CLEARINGHOUSE FOR MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

Preparing for a Program Evaluation

The program evaluation process can be confusing and overwhelming. However, understanding what to expect from a program evaluation can help professionals successfully navigate the evaluation process. Below, we have listed the different phases that are associated with conducting a program evaluation.

PHASE 1: Preparing for an Evaluation

Form an Evaluation Planning Team.

- Assemble an evaluation team who understands the evaluation process and has the expertise to provide leadership and oversight during the evaluation process.
- Decide if you will use an external (e.g., outside agency or consultant) or internal team to conduct the evaluation.

Identify Stakeholders (i.e., an individual or group who has an interest in the project/program, such as law enforcement, agency directors, community leaders, local government, superintendents) who will be included in the evaluation process.

- Plan for ways to involve stakeholders in the evaluation at various levels:
    - Determine the type of evaluation
    - Identify outcomes to measure in the evaluation
    - Define how the evaluation results will be disseminated

Conduct an Evaluability Assessment to determine if the program is ready to be evaluated.

- An Evaluability Assessment may help you determine the following:
    - Areas of strengths and weaknesses before entering the evaluation process
    - Whether an evaluation will likely improve the program

Describe the program and develop a program Logic Model.

- A Logic Model is a visual flow chart that demonstrates the program's components and the changes you expect to see as a result of the program.
- The following should be included in a Logic Model.
    - <u>Inputs</u>: resources needed to operate your program
    - <u>Outputs (Activities and Participation)</u>: products of the program's activities (i.e., what you do and who you reach)
    - <u>Outcomes and Impact</u>: results we see because of the program - the intended effects
        - <u>Short-Term Outcomes</u>: changes in skills, knowledge, attitude, or behaviors; immediate effects occurring within a few weeks or months
        - <u>Long-Term Outcomes</u>: changes in behaviors and conditions; effects occurring over many months or years
    - <u>Assumptions</u>: beliefs about the stakeholders and the implementation of the program
    - <u>External Factors</u>: factors outside the program's control that may affect the implementation or outcomes

PHASE 2: Designing and Conducting the Evaluation

Determine the type of evaluation(s) that will be conducted, such as the following:

- Process Evaluation: Determines whether program activities have been implemented as intended.
- Outcome Evaluation: Measures program effects in program participants by assessing the progress in the outcomes that the program is to achieve.
- Impact Evaluation: Assesses program effectiveness in achieving its ultimate goals.

Create evaluation questions or hypotheses and select the type of research design that will be used (e.g., Randomized Controlled Trial [RCT], RCT Wait-list, Quasi-Experimental, Pre/Posttest).

- Consider budget and resources to determine if you have the money and resources necessary to complete the evaluation from start to finish.
- Involve stakeholders in the development of the questions or hypotheses.
- Ensure the questions or hypotheses align with the program Logic Model.
- Develop a timeline and assign roles and responsibilities to members of the evaluation team to ensure the project stays on track.

Select measures to be used during the evaluation that will assess your intended outcomes.

- Consult experts who can assist in the selection process.
- If possible, select measures that are valid and reliable.

Determine the data collection time points and collect data using the measures and methods selected (e.g., pretest, posttest, 3-month follow-up).

- Determine when you want to collect data from your program participants.
- Understand data collection time points will be influenced by the type of evaluation you are conducting and the measure(s) that you select.

Analyze the data.

- Ensure you have allocated sufficient time and resources to work with and clean the data.
- Confirm conclusions are drawn directly from the data rather than reaching beyond what the data demonstrates.
- Allow time for stakeholders to review and interpret the data.

PHASE 3: Communicate Findings and Use the Results

Communicate the evaluation results.

- Identify who needs to see the evaluation results.
- Allow stakeholders to review and provide input before the results are shared publically.
- Tailor reports based on your audience to highlight findings that are most applicable to that audience.
- Use varied methods to disseminate your findings (e.g., social media, formal reports to funders and stakeholders, in-person presentations).

Use the evaluation results to discuss next steps.

- Reaching outcomes.
  - Provides validation for why continuing to implement the program is important.
  - Uses the evaluation results to create program buy-in from community members, stakeholders, and your target audience.

- Reaching some outcomes.
    - Uses the evaluation results to improve program implementation so you may have a better chance of reaching the program outcomes that were not obtained.
- Not reaching outcomes.
    - Meet with your evaluation planning team to determine if the program should continue to be implemented.
    - Discuss how the results can help you select a program that is more likely to have an impact on your population.

***Please Note**: This tool was developed based on the review of Literature and Tools related to program evaluation.*

The Clearinghouse has Technical Assistance (TA) Specialists who are available to help by offering support and guidance through the program selection, implementation, and evaluation process. The TA Specialists are available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST/EDT Monday through Friday. Use the information below to contact the Clearinghouse!

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