Chapter 15:
Evaluation
An evaluation plan should be part of your overall implementation strategy. Evaluation improves program implementation by documenting the flow of activities and assessing how well participants acquire skills and information. Evaluation also serves as a tool to promote and gain support for programs.

**Why evaluate?**

Evaluation is an objective means to helping improve delivery of the program to your target population. You can use evaluation to:

- document the implementation process;
- assess program performance;
- modify the implementation plan (such as selecting activities shown to be the most productive) to maximize the program’s effectiveness.

Administrators and funders will want to review evaluation information to justify the expenditure of program funds. Determine what information your supporters require before you begin the evaluation.

**What is in an evaluation plan?**

Start your evaluation planning when you plan the program. Remember that is not designed to directly reduce rates of high risk behaviors, but to give young people an overview of information and skills essential for improving their life options.

The following four steps will help you devise and implement a workable evaluation plan:

**Review objectives and decide what to measure.**

Your program objectives are your evaluation road map; they outline what you aim to achieve. Each objective should be measurable. Ask “How will I know when this objective is fulfilled?” The answer suggests what you should measure. If an objective does not imply what to measure, consider how it meets program goals, then re-word it so that it is measurable.

**Collect data (measurements and information).**

Define from the start what data needs to be gathered, since most information cannot be collected after the fact. Simple forms can track logistical information, such as number of sessions held, field notes and attendance. Surveys and interviews can measure knowledge, attitudes and intended behavior before and after the program.

**Analyze the data.**

Analysis summarizes the information you have gathered, illustrating the overall picture. Use simple analytic techniques, such as counts (frequencies) and percentages. The findings will allow you to examine trends or compare sub-groups within your target population.

**Apply the information you have gathered.**

Evaluation results will help you recognize areas that are effective and pinpoint aspects you need to modify. Compare the results to your expectations (as stated in your objectives). Reexamine your program activities. Institute changes to improve your program.

**What kind of evaluation should I do?**

There are basically two types of evaluation: process and impact/outcome.

**Process evaluation documents how the program is running.** It focuses on program logistics: number of sessions, number and duration of activities, participants’ acceptance of specific activities and their overall acceptance of the program. Process evaluation is easier to conduct than impact evaluation.
Impact or outcome evaluation determines the program’s effect on participants. It shows whether participants have acquired the information and skills presented by evaluating changes in their knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. Though it is relatively easy to assess whether participants have acquired knowledge, determining attitude or behavior change is more difficult. This type of evaluation may require assistance from a professional evaluator.

How do I collect information?

The methods you choose to collect information will depend on your experience, your specific program objectives and your available resources. Collecting information need not be burdensome, if appropriate systems are planned ahead of time. Use simple forms to collect powerful data for either process or impact evaluations.

✔ **Timelines:** Devise planning calendars or charts to plot program activities by the week or month. Compare the actual timing of activities to the original plan.

✔ **Attendance sheets:** Create attendance sheets to record participant retention records.

✔ **Field notes and reports:** Keep field notes as an excellent source of descriptive information. Simple protocols, such as the questionnaire at the end of this chapter, help standardize, collect and store information conveniently. Keep forms from each session in a file or notebook for easy access. Use them to give periodic progress reports to colleagues, administrators or funders.

✔ **Surveys:** Surveys can measure background information, knowledge, attitudes, behaviors or behavioral intent. They are a series of written or verbal questions for participants. Tests are actually surveys that measure knowledge or skills. Have participants fill out the same survey questionnaire before and after an activity to determine what they know before the activity and what they learn from it. Distribute the survey again at one or several points in the future to measure participants’ retention of information. Be aware that it is easier to record intended changes in behavior than actual changes.

✔ **Focus groups:** Convene a small number of participants. Ask the entire group questions and encourage members to discuss responses. Use a script or discussion guide for focus groups and repeat the same questions with other small groups.

✔ **Interviews:** Talk with individual participants about the program. Use a survey format, but ask questions verbally. The interviewer asks questions and records answers. The participant is free to respond in any way.

✔ **Games:** Develop game formats that measure knowledge gained from or enjoyment of activities. Sample games include:

✔ **Matching:** Write several descriptive words or statements on index cards: “good,” “bad,” “great,” “boring,” “interesting,” “useless,” “good to know,” and so on. The player picks cards from a box or basket, then describes some aspect of the activity which, for her or him, matches the word picked.

✔ **Team work:** Divide the group into teams and give each team a specific evaluation task. For example, have each group take an outline of a particular session’s activities and describe its positive and negative aspects. Have the group describe why each aspect was placed on the list and recommend something that would improve it.

✔ **Gameshow:** Adapt a popular gameshow to quiz participants on the knowledge they have gained. Recruit participants to adapt the gameshow, thereby allowing them to help direct the evaluation.
How do I analyze the data?

The type of data collected and the way it will be used influences the analysis. That is why it is so important to plan evaluation from the beginning.

Compare expectations of program plans with actual program activities. Record any changes in the plan and the reasons for them. Then compare timelines, work plans and budget projections to the actual dates, sequence of events or amounts spent.

