

Designing Education Projects



A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO
Needs Assessment, Project Planning
and Implementation, and Evaluation



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National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
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Acknowledgments

This manual is intended to assist NOAA professionals as they design and implement education projects.

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Their assistance is truly appreciated.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
1325 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3283
THE DIRECTOR

MEMORANDUM FOR: Warning Coordination Meteorologists

FROM: BGEN David L. Johnson, USAF Ret. 

SUBJECT: WCM Pilot Course: Designing Education Projects

DATE: June 28, 2005

NOAA has a proud tradition of educating the public about the environment. Throughout the agency, NOAA is increasing the public's environmental and scientific literacy, and NWS Warning Coordination Meteorologists are an important part of this tradition. These education efforts support the four mission goal areas identified in the NOAA Strategic Plan. Ultimately, the effectiveness of these education programs is key to the success of the agency.

This manual has been designed to assist education managers as they design and implement education projects. Through the use of the strategies that it describes, education managers can begin to understand how their programs work, and if they are meeting expectations. They will be able to clearly articulate project objectives, outcomes and impacts. They will be able to quantify changes in the knowledge, skills and behavior of their target audiences. They will be able to develop the mechanisms needed to track tangible progress toward reaching NOAA's education goals.

To be effective, project design must be rigorous, but it must also be fluid enough to capture the nuances that make a particular education program unique. This manual provides managers with a step by step description of the project design and implementation process that is both systematic and flexible. Information is presented so education managers can integrate continuous project improvement and accountability strategies into project development. When the effectiveness of a carefully crafted and targeted project is measured, sufficient data are available to determine its benefits given the overall costs of the project. By using the project design and implementation cycle, NOAA's reach is increased and the public is served.

I hope that you find this manual helpful and that you are able to use it to design effective education projects that support the agency's goals and objective to increase environmental and scientific literacy. We welcome your comments to improve future editions.

THE ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR
FOR WEATHER SERVICES



Introduction

A considerable amount of time, effort, and other resources go into the development and implementation of education projects. Quite obviously, the goal is to create effective projects that can serve as models of excellence. Whether the project is an hour-long endangered species walk, a family day festival, a severe weather awareness workshop, marine resources monitoring, or a community forum, the aim of providing quality educational experiences remains the same.

Who Should Use This Manual?

This guide has been developed to help education managers who design education projects take the development process to a new level of excellence. The guide walks through the basics of needs assessment, project planning and implementation, and evaluation. This information is intended to answer questions about the project development process and to be used as an overall project improvement tool.

A systematic approach to the overall project planning and implementation process is outlined. Education managers are encouraged to take a step back and make considered decisions that will result in increased effectiveness. Specifically, using the process described in this manual will help you:

- **Match agency's needs and capability:** Throughout the process, you will be asked to consider how the project addresses the agency's mission. Knowing how the project "fits" within the agency's priorities will ensure strategic use of resources and help you build internal support for the project. You will be able to articulate why this project is important and why NOAA should support it.
- **Set realistic and meaningful goals, objectives, and outcomes:** From the development of the needs assessment to designing the final evaluation and everything in between, you will know what you want to accomplish and how you will know if you actually accomplished it. You will set objectives that are measurable and worth measuring. You will focus your project on outcomes that make a difference and ensure that a direct relationship exists between outcomes and project components. In a time of increasing attention to accountability, you will be able to document educational impacts.
- **Use limited resources wisely:** By identifying measurable objectives based on well-thought-out and researched priorities, projects will be focused and resources will be used efficiently. At various points in the project design process, you will be asked to inventory existing materials and programs. By taking stock, you will avoid re-inventing the wheel. Judiciously adapting or adopting materials saves both time and money.
- **Design effective and sustainable projects:** Projects that are designed with best practices in mind are more effective: continuous project improvement becomes integral to the process, evaluation is not left to the end, stakeholders' needs are consciously

addressed throughout, and credibility is built. When decision-makers and others see results and meaningful partnerships are established, projects are truly sustainable.

- **Enhance the learning process:** In the end, education projects are developed because of the learner. Projects are developed because we want participants to gain specific knowledge and skills. Education projects are developed to promote public safety and the development of environmental and scientific literacy. Careful attention to the design and implementation of an education project will be reflected in learner outcomes.

It should be noted at the outset that this publication outlines an ideal process for the design of high quality education projects. Developing appropriate budgets and schedules are, obviously, key to the ultimate success of the education project. Without proper attention to budget details, a project may never make it beyond the early stages of planning. Similarly, poor scheduling may mean that materials are not ready when needed or evaluation opportunities are missed. Although both budgeting and scheduling will impact the quality of the project, the focus of this document is on the design of the education intervention and its evaluation.

Each project is different, however, varying in scope and duration. Materials developed for a one-shot event at an elementary school will be very different from those developed for a community group that meets on a regular basis. Projects vary in the amount of resources (human as well as monetary) available. It is unrealistic to expect all project developers to follow all of the recommended steps. The steps outlined here are meant as a guide. Use them as a template to inform your decision-making. Use them to help ensure the development of effective education projects.

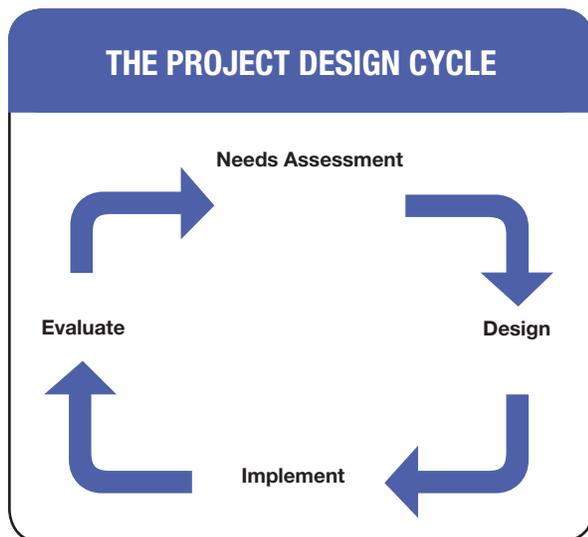
A Word about Programs and Projects

In everyday speech it would not be unusual to hear someone talk about the NOAA Education Program or for a presentation given to a group of fifth grade students at a local school to be described as a program. Similarly, it is not unusual to hear project and program used interchangeably. For purposes of clarity and consistency, “program” and “project” are used in this publication in very specific, distinct ways.

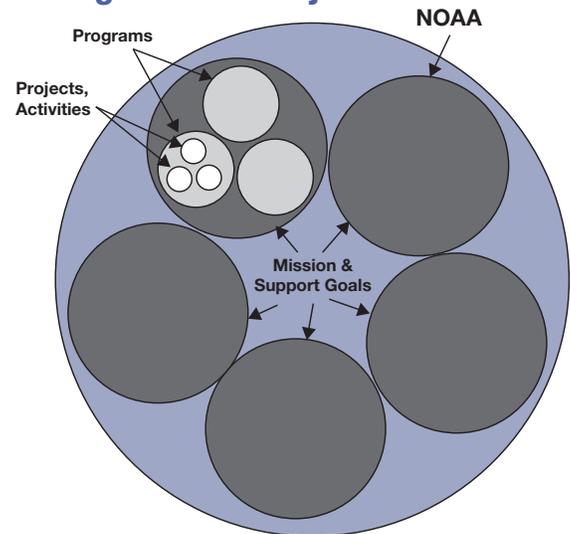
Programs derive directly from the agency’s mission and represent a coordinated and systematic effort to address that mission. Programs support NOAA’s Strategic Plan and goals. A set of **projects**, taken together, reinforce a program. In turn, a series of activities are devised to address project goals and objectives. Projects are focused on specific issues and audiences. The following graphic might help to illustrate the distinction.

Project Development as a Cycle

Project development requires a commitment to a systematic, iterative process of assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation. Whether the process is described using a flow chart or through text, it is important to remember that the process is not linear. Although each stage or phase of the project development and implementation process can be described (and will be in this publication), the stages are not discrete. These steps overlap and interrelate; they provide a dynamic and flexible guideline for developing effective projects efficiently. Project development is a cyclical process in which the results of one phase become the starting products for the next phase.



Programs vs. Projects



At each step in the process, the project team reflects on decisions and activities that have gone on before, and assesses successes and the need for course corrections. Underlying project planning and implementation is the premise that learning about how the project works takes place continuously throughout the process and that learning is fed back into the system.

It should be remembered that not all projects are alike. How the project design cycle plays out will depend on the politics surrounding the project, funding requirements

and the project's degree of complexity. For example, some projects will need review and approval at each stage, while others may only require limited oversight within the agency.

How is this Publication Organized?

For the convenience of the reader, the major sections of this publication will follow the project development cycle. It is divided into four major parts:

Part I. Needs Assessment

Part II. Project Planning and Implementation

Part III. Project Evaluation

Part IV. Data Collection Methods

Part IV is followed by a series of appendices that provide a more extensive consideration of specific topics. A glossary of technical terms, especially those related to needs assessment and evaluation, and a list of references are included at the end (after the appendices).

Throughout this publication, examples and case studies are provided. These examples are based on existing education projects run by or supported by NOAA. They offer a glimpse of how other project developers handled a particular step in the design process. Hopefully, these examples, by being rooted in real world experiences, will help you see how the project design cycle can best be fitted to your work. As you read the examples and their accompanying text, please remember that this document outlines a comprehensive project design process. Depending on the scope and scale of the education project you are proposing, all of the steps may not be followed completely.

Part I.

Needs Assessment



Introduction

The design of an education project often begins with a phone call or a casual conversation. Someone suggests that a particular audience should be reached (e.g., school children, community leaders, families) or that a particular topic remains misunderstood. The conversation soon ends with the suggestion that education may well be part of the answer, and that perhaps a project should be developed that would reach the target audience or cover the identified topic. But once the seed of an idea has been proposed, what should be done next? By conducting a needs assessment, project designers can focus their energies efficiently and develop an effective project.

What is a Needs Assessment?

On the surface, defining a needs assessment is quite simple – it is the effort to assess the need for a project or other activity. An education needs assessment establishes the need for a particular project by *systematically* examining audience interest and knowledge, agency mission, authorities and capability, and the significance of particular environmental conditions or issues.

