

USING LOGIC MODELS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Summary

This fact sheet discusses what logic models are and how they can help you organize what you have done so far and evaluate whether you are meeting your goals.

Keywords: reporting back, managing the process, analyzing data, communication tools, direction setting

What Is Program Evaluation?

Program evaluation is an organized way to understand the impacts of plans after the plans have been set in motion. You compare your original goals, objectives, and strategies with what is happening now. You can learn about what worked and what needs improvement.

It is very important to learn if your plans are working effectively. Organizations spend a lot of time, money, and other resources on planning for improvement and change. You may also need to do evaluation in order to secure or maintain funding. You need to know if you have used your resources effectively and if your ideas were appropriate.

Through evaluation, you can decide to continue with your plans or make adjustments to help your plans work better. Evaluations help to uncover problems and give you a chance to correct them. Evaluations may also help you learn new things about how your situation is changing. This enables you to serve these needs better.

When Do We Perform an Evaluation?

Ideally, you should perform evaluations on a regular schedule after allowing some time to implement plans. For example, some organizations like to evaluate their programs every 5 years.

You may also perform an evaluation if something is going wrong and needs to be addressed right away. Evaluations that are prompted by neglected problems are often disruptive to an organization or band, and may be costly.



Figure 1 | A planning team meets.

Source (USEPA Environmental Protection Agency. "Local, state, regional, and federal stakeholders work together in planning the future farmers markets and downtown," *Wikimedia Commons*. June 26, 2015. Accessed June 21, 2020. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Local,_state,_regional,_and_federal_stakeholders_work_together_in_planning_the_future_farmers_markets_and_downtown._\(19153622646\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Local,_state,_regional,_and_federal_stakeholders_work_together_in_planning_the_future_farmers_markets_and_downtown._(19153622646).jpg))

Who Can Do Program Evaluations?

Any organization can do program evaluation. Your leadership may call for a program evaluation to learn more about how their projects are doing. They may conduct one on their own or they may hire someone to do it.

What Is a Logic Model?

One way to evaluate a program is through a logic model. A logic model helps you to understand change through systematically thinking about your goals and projects. You can see how each step leads to the next step. The model is an opportunity to think about your project’s many interdependent parts.

Parts of a Logic Model

Inputs: What resources do you need to start and run the project?

Audience: Who is the project intended to reach? What might they need or like?

Activities: What are the tasks of the project?

Outcomes: What are the direct results of the project?

Impacts: What are the long-term effects of your project?

You start by identifying your inputs and your audience. You connect your inputs and audience to specific activities. From looking at the activities, you list your outcomes. Finally, you can identify your impacts.

A logic model can also help you understand that you have different levels of control over different parts of your project. For example, you may have more control over your inputs, activities and outputs. You have less control over your audience and impacts.

Example

A good example for understanding a logic model is evaluating the process of preparing a meal. When following a logic model, try to think about both broad aspects and small supporting details. Sometimes the smallest details have the biggest impact!

Below, you can think about evaluation questions for the different stages of meal preparation.

1. What are the *inputs* for a meal?
This could include food ingredients as well as pots and pans, and even the kitchen itself.
2. Who is the *audience*?
Who are you making the meal for? Friends? Family? An honoured guest?
3. What *activities* go into preparing the meal?
Shopping, chopping, and cleaning up are all good answers.
4. What are the *outcomes* of preparing this meal?
You might say that people are fed, and that you used food resources, energy, and water to cook.
5. What are the *impacts* of preparing the meal?
Perhaps you saved money, or had a healthier meal than you could get at a restaurant. Sharing your meal might help to build community.

Table 1 | Logic model framework example — making a meal.

Goal: Make a Meal				
More Control			Less Control	
Inputs	Activities	Audience	Outcomes	Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A working stove, refrigerator, & sink, • A knife and cutting board, • Pots, pans, utensils, plates, cups • Knowledge of what people like to eat, • Recipes, • A trip to the store, • Money to buy food, • Food ingredients, • A dining area, • Soap and dishrags for cleaning up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go to and from the store, • Choose foods and pay for them, • Read and follow recipe, • Prepare ingredients by chopping vegetables, beating eggs, etc., • Heat food, • Clean up the kitchen, • Serve portions, • Pack leftovers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your friends and family, • Ticketholders at an event, • Unexpected visitors, • An honoured guest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your guests satisfy their hunger, • You use some water and energy resources, • You produce some kitchen scraps and emptied food packages, • There are leftovers for tomorrow, • A gathering occurs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You practice your cooking skills or learn new ones, • You participate in the local economy, • Your kitchen scraps end up in a landfill or a compost pile, • Your guests build relationships or make new ones, • You make more plans for another dinner party

What Resources Are Needed?

