding source(s).
- Budget.

Begin with an equity lens

Evaluation plays a crucial role in providing insights into your program's effectiveness, outcomes, and impact. However, evaluation also has the potential to perpetuate inequities. Within our sector, the well-being of children, young people, and their families is the priority, and we must strive to create equitable initiatives that support their needs.

To ensure justice and inclusivity in program evaluation, begin the process with an equity lens. This approach will help you understand how race, culture, and socioeconomic status can influence outcomes. It will help you identify and address biases and disparities and ensure your program is inclusive and effective.

Here are some things to consider when applying an equity lens to program evaluation (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2021):

- **Recognize and address biases.** Acknowledge that everyone – including yourself – has biases. Commit to examining and addressing these throughout the evaluation process. This self-reflection is crucial to ensure fairness and ongoing learning.
- **Engage diverse partners**. Involve a wide range of individuals representing the communities affected by your program. Their insights and perspectives can provide valuable context and help identify areas for improvement.

- **Consider cultural context**. Understand the cultural backgrounds and experiences of the individuals served by your program. Adapt evaluation methods to be culturally appropriate, ensuring they capture the unique aspects of diverse communities.
- **Collect diverse data**. Use a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data that reflects the experiences of different groups (see the Data Collection Methods section to learn more). This approach will provide you with a more comprehensive understanding of program effectiveness, help you identify existing disparities, and allow you to learn more about the community's positive aspects and unique contributions.

How to use race-based data to advance mental health equity primer provides information on the ethical considerations of using race-based data and offers guidance on how to collect, manage, and analyze it effectively. The primer also gives recommendations and tools to help agencies take practical steps based on the data and to monitor and evaluate actions.

- **Promote transparency and collaboration**. Share evaluation findings openly and engage various partners in discussing the results. Collaborate with program staff, community members, and funders to develop action plans based on evaluation findings and promote transparency throughout the process.
- **Continuously learn and adapt**. Embrace a learning mindset and use evaluation findings to drive continuous improvement. Incorporate feedback from partners and adjust your program and evaluation approaches to address identified inequities.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has developed three comprehensive guides to support integrating racial equity into evaluation. Doing evaluation in service of racial equity provides tools to address biases, engage communities, and debunk myths in the evaluation process.

Engage key partners

Throughout this toolkit, we define "partner" as any individual or group interested in the program being evaluated or in the evaluation results. Partners can include young people, family members, program staff, program recipients, community leaders, organizations, and funders. Engaging a range of perspectives in each step of program evaluation ensures your evaluation is relevant and meaningful to those with a vested interest in the program's effectiveness (Bryson et al., 2011; Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2011). Meaningful engagement fosters relationships and collaboration. It promotes knowledge exchange and openness to new ideas (Horowitz et al., 2009).

Consider the following when identifying key partners to include in your program evaluation:

- Who are the primary beneficiaries of the program? Identify community members who directly benefit from the program's services or outcomes, such as family members and young people.
- Who are the program staff? Identify those responsible for delivering the program and those who manage and oversee its operations. This may include program managers, coordinators, direct service staff, and administrative personnel.
- Who are the program collaborators? Consider individuals or organizations that collaborate with your program, provide funding, or contribute resources. These might include government agencies, other non-profit organizations in the sector, community groups, and academic institutions.
- Who else is interested in your program or its evaluation? Are there any other partners with unique interests or perspectives? These partners might be family and youth council members, subject matter experts, researchers, or others with specialized knowledge.

Engage young people

Engaging young people in program evaluation leads to improved programs and services that better meet their needs (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003; Halsall et al., 2021). Young people who are involved in the evaluation process have an opportunity to share their experiences and expertise and to highlight pressing issues and questions that are important to them (Dare & Nowicki, 2019). Being a partner in evaluation empowers young people, equalizes power imbalances between adults and young people, promotes positive youth development, and fosters relationships within the community (Powers & Tiffany, 2006).

When supported by mentors and allies, and provided a safe space, young people can develop the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in all aspects of program evaluation. For example, they can co-develop logic models, select evaluation tools, conduct interviews, co-facilitate focus groups, and help analyze data and interpret the results (Halsall et al., 2021).

Engage families

Family members can offer valuable insights and perspectives at all stages of program evaluation. Families, particularly those who are underrepresented, such as ethnoculturally or racially diverse or 2SLGBTQIA+, should be meaningfully engaged in all aspects of program evaluation. Collaborating with families leads to more informed decision-making and increases the relevance and impact of programs and services (Jivanjee & Robinson, 2007; Sheikhan et al., 2021).

Families can lend their expertise in evaluation in many ways. For example, they can co-develop surveys, co-facilitate focus groups and interviews, and help interpret and present the results (Jivanjee & Robinson, 2007; Supple et al., 2015). They can provide feedback on the program's accessibility, cultural appropriateness, and effect on the lives of their loved ones (Gilbert & Cousins, 2022).

Develop an engagement plan

The number of key partners involved in program evaluation can vary depending on the program's complexity and scope. Typically, an evaluation team has between 8 and 10 members (CDC, 2011).

Once you have a list of key partners, take the time to understand their motivation for being involved. Discuss why they are interested in your program evaluation and determine how they can use the results. This understanding will help tailor their engagement and address their specific needs (Preskill & Jones, 2009). For example, families and young people can use the evaluation results to collaborate with program staff to co-develop interventions that better serve their needs.

Next, determine appropriate levels of engagement in conversation with each partner. Discuss whether their role is to be informed, consulted, involved, collaborated with, or empowered in the evaluation process. This ensures that the level of involvement for each partner aligns with their interests, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment (Bryson et al., 2011).

As you engage with partners, identify the benefits they can gain from actively participating in the evaluation. Be mindful of potential barriers that might hinder their participation, such as level of evaluation knowledge and experience, scheduling conflicts, access to and familiarity with technology, or challenges with transportation. By recognizing these factors, you can proactively address concerns and provide support to maximize your partners' contributions (Zarinpoush, 2006).

Consider using our engagement planning tool to keep track of partner information and engagement levels. It will help you create a comprehensive overview of your key partners and their roles in the evaluation process.