It may be helpful to visualize needs assessment as a form of gap analysis. In this case a needs assessment can be seen as a systematic exploration of the divergence or discrepancy between the current situation or level of services (“what is”) and the desired situation or level of services (“what should be”). In analyzing the “gap,” project team members can begin to identify problems, opportunities, strengths, challenges, and possible new directions. Through a careful analysis of the existing “market,” and an assessment of organizational strengths, a more strategic understanding of gaps and potential opportunities emerges, reducing the chance of duplicating the efforts of existing programs or becoming sidetracked. Through this process, it is also possible to identify and develop strategic partnerships to better reach underserved audiences. As Kaufman and English (1979, p. 31) suggest, a needs assessment is “... a tool for determining valid and useful problems which are philosophically as well as practically sound. It keeps us from running down more blind educational alleys, from using time, dollars and people in attempted solutions which do not work.”

The results of this analysis provide a context to determine an organizational niche and identify target audiences. For NOAA, a needs assessment should also include a process of self (agency) assessment of internal strengths and weaknesses relative to the agency’s mission and the environmental issues it seeks to address. Importantly, a needs assessment provides education managers with well-documented and considered evidence to support the project design process. A needs assessment does not merely justify a proposed project *after* critical decisions have been made, but helps to establish why a

project may be needed, and provides critical data and information about the ultimate structure of a project.

As might be expected, needs assessment takes place *prior* to undertaking the project.

Needs assessment:

- Gathers information/data about the gap between the current and desired level of audience skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.
- Takes place before the project is designed.
- Helps confirm or negate assumptions of audience characteristics and appropriate content; defines goals and objectives; ensures goals and objectives are aligned with the agency's strategic plan and other planning documents; and identifies stakeholders and potential collaborators.

Questions that might be addressed by a needs assessment include:

- What are the nature and scope of the problem? Where is the problem located, whom does it affect, and how does it affect them?
- What is it about the problem or its effects that justifies new, expanded, or modified projects or programs?
- What feasible actions are likely to significantly ameliorate the problem?
- What is the appropriate target audience(s)?
- Who are the stakeholders and sponsors?
- What are the appropriate deliverables that will help address the identified problem?

Why is Needs Assessment Important to Project Design and Implementation?

The initial idea spurring the development of an education project may have come from a variety of places. Casual conversations among co-workers, serendipitous opportunities such as the availability of grant funding, the publication of a scientific report or the long-term desire to enhance strategic partnerships may all spark the project development process. In the enthusiasm and excitement of the moment, however, it must be remembered that not all projects are timely or appropriate. Conducting a needs assessment allows project managers to take a step back and systematically consider whether or not there is a gap in existing services or materials, and if so, the nature of that gap. There are additional benefits of including needs assessment as an integral component of the project design and implementation process:

- **Serving the Audience:** Ultimately, the people who participate in education projects benefit from needs assessments. Education services are more targeted and delivery

systems are designed better to reach their intended audiences when founded on data, rather than hunches. Because needs assessments systematically gather data, previously unexpressed needs can be uncovered and, consequently, the audience can be better served.

- **Setting Priorities:** For any one problem or issue, the “need” is rarely one-dimensional. A needs assessment helps project planners to systematically describe the audience(s) impacted by the issue and their relationships to the issues as well as the underlying causes. With this level of information, administrators and project planners make informed decisions about which possible solution or combination of solutions can best address the need. Faced with a long wish list, the needs assessment provides the data to develop criteria necessary for priority setting.
- **Re-inventing the Wheel:** Any time a new project is initiated there is some danger that it duplicates efforts already taking place elsewhere within the agency or the wider community. A needs assessment will inventory existing projects and materials. It will also determine if materials or projects developed elsewhere can be adapted or adopted to the new situation. Considerable time, effort, and resources can be saved by taking stock of what already exists and not falling to the temptation of creating something “new” for its own sake.
- **Resource Allocation:** No matter what the problem or issue, project planners must confront the budget process sooner or later. Administrators will want documentation to substantiate decisions about which proposed projects should be fully funded, postponed, or rejected. By documenting the need for a project and providing data-based evidence of how the project will address the need, project managers can make a reasoned case and assist administrators in allocating resources appropriately.
- **Coalition Building:** Well-designed needs assessments are highly participatory. Not only are agency staff members involved in setting project priorities, but a wide variety of stakeholders are identified and involved at each step in the process. Participation can demystify a project and help ensure greater buy-in from agency personnel, partners, and potential audiences. If true coalitions are to be built, stakeholder participation cannot be approached as a public relations ploy, however. The needs assessment must be open and welcoming of ideas and not designed to validate a pre-determined course of actions.
- **Strategic Planning:** In defining the gap between what is and what is desired, a needs assessment can be a powerful strategic planning tool. First and foremost, a needs assessment focuses project planners’ attention on the end goal. By mapping out the current situation systematically, planners have the data to make decisions about realistic and meaningful goals. Additionally, a project needs assessment can serve as an important supporting document to the Program Baseline Assessment in NOAA’s Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution System (PPBES).

Where do ideas for educational programs come from?

Although it would be great if all programs grew out of a true needs assessment, most educational programs start with someone having an idea. In these cases, the needs assessments look at gaps the idea could fill or ways the idea could be adapted to fit a particular audience. So who comes up with these ideas?

Most ideas for educational programs come from the people most closely involved in a particular area – it's "my passion," or "my field," or "my experience" that determines the topic. Sometimes the idea for a program comes down from 'above' and is a passion or pet project of someone higher up in the organization. A third source of ideas is from a friend, family member, or acquaintance.

Often these ideas work very well. For example, one education coordinator based her project on her graduate research, focusing her educational effort on what she knew best. This individual's passion for the subject led to a very successful project that involved many partners, stakeholders, and continued funding. In another situation, the director of the agency gave the topic to the educator. Because the topic was a priority to the director, and thus to the agency itself, the project received support for development and testing to make sure that "it worked and made the agency look good."

Both these cases worked well because the topics of the programs were closely tied to the mission of the division and agency. Many programs fail to ensure a close and ongoing tie between the outcomes of the educational effort and the purposes of the agency. Sometimes the individual charged with developing or implementing an educational program thinks of direct delivery to school groups as the only approach. In many cases, the agency or division may not have an educational mission, or its educational mandate could be to reach the larger public and not a particular school grade. Such a mismatch can lead to "mission creep" and an inability to explain why a program is worthy of ongoing internal support, even if there is evidence that the program is good. When budgets are tight, mission-focused educational programs are even more important. An idea based on an individual's passion can be great, but the outcomes of the program must also closely relate to the outcomes of the agency and division's missions, or the program will be hard to defend.

Planning a Needs Assessment

As mentioned earlier, a needs assessment can be seen as a systematic exploration of the divergence or discrepancy between the current situation or level of services ("what is") and the desired situation or level of services ("what should be"). In analyzing this gap, project team members begin to identify problems, opportunities, strengths, challenges, and priorities. The needs assessment process can be time consuming and, as with most processes that involve multiple stakeholders and multifaceted issues, it can be complex. The following is an outline of 12 steps involved in conducting a needs assessment. The outline is intended to break down a complex process into manageable steps. Please recognize, however, that in providing an overview of the process, nuances and detail

“...some factors that are basic to a successful needs assessment:

- Keep in mind the value and necessity of broad-based participation by stakeholders.
- Choose an appropriate means of gathering information about critical issues and other data.
- Recognize core values in the group whose needs are being assessed.
- Needs assessment is a participatory process; it is not something that is “done to” people.
- Needs assessment cannot ignore political factors. Some people may view the process as causing a loss of control. The priorities derived may be counter to entrenched ideas in the system.
- Data-gathering methods by themselves are not needs assessments. The needs assessment is a total decision-making process, in which the data are but one component.” (p. 17)

Source: Witkin, B.R. and Altschuld, J.W. (1995). *Planning and conducting needs assessments: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Needs Assessment in a Nutshell

STAGE I: PLANNING
Step 1. Set the focus, refine the issue(s) and identify the stakeholder(s)
Step 2. Establish the planning team
Step 3. Establish needs assessment goals and objectives
Step 4. Gather existing information and conduct literature search
Step 5. Define participants in the needs assessment
Step 6. Design data collection strategies
STAGE II: DATA COLLECTION
Step 7. Determine sampling scheme
Step 8. Design and pilot data collection instrument(s)
Step 9. Gather and record data
STAGE III: DATA ANALYSIS, DATA REPORTING, AND PRIORITY SETTING
Step 10. Perform data analysis
Step 11. Determine priorities and identify potential solutions
Step 12. Synthesize information and create report

are necessarily omitted. Similarly, recognize that determining how much of the process should be followed depends on the project. The time and effort involved in conducting a needs assessment must be balanced against the time and resources available to be invested in the project as a whole. A project that involves developing a 30-minute weather awareness activity for local kindergarten classes suggests a very different needs assessment process than a project that involves developing a comprehensive weather awareness curriculum for pre K–12 students throughout the state. The steps outlined below should be adapted to meet the specific needs and resources of the project. Look at the examples provided throughout this section as an indication of how others have used needs assessments in situations similar to yours.

Stage I. Planning

Step 1. Set the focus, refine the issue(s) and identify the stakeholder(s)

It is probably safe to assume that the desire to conduct a needs assessment did not fall out of the sky. Specific areas of interest may have been selected based on expectations and needs delineated in the agency's strategic or management plan. Research conducted by NOAA scientists may prompt targeting a specific issue as an education priority. Comments and other anecdotal evidence collected over time from facility users and program participants may have steered project planning into a particular direction. Sometimes, general trends, environmental phenomena, or public policy priorities such as El Niño/La Niña, the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, or the Coastal Zone Management Act, may suggest that an educational need exists.

In this first step, those who are initiating the needs assessment clarify the issues of interest. The issues to be addressed should flow directly from the agency mission and program priorities. The overall or general purpose of the needs assessment is established, and the key stakeholders – the range of individuals, including audience, potential partners, decision-makers, and sponsors with a vested interest in the issue or process – are identified. Additionally, initial work on setting up an overall plan for the needs assessment (e.g., timeline, budget) is completed. Permission to conduct the needs assessment is secured and the decision-makers who should receive the results of the needs assessment are identified.

Step 2. Establish the planning team

A basic principle behind conducting a needs assessment is recognizing that no matter how knowledgeable and skilled, the education manager does not and cannot walk into the project with a complete and accurate picture of the situation. Other agency staff

members, community members, volunteers, partners – all stakeholders in the process – possess critical understandings that will help focus the needs assessment. Importantly, some of these stakeholders may also help to build credibility inside and outside the agency and assist the team in gaining access to target audiences. Forming a broad, yet manageable, planning team is essential.

Because many planning team members will be from outside the agency and will be serving as volunteers, expectations and responsibilities should be established early on. It should be recognized that a number of planning team members were invited to participate because they represent specific stakeholder groups. Consequently, they each bring a different set of assumptions and priorities to the table. Similarly, agency participation in, and sponsorship of, the needs assessment are governed by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Given this, it is important to establish a common purpose for the needs assessment and to develop a broad sense of ownership in the process.

