



CHAPTER 13

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program evaluation is a tool used to measure whether a project or program is doing what it aims to do. It is not a test, but an opportunity to improve and build on the existing program. There are two types of evaluation:

1. Process (to see how things are coming along).
2. Outcome (to compare the results with the objectives).

This chapter outlines the basics of program evaluation: Why, when, what, who, and how. A sample program evaluation form is included in the appendix.

Evaluation works best when a program begins with clear objectives. For example, a program to increase the use of traditional languages at Sunnyside Beach Early Childhood Program might have an objective that states:

“By December 2002, 50% of children at Sunnyside Beach Early Childhood Program will know how to use Halkomelem for greetings and numbers up to ten.”

When you evaluate the program in December 2002, you will measure whether you have achieved the objective. Methods for evaluation are discussed later in this chapter.

Why evaluate?

Program evaluations help to:

1. Determine new and/or ongoing needs.
2. Measure progress.
3. Show funders, parents and communities that you are accountable.
4. Identify program strengths that can be shared with other early childhood programs.
5. Contribute to policy development.
6. Understand which things work (or not) in the program, and why.

Many funders will require you to evaluate a program as part of your funding agreement.

When to evaluate

For a process evaluation, you can evaluate your program at regular intervals. You may decide on once or twice a year.

For an outcome evaluation, you will evaluate your program when it is complete. Outcome evaluations are most appropriate for short-term programs with a definite end.

What to evaluate

Each aspect of your early childhood education program should be reviewed at some point. It is not necessary to review each area at the same time. Some areas for review are:

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| 1. Program activities | 9. Staff & parent communication |
| 2. Routines | 10. Public relations |
| 3. Health and safety policies and procedures | 11. Staff relations, staff supervision, staff professional development |
| 4. Physical facilities | 12. Financial management |
| 5. Materials and supplies | 13. Program quality |
| 6. Community relations | 14. Administrative practices |
| 7. Nutrition | 15. Hiring practices |
| 8. Cultural program | |

Who to Involve

For each evaluation, be sure to involve all interested parties. Your goal should be to create a balanced evaluation team consisting of a broad selection of community members. You may want to hire an independent evaluator to ensure fairness. Here are two examples of who to involve:

Program evaluation

1. Program committee members
2. Director/coordinator/supervisor of the program
3. Staff
4. Elders
5. Volunteers
6. Children
7. Parents

Hiring practices evaluation

1. Program committee members
2. Director/coordinator/supervisor of the program
3. Staff

How to evaluate

When planning how you will evaluate your program, keep in mind three issues:

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|----|-----------------------------|----|--------------------------|----|--------|
| 1. | Principles of
evaluation | 2. | Methods of
evaluation | 3. | Ethics |
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Principles of Evaluation

1. Evaluation should be planned (set aside time and money) annually.
2. Evaluation should follow from the goals and objectives of your program.

For example, if your program aims to teach children a language, the evaluation might check that there are books in the language in the centre, look for evidence that programming integrates the language, and ask children to demonstrate some of the phrases they have learned (remind them that it isn't a test). It is a good idea to ask children if they like how language is taught in the program and if there other ways they would suggest.
3. Topics and questions should be decided and written down in advance.
4. Evaluation should be systematic (ask the same questions to each person under similar circumstances).
5. Evaluation should be useful to the program/people being evaluated.
6. Evaluation should use culturally relevant measures and indicators of success.
7. There should be an established framework for periodic overall and ongoing evaluation.

Methods of Evaluation

There are a variety of evaluation tools that you can use to assess the program. Some of these are:

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| 1. | Focus groups | 3. | Testing | 5. | Review of data |
| 2. | Questionnaires | 4. | Observation | 6. | Interviews |

Try using a chart like this to plan the methods you will use:

Evaluation questions	Who has the information?	How can we get the information?
Do children use the local language in the program daily?	Coordinator Staff Children	Interviews Review of program plan Observation
What can we do to increase children's use of the language?	Children Coordinators of other programs	Interviews Questionnaire

Ethics

When conducting an evaluation, it is important to be respectful of those who help you. It is a good idea to follow these guidelines:

1. First and foremost, your questions should not harm or threaten respondents in any way.
2. Maintain confidentiality. You will need each individual's signed permission to observe them or to have access to their private information. If respondents are under 18, you must have signed consent from their legal guardian.
3. Make sure that only the evaluation committee has access to completed interviews and questionnaires. Do not write names on the completed records. Use code names/numbers instead. Keep the list of names/code names in a locked file.

Some people may not be interested in participating in the evaluation. You may need to gently remind them why the evaluation is important and why their response is needed.

The evaluation process

Policies and procedures for program evaluation should be built into the program from the beginning. Evaluation generally involves five steps:

1. Define the project to be evaluated. (Who the evaluation is for, who will conduct the evaluation, and when. Also define the goals of the evaluation.)

