

Section 2

Manuals and Guides

In this section you will find:

- Guide to Evaluation Frameworks
- Program Design and Planning Manual (Attachment: Appendix A)
- Program Monitoring and Evaluation Manual (Attachment: Appendix B)

This framework is meant to be used as a guide for GNWT staff doing evaluation work, whether it be designing and implementing an internal evaluation or working with an evaluation consultant. There are many resources available on the internet concerning evaluation and how to go about conducting one, however, if you have any questions or need clarification with this guide please feel free to contact the Program Review Office. Evaluation should be guided by the belief that program evaluations should be supportive and responsive to both program delivery staff and decision makers. Evaluation is meant to provide evidence based information on programs and therefore should be viewed as way to get to know programs better.

WHAT IS EVALUATION?

The most widely used definition of evaluation is as follows: “Program evaluation is a systematic collection of information about a program which helps you make judgments about a program, or informs decisions about future programming.”

Evaluation is how you come to make a decision about something. There are many ways a decision can be made; the key to a good decision is good information. Program evaluation helps make informed decisions based on reliable information.

Most people informally engage in evaluation every day; what to cook for dinner; what bills to pay first; how much gas to put in the car. Information is informally gathered in our heads that helps us to make decisions on everyday issues. In a meeting in Inuvik, one woman said that evaluation was not a part of her culture. It was foreign to her. One of the elders at the meeting said this was not so. His people had been evaluating and planning for thousands of years. They needed to know when the caribou herds were thinning out and when it was wise to hunt somewhere else for a few years. If you think about traditional knowledge, it developed from the practice of observation over thousands of years. It is really not all that different from the scientific method of data gathering.

WHY DOES EVALUATION MATTER?

There is a real demand to show that programs are effective. The 17th Assembly has made effective and efficient government a guiding goal for the bureaucracy. Many people depend on services, and there has to be accountability to the public for the tax dollars spent, particularly during periods of fiscal restraint.

HOW CAN EVALUATION HELP?

Evaluation has many benefits, just to name a few:

- Can help an organization to see results
- Helps to establish if there really is a problem and how it might be addressed
- Can identify unintended impacts
- Can clarify the rationale and the intent of a program
- Helps make better decisions about resource allocation and/or program direction
- Increases the knowledge and understanding of the program and can improve the way programs deliver services
- Helps to see if everything is going as planned when a program is up and running
- Can help identify needs and growth opportunities
- Provides background information and substantiation to improve the quality of programs
- Helps develop capacity for program planning
- Helps identify program successes
- Provides guidance and direction on how to monitor program performance

The following provides the general framework within which most evaluations are conducted. Within each broad category are guiding principles and areas for consideration to help ensure your project is conducted in a credible and reliable manner. We advise that once this framework is finalized, that it be formally agreed upon and approved by the project stakeholders (or Steering Committee if you have one) as this document will become your touchstone throughout the evaluation. It will help to keep the evaluation team on track.

1. PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

- Why are you doing this evaluation?
- What is the focus of the evaluation?
- What do you hope to get out of this evaluation?

2. AUDIENCE

- Who is your primary audience?
- Who will be the recipient(s) of the report?
- Who will be making decisions regarding the report recommendations?

Answering these questions up front will help you decide how to write and design the report to be as effective and meaningful as possible. Determining how to present data and findings is central to effectively communicating results (ie: some people may prefer tables to graphs, some people prefer less text and more visual representation, some people may appreciate direct quotes from clients to help tell the story). This will also help you to be aware of what you need in terms of deliverables.

For instance, in addition to the final report you will likely need an executive summary; however, some stakeholders may not read through an entire executive summary so a more concise information sheet may also be necessary.

3. RESOURCES

- If you are hiring a consultant, what is your budget?
- If the evaluation is being conducted internally, who is available to contribute and participate?
 - Who will be on your team?
 - Be as participatory as possible. Including people in the process will help create ownership and buy in of the results and build capacity.
 - Will they get approval from senior management to dedicate time to the project?
 - Do you anticipate overtime requirements?
 - Staff time and availability will affect your timeline
- Are there any materials or software you will need for the evaluation? (ie: tape recorders for focus groups, conference room rentals, data analysis software like SPSS, summer students to help collect and analyze data etc).

4. KEY QUESTIONS

What exactly do you want to know?

- Focus on meaningful questions; take the time up front to design your questions to get you the information you want. Improperly designed questions can throw an evaluation off track very easily and likely will not lead to the desired results. When creating questions think about how you would go about answering them and if that particular wording may unintentionally throw you off track.
- Focus on priority questions – do not try to gather as much as you possibly can, this is a recipe for disaster. Instead, direct your efforts to gathering quality data rather than trying to answer a multitude of questions. Think about the purpose of each question.
- Data
 - What kind of data is already available for you to use? Is it current and accessible?
 - If there is no data to answer your questions, and collecting new data is not possible or realistic, you may have to re-think your questions.
 - Do you have to collect new data?
 - What methods will/can you use?
 - What challenges may present during data collection or analysis?
 - Consider how long it will take for you to collect the data and what your response rate will likely be. Certain methods or tools typically yield low response rates (ie: surveys/questionnaires)
 - Multiple lines of evidence are highly recommended to ensure valid and credible findings
 - The emphasis is typically put on collecting quantitative data, however, the numbers alone don't tell the whole story. Qualitative data can offer rich

information that helps provide the context within which the program operates.