Why bother with stakeholders?

“We would never have known about...” is a common response when educational programmers are asked what they learned from their stakeholders during planning. Regardless of how well educators think they know their audience, listening to stakeholders is an important task during the planning and needs assessment stage.

In one program, the overlooked stakeholder was the office director. That program ran into real problems when the office director revealed concerns over the focus of the program. In another example, the educator forgot to ask the teachers the program had planned to train how or if the topic might fit into the science standards of that grade level. Needless to say, teachers weren't as excited about the program as the planner thought they'd be!

Stakeholder involvement in planning can vary greatly. In some cases, a whole group of stakeholder representatives might be brought together to talk with the program planners. In most situations, however, individual stakeholders are called on the phone or spoken to in casual conversation about the pending program in order to get their informal feedback.

And what are stakeholders asked? Some are asked questions as simple as, “What do you think about this idea?” For major projects, however, stakeholder input is much more vital and therefore more formalized. The bottom line is, as one educator put it, “We'd have made a lot more mistakes if we hadn't talked with the people who have a reason to care about the program.”

Step 3. Establish needs assessment goals and objectives

As with any other project, the planning of a needs assessment can spin out of control easily. The desire to be all inclusive, both in terms of issues and audiences, can become overwhelming. The planning team must determine the scope of the needs assessment. That is, the team must determine the type, breadth, and depth of information the needs assessment should be designed to generate. Recognizing that the primary purpose of the needs assessment is to help the education manager design an appropriate project, specific goals and objectives must be established. These goals and objectives should be clear and precise enough to guide the further development and implementation of the needs assessment, specifying what data are to be collected and identifying who should be targeted for participation in the needs assessment. In writing precise goals and objectives the planning team must, however, balance the need to focus the needs assessment with the desire to remain flexible and open to new information. In the end, the goals and objectives will be used to measure the degree to which the needs assessment was successful.

Step 4. Gather existing information and conduct literature search

With the scope of the needs assessment established, the planning committee inventories what is already known about the proposed issue. Agency documents, reports from previous education projects, census data, and research results can all inform the needs assessment design process. Previous Program Baseline Assessments, self-assessments, and performance measures should be consulted. Lack of progress in meeting a performance measure, for instance, may be relevant in establishing future priorities. If viable, valid, and reliable data already exist for a particular aspect of the needs assessment, it may make little sense to spend valuable resources to collect new data.

This is also a good time to inventory existing education programs and resources that relate to the topic or issue under consideration. Other agencies or organizations may have already developed an education project that can be adopted or adapted. For example, monitoring protocols and support materials already exist for a number of citizen scientist initiatives around the nation. Even if the exact procedures cannot be used in the new situation, much can be learned from materials that others have designed and implemented. Similarly, existing literature can often provide important information on how to work with particular audiences to ensure that a project is age appropriate and culturally sensitive. Time spent researching may well save considerable time and effort at a later stage in the project planning process.

Step 5. Define participants in the needs assessment

Although significant background information can be gathered by researching archives and other documents, chances are the project will be best served by collecting new data from a range of stakeholders.¹ In Step #2, project managers identified key stakeholders

¹ Here the term “stakeholder” means anyone with an interest in the goals of your project. Stakeholders may be the customers who use your product. They may be the sponsors to whom you are responsible for the project’s performance. They also may be partners with similar goals who may or may not receive a direct benefit from your project.

inside and outside the agency. Although many of these stakeholders were invited to participate in the planning team, now that the goals and objectives of the needs assessment have been identified, it is time to revisit and refine the list of stakeholders and potential participant groups.

Depending on the goals and objectives, the list of key stakeholders may need to be expanded or reduced substantially. Decisions must be made about whom should be targeted for participation in the needs assessment – what type of data needs to be collected and from whom. For instance, if the needs assessment relates to the development of a citizen science project, data collection might target multiple groups, including NOAA scientists involved in research on the topic, teachers who might supervise student involvement, community service organizations that could sponsor teams of monitors, and state or local government agencies that might provide monitoring sites.

It is reasonable to assume that data will be collected from groups whose characteristics are well known by project planners, such as stakeholders within the agency (e.g., NOAA scientists) and within partner organizations. It is also reasonable to assume that data will be collected from groups of individuals whose make-up may be less familiar to project planners, such as members of specific community groups. Learning about each of the stakeholder groups is essential to the success of future steps in the needs assessment process. For example, what are the best methods for reaching the participants (e.g., phone, mail, on-line survey, during community meetings)? How many people belong to the stakeholder group – that is, what is the estimated size of the population? This information will be essential for determining the sample size (see Step 7). In designing the data collection, do project planners need to adapt methods to meet the needs of a particular group (e.g., literacy rates, language)? The more that is known about the characteristics of each participant group, the greater the chance that data collection will run smoothly and wasted efforts will be minimized.

Step 6. Design data collection strategies

By this point in the process, the planning team and project managers have identified the proposed participants in the needs assessment and why each group has been selected. Reflecting back on the goals and objectives of the needs assessment, key questions should be developed for each participant group that delineate the information to be gathered. From here the best data collection methods are identified. This process matches up the audience of participant groups with key questions and appropriate methods (see Part IV and Appendix A), while keeping in mind budget, personnel, and time constraints.

For example, the needs assessment may call for collecting data from adult community members who are not familiar with the agency. A focus group, survey, or interview might be used to collect the data from this type of group. For the same needs assessment, a key study question might involve assessing participants' level of knowledge about some aspect of the issue. Typically, focus groups are not particularly effective for assessing individual knowledge. Consequently, the planning team must determine the best data collection method given the specific situation (assessing the knowledge of adults who

are not familiar with the agency). No one data collection method fits all situations; each method comes with its own strengths and weaknesses (see Part IV for a discussion of data collection methods).

Before moving to the next stage (data collection) in the needs assessment process, the project should assess whether approvals are needed or desired, e.g., because of Paperwork Reduction Act rules. Collecting data often takes the project public and requires a new commitment of funds and other resources.

Stage II. Data Collection

Step 7. Determine sampling scheme

Although it might be possible (and desirable) to collect data from all the meteorologists within a specific NOAA region, in all probability it will not be realistic to collect data from all the *adults* in that same geographic region. Consider how difficult it is to conduct the U.S. Census every ten years. Even with a substantial effort, the U.S. Census is not able to survey everyone in the population. Unless a participant group is small and well-defined, collecting information from the entire group is usually not practical. Similarly, even if the group is reasonably small, it might not be realistic to conduct a lengthy interview with each and every member.

Once the decision is made to collect data from a portion or subset of the population, project planners risk injecting bias into the process and limiting the usefulness of the data. Careful design of the data collection process and use of random sampling procedures can reduce the likelihood of this error (see Appendix B). The goal is to draw a sample that accurately reflects or is representative of the population as a whole.

i A sample is considered representative of the population if every person in the population has an equal chance of being selected.

Similarly, the number of people sampled (sample size) impacts the degree of sampling error. Typically, sampling errors are reduced when the sample size is increased (See Determining Sample Size – Rules of Thumb in Appendix B). The tradeoff is obvious, however. A larger sample, while reducing error, increases time and other costs.

Step 8. Design and pilot data collection instrument(s)

Using the key questions developed in Step #6 as a guide, the data collection instruments are designed. Whether individuals will be asked to participate in a focus group or to complete a survey, decisions need to be made about what questions should be asked and how best to ask those questions. Similarly, if the decision has been made to observe a set of behaviors (such as how visitors interact with a hands-on exhibit), the specific behaviors of interest must be delineated. Each step in the procedure needs to be articulated in the data collection protocol to ensure that the process is clear and well thought out.

Once the data collection instrument has been designed, it should be pilot tested. What seems to be reasonable and clear to the planning committee may make little sense in the field or to individuals who are not familiar with the project. Pilot testing can highlight instances where directions might be misleading or meanings might be misinterpreted. Particularly in the case of interviews or open-ended questions, pilot testing can help project planners determine if the desired level of data will be collected given the questions asked, and what, if any, follow-up questions should be asked.

How much data should I collect?

As we looked at different programs, we asked educators how much data they actually gather as they're planning a program. Do they really go through all these steps? And if they go through the steps, how much information do they really use?

Not surprisingly, there is a consistent relationship between the size and/or cost of the program and the rigor and amount of data gathered. In planning for short-term, small-budget programs, many educators talk casually with only one or two people. For larger efforts involving developing resources, making repeated contacts, or training programs, some educators regret that they didn't get more information in advance, while others acknowledge, "We could have gotten more, but what we got told us a lot more than we expected."

Here are some ways in which educators gathered data for their needs assessments:

Telephone:

- Called or wrote people they knew and asked them a series of questions
- Made cold calls to people recommended by others

Face-to-face:

- Informal dialogues with interested people
- Semi-structured interviews
- Formal, structured interviews

E-mail:

- E-mail questions to colleagues
- Listserves to get additional input

Only one program used a large mail survey. It was a large program with important stakeholders spread out across the country, and its staff had a lot of questions to which they wanted answers.

So how do you know if you have enough data? One educator suggested, "when you get a clear answer to your question." Several educators acknowledged that they got very little information except informally. In retrospect, they would use a more formal process because, as one said, "any good data are better than no data."

Finally, the planning committee must determine that the instruments are valid and reliable. That is, they must ensure that the instruments are measuring what they are designed to measure (validity) and that the measurements are consistent time after time (reliability).

Step 9. Gather and record data

Orchestrating the data gathering process requires substantial planning and day-to-day management. For example, contact information must be acquired, materials (e.g., interview schedules, surveys, return envelopes) need to be printed, focus group meetings and interview times must be scheduled, and arrangements must be made to tape record interviews and focus groups. You may find a master calendar helpful to plot each point in the process. The planning team will need to determine who will collect the data (i.e., who will conduct the interviews, who will facilitate focus groups, etc.), whether those collecting data need training to ensure that proper protocols are followed, and how the rights of study participants will be guaranteed. Not only do ethical issues arise related to confidentiality, but informed consent and oversight by a human subjects review board may be warranted.

Once data are collected, the data will need to be recorded or entered into the appropriate format for analysis. Survey data will need to be entered into a database. Interviews and focus group sessions will need to be transcribed. As with each step in this process, care must be given to how the data are handled to preserve confidentiality and to ensure that the data are recorded accurately.

Stage III: Data Analysis, Data Reporting, and Priority Setting

Step 10. Perform data analysis

The type of data analysis will depend on both the instruments used and the study questions being answered. Some portion of the data analysis may involve a simple tallying of responses – numbers or percentages of those indicating yes or no. In most cases, however, far more sophisticated statistical analyses that examine the relationships or patterns among responses may be appropriate. For qualitative data, collected most often through interviews and focus groups, categories and themes will need to be extracted from verbatim meeting transcripts. These types of analyses will require someone with specific research and evaluation expertise.

