Evaluating Your Project

What is project evaluation? Project evaluation is an examination of how well your project has met its goals. There are two types of evaluation. Process evaluation examines your activities and methods. If your project was supposed to hold five trainings for 50 adults from Union Square, a process evaluation will examine whether you held all five trainings, whether you trained 50 people, and whether the trainees were from Union Square. Outcomes (or impact) evaluation examines how your trainings changed or improved the participants' knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Both kinds of evaluation are valuable. This document focuses mostly on outcomes evaluation.

Why should you complete an outcomes evaluation? Increasingly, grant funders are requiring some level of outcomes measurement and reporting, but there are other reasons to do it as well. You may want to confirm that you're on the right track, validate your work, gather data to justify a new direction or expansion, make the case for needing more resources, or provide helpful data to city leadership and constituents.

When should you start developing your evaluation process? Start as soon as you start designing your project (and developing any related grant proposals). Evaluation is an integral part of your project that will influence the way you state your goals and implement the project, as well as the roles and responsibilities of you and your partners.

Should you handle the evaluation process on your own, or hire an evaluator? It depends. Outcomes measurement is time consuming and a bit complicated, but hiring an evaluator is expensive. Consider your project scope and duration, your project budget, the number of people your project will serve, the number of goals and objectives you'd want to track, and your immediate and long-term plans for using outcomes data. Keep in mind that some grant funders require you to hire a professional evaluator, so you may have no choice.

What benefits can a professional evaluator bring to a project? Evaluators can design efficient data-gathering and evaluation plans; ensure that your evaluation plan tells the story you (and your funder) want to tell; help divide up the evaluation work among you, your partners, and stakeholders; develop or find effective data collection tools; identify implementation problems before they become expensive-to-fix or skew your results; write reports; plan dissemination activities; and participate in follow-up presentations about your data and outcomes.

When should you hire an evaluator? Most professional evaluators will want to be involved during the project design phase, when they can have a real influence on your data-gathering, evaluation, and reporting protocols. If you hire an evaluator after you get funded, they may offer suggestions for adjusting your goals and/or evaluation plans. If their suggestions are wide-ranging, or will affect deliverables, contact your funder first.

Things to consider when hiring an evaluator: Work with Purchasing to ensure that your hiring process meets all purchasing guidelines. Some evaluators may offer to help with your grant application free-of-charge in hopes of being hired if you get funded. Be upfront with your evaluator about City bidding requirements. Look for an evaluator who has experience with Somerville, your type of program, and (if possible) your funder. Ask to see sample reports—can the evaluator extract meaning from hard data? Can they identify multiple theories to explain data? Do they seem excited to work with you and not just judge you? Don't expect the evaluator to do all the data collection; involving the project lead, staff, partners, and stakeholders will make for a stronger grant proposal, support deeper involvement in the program, and help to control costs. The Golden Rule (evaluation costs 10% of the total budget), is not always true. Base fees on the Scope of Work and tie evaluator payments to specific benchmarks.

Whether you evaluate a project on your own, or work with a professional evaluator, these are the basic steps. The Grants Development Department is happy to help you develop any part of this process:

<table>
<tr><th>What</th><th>Why</th><th>How</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">WHILE DEVELOPING YOUR PROPOSAL</td></tr>
<tr><td>Form an evaluation team with project partners & other stakeholders

If working solo: Use your supervisor as a sounding board for your evaluation tools and processes.

If hiring an evaluator:
The evaluator will become part of your evaluation team and may influence how you carry out the steps detailed below.</td><td>To incorporate multiple perspectives into the evaluation process.
To avoid doubts about your ability to fairly self-evaluate (especially if you're working solo)
To assist with identifying the best evaluator for your project (if you hire an evaluator)</td><td>Make participation in the evaluation team a component of project partnership. Outline the benefits team members will gain from an evaluation process designed to serve their needs.

If working solo: Present your project plan and evaluation plan to your supervisor and include discussion of the evaluation process in all of your supervision meetings.