Bring the group together

When bringing key partners together for program evaluation, it's essential to create an inclusive and collaborative environment that encourages active participation. Here are some tips to help you achieve this goal (Boaz et al., 2018; Preskill & Jones, 2009):

- **Clarify roles and responsibilities**. Communicate what is expected from all key partners throughout the evaluation process and explain the time commitment.
- **Establish a regular meeting schedule that accommodates the availability of all key partners.** Meetings can be monthly or as needed. Share meeting agendas in advance and encourage partners to provide input or suggest agenda items.
- **Foster an environment of open and respectful communication.** Emphasize the value of diverse perspectives and encourage all key partners to contribute their unique insights and experiences. Create opportunities for partners to share their expertise, ask questions, and challenge assumptions.
- **Ensure all partners have the necessary support and resources to actively participate in your program evaluation.** Provide timely and relevant documents, data, and tools to all partners. Offer training or capacity-building opportunities, such as Evaluation 101 sessions. Address any logistical or technical barriers that may hinder partners' involvement. Ensure young people and family members have access to clinical supports and that they are debriefed as appropriate. Provide honoraria for their expertise.

Together, identify the purpose and goals of your evaluation

Working closely with your key partners to establish a clear purpose and goals is essential when planning a program evaluation. Take the time to discuss what each partner would like to gain from the evaluation, their expectations, and how they plan to use the findings. This will ensure everyone is on the same page and working toward a common goal. Having a clear understanding of the purpose will help you tailor your evaluation approach to ensure the outcomes are relevant and meaningful to all partners.

Explore the evidence

Gathering and reviewing the available evidence related to your program is an important step in planning and doing your evaluation. In the planning stages, it can help you identify other evaluations of similar programs that have been conducted, the evidence supporting the theory and rationale of the program, and the questions used in the evaluation. The evidence can show you what outcomes were assessed, the measures used, and any barriers or challenges encountered. You can use this important information to help develop your evaluation framework.
For example, review the literature on the implementation of evidence-based practices as they relate to your program, as this will help to inform optimum program delivery.

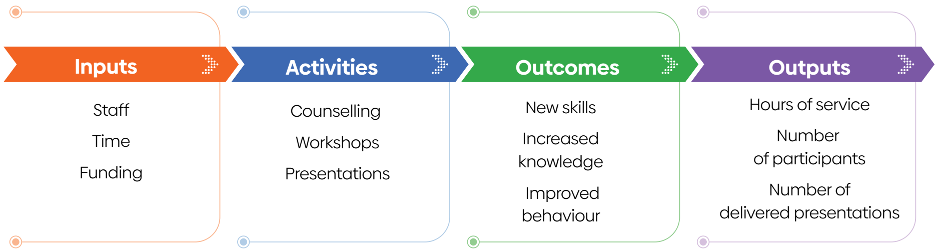
For information on how to access journals and databases free of charge, refer to our resource on Using open access resources to enhance your best practices and search.

Develop a program logic model

A logic model is a visual representation of how something is designed to work. A program logic model illustrates how the program's resources, planned activities, and desired changes or results relate to one another. The purpose of a logic model is to articulate the program theory and provide a pathway describing the chain of events needed to connect the planned program with its anticipated outcomes (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004).

Although not all logic models look the same, they generally include the following main components:

Figure 1. Components of a logic model.



This program logic model template is a valuable tool for creating a clear visual representation of your program's design and its intended outcomes. The template will support your organization in creating the foundation for your program evaluation.

- **Inputs:** Resources invested into the program, such as funding, staff, time, materials, and supplies.
- **Activities:** Activities carried out as part of the program or intervention – for example, workshops or group counselling sessions.
- **Outputs:** Tangible, often process-oriented results derived from completed program activities, such as the number of workshops or group sessions.
- **Outcomes:** Results ranging from short term to long term and related to changes in participants' knowledge, awareness, behaviour, and skills. Examples include problem-solving skills and increased knowledge about emotions.

Constructing the program logic model is best done in collaboration with key partners, such as leadership, program staff, and program recipients. Developing the logic model collaboratively demonstrates engagement with key partners right from the beginning of the evaluation and promotes a shared understanding of the program.

Once you develop a draft logic model, make sure to examine the accuracy of the information. This can be done by reviewing program documents, followed by a team effort to finalize the logic model.

To see an example from our sector, refer to the Stop Now and Plan program (SNAP®) logic model in Appendix A. SNAP® is an evidence-based program designed to help children facing behavioral challenges in learning effective approaches for emotional regulation, self-control, and problem-solving.

Identify evaluation questions

Evaluation questions are high-level questions that help you reflect on the purpose and priorities of your evaluation. Evaluation questions (Preskill & Jones, 2009):

- Are clearly aligned with the program's goals and objectives.
- Are broad; they are not the specific questions that might appear in a survey or interview guide.
- Reflect diverse perspectives.
- Are addressed by collecting and analyzing data.

Evaluation questions are generated from your logic model. By clarifying the connections between activities and outcomes, the model helps you determine what questions to target in the program evaluation.

Evaluation questions should be co-developed with your key partners. See Appendix B for examples of process and outcome evaluation questions.

Identify indicators and measures

Now that you have established your evaluation questions, it's time to determine how to measure and collect your data. To do this, you will identify indicators relevant to the evaluation questions and the program's outputs and outcomes.

What are indicators?

Indicators are measurable pieces of information that assess whether a program is achieving its goals and objectives. They are used to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of programs over time. We can use indicators to make informed decisions about ways to improve a program, how to best allocate resources, and whether a program should be continued (CDC, 2021b; Mertens & Wilson, 2018).

Indicators can measure a variety of program components, including the following (Donabedian, 2005):

- Structure: Measure the resources invested in the program, such as staff time, funding, or equipment.
- Process: Measure the program's activities and outputs, such as the number of clients served, the number of services provided, or the number of referrals made.
- Outcome: Measure the program's short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes, such as changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, or health.

Indicators should be "SMART": Specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. This approach will help your organization make informed decisions based on precise, quantifiable data. It will also ensure alignment with your evaluation objectives (Public Health Ontario, 2016).

In recent years, a number of sectors have developed common indicators for monitoring and evaluation. Examples include mental health indicators, public health indicators, and health system indicators.

Once indicators are developed, you may need to select or create measures. Measures are a way to qualify or quantify your indicator. Each indicator may have more than one measure.

Validity and reliability of measures

When selecting measures, it is essential to consider how valid and reliable they are and how practical they will be to find and use.

