

Program evaluation planning



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Introduction

Program evaluation refers to the process of gathering information about a program or some characteristics of the program so as to make the essential decisions about the program. Planning and evaluation should be a regular, ongoing process. Program evaluation helps the stakeholders understand, verify, and improve the impact of the services or products to the clients. Program evaluation and planning helps improve the delivery mechanisms making them more efficient, effective, and less costly. Program evaluation identifies program strengths and weaknesses; it can thus help the stakeholder improve the program accordingly.

Program evaluation and planning helps ensure that the program is developed and implemented as planned. This is accomplished by setting clear goals and targets at the start of the project. Program evaluation also helps the stake holders identify whether and when they have met the set goals and objectives. Program evaluation produce data that is essential to the management for decision making; it provides a good comparison between programs and helps identify the best program to be retained. It helps examine and describe effective programs for duplication in other departments or organizations.

The evaluation must be planned with utility in mind. This means that the results of the evaluation must be implemented. If the evaluation results are not implemented, then the evaluation was just a waste of time. To successfully set objectives, anticipate problems, and the available resources wisely, the stakeholders must be able to ask the right questions.

Asking the Right Questions

Change is the main objective of conducting a program evaluation. In order to identify the change required, the evaluation team must ask the right questions. Knowing the right question to ask is essential to the evaluators as well as the program planners. There are a number of levels of questions that may be asked during program evaluation. These levels of question may be grouped into: individual, organizational, global, national, regional, and organizational. The evaluators should seek the best level that provides a pertinent method for collecting the required data. After identifying the best level, the evaluators must craft a logical model. The evaluators must carefully draft the questions they will ask. This will help in the development of a relevant logical model. Asking the right questions will enable the evaluators get the appropriate answers. It will help to show the evaluators what difference the program has brought to the lives of the target audience.

Overview of a Logic Model

Logic model is a model mostly used by managers to evaluate how effectiveness of a program. Logic models provide a relationship between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes of a program. The main purpose of constructing a logic model is to assess how elements of a model relate to each other. If inputs or resources are available for the program, then it will be possible to implement the activities. If these activities are implemented successfully, then certain outputs or outcomes are expected. Logic models are often used for evaluation of a program. The logic model may also be used in planning, testing, and implementation stages of a program.

A simple Logic Model

The main advantage of the logic model is the ability to measure the final outcome of a program. It is possible for managers to make mistakes in the planning process and use a lot of time and money in the inputs and activities without producing the desired outcomes. The logic model enables the managers to view what certain inputs and activities will give as an output. Thus, they can assess the outcome of each alternative before they decide on the best one.

The program evaluators must be sentient of the questions they are trying to answer through program evaluation and planning. Who will be the stakeholders in the program evaluation process? Who will the results affect? Who will use these results? What data will be necessary to answer the stated questions? How will the required data be interpreted? What are the likely obstacles that the program evaluation team may face while collecting data? What financial resources should the management bring to the evaluation? What human resources should be availed for the program evaluation to succeed? What are the available methods for conducting program evaluation? What is the optimal method that can be used in this project? How will the results be used?

After determining the focus of the project, the managers will need to decide how they are going to obtain the relevant information. It is necessary to come up with suitable method of collecting data. Will the data be collected through survey, interviews, focus group, or a combination of one or more of these options?

What questions will be asked, for example multiple choice questions, open ended questions or yes/no questions? The questions be typed on a paper or will the questions be asked orally?

The managers must fully understand the organizational goals. The managers must be come up with outcomes that are to be accomplished. The outcomes must be realistic and robust. A meaningful evaluation will indicate what worked and what did not. The managers should ask whether the set objectives were accomplished. Is the developed program effective? Is it able to solve the problem for which it was designed? Does the program satisfy the user needs and the needs of the stakeholders?

Goals and Target Populations

The process of program evaluation ensures that the inputs and activities are consistent the stated goals and targets. This is important to the organization because it informs the decision making and resource allocation departments on the optimal methods that may be used. Successful planning and evaluation may vary from one institution to the other, but should fit the institution's goals, targets, and the available resources.

Before planning for the outcomes, the organization management must first establish a clear mission, goal, and target. The stakeholders must agree on their collective goal as a team. After establishing the goals, the stakeholders must identify measures or indicators for meeting the goals and targets. The stakeholder should avoid just naming goals; instead, they should identify clear targets and benchmarks by which success may be measured.

The stakeholders should then measure and monitor the performance of the program with reference to the set targets and benchmarks. This ensures that the stakeholders will notice whether and when the goals and targets have been accomplished. Progress data collected must be thoroughly analyzed and shared with the relevant stakeholders for further action.

It is essential for the stakeholders to identify the methodology to be used for assessing the progress of the project. The stakeholders must identify how often and who will be responsible for collecting the progress data. The responsible person should develop a schedule for collecting the progress data throughout the year.

After the successful collection of progress data, there must be a systematic method by which the data is evaluated and reviewed. The evaluation of the progress must involve major stakeholders, administrators, and sponsors. Committees should be held and some questions asked. The questions may include: How were the goals and targets established? Were the goals and targets reached? If not, what is the status of the project towards achieving the goals? If yes, how were they reached? Were the goals reached within the specified timelines? If not, then why? Did the personnel have the necessary resources to accomplish the goals? What went well? Were there extenuation situations? How should priorities be managed to put more emphasis on achieving the goals? What needs to be changed? How should timelines be changed? How should goals be changed? How should goals be established in future?

Based on the findings, necessary adjustments must be made. After the changes are effected, the goals and targets may need to be revised. Some goals and targets may already have been met and thus, new ones may need to be added or some old ones removed. After the establishment of the new goals, the cycle begins again.

Organizational Structure

Program evaluation focuses on improving the output and outcome of the project. The stakeholders must ask themselves whether the organization is conducting the right program activities to ensure the success of the project.

The organization managers must support the implementation of the new program. The program will need financial support from the organization sponsors. If the program meets the stakeholders' expectations, then, it is most likely that they will support it financially. This will ensure success of the project. The organization will need to support the new program and involve the people who will be using the program throughout its development process. Involvement of the program users ensures there will be no resistance to change during the implementation phase. It also enhances training and improves learning.

What is required of the staff in order to successfully implement the program? How staff is trained on the implementation and use the program? What is required of the stakeholders for the program to succeed? What are the typical complaints from the staff and users of the program? What are the recommendations from staff and other stakeholders?

Time Lines and Resources

Anticipated timeline

The anticipated timeline and resources helps the stakeholders to monitor the program progress to ensure it is being carried out in the planned manner. It helps to make sure that resources are used effectively and efficiently.

Timeline helps verify that the resources are achieving stated goals in a timely fashion. The timeline can be used by the stakeholders to determine whether a certain goal may need more or less time to be accomplished. It helps to avoid misuse of resources. Timeline provide the basis for improved and informed decision making.

Program evaluation requires a careful plan that includes the need for assessment clearly set evaluation goals. The plan helps the stakeholders determine what they need to know and how will collect the relevant information to come up with a valid conclusion to make decisions. The plan helps to manage the project by keeping the entire team on track. For the plan to succeed, it must have a time schedule that the team follows strictly. This brings the need for a timeline and resource management guidelines.