Evaluation, Plans and Reports
Sarah Ehrhard Reid
What is evaluation?

• Use of social science research methods to assess a program’s design, implementation, and effectiveness.

• Helps programs continuously improve their work.

• Demonstrates what they are accomplishing in communities.
What is an evaluation plan?

- Written document that details all of the evaluation steps and activities you plan to conduct.
- Dynamic tool (i.e., a living document) that should be continually updated as you plan and develop each aspect of the evaluation.
Why develop an evaluation plan?

- Helps the evaluation team be more systematic and comprehensive in their evaluation efforts
- Increases efficiency of the evaluation
- Helps the evaluation team and/or program staff anticipate potential challenges and plan accordingly to avoid any missteps
- Creates a shared understanding of the purpose and use of evaluation results for program stakeholders
- Facilitates a smoother transition if staff turnover occurs
- Serves as a written understanding between the grantee and external evaluator(s), if applicable
What is an evaluation report?

• A written document that objectively describes all of the steps involved in completing the evaluation
  – Program background
  – Evaluation purpose, methods and procedures
  – Evaluation results
  – Programmatic achievements
  – Lessons learned

• Provides a transparent basis for:
  – Understanding the program’s accountability to its theory of change
  – Decision-making on policies and programs
  – Drawing lessons for program improvement
What is required?

If you are applying for an AmeriCorps grant beyond your third three-year grant award you are required to submit an Evaluation Plan for each successive three-year grant period and a report with findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>EVALUATION PLAN</th>
<th>EVALUATION REPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Continuation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Continuation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Re-compete</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Continuation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Continuation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Re-compete</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Continuation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Continuation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is required?

• If your annual CNCS program grant is less than $500,000 or an Education Award Program Grantee:
  – You must conduct an internal or an external evaluation of the program, and submit the evaluation with any subsequent application to CNCS for competitive funds as required in 45 CFR §2522.730 or to MCSC for formula funds.

• If your annual CNCS program grant is $500,000 or more:
  – You must arrange for an external evaluation of the program, and submit the evaluation with any subsequent application to CNCS for competitive funds as required in 45 CFR §2522.730 or to MCSC for formula funds.
    • Only quasi-experimental or experimental meet the requirements
  – You may request approval of an alternative evaluation approach as explained in the Missouri Notice of Funding Opportunity and Application Instructions.
What should your evaluation plan include?

Evaluation Plan Outline

I. Introduction
II. Program background
III. Research questions
IV. Evaluation design
V. Data collection
VI. Analysis plan
VII. Timeline
VIII. Budget and other
I. Introduction

• The introduction is intended to establish the context of your planned evaluation.

• It should explain:
  – Your program model (brief overview)
  – Purpose, scope, and timeframe of the evaluation
  – Intended use and users of the evaluation results
  – Who will be involved in planning and implementing the evaluation
II. Program background

• A description of the program and which specific program components the evaluation will focus on helps set the stage for understanding the evaluation approach.

• Your program background section should include:
  – Statement of need
  – Your program’s theory of change and supporting research evidence
  – Summary of previous evaluations (if applicable)
  – Narrative account of your program
  – Your program’s logic model
  – Description of which program components the evaluation will focus on
III: Evaluation research questions

• Choosing research questions is key to defining exactly what it is the evaluation is trying to accomplish.

• What characterizes a good research question?
  – Clearly stated and specific
  – Aligns with your program’s theory of change and logic model
  – Will lead to measurable or observable results
  – Realistic to answer given the resources, time, and experience of those doing the evaluation
  – Builds upon results from previous research and evaluations (if applicable)
III: Evaluation research questions

Process and outcome objectives generate different kinds of research questions.

Research questions for **process objectives** ask:
- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?

Research questions for **outcome objectives** ask about:
- Changes?
- Effects?
- Impacts?

**About:**
- Inputs/resources
- Program activities
- Outputs
- Stakeholder views

**In:**
- (Short-term) Knowledge
- (Medium-term) Skills
- (Long-term) Attitudes

**Out:**
- Behaviors
- Actions
- Opinions
- Status
# Logic model of a fictional homelessness prevention program

## Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INPUTS</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>OUTPUTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What we invest</td>
<td>What we do</td>
<td>Direct products from program activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short-Term</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in # of families averting displacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased knowledge of responsible home owner or tenant practices/skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased knowledge of resources/services in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># families received relocation and stabilization services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># families attended workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of program participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Funding**
  - Staff
    - AmeriCorps members
    - Non-AmeriCorps volunteers
  - Research
Examples of process evaluation questions

• Who did the program reach in its first year of operation?
  – What are the demographic characteristics of those served?
  – How many families did it reach overall and by service activity?