- A measure is valid when it measures what it was supposed to measure within the program and the broader population. A valid measure is necessary to ensure your results are interpreted and used appropriately (Mertens & Wilson, 2018).
- A measure is reliable when it produces the same results over and over again. If changes are made to the way your data is collected (for example, changing the wording of questions or asking interview questions in a different way), it can impact the measure's reliability (Mertens & Wilson, 2018).

Consider the questions outlined in Appendix C to ensure your measures are valid and reliable.

Where possible, choose standardized measures that have already been tested for validity and reliability. Appendix D includes suggestions to help you select appropriate measures for your program evaluation. To access an online directory of measures related to evaluating child and youth mental health and addictions programs, see our measures database.

Select data collection methods

Deciding which data collection method(s) you will use for your program evaluation depends on many factors unique to your organization's circumstances – for instance, the purpose of your evaluation, the type of data to be collected, and the time and resources available.

Before you start selecting data collection method(s), consider the type of data you already have access to. Your organization may already have data you can leverage, such as:

- Program activities: Data on referrals, appointments, and training sessions.
- Structure: Personnel data, such as their roles, responsibilities, qualifications, and workload distribution.

- Outcomes: Data related to measurable achievements, like reduced wait times for mental health and addictions services.
- Beneficiaries: Any data related to the diverse groups benefitting from the program, such as children, young people, and families.

There are two main types of data (Mertens & Wilson, 2018):

- **Quantitative data** is measured by numbers. It can help you understand how your program is being delivered. For example, quantitative data can show you the number of referrals your organization receives, the number of counselling sessions completed, or the percentage of available workdays for counsellors. Quantitative data can also tell you how effective your program is – for example, by identifying the proportion of clients satisfied with your program or the number of clients meeting their goals.
- **Qualitative data** describes qualities or characteristics. It gives you context to help explain why and how changes occurred as a result of program actions or activities. For example, it can tell you about the experiences and challenges faced by young people and family members attending counselling sessions or provide suggestions for improving services.

Program evaluation in the mental health and addictions sector often requires collecting both qualitative and quantitative data because of the broad range of services provided (populations served, type of programs, and goals).

There are six main data collection methods in program evaluation (International Program for Development Evaluation Training [IPDET], 2007; W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2017):

- Program records or administrative data: A systematic review of documents – for example, general program files, brochures, reports or files on individual projects, or clients. You can develop a checklist in advance.
- Surveys and questionnaires: Written questions are used to get written responses which, when analyzed, will enable indicators to be measured. Ideally, these questionnaires are standardized tools that are reliable and valid in their ability to measure what they are intended to measure.
- Interviews: These are versatile and allow the collection of information on complex or sensitive topics. They involve asking specific questions to participants and recording their responses for analysis. Questions can be open-ended or closed (yes/no answers) and can be a source of both qualitative and quantitative information.
- Focus groups: A group of approximately 6 to 8 people who are interviewed together by a skilled facilitator, with a set of open-ended questions focused on a specific topic or issue.

- Observation: Involves direct observation of events, processes, relationships, and behaviours. Observation provides an opportunity to collect data on a broad range of behaviours within a specific context.
- Case study: Thoroughly examines one or more defined cases (a person or a project) by collecting data from multiple sources such as interviews, surveys, document reviews, and observations.

When developing questions in your surveys, interviews or focus groups, pay attention to what you need to know. Too many questions can cause survey fatigue. Always focus on developing your questionnaires to provide relevant information – for example, provide the rationale for collecting self-identification questions on race or gender. To learn more about collecting socio-demographic data, see Collecting information on ethnic origin, race, income, household size, and language data: A resource for data collectors.

To learn more about collecting and using data, check out more resources on our resource hub.

Evaluation ethics

Evaluation ethics refer to the principles and standards that guide ethical behaviour in the evaluation process. They provide a framework for ensuring that evaluations are conducted in a fair, unbiased, and respectful manner. The Canadian Evaluation Society has developed ethical guidelines for evaluators to promote ethical behaviour and decision-making.

In the context of Indigenous evaluation, the First Nations Information Governance Centre in Canada developed the OCAP® principles to guide the ethical and respectful handling of Indigenous data. These principles emphasize the importance of Indigenous communities having ownership and control of their data and serve as a crucial tool for maintaining ethical standards and honouring the autonomy of Indigenous communities in the evaluation process.

Program evaluations typically do not require the same ethics board approval that is needed for research. However, it is important to include ethical considerations at every step in your evaluation, especially with evaluations that concern young people or equity-deserving populations.

Considerations could include the following:

- Obtain consent for participating in the evaluation.
- Create safe spaces for key informants to share information and experiences.
- Use language that respects the people and groups you are engaging with.
- Maintain confidentiality and ensure respondents are not identifiable in results or reports.
- Respect participants' privacy and take only the information needed for the evaluation.
- Use participants' time to its fullest potential.
- Develop a plan for retaining and deleting data.

Consent

Obtaining written or verbal consent from any potential participant is essential in program evaluation. All participants must provide their permission to take part in your evaluation. A consent letter should include information about:

- The purpose of the evaluation, and what specific tasks you are asking them to complete.
- The benefits and risks associated with their participation.
- How much time is required to participate.
- How their information and responses are confidential and anonymous.
- How their participation is voluntary, and that they can withdraw at any point. Declining participation will not affect their access to services in any way.
- Who will have access to their data and how it will be used.

Develop your evaluation framework

An evaluation framework is a practical tool for organizing key elements of program evaluation. A well-designed framework can convey complex information in a simple way and provide a clear and systematic approach to planning program evaluation. To develop an evaluation framework, follow these steps.

Create a table with the following columns:

- Evaluation questions.
- Link to activities or target population in the logic model.
- Indicator(s).
- Data collection methods.
- Data collection tool(s).
- Respondent(s).
- Person(s) responsible for data collection.
- Timing of data collection.

For each evaluation question, fill in the corresponding row in the table:

- Evaluation question: Write down the questions you want answered about the program. These questions should reflect the information you want to gather during the evaluation.
- Link to activities or target population in your logic model: For each question, identify the corresponding activities or target population in the logic model that the question relates to. This helps establish the connection between program activities and evaluation questions.
- Indicator(s): Define one or more indicators that serve as a measure of the process or outcomes you want to assess. These indicators should align with the questions and provide a way to gauge progress or success.
- Data collection methods: Identify the data collection method(s) you will use to measure each indicator. Examples include surveys, focus groups, interviews, and document reviews.
- Data collection tool(s): Specify the name of the tool to be used for data collection. If using a standardized tool, mention its name. If you plan to use an internally developed tool, describe it briefly.
- Respondent(s): Identify who will provide the necessary information to answer the evaluation questions. This could be caregivers, young people, program staff, or any other relevant partners.
- Person(s) responsible for data collection: Assign an individual or team responsible for collecting the data. This ensures accountability and proper execution of the data collection process.
- Timing of data collection: Specify when the data will be collected according to the evaluation plan.