Step 11. Determine priorities and identify potential solutions

Once the data analysis is completed, your team is finally in the position to articulate the results in terms of needs. Now you can systematically describe the discrepancy between what is and what should be. In all probability, a large number of needs will be identified in this process. The team must evaluate the list of identified needs and prioritize them. It is easy to imagine that priority setting could become a difficult (and potentially contentious) task for the team.

A variety of priority-setting approaches are available to the team. In the end, however, the team must determine a set of criteria for making decisions. Sork (1995) recommends that needs should be evaluated against two primary sets of criteria: importance and feasibility. (See box below.) Importance can be determined by examining characteristics such as the number of people affected and the degree of fit with organizational or agency goals. Feasibility relates to characteristics such as the potential efficacy of a project designed to address the need.

Sork's Priority Setting Criteria

Importance Criteria

1. How many individuals are affected by this need? The greater the number affected, the greater the importance.
2. If we dealt with the need, to what extent would it contribute to organizational goals? The larger the contribution, the greater the importance.
3. Does the need require immediate attention? Or can attention be deferred for a period of time, with the need tending to resolve itself with the passage of time?
4. How large is the discrepancy between the desired status for an area of concern and the current level of achievement in regard to it? The greater the discrepancy, the greater the importance.
5. To what extent would resolving a need in this particular area have a positive effect on a need in another area? The more positive the effect, the greater the importance.

Feasibility Criteria

1. The degree to which an educational intervention, particularly an adult education strategy, can reduce or even eliminate the need.
2. The extent to which resources are, or could become, available for programs to reduce the need.
3. The commitment or willingness of the organization to change.

Source: Altschuld, J.W. and Witkin, B.R. (2000). *From needs assessment to action: Transforming needs into solution strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, Inc. p. 110.

With the list of needs prioritized, the project team focuses its attention on solutions or determining which interventions will best address these priority needs while meeting organizational goals. By identifying solutions, the project team is poised to move on to project planning and implementation. As the team considers solutions to the high priority needs, it must also determine if an education project is the appropriate intervention. It is quite possible that the best strategies for addressing the need are structural or temporal. For example, a needs assessment might confirm that a particular community does not recycle its solid waste at the desired levels. The needs assessment might also determine that the low recycling levels are due more to the lack of appropriate receptacles than a lack of knowledge or motivation.

Designing Needs-Based Action Plans

After sorting through priorities and determining potential solutions or strategies, the planning team will have considered numerous alternatives. Now, carefully take a second look at potential solution strategies.

Revisit the most likely solution strategy and compare it to its strongest competitors. Ask the following key questions:

- What features of the top solution strategy are its strongest assets?
- What are some of its less strong and even weak features?
- Were some of the competing strategies stronger in these areas?
- Would it be possible to combine features of solution strategies without compromising the integrity of the top solution?
- What is the scope of the solution in terms of location within the organization (i.e., will it reside in one unit or subsystem, or will it cut across many units)?
- How much time will the solution require – that is, from a relatively short time frame to develop and implement (less than 6 months) to intermediate and long-range time frames (2-5 years or even longer)?
- What is the scope of the solution in terms of focus – from narrow and fairly easy to implement to broad and complex to implement?
- Is it possible to divide a large solution strategy into smaller increments for implementation?

Source: Altschuld, J.W. and Witkin, B.R. (2000). *From needs assessment to action: Transforming needs into solution strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, Inc. p. 175.

Step 12. Synthesize information and create report

By this stage in the process, the planning team has designed and implemented a significant endeavor. Coalitions are being built, stakeholders have been brought into the planning process, data has been collected, priorities have been set, and strategies proposed. It might be tempting (because of sheer exhaustion if nothing else) to truncate this step and jump directly to project design, but the importance of creating a record of the needs assessment and its results is essential. Administrators will need a report for approving the onset of the design phase of the project. Those responsible for taking the results of the needs assessment and turning them into an effective education project will need to be able to draw from the results on a regular basis. It is quite possible that portions of the needs assessment may serve as baseline data for the eventual evaluation of the project. Finally, access to the results of the needs assessment is valuable as a foundation for future project planning efforts. So, write the report.

Should a Consultant be Hired?

Much of the expertise needed to conduct a needs assessment will be found within the planning team. If the team has been carefully crafted, members represent many of the stakeholder groups and can provide valuable information and insight. However, if the team does not include someone with significant educational research and evaluation experience, it may be necessary to hire a consultant. Determining a sampling scheme, designing data collection instruments, and analyzing the data all require specific knowledge and skills that cannot be substituted. Additionally, an argument can be made that an external consultant provides distance and objectivity that may not be possible for members of the planning team with vested interests. The education coordinator will need to assess the situation and determine if a consultant should be hired to maintain credibility. The box on the next page provides guidance on working with consultants.

Part I Wrap-Up

A needs assessment helps project planners understand more fully the gap between what is and what should be. By conducting a needs assessment before the project is designed, assumptions integral to the development of the project (e.g., audience characteristics, current level of knowledge) can be confirmed or negated, avoiding costly missteps. The data gathered during a needs assessment can also help project designers define goals and objectives, and identify stakeholders and potential collaborators. This information will be essential as the project team turns to the next phase of the planning process: project design and implementation.

Hiring a Consultant

As with most projects, deciding to hire a consultant is only the first step. The following should help guide the team as you work through the process:

- Define the scope of work. Be as specific as possible. Determine what you want to accomplish and what aspects of the needs assessment can be conducted by the project team.
- Determine the budget.
- Identify consultants with experience conducting needs assessments and evaluations. Pay particular attention to any experience working on education projects.
- Interview at least two consultants who seem most qualified. During the interview try to assess:
 - **Relevance** of previous evaluation experience to the specific needs of the project. Has the consultant worked on similar projects?
 - **Workload** – how likely is the consultant to be able to meet timelines? Will there be other members of the consulting team? If so, how will they divide the work?
 - **Work style** – Will the consultant work with the project team as a partner, while maintaining objectivity? Is the consultant a good listener? Will the consultant customize the needs assessment strategy to the project or merely adapt an existing one? Is the consultant willing to share ideas on how the team should proceed with the project? Is the consultant willing to share his/her expertise with the project team so that the team learns from the experience?
- Request a written proposal that details process, timeline, responsibilities, and budget.
- Check references. Ask the consultant for a recent client list. Select names from this list rather than asking the consultant to supply two or three names of references. In particular, use references to try to gauge the consultant's ability to meet deadlines and to adapt to unforeseen circumstances.
- Select a consultant based on qualifications and “match.”
- Develop a written agreement. Spell out, in writing, expectations, deliverables, timeline, and budget. Make sure that the contract meets any applicable regulations or policies.
- Be honest, open, and willing to change. To design and implement a useful needs assessment or evaluation, the consultant must understand fully the situation and any problems that the project team is facing.

Part II.

Project Planning and Implementation



Introduction

Once the need for a project is understood and authorization to proceed is secured, the planning team faces the task of designing a specific education project that addresses that need. Project planning requires an attention to what might at times seem like minuscule detail, while always keeping the big picture in mind. In the end, effort spent in planning an education project well will pay off in its ultimate effectiveness. This portion of the guide has been developed to help managers anticipate some of that minuscule detail and define the project's desired outcomes – ultimately, what we hope participants will learn.

Planning and Implementing an Education Project

Just as conducting a successful needs assessment depended on taking a systematic approach, project design benefits from careful attention to the planning process. The time involved in planning an education project usually depends on the project's complexity and the number of stakeholders involved.

The following 12 steps of planning and implementing an education project break down a complex process into manageable steps. As with each of the major sections in this document, please recognize that much of the detail has been left out. The 12 steps simply provide a generalized overview. For instance, the need to establish a budget and a schedule are only briefly mentioned; obviously, each requires considerable effort to develop. At each step, determining how extensive a process should be undertaken depends on the nature of the project. Obviously, a project that involves the development of materials for others to use will be very different from one that involves training individuals to make presentations to civic groups or teach school children.

The steps outlined below should be adapted to meet the specific needs and resources of the project. As mentioned previously, the examples in this section can provide an indication of how others have planned education projects in similar situations.

12 Steps of the Project Planning and Implementation Process

Step 1. (Re)assess need and capability
Step 2. Establish the project planning team
Step 3. Develop project goals and objectives
Step 4. Develop logic model
Step 5. Select and characterize the audience
Step 6. Establish program format and delivery system
Step 7. Ensure quality instructional staff
Step 8. Ensure quality instructional materials and strategies
Step 9. Assemble materials, resources, and facilities
Step 10. Plan for emergencies
Step 11. Promote, market, and disseminate project
Step 12. Implement project

Step 1. (Re)assess agency need and capability

During the needs assessment phase the project team prioritized needs and strategies that were evaluated against the Agency mission. With the needs assessment recommendations in hand, project managers should revisit the issue to determine if the proposed project is consistent with NOAA's mission and priorities. The need may have a high priority; however, it is quite possible that NOAA may not be the most appropriate organization to tackle it.

The needs assessment team also inventoried existing projects based on a tentative understanding of the issue being analyzed. Now that the project need and potential strategies have been articulated further, it is important to more fully inventory existing projects both inside and outside NOAA to determine areas of potential duplication. By conducting this inventory, the interrelationships among existing projects and the proposed project can be considered, and the function of the proposed new project contrasted with existing activities.

Similarly, project managers should take this opportunity to step back and inventory existing resources (human, financial, physical, and material resources) available to NOAA. Does the agency have the means to support the project at this time? There is little to gain from entering into an extensive project design process only to determine that funding and personnel are insufficient to support the activity.

Step 2. Establish the project planning team

In all likelihood, a number of potential partnerships and collaborative arrangements were identified and built during the needs assessment phase. Stakeholders from both inside and outside of NOAA were identified. Project managers might want to evaluate how well the needs assessment planning team functioned and consider asking some or all of its members to continue to participate in the project planning process. Establishing a broad-based project planning team is one way of tapping expertise and continuing the process of developing partnerships and collaborations. Since the focus during this phase of project development is on design and implementation, it is quite possible that additional members will need to be recruited to the team. Depending on levels of expertise, individuals with an understanding of the NOAA science related to the specific issue as well as those with experience designing instructional activities may be needed. As with the needs assessment planning team, roles and expectations must be delineated.