- One method or data source on its own, whether it is quantitative or qualitative, is not sufficient to be considered credible or reliable. Several sources of data (both qualitative and quantitative) working together is recommended.
- The data should be internally consistent (ie: don't change your survey or interview questions half way through your sample. You may need to add a different tool or collect differently if you are not getting the information you anticipated, but make sure each tool is consistent within itself).
- Be flexible – your approach or methodologies may need to be adjusted as you get into the data collection. Keeping an open mind will help you to adjust your approach to emergent issues. There may be issues that should be investigated that you don't know about yet.
- Analysis
 - How do you plan to analyze the data?
 - Do you require specialized expertise for the analysis?
 - How do you plan to present the analysis?
 - Data analysis should be presented in a manner that will effectively speak to your audience. The analysis should inform readers, not confuse or mislead them.
 - Who will analyze the data?
 - Think about how the data will be analyzed before you start collecting it.
- Criteria for Judgment
 - How will you know if the program is a success or is having the intended impact? For instance, by which criteria will you judge the program to be a success? To be effective? To be inadequate? Doing this before you start analyzing your data helps to prevent the evaluator from being influenced by the data. It will also keep you closer to the purpose of the program and of the evaluation. Every evaluation may not require a judgment on success, however, for those evaluations that do, now is the time to establish the ground rules. This may look something like: "If we receive positive feedback from X% of respondents/clients the program will be considered successful" etc.

When immersed in an evaluation or research it is easy to lose sight of the bigger picture, so before you draft your report consider the following points about the evaluation design:

- Is the evaluation design appropriate for the objectives of the evaluation?
- Were the methods carried out appropriately and ethically?
- Is the data gathered accurate and reliable?
- What were the limitations in the data gathering and analysis?
- Were there any constraints to your methodology (i.e.: scope of the project, budget, access to data etc.)

The last two points are more of a reflection to make note of in the report.

5. CODES OF BEHAVIOR

- What ethical issues need to be addressed?
- Will there be any conflicts of interest that arise?
- Are you dealing with sensitive and/or confidential information?
 - How will you ensure confidentiality?
 - What is your plan for the raw data files with confidential information? (storage and destruction)
 - Will your client have access to the raw data files?

It is recommended that all reviews and evaluations adhere to the Canadian Evaluation Society's Guidelines for Ethical Conduct found on their website (www.evaluationcanada.ca).

6. REPORT DISSEMINATION & COMMUNICATION

Deliverables

- What product(s) are your stakeholders/ Steering Committee expecting?
 - Do they expect an executive summary?
 - Do they expect a power point presentation of the report?
 - Do they expect progress reports? How many?
 - When do they expect all of this?
 - Who on the working group/ evaluation team will be responsible for writing the report?
 - Who will be the recipients of the report?
 - How do they expect the report to be structured?
 - Do they prefer electronic PDF copies or hard copies?
 - What kind of findings will be included?
 - Do they expect recommendations or will the Steering Committee make recommendations from the findings?

Communication

- What is your communication plan?
- How often will you communicate with the Steering Committee?
- Who will be your key contact on the Steering Committee?
- Who on your working group/team will be responsible for communicating with the Steering Committee?
- How will the working group/team communicate with each other and how often?
 - What are the roles and responsibilities of the people on your team?
- How will the findings be reported?
- What are some issues that are likely to come up?

- What information will be a priority to the Steering Committee?
- How will the working group/team communicate within the organization or client group about the evaluation?
 - This step is important to try and foster buy in and cooperation from the people who will be providing you with data, or the client group you are trying to collect data from. Cooperation will help keep your timelines in check.

Negotiating these issues up front ensures everyone is aware of the reporting relationships and what is expected with regards to the evaluation.

7. TIMELINE

This will tie into the project deliverables – what will be achieved at key time points during the evaluation?

- How long do you anticipate each phase of the evaluation to take?
 - Be sure to allow extra time for the data collection and analysis phases – they almost always take longer than planned. Expect to encounter many hurdles along the way.
- Are there any meeting deadlines that need to be noted?
 - Are progress reports or the final report on the agenda of any senior management meetings that the team should be aware of?
- How much flexibility is there in the timeline?
 - Typically, the more people/ organizations involved in a project, the longer the project.
 - Be upfront about your expectations concerning the timeline

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Taking the time up front to carefully consider these points and think through the questions will pay off in the end with an evaluation that encounters less obstacles and that will achieve what you intended. After you have completed the evaluation and have drafted the report consider the following points as a checks and balance:

Evaluation Design

- Is the data presented clear and concise? (Detailed analysis and information should be included as appendices if necessary)

Findings & Conclusions

- Are all of the findings testable? Do they go beyond what the evidence supports?
- Do the findings represent a balanced perspective? (Do they reflect the range of observations and data gathered?)
- Are the results substantiated sufficiently? (The evidence to support the results should be found in the report. There should not be any surprise findings that have not been reference elsewhere in the report)
- Do the conclusions address the evaluation questions?
- Are the conclusions supported by and drawn from the findings and data?
- Do findings contradict one another?

Recommendations

- Are the recommendations supported by and flow logically from the findings and evidence gathered?
- Are the recommendations realistic and logical?
 - Can they be practically implemented?
- Will the recommendations have any unintended impacts?