Phase 2. Doing

In Phase 1 you focused on conceptualizing and planning your evaluation. Now it is time to evaluate your program. In Phase 2 you will:

- Collect data.
- Analyze data.
- Interpret your findings.
- Present data visually.

Collect your data

During the data collection process, you will gather information about the indicators you identified in Phase 1 (Mertens & Wilson, 2018). This may include leveraging data and indicators that your organization collects as part of its standard data collection procedures.

Managing tasks associated with collecting data is an important part of a successful program evaluation. Developing a plan outlining the steps involved in your data collection process can help you standardize the process and provide a reference for other team members involved in the evaluation.

A data collection plan includes the following information:

Why?	Why are you collecting this data? (Include logic model and evaluation framework.)
What?	What are you measuring? What type of data are you collecting?
Who?	Who is responsible for collecting data? Who is supporting data collection?
When?	When are you planning to collect your data and for how long?
Where?	Where will you collect your data? (Consider physical or virtual locations – for example, local agencies or an online platform.) Where will you store your data? (Electronic or hard copies of consent forms, participant tracking sheet, survey responses.)
How?	How are you collecting your data? How are you going to analyze your data?
How much?	Sample size: How many participants will be involved in your program evaluation? How many observations and items will you collect?

To learn effective strategies for identifying and reaching participants, see Sampling and recruitment 101.

Response rate

As you collect data, make sure to monitor your response rate to the surveys you conducted in Phase 1. Response rate measures the percentage of people who complete a survey out of those who were invited to participate (CDC, 2018; IPDET, 2007).

Response rates can vary depending on the survey, with a rate of 30% being considered good and anything over 50% being considered excellent. Having a higher response rate increases the likelihood that your survey results can be generalized to the entire target population, making your findings more applicable and relevant (IPDET, 2007).

To increase your response rate and maximize engagement (CDC, 2018; IPDET, 2007):

- Ensure your survey is easy to follow with clear instructions.
- Consider providing small, tangible incentives such as books or other non-digital goods to help encourage participation. See our resource on Gathering and cleaning online survey data.
- Send out a friendly reminder email one week before the survey closes to encourage people to complete the survey.

Data safety

Protecting participants' privacy and confidentiality, as well as safeguarding sensitive information, is crucial in program evaluation. These practices can help you keep your data safe and maintain its integrity (Czechowski et al., 2019):

- De-identify data to protect clients' privacy. Remove personal information so that the data cannot be used to identify any individuals. To learn more, see How to de-identify personal information when sharing data.
- Stay current with updates to software and devices to maintain optimal performance and security. Make sure you have the latest security patches to protect your devices.
- Protect your devices by installing reliable antivirus software. Perform regular scans to detect and remove potential threats to your data.
- Use trusted and secure networks. Avoid connecting to public networks, as they can pose security risks.
- Create strong, unique passwords. This helps prevent unauthorized access and keeps your sensitive information safe.
- Minimize the risk of accidentally exposing data by sharing confidential information only with those who need it.
- Become familiar with encryption principles to ensure your data is accessible only to trusted parties.
- Ensure the safety of your information by regularly backing up your essential data to a secure location.
- Keep physical documents in locked spaces, like cabinets, to prevent unauthorized access.

Analyze your data

Before analyzing your data, take a moment to revisit and reflect on the purpose of your program evaluation, review your evaluation questions, and review the indicators you have selected. This will help you decide what to focus on as you analyze your data.

Tip: To protect the safety and privacy of your respondents, keep in mind that very low numbers for a particular frequency breakdown can put confidentiality at risk. For example, if there is only one respondent from a particular group, such as a rural area, make sure to exclude that data from your analysis. This will prevent respondents from being easily identifiable and will safeguard their privacy.

Quantitative analysis

Analyzing quantitative data in program evaluation involves carefully examining numerical data to assess the effectiveness of your program. Quantitative data analysis does not have to be complicated. In many cases, simple descriptive statistics can provide sufficient information to interpret your data. To look for patterns in participants' responses, calculate the following statistics (Alkin & Vo, 2018):

- Frequencies and frequency tables: Indicate how many times a particular response was recorded (for example, 25 youth completed mental health training). You can also divide your data into groups and look at the frequencies for each subgroup (among the 25 youth who completed the training, 18 resided in an urban area and 7 in a rural).
- Percentages: Convey information as a proportion of a whole. Percentages are helpful when comparing groups of respondents or categories (for example, 97% of youth and 95% of family members completed mental health training).
- Mean, median, and mode: Commonly known as measures of central tendency, these tell us where the data is centered or concentrated. The mean is commonly known as the average (for example, the average age of respondents was 24). The median represents the middle value in a dataset. The mode is the value or response that appears most frequently in a dataset (the majority of respondents were 21 years of age).

Microsoft Excel is an excellent tool for analyzing and storing survey data. It is easily accessible, user friendly, and easy to navigate. Using Excel for analyzing survey questionnaires will guide you through the process of setting up your dataset and analyzing your survey responses. If you are interested in doing a more advanced analysis, consider using data analysis software like IBM SPSS.

To learn more about quantitative data analysis, see Analyzing quantitative data for an evaluation brief.

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis is the process of using qualitative data to gain insight into changes that occurred as a result of your program. It can also be used to gather feedback, assess satisfaction levels, and explore other relevant aspects of the program's impact. Qualitative analysis offers you a way to learn about people's experiences by studying their words, as well as by deriving meaningful insights from images and audio and video materials (Alkin & Vo, 2018).

To ensure your data is reliable, it is important to transcribe the focus group or one-on-one interviews accurately and allow participants to review and approve the transcripts. This approach not only enhances the quality of your data, but also fosters trust, safeguards participants' privacy, and promotes transparency (Mero-Jaffe, 2011; Rowlands, 2021).