Pay particular attention to the outcome of training exercises and the conclusions of group discussions. Look for areas that will help you improve the program and continue program activities. If you have given tests on material covered, this, too, is part of your evaluation

✓ Counts: You can count the number of presentations, materials distributed, participants or correct responses on a questionnaire. Compare counts to the total number in the target population or to a comparison group. Counts can also be summed up for a total score, where a 10-item questionnaire receives one point for each correct answer, or a maximum score of 10.

✓ Summary statistics: These detail the characteristics of the target population. They include averages, such as means and medians, and percentages. You can calculate the percentage of participants that answered yes to a question or calculate the average number of correct responses on a test. When you have large numbers, summary statistics are often easier to interpret than counts.

✓ Categories: You can also divide the information by categories within the participant group (gender or grade level, for example). You can tally the number of responses from each category in separate columns (male and female, for example) or divide the surveys into male and female stacks, then tally responses.

How do I involve participants in evaluation?

Participants can be involved in all stages of evaluation from planning to analysis. In a classroom setting, students often record attendance, grade papers or otherwise participate in evaluation. You can apply the same principles to designing and implementing your evaluation plan.

Participants can help design or review evaluation plans or develop games, questions and tracking systems. They can help collect data by recording responses in a group discussion. They can analyze the data by scoring tests, categorizing responses and calculating counts and percentages.

How can I get help with my evaluation?

There are numerous reasons for getting help with evaluation plans. You may need someone to review your plan, or help design a survey or select samples. You may want help understanding the evaluation process before you begin planning. Your sponsor or funder may request a more precise evaluation than you feel capable of doing. Rigorous evaluations require money, time and thoughtful preparation with the expert help of a trained evaluator. Whatever your needs, help is available.

✓ Written material: There are a variety of books and step-by-step guides about evaluation. Check with your local or university library or social science, psychology and public health departments. Funding institutions, and organizations that conduct applied research in the social sciences, often have simple written materials to guide evaluation planning.

✓ Technical assistance: Contact the education, social sciences and public health departments of colleges or universities to find out if an evaluator — either a professor or a graduate student — can help with your project. Often, graduate students are eager for work experience and may charge fees lower than those of professional evaluators. Sometimes these students can use your data for a thesis or dissertation, in exchange for their work. There are also a number of organizations that may be able to help with different aspects of the evaluation. Check with local youth agencies and public health organizations for leads.
Whether working with a graduate student or a seasoned professional, gain the best results by starting the process in the early stages of the program and by communicating your needs clearly. If you want anything more than cursory assistance, you will need to contact an evaluator at least three months before you need his or her direct assistance.

The evaluator will want to know how much time your project will need. If you are unclear about the steps — and therefore the time required — discuss precise scheduling at the initial meeting. If you keep adding tasks after the evaluation begins, volunteers may withdraw from the project, while paid consultants will need additional funding.

Acknowledge any evaluation help often and publicly, as a regular part of reporting to funders, agencies and the community.

In summary

A well-planned evaluation will make you feel good about your work. If program participants assist you actively, that suggests they want the information and skills provided. Increases in knowledge suggest that participatory exercises are a good way to learn. Parents, administrators and funders want to know that young people are feeling more confident about meeting the challenges life offers. Evaluation will allow you to make your program even better next year.

Advocates for Youth wants to do the same! Please make a commitment, now, to complete our evaluation form when you conclude your program. Advocates’ evaluation form follows the Sample Field Notes Form. Thank you!
Sample Field Notes Form

Date ________________________________________________________________

Leader’s Name ________________________________________________________

Briefly describe the education session (your goal(s), which activities you used and so on). ____________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Number of participants  male ____________________________ female ________________

What was successful about the session? ____________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What needs to be improved? ____________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Evaluation Form for Leaders

We appreciate feedback from leaders to find out how you are using the material and how satisfied you are. Please complete the questionnaire below after you have used *Life Planning Education* for the first time. Return to: Advocates for Youth, 1025 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, D.C. 20005. Thank you for your help!

1. Grade level used with: 6  7  8  9  10  11  12

2. Setting:
   - Public school
   - Private school
   - Church/religious organization
   - Youth serving organization
   - Other, specify ____________________________

3. Time:
   - During school hours
   - Weekdays after school
   - Weekends
   - Summer

4. Frequency:
   - Once or twice a week
   - Three or four times a week
   - Five or more

5. Duration:
   - A month or less
   - Two to three months
   - Four to six months
   - Six months to a year
   - Over a year

6. Number of activities used:
   - All of the activities
   - At least half
   - Fewer than half

7. Program materials:
   - Only activities from *Life Planning Education*
   - Supplemented with additional activities from another curriculum
     (name: ____________________________________________ )
   - created own activities
8. In general, how were the directions for the exercises?
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Difficult  Easy

9. Overall, how was conducting the exercises?
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Difficult  Easy

10. Were the exercises:
    
    [ ] Too easy for participants
    [ ] Just about right
    [ ] Too advanced

11. Do you feel participants benefited from?
    1  2  3  4  5  6  7
    Did not benefit  Benefitted Greatly

12. Overall, how satisfied are you with?
    1  2  3  4  5  6  7
    Very satisfied  Very dissatisfied

13. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

THANK YOU!