• How well was the program delivered and received?
  – Was each activity implemented according to standards or protocol? Why or why not?
  – How satisfied are the program’s beneficiaries with the services they received?
Examples of outcome evaluation questions

- Did those served by the program increase their knowledge of responsible home ownership or tenant practices and skills?
  - How does their change in knowledge compare to a matched comparison group of individuals who did not participate in the program?
- Did those served by the program adopt more responsible home ownership or tenant practices and skills?
IV: Evaluation design

• Evaluation design is the structure that provides the information needed to answer each of your evaluation questions.

• Your intended evaluation design should be based on and aligned with the following:
  – Your program’s theory of change and logic model
  – Primary purpose of the evaluation and key research questions
  – Funder’s evaluation requirements
  – Resources available for the evaluation
IV: Evaluation design - Process

- Process evaluation
  - Focuses on a program’s inputs, activities, and outputs
  - Documents what the program is doing and the extent to which the program has been implemented as intended
  - Informs changes or improvements in the program’s operations
  - Includes qualitative and quantitative data collection
  - Does not require advanced statistical methods
  - Does not require a comparison or control group
Non-Experimental Outcome Evaluation Design

- Outcomes are only tracked for the intervention group.
- There are several variations within the category of non-experimental outcome designs, differing only in number and timing of outcome measurement points:
  a) Single group post-test
  b) Single group pre- and posttest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Single group post-test</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Single group pre- and posttest</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X = intervention is administered
0 = measurement is taken
IV: Evaluation design-Outcome

Quasi-Experimental Evaluation Design

- Defined by collecting data on two or more study groups – an intervention group and a comparison group.
- The intervention and comparison groups are identified from pre-existing or self-selected groups and are not formed through a random assignment process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Group</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Group</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X = intervention is administered
0 = measurement is taken

- Pre-existing differences between the intervention and comparison groups at the outset of the intervention may lead to inaccurate estimates of the program’s effects.
Experimental Evaluation Design (Randomized Controlled Trial)

- Defined by collecting data on two or more study groups – an intervention group and a control group.
- Random assignment techniques (e.g., lottery draw) are used by the evaluator to assign study participants to either the intervention or the control group.
- Random assignment ensures the study groups are equivalent prior to intervention, thus experimental designs are often considered the most credible design in regards to producing evidence of program impact.

<table>
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<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Group</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randomly assigned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randomly assigned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X = intervention is administered
0 = measurement is taken
IV: Evaluation design

• Describe your evaluation study group(s)
  – The evaluation design section of your plan should provide a description of each study group.
  – Explain how each study group will be identified.
    • Define the target population from which you will recruit your study group participants.
    • Describe how you will access or recruit participants for each study group.
    • Specify any applicable eligibility criteria for each study group (e.g., study participants from your target population must be within a certain age range, hold a certain degree type).
V: Data collection

• This section focuses on the data you plan to collect to answer your key research questions.

• Describe how you plan to answer each research question by specifying:
  – What information will be collected (i.e., data indicators)
  – Who/what will be the source of data
  – Data collection tools/instruments
  – When the data will be collected and by whom
  – Sampling methods (if any)
V: Data collection

• Indicators (or variables)
  – Help define exactly what information will be used to answer your research questions.
  – Specific, observable, and measurable sources of information
  – Can be quantitative (numerical) or qualitative (non-numerical).
  – There can be more than one indicator for each activity or outcome you choose to measure.

• Identify your data sources.
  – Existing data (e.g., administrative records, program databases, external datasets, program documents)
  – Beneficiaries, comparison/control group individuals, program staff, AmeriCorps members
V: Data collection

- Identify your data collection tools/instruments.
  - Surveys
  - Interview protocols
  - Focus groups guides
  - Observation templates

- Specify the start and end date and frequency of data collection.
  - Single measure (e.g., after the intervention only)
  - Pre- and post-measures before and after the intervention
  - At various times or continuously during the course of the intervention
  - Over time (longitudinal)
V: Data collection

• Specify who will be responsible for collecting the data.
  – Internal program staff or AmeriCorps members
  – External evaluator

• Describe your approach to managing and securing the data.

• Specify whether a sample will be drawn.
  – Will you collect data on the entire population or a sample?
  – If selecting a sample, include information on:
    – The population from which your sample will be drawn
    – Selected sampling techniques
    – Expected sample size
  – Sampling is a complex process and should be determined by an experienced evaluator.
VI: Analysis plan

• This section explains the analytic techniques you plan to use in the evaluation.
  – Quantitative data analysis techniques
    • Statistical analysis (mean, median, chi-square, t-test, ANOVA, regression, etc.)
  – Qualitative data analysis techniques
    • Content analysis (cross-site analysis, theme identification, case study descriptions)
## VI: Analysis plan