It should be noted that an evaluation planning team will also need to be established (see Part III, Step 2). To ensure that evaluation is considered at every step in the project design and implementation process, project managers should form the evaluation planning team now. Depending on the project, its timeline and level of complexity, the evaluation planning team might function well as a subcommittee of the overall project planning team. The importance of forming an evaluation planning team early cannot be overemphasized. Even though evaluation is discussed in detail later, its success depends upon being integrated throughout the planning, design, and implementation process.

Step 3. Develop project goals and objectives

As with any activity, it is important to know where you are going. The planning team needs to establish project goals and objectives early on as these will steer much of the team's future work. Goals provide the "big picture" of what is to be accomplished by undertaking this project. Although project goals are typically not measurable, they do describe the desired impact of the project in broad terms. The reason a goal is difficult or impossible to measure is because it is often not specific in its end point. Objectives, on the other hand, provide specific end points or measurable outcomes. Consequently, well-articulated goals and objectives are both essential at this stage in the planning process.

Objectives describe what the specific impact of the program will be, and the degree to which that impact must occur. Objectives also specify what the audience will be able to do, or what the specific change will be to the resource/issue after the intervention (see Writing SMART Objectives box on the next page). Clear, *measurable* objectives will not only facilitate the design and implementation of the project, but its evaluation too (see Part III). In drafting the objectives, the project team should also develop a clear conception of how NOAA science will be used and promoted throughout the project.

Writing Project Goals

A goal provides the “big picture” or the ultimate vision of the program. When writing goals ask, “What will this situation look like in five or ten years?” or “What is the perfect world with regard to this issue/topic/project?” Although there are many methods of writing good goals, here are three suggestions for writing effective project goal statements:

1. State the goal in the present tense (even though the goal might not be reached until five years from now).
Example: “Coastal zone managers have access to and use remote sensing and geographic information systems (GIS) in their decision making.”
2. Write the goal with an unspecified or indefinite endpoint.
Example: “. . . to improve the ability of extension and education professionals to measure the impacts and outcomes of their projects and products.”
3. State the broad anticipated impact of the project.
Example: “. . . species diversity in the restored area is increased.”

Writing SMART Objectives for the Project

In writing meaningful objectives, many project developers have found a set of criteria, summarized by the acronym SMART, to be helpful. A SMART objective is:

Specific: Describes an action, behavior, outcome, or achievement that is observable.

Measurable: Details quantifiable indicator(s) of progress towards meeting the goal (e.g., 70% of participants..., five or more...)

Audience: Names the audience (e.g., workshop participants, community members) and describes outcomes from the perspective of the audience (i.e., what the audience will be able to do).

Relevant: Is meaningful, realistic, and ambitious; the audience can (given the appropriate tools, knowledge, skills, authority, resources) accomplish the task or make the specified impact.

Time-bound: Delineates a specific time frame.

Step 4. Develop a logic model

Once the team members have agreed on the goals and objectives, they are in the position to draft the rest of the project. At this stage, project planners find the development of a project logic model particularly helpful. The logic model will also serve as a guide for evaluation (see Appendix C for an example). A logic model is a schematic of how the project will work, linking project outcomes (short-term, intermediate, and long-term) with project activities, outputs, and inputs (or resources).² Logic models articulate the underlying theory and assumptions of the project. They provide a road map, showing how the project is expected to work, the logical order of activities, and how the desired outcomes will be achieved.

The use of a logic model forces a “backward” design of the overall project. By determining up front the ultimate or desired long-term, intermediate, and short-term outcomes (based on the project goals and objectives), the planning team is in a much better position to identify appropriate project activities, resource needs, and timeframes.

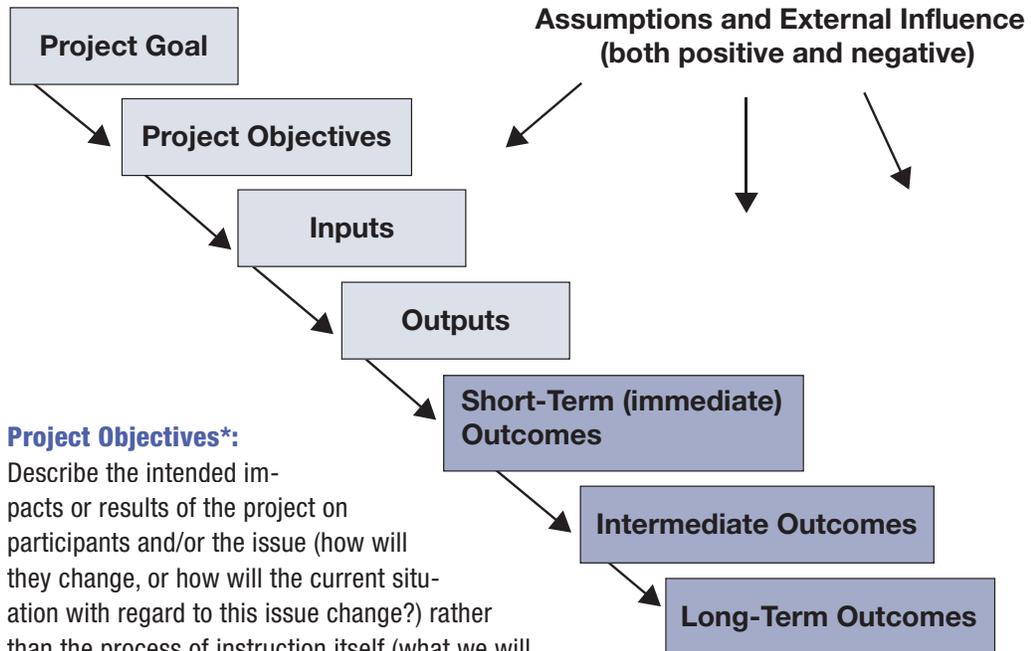
Project Success and the Benefits of Using Logic Models

Project Elements	Criteria for Project Success	Benefits of Project Logic Models
Planning and Design	<p>Project goals and objectives are well-defined at outset of project planning.</p> <p>Project goals and objectives are both plausible and possible (realistic and ambitious).</p>	<p>Identifies “gaps” in the logic of project components (resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes).</p> <p>Builds a shared understanding of what the project is about and how all components work together to achieve desired outcomes.</p>
Implementation and Management	<p>Relevant, credible, and useful performance data can be obtained.</p>	<p>Focuses attention of management on the most important connections between actions and results.</p>
Evaluation, Communication, and Marketing	<p>The intended users of the evaluation results have agreed on how they will use the information.</p>	<p>Provides a way to involve stakeholders in the design, process, and use of evaluation.</p>

Adapted from: W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2001

² Inputs and outputs in a logic model are referred to as “capacities” in NOAA’s Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution System. Input capacities may be funding, personnel, or other resources needed to do the project. Output capacities could be numbers of workshops held, number of target audience members in attendance, numbers of teacher resource kits produced, etc.

What does a logic model look like?



Project Objectives*:

Describe the intended impacts or results of the project on participants and/or the issue (how will they change, or how will the current situation with regard to this issue change?) rather than the process of instruction itself (what we will do to them).

Inputs: List the time, money, human resources, office space, utilities, equipment, supplies, management and partner support, etc. needed to accomplish the project.

Outputs: Describe the activities, events, products, and services that reach people targeted by the project.

Short-Term Outcomes*: Describe the expected immediate impacts of the project (e.g., audience reactions and changes in knowledge, skills, abilities, or attitudes immediately following participation in the project).

Intermediate Outcomes*: Describe expected impacts on the audience's behavior because of the project. What behavioral changes are individuals expected to make because of the project? These outcomes tend to occur after there has been an earlier change of knowledge, attitudes, skills, or aspirations.

Long-Term Outcomes*: Describe the intended ultimate impacts or objectives of the project on the issue. These might be social, economic, environmental, or individual consequences. These consequences are expected to occur after a certain number of behavioral changes have been made.

*Note: Objectives and outcomes are both statements of the impacts of the project on the audience and, in the longer term, on the issue. Objectives are statements of the intended impacts before the project is initiated (in planning the project). Outcomes are these same impacts during or after the project is complete.

How logical is a program?

Educational programs in many agencies have traditionally been designed based on the intuition and experience of the agency educator in charge. This does not mean the programs are guaranteed to either succeed or fail. It is interesting, however, to ask various educators about the steps they went through to design their program. In talking through how they developed the program, they often realize that there were gaps in their thinking.

One purpose of program logic is to ensure that no important steps are skipped when planning a program. Some agencies have used logic modeling for many years and are proficient in their use – although, as one educator said, “we should be proficient, but we often use [logic models] to rationalize rather than plan a program.” Other agencies and organizations are just beginning to think through how program outcomes are tied to program inputs and resources.

One educator who uses logic models describes the process as “taking a look at the components of your program [resources, activities, audiences, outcomes] and seeing how it’s organized.” Another said that doing a logic model creates “a visualization of the process. It’s something tangible that you can see.” One agency-based educator observed that logic models were good for “accountability—you have something tangible to take to supervisors, funders, taxpayers, etc” to show exactly how and why a program will work.

Perhaps program logic can be best understood, in the words of one educator, as “the process of thinking through everything. It breaks the mold, stimulates new ideas, and helps clarify and crystallize thinking.”

Step 5. Select and characterize the audience(s)

Each audience is distinct. Not only do audiences vary in terms of background and cultural characteristics, personal experiences, and prior knowledge, but they also vary in terms of age and developmental level. Participants also vary in their motivations for learning, depending on whether they are participating as students in a mandated, formal classroom, as members of a family outing, or as employees. Each of these factors is important to consider in determining what particular audience(s) should be targeted by the project.

Ultimately, the project planning team will need to examine the stated outcomes and weigh them against the feasibility of reaching particular audiences effectively. Even though the audience was analyzed as part of the needs assessment, it may be necessary to conduct a more specific, targeted assessment now that the project goals, objectives, and outcomes have been identified. An audience assessment will help the planning team decide how a specific project can be customized to meet participant interests and learning styles. Some of the issues to be addressed in the audience assessment include:

- **Knowledge and interests:** How much do they know about the topic or issue? Are they familiar with terminology or basic concepts? How interested are they in the topic or issue? To what extent are they interested in learning about the topic?
- **Prior educational experiences:** Have they participated in other educational activities related to the issue?
- **Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations:** Why would they want to learn about the topic or issue?
- **Attitudes and preconceptions:** What are their basic attitudes toward the issue, NOAA, education, etc.?

Who should the program's audience be?

Through interviews we found that most education and outreach programs are targeted either to schools or to community groups. Yet there are many other potential audiences for programs. The decision about who the audience of a program is should be based in part on the needs assessment and in part on the needs of the agency.