If hiring an evaluator: See comments above on things to consider.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Consider creating a logic model: a flow-chart that demonstrates your theory of change. Even a brief, hand-drawn model can help organize your thoughts. Some funders require a logic model and provide a form for you to use.</td><td>To document why your project exists and what it will accomplish.
To show how your project will create the kinds of changes that you (and your funder) want.
To justify any adjustments you make to the program during implementation.</td><td>A logic model generally has six columns. Working left-to-right across the page, the contents of each column leads into the contents of the next column. The columns are:
Inputs: The resources supporting your project.
Activities: Actions supported by inputs.
Outputs: Tangible products that will last beyond your project (toolkits, lesson plans, trained people).
Short-term Outcomes (changes in people's knowledge, skills, attitudes).
Mid-term Outcomes (changes in policies, behaviors, practices).
Long-term Outcomes (changes in broad conditions).
Many projects end at the mid-term point but set the stage for long-term outcomes.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Articulate your evaluation questions</td><td>To direct your data collection before you implement the program.</td><td><u>Consider</u>:
Short- and mid-term outcomes in your logic model. How will you test for them?
Other things your evaluation team members need to know</td></tr>
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		• Things your target population needs to learn about itself • Whether this is an opportunity to add to existing knowledge As you develop your questions: • Avoid yes/no questions (e.g.: Did the number of students taking algebra courses increase?) • Use qualitative words: (e.g.: What impact did the project have on algebra enrollment levels? How effective was the project at increasing algebra enrollment? To what degree did the project increase algebra enrollment?) This is how you show degrees of change. • You may also ask participants to indicate their level of agreement with statements about your project (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree).
Identify indicators of success (benchmarks), data collection tools, and collection schedule	To quantify how well your project has done.	• If available, use state, national or industry standards • If there are no agreed-upon standards, decide what level of change or ability equals poor, marginal, adequate, good, and excellent performance. Example: 100% of program participants demonstrating 2 new behaviors by end of first quarter = good.
Design the evaluation process	• To determine how data will be collected and who will do the work. • To ensure that your whole evaluation team is appropriately involved. • To ensure that you collect data often enough to notice if your project is producing unexpected or unwanted results.	• Determine the tools you will use (interviews, electronic surveys, focus groups, observation, dot voting). • Determine whether you'll need to design or buy any tools. If so, where will you get them/who will design them and how much will they cost? • Never name-drop a commercial evaluation tool in your grant narrative without explaining why you chose it and how you'll use it. • Create a work plan and work contract and have all evaluation team members sign it.
DURING AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION		

Collect data	• To track progress as you go
	• To give your team a chance to fix implementation issues while your target population is still under your control
	• To determine final outcomes
		• Collect "outcomes data"—use your evaluation questions, tools and workplan to test against your logic model.
		    ○ Ensure that any questions asked repeatedly during the program (in surveys or pre- and post-tests, for example) are phrased the same way each time.
		    ○ Avoid conclusions not based on evidence (e.g.: "The participants seem thoroughly engaged" vs. actually interviewing the participants).
		• Collect "process data" (your own activities and methods that can affect your outcomes). Examples: Your ability to recruit enough

		people to the program, reach your target population, obtain right-sized workspace, and retain key staff.
Analyze and interpret data analyze = clean, organize, transcribe interpret = make sense, draw conclusions	• To make sure that A and B really do lead to X, Y, and Z. • To quantify your work. • To support your funder relationships	• Compare your analyzed data to the short- and medium-term outcomes in your logic model. Note successes and problems. • Review your process data—can they help explain your successes and problems? During project: Work with partners to capitalize on gains and deal with challenges. Tell your funder immediately if you substantially change project deliverables. Use your logic model and data to explain why. At end of project: Hold a "Project Wrap" meeting with your partners (or supervisor if you're working solo). Determine how you will use outcome and process data to tell your story (positive and negative) to funders and the public.
AFTER YOUR PROJECT ENDS (OR AT END OF FIRST REPORTING PERIOD)		
Communicate findings	• To meet funder requirements. • To share learning with your stakeholders and community. • To legitimize your achievements and challenges, and prompt others to see what you see. • To document the origins of methodologies and program models that you may use, and seek funding for, in the future.	• Always use funder guidelines and reporting templates if provided. • If there is no funder template, decide whether you'll use a narrative or bullets-and-data report format. • Consider including these sections in your report: ○ Project overview, goals (pull from proposal) ○ Funding dates and amount (pull from award email or letter) ○ Activities, outputs (pull from logic model) ○ Outcomes (mix hard outcomes data and interpretation) ○ Successes and challenges (use outcomes and process data to celebrate and explain) ○ Conclusion • If appropriate, disseminate your findings to other municipalities, non-profits, and/or community groups.
Incorporate lessons learned into future programming or other actions	• To show your funder that you respect their investment and will put what you've learned to good use. • To capitalize on your experiences and best practices.	Evaluation team morphs into program redevelopment team. If working solo: Use your next supervisory meeting to discuss your ideas for project retention, enhancement or redesign.