Building a logic model is an important task that requires some specific resources. The most important resource is *time*. It may take more than one meeting to complete and analyze a logic model. You might choose to have recurring meetings over a few weeks, set aside a few focused days, or even opt for a weekend retreat. A team approach is best. The team should involve dedicated people who are involved in the project. Include people who are able to be fair and objective about the project under evaluation. Keep in mind that this may be an uncomfortable process at times, but the key is to use the process as a learning experience and an opportunity to discover solutions.

Tips for Holding Meetings

- Hold the meetings in a place that is accessible to everyone.
- The meeting room should seat everyone comfortably.
- Build a collection of office supplies for recording ideas and keep it together in a safe but easy-to-reach place.
- Have something to write on that everyone can see. You may use a large pad of drawing paper with an easel or a whiteboard on the wall.
- Bring markers or dry-erase markers and sticky notes.
- Ensure that everyone has a pad and pens/pencils to write down ideas.
- Be ready to take photos of, or record anything that will be erased from a whiteboard.
- A projector that can connect to a laptop may also be helpful.
- Light refreshments are always welcome!

Before beginning, it is very important to gather all relevant information about the project, from the early stages to the current state of things. Both positive and negative feedback about the project should be included. Share this knowledge with everyone on the team, so that everyone can begin at the same place.

Create a schedule for the logic model process. At the beginning of each meeting, briefly review the last meeting so that you stay on track. Have someone take notes for the meetings, and keep their notes in a safe place with the other meeting equipment. You may want to have people take turns, or you may want the same person to take notes each time.

How Do We Succeed at Evaluation?

It is important to be patient and realistic about how much time is needed to evaluate a project. Evaluation works best if it is well-organized from the start. Being organized helps the team to use time wisely. Clear communication among the evaluation team is very important.

For the most thorough evaluation, the project will be examined closely. Team members must be honest about a project's strengths and weaknesses. Teams may need to resolve conflicts and disagreements. Remind everyone of the common goal. Be creative and be caring about people's concerns. Remember that the goal is to make things better and to learn new things about the best way to help.

Most of all, evaluations should happen on a regular schedule, whether it is annually, every five years, or some other timeline that people agree upon. Do not go too long between evaluations. Problems may be brewing, and you will not be aware of them until they become difficult or expensive to fix. Regular evaluation catches problems early. The goal is to be pro-active, not re-active!

For more information on evaluation, see the *Establishing Baselines* and *Understanding KPI's* factsheets.

Final Thoughts

Evaluation is the link between the end and the beginning of a project. Evaluation teaches you important lessons about your work, and helps you to make your future work better. It helps you to see the impact of what you have been doing and makes you feel good about your impacts. You can also learn to face your challenges and develop solutions.

Evaluation can also show you when you need to ask for help. By studying and measuring your outcomes, you can make sure that you use your resources wisely.

Future project participants will also benefit from a clearly recorded history of the work, which ensures continued success and development without having to start from scratch. Finally, you can build problem-solving skills in your community by sharing your lessons with other people who want to do similar projects.

Further Reading

Indigenous Approaches to Program Evaluation by the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health

This article discusses the key parts of program evaluation on a higher level, using the logic model as an example. There is emphasis on adjustability for Indigenous values, and how both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers can work in a culturally-sensitive way.

<https://www.ccsa-nccah.ca/docs/context/FS-IndigenousApproachesProgramEvaluation-EN.pdf>

Considerations for Culturally Competent Program Evaluation by the Indigenous Child Well-being Research Network

This brief article offers insights into Indigenous values and evaluation. It discusses evaluation components similar to the logic model, and provides suggestions to shape the process to fit Indigenous needs.

<https://icwrn.uvic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Indigenous-Program-Evaluation-annotated-bib.pdf>

Evaluating Indigenous programs: a toolkit for change by Sara Hudson

This is an in-depth report on program evaluation from an Australian Indigenous perspective. It calls for rooting government-led evaluation programs in Indigenous values, as well as keeping up-to-date with research about good evaluation techniques.

<https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2017/06/rr28.pdf>

Endnotes

- 1 Huck, Erin. "The Four Es of Evaluation." Presentation on October 19, 2018 at the 16th annual The Gathering conference at St. John's High School, Winnipeg, MB.
- 2 Hudson, Sara. "Evaluating Indigenous programs: a toolkit for change." The Centre for Independent Studies. June 2017. <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2017/06/rr28.pdf>
- 3 Indigenous Child Well-being Research Network (ICWRN). "Considerations for Culturally Competent Program Evaluation." Last modified 2013. <https://icwrn.uvic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Indigenous-Program-Evaluation-annotated-bib.pdf>
- 4 National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. "Indigenous Approaches to Program Evaluation." 2013. <https://www.ccsa-nccah.ca/docs/context/FS-IndigenousApproachesProgramEvaluation-EN.pdf>
- 5 The Pell Institute and Pathways to College Network. "Using a logic model." Last modified 2018. <http://toolkit.pellinstitute.org/evaluation-guide/plan-budget/using-a-logic-model/>