Consider the following questions as you begin to prepare to analyze your qualitative data (Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions [Knowledge Institute], 2019; Sabo Flores, 2007):

- What generally is being said? Is it positive or negative?
- What surprised you the most? Why?
- What responses didn't surprise you? Why?
- What patterns or themes emerge: which words, issues, or responses keep coming up?
- Are there any deviations from these patterns?
- Were there any differences in the data that could be attributed to a specific group based on demographic data?
- Are there any interesting quotes or stories that illustrate a particular pattern? Do they speak to the overall evaluation question?
- Do these patterns match other findings?

Working together with your team, you will look for patterns in the qualitative data. Here are some techniques that can help you facilitate the analysis process (Knowledge Institute, 2019):

- Rearranging and grouping data.
- Using visual aids like coloured dots or symbols.
- Assigning codes to themes (adding labels to different topics or ideas that you find in the data to help organize and understand it better).

NVivo is a standard qualitative analysis software program; however, it is quite costly and may be better suited to large data sets for research purposes. If your participant sample is small (fewer than 20 respondents), consider using Microsoft Excel instead.

Using Excel for qualitative data analysis can help you determine the best way and approach to analyzing qualitative data in Microsoft Excel.

See Analyzing qualitative data for evaluation brief to learn more about qualitative data analysis in evaluation.

Interpret your data

You have spent a lot of time analyzing your data and identifying important trends and patterns. Now it is time to draw conclusions. To do that, work in collaboration with your team and key partners to interpret your findings.

Together, consider the following questions:

- Can you provide answers to your evaluation questions based on the results?
- Which program objectives have the most evidence to suggest they are being achieved? Are there program objectives that are not being met?
- Are the indicator values above or below an expected range?
- What does the data say about your program? Can you identify strengths and opportunities for improvement?
- What key findings would be most exciting and valuable to your partners?

To get the most out of your data, align your qualitative and quantitative findings with the evaluation questions you set out to answer. Summarizing the results based on evaluation questions can help you understand all the data and how it relates to the evaluation goals you established during the planning phase. Consider developing a table with the following columns to help you organize your data:

- Evaluation questions: List all your evaluation questions. Each question will form a row in the table.
- Qualitative data: Identify specific qualitative findings that relate to each evaluation question. Note what method you used to obtain the findings.
- Quantitative data: Include quantitative findings that correspond to each evaluation question. Note what method you used to obtain the findings.

Review Questions to get you thinking about your data to ensure you are using your data to its fullest potential.

Present data visually

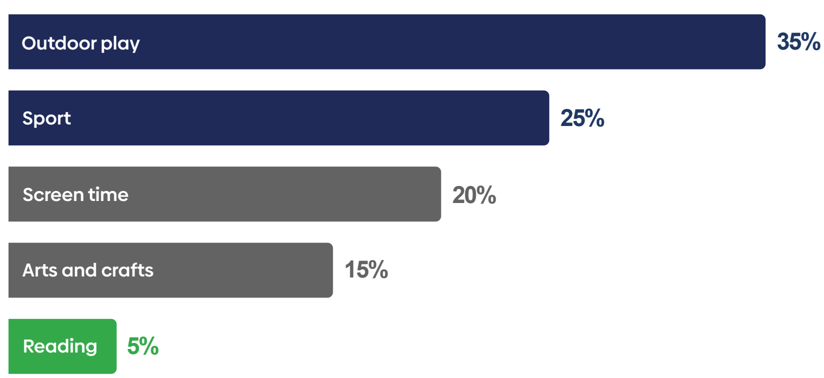
Graphs and charts are valuable data visualization tools for presenting your findings. To create effective data visualizations, follow these tips (Evergreen, 2018):

- Use short titles to convey the main message. Add subtitles and notes for more details.
- Place labels close to the data.
- Avoid using too many labels to prevent repetition. For example, label every other year instead of every year on a line chart. Don’t use numeric labels with a y-axis scale.
- Keep the intervals between axis markings evenly spaced, even if you don’t label every interval.
- Use two-dimensional displays and avoid unnecessary graphics.
- Choose colours purposefully. Highlight important patterns with vibrant colours and use muted colours for less important data.
- Make sure your visualization is readable in black and white. Avoid colour combinations that can be confusing for people with colour blindness.
- Use black or very dark text on a white or transparent background for the best readability.

Take a moment to review Figure 2, which serves as an example of a clear and well-structured data visualization.

Figure 2. Example of data visualization.

Children's leisure time centers around movement and physical activity.
Allocating only 5% of leisure time to reading may impact their language development and reading habits.



See the [Data visualization checklist] and [How to build data visualizations in Excel] for more information on developing compelling data visualizations.

Phase 3. Using evaluation findings

Phase 3 marks the final step in your program evaluation journey, building on the work established in Phase 1 and executed in Phase 2. In Phase 3, you will use your findings and take action to enhance your program's effectiveness. You will:

1. Summarize your findings.
2. Share your findings.
3. Implement changes.

Summarize your findings

Congratulations on completing the evaluation of your program! Now it's time to identify what valuable knowledge and insights you want to share from this process, and how to share them. By effectively communicating your evaluation findings, you can promote understanding, informed decision-making, and action. Quality documentation, research, and analysis can create powerful and compelling reports that can influence the continuation of your funding and facilitate change (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2017).

Evaluation reports are the most popular way of summarizing and presenting evaluation findings. However, developing an evaluation report is not always necessary and depends on the specific needs of your audience. You can also create presentations or infographics to showcase your findings. Use language, format, and visuals that will resonate with your audience.

Evaluation reports vary depending on the purpose of your evaluation and the specific knowledge needs of your intended audience. Before writing an evaluation report, take time to review your engagement plan. This will help you identify your key audiences. Consider which key partners are directly impacted by the program evaluation outcomes. This may include young people, family members, program staff, funders, board members, or others.

Next, in collaboration with key partners, determine the main points you want to convey about the program's effectiveness, achievements, areas for improvement, and plans to address identified gaps. Review the purpose and uses of the evaluation findings that you articulated in the planning phase.

Make recommendations

Recommendations are actionable statements based on the information collected during a program evaluation. They provide guidance for improving the program's processes, outcomes, and decision-making based on your evaluation findings (Feinstein, 2019).

Developing effective recommendations requires careful consideration. Follow these steps to make recommendations that drive positive change (Feinstein, 2019).