### Process Evaluation of a Homelessness Prevention Program for Low-income Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>What is collected and how?</th>
<th>From whom / data sources?</th>
<th>When collected and by whom?</th>
<th>How will you analyze the data?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Is the program’s activity – educational workshops - being implemented as designed? | a) Duration of workshops  
b) Participant workshop attendance rates  
c) Topics covered by member  
c) Members delivery of program curriculum during workshops | a, b, and c) Members report details about workshops in logs with pre-defined categories of reporting  
a and b) observations of workshops | a, b, and c) Member logs  
a and b) Evaluator observes members delivery of curriculum | a, b, and c) Evaluator collects the workshop logs quarterly  
a) Quarterly observations by the evaluator(s) using structured observation guides | a, b, and c) Generate average duration of workshops; average rate of workshop attendance; and frequencies on use of curriculum;  
c) Generate frequencies and averages on quantitative data (e.g., ratings scales, frequency scales) and thematically code and analyze open-ended comments/notes |
## VI: Analysis plan

### Impact Evaluation of a Homelessness Prevention Program for Low-income Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Outcome of interest</th>
<th>What is collected and how?</th>
<th>From whom / data sources?</th>
<th>When collected and by whom?</th>
<th>How will you analyze the data?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What impact does the homelessness prevention program have on beneficiaries’ ability to hold a stable tenancy relative to a comparison group? | Tenancy status of low-income families at risk of homelessness | Low income families’ housing stability is measured with a survey. | a) Low-income families participating in the program serve as the intervention group.  
   b) Low-income families facing an immediate housing crisis that do not participate in a homelessness prevention program serve as the comparison group. | The evaluator administers the survey at two time points:  
   - before the homelessness prevention program begins  
   - 1 year after the homelessness prevention program is implemented | Calculate the difference in average outcome in the intervention group minus the difference in average outcome in the comparison group before and after treatment (difference in differences method) |
VII. Timeline

- Include a timeline of when you expect to carry out each of your key evaluation activities specified in your plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Activities</th>
<th>Example of Timing of Activities for Grant Year 1 – Grant Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1: Sept-Nov; Q2: Dec-Feb; Q3: Mar-May; Q4: Jun-Aug</td>
<td>Year 1                     Year 2                     Year 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop/refine logic model</td>
<td>Q1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hire/identify evaluator</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop evaluation plan and data collection tools</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit study participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis/ interpretation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report/ dissemination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VIII. Budget and other

• Include an estimated budget for your evaluation. Common cost categories:
  – Staff time
  – Materials, equipment, and supplies
  – Travel
  – Data collection

• Include any other relevant information that is not in other sections of your evaluation plan:
  – Institutional Review Board (IRB) clearance
Appendix

• References
  – Provide complete citations of any reports or publications cited in the body of the plan

• Copies of data collection tools or instruments you plan to use
  – Surveys
  – Interview protocols
What is an evaluation report?

• A written document that objectively describes all of the steps involved in completing the evaluation
  – Program background
  – Evaluation purpose, methods and procedures
  – Evaluation results
  – Programmatic achievements
  – Lessons learned

• Provides a transparent basis for: Understanding the program’s accountability to its theory of change
  – Decision-making on policies and programs
  – Drawing lessons for program improvement
Key Components of a Report

I. Executive summary
II. Background and purpose
III. Evaluation methods (design, data collection, analysis)
IV. Results
V. Conclusions and recommendations
VI. References and appendices
I. Executive Summary

• The executive summary is a short section, usually two pages or less at the beginning of the report.

• It is a condensed version of the report and should provide a brief understanding of the purpose of the evaluation and the key findings.
Things to remember

- Developing an evaluation plan should be a collaborative process that takes place over time.
- An evaluation plan is a dynamic tool and can change and be refined as you make decisions about how best to evaluate your program.
- An evaluation plan facilitates the process of keeping diverse stakeholders on the same page with regards to the actual implementation of the evaluation.
II. Background and Purpose

III. Evaluation Methods

• For these sections of the report, you should be able to draw on the write-up of the corresponding sections of the evaluation plan, editing it to reflect changes in methods used as necessary.

• Your report should contain sufficient detail to enable others to replicate the evaluation approach and objectively understand the findings.
IV. Results

• Basic guidelines in reporting evaluation results
  – Organize results such that they clearly answer each evaluation question/objective
  – Present objective (unbiased), clear, and factual results
  – Consider using tables or charts to present quantitative results if easier to interpret
IV. Results

• Acknowledge limitations of the study
  – Specify the main limitations of the evaluation design and methods and a rationale for why
    • How reliable are your results based on the design you used?
  – Explain the implications of each limitation and how it affects interpretation of the evaluation results
  – Connect the study’s limitations to suggestions for further research
    • Explain how you might want to address any unanswered questions in a future study
V. Conclusions and Recommendations