For example, “The policy circle has asked an evaluation committee to evaluate the language program to see how it can be improved. The committee will be made up of an external consultant and community members not directly involved in the program. It will take place during the first two weeks of June.”

2. With input from interested parties (e.g. the people whose work will be evaluated), define questions and indicators of each objective.

For example, “To what extent is the local language used in the program? A high level of use will be indicated by: children using the language daily; caregivers using the language daily; signs in the facility are written in the language, the program has links to other language programs.”

3. Plan the method of evaluation and collect the information.

For example, use questionnaires, surveys, program records, and observation. Also, where applicable, collect newsletters from the program, letters of support from parents, financial statements, and information about how many families are served by the program.

4. Interpret the results and make recommendations.

What are the various responses? Are there similar responses that can be grouped together? Can you use any quotes to summarize an idea?

5. Use the results to implement changes and improvements.

Evaluation questions

The questions you ask should be very specific to what is being evaluated. For example, in a review of hiring processes, you might ask interviewers if they felt they had enough time to reflect between candidate interviews. Other questions that may be useful are:

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| 1. Did we do what we said we would? | 10. Are desired results achieved through the activities? (For example, are children learning the local language and integrating it into their daily lives?) |
| 2. What strategies worked? | |
| 3. What strategies didn't work? | |
| 4. What characteristics have hindered or helped the program? | 11. Is the program running in a cost-effective manner? How can it improve? |
| 5. What difference did this program make? | 12. Is there financial accountability for the program? |
| 6. What could we be doing differently? | 13. Are the facilities being used most effectively? |
| 7. What will we do now? | 14. Are the facilities still safe, functional, flexible, and visually appealing? |
| 8. Do the activities meet the goals and objectives of the program? | 15. Are program records (children's health records, attendance records, consent forms) up-to-date? |
| 9. Are the goals and objectives of the program still relevant? | |

The evaluation budget

When you prepare your operating budget, be sure to set aside funds for evaluation. Here is a list of items usually associated with evaluation:

1. External consultants
2. Travel/meals
3. Communication (telephone, fax, postage)
4. Printing and copying
5. Honorariums

An example of a program evaluation form is included in the appendix of this chapter. When reviewing this sample evaluation, keep in mind that all programs are different. You may want to customize your evaluation by using other available templates. Also, funding agencies may specify their own criteria for evaluation.

REFERENCES

*** Indicates resources available on loan through the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society.**

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APPENDIX 13-I

SAMPLE PROGRAM EVALUATION FORM

This program evaluation form is based on the quality indicators in table 3-1.
Include additional indicators based on your unique program.

Quality Indicators	Yes	Needs Improvement	Comments
<p>The program is culturally meaningful to the children and community.</p> <p>Children are encouraged to be proud of their heritage.</p> <p>Children have opportunities to learn the language spoken by their ancestors.</p> <p>Children participate in local cultural events.</p>			
<p>The setting encourages appropriate child-staff interaction.</p> <p>Space for one-on-one, small group, and large group activities.</p> <p>Appropriate child:staff ratios.</p> <p>The facility design permits children to be seen at all times.</p>			
<p>The classrooms are appropriate sizes.</p> <p>Space is approved by local licensing office.</p>			
<p>The setting helps children develop independence and self-help skills.</p> <p>Children have a convenient place to hang up their coats and cubbies to keep their belongings.</p> <p>Furniture is child-sized.</p> <p>Mirrors, water fountains, and washrooms are child-sized and accessible to children.</p>			

Evaluation

Quality Indicators	Yes	Needs Improvement	Comments
<p>The physical environment is suitable for children who require extra support.</p> <p>The room meets regulations for access.</p> <p>The setting promotes mainstreaming of children and responds to children's special needs.</p>			
<p>Space is designed for flexibility.</p> <p>Children can rearrange space.</p> <p>Children can move freely from area to area.</p>			
<p>The classroom promotes learning.</p> <p>Sound absorbing materials are used.</p> <p>There are separate quiet areas and active areas.</p> <p>There is adequate lighting.</p> <p>There are soft elements in the environment.</p> <p>Space is provided for children's art work.</p>			
<p>The outdoor playground is child-centred.</p> <p>Licensing requirements for space are met.</p> <p>Surfaces and equipment for all types of play.</p> <p>Appropriate cushioning under equipment.</p> <p>There are both shady and sunny areas.</p> <p>The playground is fenced in and protected</p>			
<p>Facilities are safe, healthy, and sanitary.</p> <p>Policies ensure that all visitors are authorized.</p> <p>Licensing requirements are met.</p> <p>Schedules are set for cleaning and inspection.</p>			