By far, most educational programs focus on what we call “intact groups.” These are usually school groups, but can also include other youth groups – Scouts, 4-H, Boys and Girls Clubs, church groups – and community groups; service, fraternal, professional, and interest groups. Even within intact groups, the vast majority of educational programs conducted by agencies are for formal education audiences.

A mistake made by many managers and staff during development is to forget that the program is really for the audience and not for the agency. There are plenty of examples of programs that were created for school groups; then, when budgets got tight, the school groups no longer made the trip to the site. As long as there was funding, teachers would bring their classes, but with funding cuts, teachers selected the field trips that most closely aligned with their curriculum. Because managers had not taken the audience into account when building the program or considering the curriculum needs of a particular grade, the program was easily cut since teachers viewed it as an “add on” rather than as “core.”

For many programs, school groups are an appropriate target audience, but the real audience is the teachers, not the students. Developing teacher-training programs can be a resource-effective way to ultimately reach more students. But as with direct delivery programs, unless the program is designed in partnership with the targeted teachers (topic and grade level), participation and continued use of a program are limited.

Some program developers have looked for new and different audiences in order to broaden the reach of their agency or division. Some have targeted intact groups in different neighborhoods, while others have created partnerships with agencies and organizations that directly serve the audiences they're trying to reach. Regardless of the program, though, the most successful educational efforts are those where the agency's mission drives the educational program, and the program is tied to an important audience of the agency or division.

- **Constraints related to attending an education activity:** When is the audience able to attend an educational event? Do they have the necessary transportation available to travel to a particular site?
- **Cultural characteristics:** What are the audience's attitudes toward nature, society, learning, and other values relevant to the project?

Answers to each of these questions will impact the design of the education project and its budget.

Culturally Competent Informal Learning

Each culture has a shared set of meanings and beliefs, and distinguishes itself from others by the approaches it takes toward basic issues of interpersonal and intergroup relations, time, and nature. Cultures typically fall in different places along the spectrum for each issue. For example:

Interpersonal Relationships

- Universalism versus Particularism – the importance of rules, codes, and laws versus exceptions, special circumstances, and personal relationships.
- Individualism versus Collectivism – the importance of the individual and personal freedom versus the importance of the group and cooperative and harmonious relations.
- Neutral versus Emotional – the range of feelings expressed, whether interactions are detached or express emotion.
- Specific versus Diffuse – the degree of personal involvement in transactions between people, i.e., whether limited to the specific aspect of a transaction or requiring a relationship with the whole person.
- Achievement versus Ascription – whether status is accorded by what a person has achieved or by who the person is and the person's family or social connections.

Attitudes about Time

- Sequential or Synchronic – how the past, present, and future relate to each other, and which has greatest importance; whether time is considered as a sequence passing in a straight line or more as moving in a circle. Standards of punctuality can range from minutes to a day or more.

Attitudes about the Natural Environment

- Whether the world is considered as more powerful than the individual or the individual is the source of vice and virtue; whether society should be considered subordinate to, in harmony with, or having mastery over, nature.

Source: White, R. (2002). The importance of cultural competence to informal learning attractions. *The Informal Learning Review*, Jan-Feb 2002, pp. 18-20.

Step 6. Establish program format and delivery system

Given the range of alternatives available, the planning team must determine what type of educational activity best meets the needs of the audience and addresses the ultimate outcomes, budget, schedule, etc. That is, what types of activity are most appropriate – workshop, demonstration area, community forum, field day, course, guest speaker, etc.? In many ways, decisions concerning project outcomes and target audience, along with budget and time constraints, have narrowed the range of feasible options available to the planning team. Matching the ultimate impact or outcomes of the project with appropriate educational activities is essential. A complex long-term outcome that requires participants to develop a high level of understanding and skill will not, in all likelihood, be met through a two-hour workshop. Similarly, access to an audience may be limited by external constraints. For instance, teachers may be willing to invite outside experts into their classrooms on an occasional basis as long as the activity addresses educational standards. It would be a rare situation, however, where outside experts are given the opportunity to teach an entire unit or semester-long course during regular school hours.

Although many education projects rely on stand-alone strategies (e.g., one-shot workshops, seminars), the planning team should also consider opportunities for infusion within other activities or curricula. For example, the project might develop a module or event that is incorporated into an existing program or regular community group activity.

In selecting the appropriate scope and format for the project, planning team members should also take this opportunity to consider how meaningful partnerships and collaboration can be enhanced through the project. It is quite possible that a more effective and efficient long-term educational strategy can be designed by partnering with a community organization rather than developing a stand-alone event.

Step 7. Ensure quality instructional staff

No matter what the ultimate format (course, field day, or workshop) or length of time (one hour, one week, or two years), someone (staff members or volunteers) will need to deliver the educational content through some form of instruction. The efficacy of the project depends on the instructional staff and their abilities. Although the educational materials or activity guide may give instructors direction, teaching requires skill and conscious effort. Instructors need preparation. At a minimum, they will require training in how to deliver the specific activities to the specific audience.

The amount of time and effort expended on training instructors will depend, at least to some extent, on the educational activity. Short, discrete activities being led by experienced instructors may require little orientation. On the other hand, if individuals are involved in long-term educational activities, the project planning team may wish to consider a more extensive professional development program that includes appropriate education theory, instructional practices, and use of different instructional settings.

How do we staff the program?

It's the best of all possible problems: What happens if your program is a success? In one case, a new program was so successful and popular that the demand quickly grew beyond the ability of the staff to provide access to all groups wanting to participate. In several cases, educators realized that quality control suffered when a program grew, and they had to hire seasonal educators to implement the program.

Making good staffing decisions is part of the reason for doing a needs assessment. One educator commented that through asking the potential audience about the demand for a program, "We knew it would be popular, and that's why we limited our promotion of the program." Many others reflected that they hadn't planned on the time it would take to train and oversee volunteers to ensure that the program was conducted the way it was designed. Some programs only allow certain staff to do certain types of educational programs — such as public speaking programs — in order to guarantee that the program is done correctly. All these are staffing decisions that need to be considered in planning and implementation.

Another lesson many educators learned is that the amount of time needed for a program must include preparation and follow-up. A couple of typical realizations were, "We didn't build in the time it took to gather up the materials before each program," and "We didn't build in time for doing a careful evaluation." Several programs included some data collection for evaluation, but failed to consider the time needed to enter the data for analysis. There are other programs where analysis means quickly looking through the feedback forms, but never really analyzing the data or examining data across programs. The reason? "We didn't think about how much time it would take..."

Again, not all programs are created equal; different types of programs require different amounts of time and dedication. One lesson several educators shared is that if consistency in a particular program is a goal, then training and oversight are important and should be built into the program. Another lesson from a program suggests that the educator needs to consider the knowledge of the audience when making decisions about staff time. When asked why, the response was that if the audience knows a lot about the subject, "the educator needs to be better prepared and needs to spend more time staying current."

Ensuring quality instructional staff turns out to be more complex than it first appears!

Environmental Education Materials: Guidelines for Excellence

The *Guidelines for Excellence* developed by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) point out six key characteristics of high quality education materials. The *Guidelines* were designed to help educators, administrators, curriculum designers, and materials developers evaluate the quality of materials.

Key Characteristic #1: Fairness and Accuracy

- 1.1 Factual accuracy
- 1.2 Balanced presentation of differing viewpoints and theories
- 1.3 Openness to inquiry
- 1.4 Reflection of diversity

Key Characteristic #2: Depth

- 2.1 Awareness
- 2.2 Focus on concepts
- 2.3 Concepts in context
- 2.4 Attention to different scales

Key Characteristic #3: Emphasis on Skills Building

- 3.2 Critical and creative thinking
- 3.3 Applying skills to issues
- 3.4 Action skills

Key Characteristic #4: Action Orientation

- 4.1 Sense of personal stake and responsibility
- 4.2 Self-efficacy

Key Characteristic #5: Instructional Soundness

- 5.2 Learner-centered instruction
- 5.3 Different ways of learning
- 5.4 Connection to learners' everyday lives
- 5.5 Expanded learning environment
- 5.6 Interdisciplinary
- 5.7 Goals and objectives
- 5.8 Appropriateness for specific learning settings
- 5.9 Assessment

Key Characteristic #6: Usability

- 6.1 Clarity and logic
- 6.2 Easy to use
- 6.3 Long-lived
- 6.4 Adaptable
- 6.5 Accompanied by instruction and support
- 6.6 Make substantiated claims
- 6.7 Fit with national, state, or local requirements

From: North American Association for Environmental Education. (2004). *Environmental Education Materials: Guidelines for Excellence*. Washington, DC: www.naaee.org/npeee.

Step 8. Ensure quality instructional materials and strategies

Depending on the topic, audience, format, and time frame, project planners will need to adopt or adapt existing education materials for their particular use, or design new materials and strategies. In either case, the quality and appropriateness of the instructional materials are critical. The good news is that literally thousands of instructional materials are available. Lesson plans and other support materials can be retrieved easily online or accessed through government agencies, non-profit organizations, and commercial publishers. These materials and lesson plans often provide background information, outline learner objectives, and offer step-by-step instructions on how to teach the lessons.

The bad news is also that literally thousands of instructional materials are available! Finding good quality materials that meet a specific set of needs may be time consuming and frustrating. On the other hand, designing curriculum materials anew is not a simple task and can take months.

Although there may not be an easy way of identifying or creating quality materials, criteria are available to assist the planning team in the process. Whether developed specifically for the project or adapted from existing sources, instructional materials should be accurate, balanced, fair, and reflective of good pedagogy (e.g., relevant to the learners, encouraging hands-on learning, accommodating different learning styles, age/audience appropriate). For projects aimed at children, it may be important for the instructional materials to be aligned to local, state, and national standards or organizational award programs (e.g., scouting badges). It is particularly important that any instructional materials be field tested with the target audience and under similar circumstances. Materials that work well in a classroom with tenth graders may not work at all in a field setting with young children. Similarly, materials designed for children may not work with adults unless they have been modified significantly.

Developing quality instructional materials and strategies represents a significant process in and of itself. Time, effort, and expertise are needed. Since instruction is the center of an education project, this step cannot be abbreviated. Although there are many approaches to instructional design, some find the five-step ADDIE model particularly helpful:

1. Analyze: Focuses on understanding the audience and what they need to learn, determining the budget, identifying constraints, and setting a time line.	2. Design: Focuses on selecting the specific subject matter, writing instructional or learner objectives, determining appropriate sequencing of subject matter or skills, and developing instructional strategies.	3. Development: Focuses on the creation or selection of instructional materials (including detailed lesson plans and other resources such as websites) that support instructional objectives. Field-test materials and revise if necessary.	4. Implement: Present instructional activities.	5. Evaluate: Assess the success of the instructional design.
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It should be noted that project planners write instructional or learner objectives as part of the materials development process. SMART objectives for each instructional activity are written to describe learner behavior, attitudes, knowledge and/or skills as a result of instruction. These objectives should be stated from the perspective of learner behavior and not instructor behavior. Taken together, instructional objectives support project objectives and should lead directly to the desired short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes expressed in the project logic model.