- Collaborate with key partners: Engage key partners from the start. Their input will help you align recommendations with program objectives.
- Establish a solid connection to evidence: Ensure each recommendation is rooted in your evaluation findings.
- Focus on one idea at a time: Address a single idea or action per recommendation.
- Keep it feasible: Ensure your recommendations are practical and achievable. Avoid unrealistic ideas that might hinder their implementation.
- Define responsibility: Indicate who is responsible for implementing each recommendation. This ensures accountability and promotes action.
- Identify any risks associated with the recommendations or related actions.
- Use clear language: Write in clear and concise language that is accessible to everyone.

Pull it all together

An evaluation report typically includes the following sections:

- Executive summary: Provides a concise overview of the evaluation report, highlighting key findings and recommendations.
- Introduction: Provides background information about the project, its activities, and the purpose of the evaluation.
- Evaluation procedures: Contains information about evaluation methods, tools, and procedures.
- Data analysis: Describes the types of data analyses performed and why.
- Results: Explains the meaning of the findings, their impact on staff and clients, the effectiveness of services, the sustainability of program activities, strengths, and areas for improvement.
- Limitations: Identifies any potential restrictions related to your evaluation process or findings.
- Discussion/recommendations: Explains whether and how your program objectives were met. Provides a summary of key findings and includes recommendations for improvement, sustainability, and potential next steps.

To learn more about developing program evaluation reports, see the following resources:

- Evaluation reporting: A guide to help ensure use of evaluation findings
- Checklist for program evaluation report content
- 10 tips for designing quality reports

Share your findings

There are many advantages to sharing the findings from your program evaluation. When shared within your organization, your findings can inform strategic planning and improve your programs. Sharing internally with your team ensures everyone knows the impact of the work they do. It also increases buy-in for changes that may affect the way people work.

Sharing findings externally can help secure additional resources and promote transparency and accountability to all partners. By sharing evaluation findings widely, you foster collaboration, encourage knowledge mobilization, and contribute to the overall knowledge of the sector. Sharing the positive outcomes of your evaluation findings can inspire other organizations to scale and replicate successful programs, leading to a broader impact in the sector. However, when communicating evaluation results to various partners, you may need to consider potential risks, as sometimes the findings may not be as expected.

When developing knowledge mobilization strategies, consider who you want to reach and what they need to know. Consider what message and tone should be used, appropriate timing, and appropriate settings based on your audience. You can share your findings in many ways, such as:

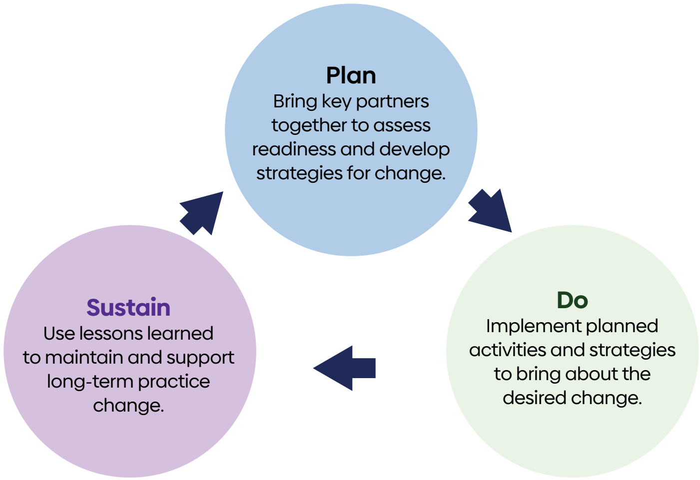
- Infographics and fact sheets.
- Webinars and conference presentations.
- Reports or journal articles.
- Social media campaigns.
- Communities of practice and community tables at the local service and provincial levels.

To learn more about knowledge mobilization strategies, refer to our toolkit, Doing more with what you know.

Implement changes

Evaluation findings show what can be improved in your program, providing you with an excellent opportunity to make positive changes. Once you and your team have identified recommendations for improving your program, work with the program team and partners on how you can prioritize and start to implement improvements. By implementing changes based on the evaluation results and reviewing best practices, you can enhance the quality and effectiveness of your program.

Figure 3. Implementation phases.



The implementation process consists of three phases: plan, do, and sustain.

- Plan: Bring key partners together to assess readiness and develop strategies for change.

- Do: Implement planned activities and strategies to bring about the desired change.
- Sustain: Use lessons learned to maintain and support long-term practice change.

Here are some suggestions to help you and your team implement your evaluation findings and recommendations (The Pell Institute and Pathways to College Network, n.d.):

- **Develop an action plan**. The plan should include the following elements (CDC, 2021a):
  - Rationale for recommended improvement strategies: Clearly explain why you have chosen specific strategies to implement the evaluation recommendations. Show how these strategies align with the evaluation findings and will help improve your program.
  - Roles and responsibilities: Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each person involved in implementing the action plan.
  - Timelines: Create timelines that set out important milestones and deadlines for implementing the action plan. This will help you keep track of progress and ensure tasks are completed on time.
  - Resources: Identify any potential sources of funding needed to make changes or improvements to your program. This will help you secure the necessary resources for your program.
- **Implement the action plan.** Monitor the progress closely and adjust as needed.
- **Evaluate**. Stay open to learning from the implementation. Measure the impact to gain insights into the overall process and to determine if the program improvements have achieved the intended results.

We have developed a resource that offers practical strategies and resources for the planning phase of implementation. The implementation toolkit provides concrete examples from the sector that may be highly relevant to your organization.

To make lasting improvements that benefit staff, young people, and families, consider combining insights from your program evaluation with quality improvement (QI) strategies. Program evaluation can help you identify areas for improvement, while QI strategies can help you find innovative solutions to improve your program. By leveraging both methods, you can ensure your program meets the ever-changing needs of children, young people, and families.

To learn more about QI initiatives in the sector, see Quest: Quality improvement.

Moving forward together

We have walked through how to plan your evaluation, including how to engage key partners and consider your approach to ensure equity and inclusion. We have looked at doing an evaluation, including collecting and analyzing data. Finally, we have reviewed how to use your evaluation findings to make the changes necessary to improve your program.

You have now come to the end of this toolkit – but it's far from the end of your work. Evaluation is just one part of a cyclical process. After evaluation comes more planning, implementation, monitoring, and then, of course, future evaluations.