• Basic guidelines in reporting conclusions and recommendations:
  – Answer the evaluation questions/objectives
    – Explain which program objectives were and were not met
    – Give possible reasons why
  – Support conclusions with factual evidence from study results
  – Recommend future program improvements
VI. References and Appendices

• References
  – Provide complete citations of any reports or publications cited in the body of the report

• Appendix
  – Provide a copy of all data collection tools (e.g., questionnaires and interview protocols)
  – Detailed documentation about the program (e.g., copy of program logic model)
  – Detailed documentation about the evaluation methodology (e.g., power analysis calculations, statistical models)
How To Find Resources On The CNCS Website

www.nationalservice.gov
A place for State Service Commission and program staff to find tools to support strong AmeriCorps programs and national service initiatives.

See resources for AmeriCorps programs on start-up, financial & grant management, program management, and member management.

Featured Video

National Service: #AmeriDay

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Please email ServiceResources@cns.gov
Evaluation Resources

Evaluation is the use of social science research methods to assess a program’s design, implementation, and effectiveness. It is a tool that helps programs continuously improve their work and demonstrate what they are accomplishing in communities. Evaluation gives programs an opportunity to test their interventions, adjust services to best meet community needs, and collect data to support their work. Evaluation is more than a funder’s requirement; it is a powerful tool for improving a program and increasing its ability to serve people more efficiently and effectively.

Explore Resources

CNCS has created a number of resources to assist your program as it moves through each stage of the evaluation process. Explore resources related to:

- Planning
- Implementation
- Analysis and Reporting
- Using Evaluation Results for Action and Improvement

Find Resources

Keywords

Search

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Featured Resources

- How to Write an Evaluation Plan
- Budgeting for Evaluation
- Managing an External Evaluation

Resources are available to learn about the evidence continuum and how to determine your program’s level of evidence.

You can also learn more about CNCS’ Evaluation Policies, including details about evaluation requirements.

Visit CNCS’ Evidence Exchange page to browse evaluation studies, ranging from promising to proven, by CNCS grantees. Browse research on volunteering, civic engagement, and other topics on our Research and Reports page.

View All Evaluation Core Curriculum Courses
Evaluation Core Curriculum Courses

The Evaluation Core Curriculum is designed to help increase your program’s capacity to evaluate its intervention. Ultimately, evaluating your program will create the knowledge needed to improve services, and allow your program to serve more people, better.

AmeriCorps State & National

- Planning
- Implementation
- Reporting
- Using Results for Action and Improvement

Many of these materials were developed by NORC at the University of Chicago, in collaboration with CNCS.

Return to the Evaluation Resources main page
Planning

**Developing the Right Research Questions:** This presentation describes the importance of research questions in overall program evaluation design, identifies the four basic steps for developing research questions, and demonstrates how to write strong research questions for different types of evaluation designs (i.e., process evaluation and outcome evaluation).

- Developing the Right Research Questions Slides (PDF) (PPT)
- Research Questions Handout (PDF) (DOC)
- Access the recording of the Developing the Right Research Questions presentation held on April 18, 2015 here. (Description of audio.)

**Budgeting for Evaluation:** This course discusses the key components of an evaluation budget and approaches for creating an evaluation budget.

- Budgeting for Evaluation Slides (PDF) (PPT)
- Access the recording of the Budgeting for Evaluation presentation held on December 11, 2014 here. (Description of audio.)

**How to Write an Evaluation Plan:** This course explains the purpose of an evaluation plan and outlines the key sections of the plan and what should be included in each section.

- How to Write an Evaluation Plan Slides (PDF) (PPT)
- How to Write an Evaluation Plan Slides February 26 (PDF)
- Handout packet for how to write an evaluation plan (PDF)
- Sample evaluation plan checklist (PDF)
- Example Impact Evaluation Plan (PDF)
- Example Impact Evaluation Plan Annotated (PDF) (Accessible Version)
- Example Process Evaluation Plan (PDF)
- Example Process Evaluation Plan Annotated (PDF) (Accessible Version)
- Access the recording of the How to Write an Evaluation Plan presentation held on February 26, 2015 here. (Description of audio.)

**Logic Models:** This course introduces the key components of a logic model and discusses how logic models can be used to support daily program operations and evaluation planning.
Any questions?
Resources

- The American Evaluation Association
  - http://www.eval.org
- The Evaluation Center
  - http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/
- Innovation Network’s Point K Learning Center
  - http://www.innonet.org
- Digital Resources for Evaluators
  - http://www.resources4evaluators.info/CommunitiesOfEvaluators.html
- SAMHSA’s National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices: Non-Researcher's Guide to Evidence-Based Program Evaluation
- CNCS’s Knowledge Network
  - https://www.nationalserviceresources.gov/evaluation-americorps