Writing SMART Objectives for Learner Outcomes

Examples of Action Words Used to Help Set Objectives for Different Levels of Learning					
Knowledge	Comprehend	Apply	Analyze	Synthesize	Evaluate
define	discuss	demonstrate	distinguish	design	appraise
record	explain	employ	debate	construct	assess
list	differentiate	illustrate	calculate	create	judge
name	identify	translate	diagram	propose	predict

Step 9. Assemble materials, resources, and facilities

Deficiencies in logistical planning – facilities, materials, and equipment – can sink even the best instructional design delivered by the best educator. The importance of this step cannot be underestimated. More often than not, miscommunication and assumptions lead to logistical difficulties during project implementation. Activities planned for a single class of 30 sixth graders may turn chaotic if there are three classes or 90 students instead. Room arrangements (e.g., theatre style versus round tables with moveable chairs) can make a significant difference depending on the planned presentation type. Planners must think ahead to the actual implementation of the project and anticipate a variety of needs, including:

- materials (e.g., newsprint and markers)
- equipment (e.g., computers, overhead project, monitoring equipment)
- comfort and amenities (e.g., food, restrooms, heating and cooling)
- facilities (e.g., indoor and outdoor spaces, ambience, seating arrangements).

A number of other details also need to be considered: coordinating schedules with collaborators and partners, double-checking participant lists, and confirming participation of honored guests. Communication, checklists, and clearly delineated roles can limit disruptions.

Step 10. Plan for emergencies

The old adage, “What can go wrong, will go wrong,” is just as applicable when designing an education project as with any other activity. Project managers must plan for emergencies and the inevitable mishap. Especially if participants will be outdoors, engaging in physically challenging activities, or in the proximity of potentially dangerous materials, emergency preparations are a must. Leaders must know what to do in the case of severe weather or injuries. They need to know whom to contact for medical assistance and how to report an emergency such as fire. Project planners need to develop a system to warn leaders of severe weather or other emergency situations. Promotional materials should indicate relevant information about participation in the activities, including level of physical activity, appropriate clothing, safety concerns, etc. Similarly, liability concerns and any regulations need to be taken into consideration during planning.

Step 11. Promote, market, and disseminate the project

Although some projects flow into regularly scheduled activities with a “captured” audience, most projects depend on some form of promotion or recruitment for participation. Even though an education activity geared toward school children does not need to recruit the children as participants, their teachers do need to be reached. Visitors to a wetland area on a Saturday afternoon need to be made aware that an education activity is available and, importantly, they need to see why participating in that activity would be worth their time.

Few projects have the luxury of a built-in audience. Most projects need to plan a promotion and marketing strategy and secure sufficient resources (including time) to implement the plan. The key is to plan a marketing program that reaches the target audience and motivates them to participate. Partners, media, websites, and word of mouth may all be key to successful promotion. In addition, project planners should not overlook participants in current education programs as potential recruits and ambassadors. It should be remembered, however, that promotion and marketing require expertise. If this expertise is not available in-house or within the planning team, hiring a consultant may be necessary to ensure success.

The project planning process depends upon a great deal of forward thinking. The planning team should begin to think about steps *beyond* the actual implementation and evaluation of the project. Assuming that the project is successful, planners should begin to consider how to disseminate project products. Building in a dissemination plan helps to close the loop on project development and ensures that someone else does not waste time and effort reinventing the wheel.

If you build it, will they come?

One very surprising finding from interviews of agency educators is their sense that if a program is created, there will be an audience. Some managers base this assumption on their needs assessment, but in general, there was a belief that people would naturally be interested in the program and would show up. Very little attention was paid to how these people would find out about the program. In other words, there wasn't much thought given to promotion. And as one educator noted: "Sometimes we make a product and don't go to the intended audience to see if it's what they need."

In some situations, the educator used a newsletter to inform people about the program. In one such situation, the program was designed to reach a new audience. However, no one had thought in advance about the fact that a newsletter sent to previous participants would not reach a new audience.

Similarly, new on-site programs advertised by signs and handouts will not reach a different audience than the ones that already come. Several educators believe "word of mouth" is the most effective way of reaching their desired audience, but others have discovered the need to "reach some of the desired audience first in order to get the word-of-mouth going." Many educators who focus on teacher training used word-of-mouth effectively because they were able to reach their core teachers, who did pass on the word to their colleagues. Attempts to reach new audiences posed the biggest challenges.

A few educators mentioned that they changed their programs once they were implemented, based on who was attending. Rather than marketing toward their original audience, they decided that those attending were an appropriate audience for their programs. This was often the case for programs with small resource bases. In a couple of situations, a concerted effort was made to "create bridges to the community" in order to reach the desired audience after the program was already in place.

It turns out that building and implementing a thoughtful plan for marketing or promotion is an important and often overlooked step.

Step 12. Implement the project

The day will come when the project is actually implemented. All of the planning effort is finally realized. Each type of event (e.g., workshop, class meeting, community forum, field day) requires a unique set of actions, materials, and equipment. Hopefully, adequate pre-planning will have been done, allowing instructors and leaders to focus on the needs and educational experience of the participants. Event planners often find that creating checklists and detailed agenda are helpful. The more complex the event, the more important it is that each person knows what to do when.

Part II Wrap Up

Project design and implementation are the heart of an education program. As this section has underscored, careful attention to the details of planning will pay off in program results. Use of a logic model can be invaluable in setting clear expectations and seeing how all components of the program work together. Attention to the details of implementation is also essential, including planning for emergencies and contingencies. Finally, promotion and marketing of an education project should receive systematic attention in the planning phase. All of the key elements of the program should be monitored during the implementation phase to ensure that they are running smoothly and to undertake mid-course corrections as needed.

3

Part III. Project Evaluation

Introduction

To get to this point in the project design process, a considerable amount of time, effort, and other resources have been expended. Quite obviously, the goal is to create effective education projects that can serve as models of excellence. But how do you know if you have succeeded?

This portion of the guide has been developed to help education managers take project development to a new level by truly integrating evaluation into the process. Part III walks through the basics of evaluation, outlining everything from types of evaluations and ways of collecting information to the use of outside evaluators and ethical considerations in gathering data from program participants. This information is intended to answer questions about project evaluation and provide guidance in using evaluation as a project improvement tool.

What is Project Evaluation?

In the course of implementing a project various types of information are gathered. Project managers often want to know how many individuals participated in an event, whether participants were satisfied with the logistics, or whether staff members and volunteers feel confident in their ability to deliver a particular educational experience. Answers to these questions provide useful information. They help managers monitor specific aspects of the project. However, in practice, this type of information gathering tends to be more sporadic and patchy than methodical and comprehensive.

Evaluation is the systematic collection of information about activities, characteristics, and outcomes of projects in order to make judgments about the project, improve effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming (adapted from Patton, 1987). Importantly, evaluation provides managers with well-documented and considered evidence to support the decision-making process. Evaluation is not merely the accumulation and summary of data and information about a project.

Project evaluation helps determine a project's merit (does it work?) and its worth (do we need it?). Evaluation helps decision-makers determine if a project should be continued and, if so, suggests ways to improve it. Additionally, evaluation documents project (and program) accomplishments. If the project has been designed properly with well-articulated objectives that specify what must be accomplished, to what degree, and within what time period, the evaluation can determine whether or not the objectives have been met. The evaluation can also gather information as to the reasons why a project is or is not meeting its objectives.

Why is Evaluation Important to Project Design and Implementation?

The reasons for conducting a project evaluation vary as dramatically as do the projects and their contexts. Perhaps the most common reason revolves around the desire to understand, in a systematic way, what is and is not working in a project. All too often, how projects work (or don't work) is understood primarily through a combination of instincts, anecdotes, and numbers on a balance sheet. The passionate instructor wrapped up in the moment of teaching is probably not in the position to make defensible claims about the long-term impact of a lesson on learner's education. Likewise, a series of anecdotes, although informative and even satisfying, cannot serve as the basis for generalizations. Evaluation provides perspective. It provides evidence. It provides the types of information necessary for sound decision-making. The following outlines additional benefits of conducting project evaluations.

- **Participants:** Participants are core to the success of the project. In the long run, project sustainability will depend on the degree to which participants benefit directly, short-term and long-term, from the experiences or services. The evaluation will provide evidence of the ways in which participant learning is impacted.
- **Project Improvement:** Project strengths and weaknesses can be identified through an evaluation. Of equal importance, an evaluation can map out the relationships among project components – that is, how the various parts of a project work together. This information can be used to re-design the project and increase both efficiency and effectiveness.
- **Public Relations:** Data generated by an evaluation can be used to promote the products and services of the project within and outside of the agency. Instead of vague claims and uncertain assertions, statements based on evaluation results will be viewed as more substantial and justifiable.
- **Funding:** More and more education managers require a comprehensive, outcomes-based evaluation. They want to know what types of impacts the project has made. Even if evaluation is not required, an evaluation can provide evidence of project effectiveness. Such evidence may be important when limited resources are being distributed internally. Evaluation results are often used in the process of determining if a project should be continued, scaled back, discontinued, or enhanced.
- **Improved Delivery:** Projects evolve over time. What was once a coherent, discrete set of activities may have grown into a jumbled set of loosely related events. An evaluation can help clarify the purposes of the project, allowing decision-makers to examine project components against well-thought out criteria. Valid comparisons of projects and activities can be made and duplication of efforts can be limited. It is quite possible that the evaluation will uncover a gem hidden in the jumble.
- **Capacity Building:** Engaging staff members, volunteers, and other stakeholders in the design and implementation of an evaluation will provide opportunities for skill-building and learning. As the project or program is examined, those involved will also develop insights into the workings of the project and perhaps even the workings of the organization. These insights can be used to inform a strategic examination of projects and programs by identifying priorities, overlap, gaps, and model programs.

- **Clarifying Project Theory:** When the project was designed initially, it was built either explicitly or implicitly on a project theory that explained how things work or how people learn or even how organizations change. Based on experiences with the project and information taken from research literature, the evaluation provides an opportunity to revisit the theory behind the project. By making the project theory explicit, the underpinnings of the project and what makes it work will be better understood and thus, better implemented. Staff members and volunteers who understand why a particular set of teaching methods was selected or why the project activities were sequenced the way they were will be more likely to follow the plan. They will also feel more ownership in the project if they understand the theory behind the project more fully.
- **Taking Stock:** Engaging in evaluation provides a precious opportunity to reflect on the project, to consider where the project is going and what it has been able to accomplish compared to expectations. Taking stock is more than accumulating information about the project – it is learning through the project.