We hope you have found this toolkit to be helpful and have identified new tools and resources to use with your program evaluations. There are many resources available online. For your convenience, we have compiled a list of those that we find most relevant to our sector. You can find them in the additional resources section.

If you have questions about this toolkit, please contact us at:

The Knowledge Institute: info@cymha.ca.

Additional resources

Resources specific to equity, diversity, and inclusion

Creating equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) cultures (Canadian Evaluation Society) – This webinar is designed for evaluators interested in integrating EDI in their practices and organizations. It addresses the evaluator's role in addressing systemic issues that impact people's lives and explores topics such as unconscious bias and structures and behaviours that support inclusive leadership.

How can we incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion in evaluation (Eval Academy) – This article explores the importance of equity and inclusion in evaluation and provides guidance on how evaluators can incorporate equity and inclusion in their evaluation practice.

Foundations for equity, diversity and inclusion (Canadian Evaluation Society) – A nine-part series for evaluators and leaders seeking to incorporate EDI principles in their practices and organizations to create an inclusive and equitable evaluation community.

Getting ready for evaluation (Racial Equity Tools) – Resources to support groups in preparing for evaluation, highlighting the significance of the evaluation process and the implications of the findings and lessons for various groups and partners.

Evaluation organizations and programs

Eval Academy – An online platform that aims to empower individuals worldwide by providing resources and training to enhance their evaluation skills and drive organizational learning and improvement.

Additional resources

The Evaluation Center (Western Michigan University) – An independent, interdisciplinary unit that offers evaluation services for programs, projects, and organizations. They also provide valuable resources such as reference guides and short tutorials for practitioners in evaluation and for those interested in pursuing graduate-level education in this field.

Canadian Evaluation Society – This community brings together individuals in the field of evaluation, providing opportunities for connection, growth, and learning. They offer a range of activities, such as an annual national conference, chapter events, webinars, and mentorship programs to support professionals in their evaluation practices.

Evaluation toolkits

Evaluation toolkit for youth programs (YouthRex) – A comprehensive resource designed to assist grassroots youth programs in Ontario with evaluating their impact and improving youth well-being. It provides step-by-step guidance, action steps, and online resources for developing and implementing an evaluation plan and using findings to strengthen programs.

Evaluation toolkit (Pell Institute) – A toolkit supporting professionals in college outreach programs to conduct effective evaluations by providing guidance on planning, data collection, analysis, and program improvement.

Evaluating community programs and initiatives (Community Toolbox) – A toolkit for evaluating community interventions and comprehensive community initiatives.

General evaluation resources

Effective communication strategies for interviews and focus groups (The Evaluation Center- Western Michigan University) – A checklist providing key concepts and strategies for effective communication during interviews and focus groups for evaluation. It emphasizes the importance of clear messaging, interviewer communication skills, and creating a positive experience for participants to enhance data quality and guide data collection events.

Criteria for selecting high-performance indicators – This resource provides guidance and support in the process of selecting indicators that are considered effective in capturing information relevant to your program evaluation.

Glossary

Descriptive statistics: Descriptive statistics give general summaries using frequency distribution tables, percentages, and measures of central tendency (Alkin & Vo, 2018).

Evaluation: Evaluation involves systematically collecting and analyzing information to see whether a program or a project is doing what it set out to do (Whitman & Wadud, 2013).

Indicator: Indicators are measurable information that assess whether a program is achieving its goals and objectives. They are used to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of programs over time. We can use indicators to make informed decisions about program improvements, resource allocation, and program continuation (Mertens & Wilson, 2018).

Logic model: A program logic model is a visual representation of how a program is designed to work. This model shows causal relationships between the program's resources, planned activities, and the desired changes or results.

Outcome evaluation: Outcome evaluation helps you understand the impact or results of your program. It also helps you determine whether your program has been successful in reaching its intended goals. Outcome evaluation takes place once all your program activities are complete (Wadsworth, 2011).

Partner: A partner is any individual or group who has an interest in the program being evaluated or in the results of the evaluation. This includes, but is not limited to, young people, family members, program staff, program recipients, community leaders, and funders.

Process evaluation: Process evaluation tells you how well your program is being delivered. This type of evaluation is often done when a program is new. It can help you determine whether your program activities are carried out as planned and whether you need to make any improvements (Wadsworth, 2011).

Program evaluation: Program evaluation includes the systematic collection and analysis of information about program activities, characteristics, and outcomes to make judgements about it, improve its effectiveness, and inform future decision-making about it (Patton, 2021).

Qualitative analysis: Qualitative analysis is the process of using qualitative data to gain insight into changes that occurred as a result of your program. This approach offers you a way to learn about people's experiences by examining their words, as well as by deriving meaningful insights from images and audio/video materials (Alkin & Vo, 2018).

Qualitative data: Qualitative data describes qualities or characteristics. It gives you context to help explain why and how changes occurred as a result of program actions or activities (Mertens & Wilson, 2018).

Quantitative analysis: Quantitative analysis in program evaluation involves carefully examining numerical data to assess the effectiveness of your program (Alkin & Vo, 2018).

Quantitative data: Quantitative data is measured by numbers. It can help you understand how your program is being delivered (Mertens & Wilson, 2018).

Reliability: A measure is reliable when it produces the same results over and over again. If the way your data is collected changes (for example, changing the wording of questions or asking interview questions in a different way), it can impact the reliability of the measure (Mertens & Wilson, 2018).

Validity: A measure is valid when it measures what it was supposed to measure, both within the program and in the broader population. This is necessary to ensure that your results are interpreted and used appropriately (Mertens & Wilson, 2018).

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Appendix A: SNAP® logic model

Appendix A provides a logic model example from our field. It features the SNAP® program designed to help children who are facing behavioral challenges in learning effective approaches for emotional regulation, self-control and problem-solving.

SNAP® (Stop Now And Plan)

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

- Need/Goal:
  - Overarching goal: Reduce the likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system.
  - Reduce externalizing behaviours (aggression, rule-breaking and conduct problems) and increase self-control, emotion regulation and problem solving skills.
  - Increase parent/caregiver management skills.
- Admission Criteria:
  - Child (under 12 years of age), **AND**
  - No significant developmental delays, **AND**
  - Child able to communicate in language the program is delivered, **AND**
  - Police contact for engaging in general offences, antisocial activities or having conduct problems **AND/OR**
  - T Score > or = to 70 on the CBCL CD/Rule Breaking/Aggressive subscales

INPUTS

1. Financial
2. Identify and form relationships with relevant community partners (working with at-risk children in the community)
3. Police/Community Referral Protocol
4. Recruit and train staff
5. Space and materials to operate the program
6. Community education strategy

ACTIVITIES

1. Referral Form
2. Intake referral screen
3. Early Assessment Risk Lists (EARL) – to assess child, family, community & responsivity risk issues
4. SNAP Intake Review Face Sheet & Eco-systemic Assessment – case conference and treatment planning report
5. Battery of evaluation assessment measures & forms

OUTPUTS (Intervention)

Core components:

- SNAP Boys or SNAP Girls Group
- SNAP Parent Group
- Individual Counseling/Mentoring
- SNAP Parenting: Individualized Family Counseling
- School Advocacy
- Teacher Support
- Growing Up Healthy
- SNAP Youth Leadership Club *(SNAP graduates 12 yrs. of age and older who may need continued support and skill development based on their level of risk)*
- Homework Club/Academic (SEESA) Tutoring

OUTCOMES Short Term

(4-6 months – typically post group)

Children:

- Emotional regulation: Use SNAP techniques for self-control and problem-solving
- Decreased antisocial behaviour
- Reduced police contact, if applicable
- Increased social competence
- Healthy peer relationships
- School success: decrease in discipline issues

Parents:

- Emotional regulation: Use SNAP techniques for self-control and problem-solving
- Effective child management strategies
- Enhance communication skills
- More positive support systems in place
- Connected to positive community activities
- Increased self-efficacy
- Greater positive pro-social values and conduct

OUTCOMES Medium Term

(12 months)

- Short term achievements have been maintained
- Continued improvement in children's social competence and pro-social behaviour
- Continued improvement in the parents' ability to use effective child management strategies

OUTCOMES Long Term

Reduced mental health concerns including:

- Improved self-regulation (emotion regulation, self-control & problem-solving)
- Reduced involvement with criminal justice system
- Children stay in school and out of trouble
- Families remain engaged in positive community activities
- Families maintain positive support systems

ASSUMPTIONS

Early intervention and crime prevention can be achieved through a structured, multifaceted evidence-based model designed to mitigate risk factors and promote protective factors.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

- FUNDING: Government funds; corporate and private donations.
- COMMUNITY BUY-IN: Based on a community identified 'need' (service gap) and ensuring culturally responsive programming.

Appendix B: Identify your evaluation questions

Appendix B provides sample evaluation questions categorized into activities (process), target groups (process), and outcomes. These examples serve as a valuable resource to guide you in developing relevant and tailored evaluation questions to assess your program's goals and objectives.

Activities (process)

Note: Think about which activities contribute toward the program's outcomes. Are there any activities you are particularly concerned about or interested in?

- Were activities implemented as planned (how often, when, where, duration)? To what extent was there program fidelity (adherence to the intended model of practice)?
- Did the activities vary from one site to another? Or one staff person to another?
- Were required resources in place and sufficient?
- Did staff think they were able to implement the activities as planned? If not, what factors limited their implementation?
- Did staff and community partners think the partnership was positive?
- Did community partners think the activities were implemented as planned?
- What activities worked well? What activities did not work so well?
- What was the cost of delivering the activities?
- What are best practices for program delivery?

Target groups (process)

Note: Think about who the program is designed for. What do you need to know about who you are reaching and who you are not?

- How many children/young people and/or families were reached?
- What are the program participants' characteristics (presenting issues and demographics)?
- Did the program reach the intended target group?

- To what extent did activities reach children/young people and/or families outside the target group?
- What proportion of children/young people and/or families were reached?
- Were potential participants (non-participants) aware of the program?
- Were participants satisfied with the delivery of the program?
- How do staff, community partners and referring agencies feel about the program?
- How did participants find out about the program?
- How many children/young people and/or families completed the program?

Outcomes

- Have the short-term outcomes been achieved (for example, the development of coping skills, such as mindfulness and positive self-talk)?
- Have the medium-term outcomes been achieved (for example, frequent attendance and active participation in a support group)?

Appendix C: Assess the validity and reliability of your measures

Appendix C provides a set of questions to guide the assessment of validity and reliability when considering measures for your program evaluation. By considering these questions, you can ensure the measures you select align with your objectives and provide accurate and consistent results.

The reliability and validity of the measure are sufficiently high if the measure is consistent over time and the measure is accurate in assessing what it is intended to. This may be assessed using various statistics (for example, a Cronbach's alpha above 0.70 for internal consistency, a test-retest correlation above 0.70 for stability, and a convergent validity correlation of 0.50 or higher with established measures).

Questions to consider for ensuring validity:

- With what target populations has the measure been used?
- What outcomes have been assessed using this measure?
- What additional measures has this measure been correlated with? Is there a strong correlation with other known measures (construct validity)?
- What outcomes have been assessed using this measure?
- How closely do the measures' reported objectives correspond to your objectives?
- What have reviewers and critics said about the measure?

Questions to consider for ensuring reliability:

- Do the authors indicate the size and nature of groups for which data is reported?
- Do they report reliability for each type of group that may be included in the evaluation?
- Do they indicate the type of reliability coefficient computed (for example, test-retest or internal consistency reliability)?
- Do they give the mean and standard deviation for the groups?

Appendix D: Identify appropriate measures for your evaluation

Appendix D provides a set of criteria to help you choose the most suitable measures for evaluating your program. By assessing potential measures against these criteria, you can ensure that the selected measures align with your program's objectives and effectively capture the information you seek.

To select appropriate measures for your program evaluation, consider the following criteria:

- The tool measures what the program wants to know.
- The measure is appropriate for the intended population (consider factors such as age, literacy level, attention span, and cultural sensitivity)
- The measure was designed for the purpose for which it will be used.
- The measure is appropriate for the cultural backgrounds of children/ families that will be assessed.
- The measure is valid and reliable (see Appendix C).
- There are sufficient resources available to obtain and use the measure.
- Staff members who will be administering the measure have (or will receive) the necessary training for administering and scoring the measure correctly.
- It is feasible to administer the measure based on the developer's directions.
- It is feasible to administer the measure in settings that children/young people (and/or families) are comfortable with.
- The measure facilitates sharing information about children/young people (or families) with staff and caregivers.

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