12 Steps of Planning a Project Evaluation

STAGE I: PLANNING
Step 1. Reexamine the issue, audience, and project objectives
Step 2. Establish the planning team (including stakeholders, audience, and evaluators)
Step 3. Establish the goals and objectives of the evaluation
Step 4. Clarify the time frame in which the activities and impacts (outcomes) are expected to occur
Step 5. Perform a literature search
Step 6. Select data collection methods and develop questions based on the evaluation goals and objectives
STAGE II: DATA COLLECTION
Step 7. Determine the audience sample
Step 8. Design and pilot the data collection instrument
Step 9. Gather and record data
STAGE III: DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING
Step 10. Perform data analysis
Step 11. Manage data
Step 12. Synthesize information and create report

Planning an Evaluation

As mentioned earlier, evaluation is the *systematic* collection of information about activities, characteristics, and outcomes of projects to make judgments about the project, improve effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming. Consequently, great care must be made in the planning of any evaluation effort. Twelve steps in conducting a project evaluation are outlined below. The outline is intended to breakdown a complex process into manageable steps. Please recognize, however, that in providing an overview of the process, nuances and detail are necessarily omitted.

Does evaluation really matter?

“We all know evaluation is important...some of what we learned made me realize just *how* important.” In interviews with a variety of agency educators, a common theme was that evaluation is important, but that it’s often not thought about until after a program is well underway.

Most educators used feedback forms for the bulk of their evaluation information. In most cases, they found that people liked their programs and offered some minor ways in which the program could be improved. Several of the educators who used evaluation in this way commented that there was no need for more information because they know their program already. Many wanted to continue with gathering the same type of evaluation data in order to maintain a consistent level of participant/audience satisfaction with the program.

On the other hand, educators who wanted to use evaluation to improve their programs asked more people more questions in different ways and at different times in order to get a “good picture of how we’re doing.” The outcomes from these evaluations revealed that people liked the programs, but also gave the educators a lot of information for making changes and for reporting purposes. One educator was surprised when she realized that not all the findings had to be high scores because she was able to explain how the data were being used and able to show improvement. “That made my boss very happy – I was able to show accountability.”

When evaluative data are gathered reveals a lot about program managers’ beliefs about evaluation. A clear majority assume that a feedback form is “an evaluation,” while others believe it is a pre-test/post-test. Some individuals used team meetings in the planning phase all the way through staff and secondary audience measures in the outcome measurement phase as “parts of how we’re learning about our program.”

As with needs assessment, the larger the program, the more time that it takes to conduct and run, and the more funding it has, the more evaluation is formalized throughout the process. This makes good sense from an accountability perspective – where you spend your resources, including your time, makes all the difference, and evaluation can help you improve and understand whether your resources are being wisely used.

Stage I: Planning

Step 1. Reiterate the issue, audience, and project objectives

Before a project evaluation can be designed, it is essential to fully understand the project – its components, the relationships among the components, the audience(s), and the intended outcomes (short-term, intermediate, and long-term). The project logic model should be examined and used as a roadmap for evaluation planning. With the logic model and the associated performance objectives in hand (see Part II, Step 4), evaluation planners will be able to articulate how the project is supposed to work. From this foundation, the rest of the evaluation design will follow.

What evaluation steps do people really do?

This manual aims to provide you with a good picture of how programs should be considered, planned, implemented, and evaluated. But when it comes to evaluation, what do people really do?

Well, some really do everything! One program used a needs assessment in the field to write a grant. The managers then used logic modeling with stakeholders to begin the planning process, resulting in a plan for developing, implementing, and evaluating the program at all points in the process. Funding for hiring external evaluators was built into the grant proposal.

Some programs do very little on a formal basis. But even in these programs, when asked how they know the program is successful, the educators are able to cite examples. Thus, data are being gathered, even if informally.

Most programs fall somewhere in the middle. Education managers do pieces of several of the steps listed, but may not do all of them, or they do some of them cursorily. For example, step 5, performing a literature review, works for both planning and evaluating the program. One educator knew she didn't have the educational background to develop a program and so spent several weeks in the library looking at what others had done with similar content programming. She felt that time spent on Step 5 made a tremendous difference in the success of her program since she "was able to pick from the best of what's out there already," and she had clear insight into what she needed to measure in order to be sure her program was meeting its goals. Others also hoped to avoid "re-inventing the wheel" and used listserves and correspondence with colleagues and friends to locate existing resources. A few educators also did Internet searches for resources, research, and reports, including visiting educational clearinghouses to locate well-reviewed materials and "best practices." In some cases, they were able to find evaluation instruments that could be adapted to their own programs.

Based on our interviews, it is clear that different programs relied on different steps to provide important information. Only a few carried out all steps with equal weight – and given the resources involved, that too may be appropriate. But what we learned from interviewing these educators is that if every step is valuable to someone, then all the steps *are* valuable. Maybe not every step needs to take up a lot of time, but every step should definitely be considered.

Step 2. Establish the planning team (including stakeholders, audience, and evaluators)

The project, in all likelihood, involves a variety of players. Project managers, resource managers, staff members, volunteers, participants, and community members all have a stake in the overall success of the project. Each plays a different role and sees the project through a different lens. These perspectives should be tapped when planning an evaluation. To ensure that ideas and perspectives are represented, members of stakeholder groups should be invited to participate in an evaluation planning team. The team, depending on the particulars of the evaluation, may play a purely advisory role or may take a more hands-on role in the actual data collection. The exact expectations of planning team members need to be decided on and articulated early in the process. Hopefully, this team was established during the planning process for the project itself (see Part II, Step 2).

Step 3. Establish the goals and objectives of the evaluation

The project logic model (see Appendix C), created during the early phases of project planning, illustrates the relationships among the various project components (objectives, resources, activities, outputs, and short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes). The logic model should help guide project evaluation by serving as a tool for clarifying program elements, on-going self-evaluation, and identifying evaluation questions and indicators (performance measures).

At some point, however, the evaluation team will need to determine the scope of the evaluation – that is, define the purpose of the evaluation, what is going to be evaluated, and who will use the evaluation. Given time and resource constraints, it may not be realistic to expect that all aspects of the project will be evaluated. The project team will need to set specific goals and objectives that can be used to focus evaluation planning and design. A careful consideration of the project theory should be included in this discussion. To get the most out of an evaluation process, the project theory should be made explicit and put to a test. In doing so, the evaluation should be able to shed light on deeper questions related to how and why the project works the way it does. The model below gives an indication of how outputs and outcomes can be described qualitatively and measured quantitatively.

Determining What Can Be Measured

	Quantity	Quality
Outputs	Output Quantity <i>e.g., How many workshops have been given?</i>	Output Quality <i>e.g., How often have participants referred back to the materials since the workshop?</i>
Outcomes	Outcome Quantity <i>e.g., How many local policies have changed?</i>	Outcome Quality <i>e.g., Is the information in the workshops conducted by the local planning agency accurate?</i>

Source: Adapted from: Friedman, M. (1997). A guide to developing and using performance measures in results-based budgeting. Washington, DC: The Finance Project.

Step 4. Clarify the time frame in which the activities and impacts (outcomes) are expected to occur

The relationships between overall project design and implementation, and project evaluation cannot be overestimated. Project evaluation is integral to project design. The evaluation timeline must be integrated into the project implementation timeline and vice versa. Otherwise, important opportunities, such as the ability to collect baseline data or assess critical impacts, can be easily missed and lost forever. Planning and implementing an evaluation can take several months. Sufficient care must be given to the development of the evaluation timeline to ensure effectiveness.

Sample Evaluation Timeline for the Development and Analysis of a Survey

Month 1	Form evaluation team; set expectations; conduct background research (literature review, gather existing data, review logic model)
Month 2	Determine survey method; determine sampling method; develop draft survey
Month 3	Pilot test survey and revise
Months 4-5	Administer survey (mail, phone, in person)
Month 6	Code and enter data; analyze data
Month 7	Write evaluation report and send results to stakeholders

Step 5. Perform a literature search

Evaluation, like overall project planning, rarely takes place in a vacuum. As mentioned previously, projects are developed based on explicit or implicit theories of how the world works. In designing an evaluation it is helpful to identify the related literature and use this literature as a touchstone. Likewise, research into evaluation processes, practices, and standards is useful. This is particularly true if the evaluation team does not include an outside evaluation expert or someone with significant evaluation expertise. Finally, existing sources of information (previous evaluations, census data, reports, budgets, etc.) should be tapped.

Step 6. Select data collection methods and develop questions based on the evaluation goals and objectives

By this point in the process, the evaluation team has determined why an evaluation is being conducted, who will conduct it, what will be evaluated (including defining project theory, expected outcomes, and indicators), who will be evaluated, and when the evaluation will take place. Each of these decisions begins to define the type of evaluation (e.g., formative, summative) to be conducted as well as the data collection methods (e.g., surveys, interviews, case studies, focus groups) that will be most appropriate (see discussion of tools in Part IV).

Stage II: Data Collection

Step 7. Determine the audience sample

Except in rare cases when a project is very small and affects only a few participants, evaluations will be limited to a subset of the total anticipated audience. The preferred method for selecting a subset is random sampling – a procedure that reduces sample bias and response bias by selecting a sample that accurately reflects the population (see Appendix B). A sample represents the population if every person in the population has an equal chance of being selected. In general, to reduce sampling errors, make the sample as large as feasible in terms of time and money. The larger the sample, the more it accurately reflects what would be obtained by evaluating everybody in the population.

In determining an audience sample, some basic questions will need to be answered. For example:

- **How many audiences do you wish to sample?** A project might identify teachers, parents, and students as its audiences. Each audience would be sampled independently.
- **How many individuals do you hope to assess?** See Determining Sample Size – Rules of Thumb in Appendix B as a guide.
- **How can you best reach the audience to collect data?** Visitors to a marine sanctuary, for example, might only be accessed during a short window of opportunity; members of an advisory group might be more readily available.

All of these questions are important in devising an appropriate evaluation sample.

Step 8. Design and pilot the data collection instrument

Just as the initial design of the project required careful design and pilot testing of instructional materials to see how they worked, the data collection methods and instruments (e.g., interview, focus group, survey, observation) need to be crafted and pilot tested. The evaluator will need to consider a series of questions in order to design the data collection instrument, such as: How important is statistical precision? How important is in-depth information about one or more aspect of the project? How will data collection be standardized? Is contact information on target audience(s) available? What method would the audience be most receptive to? How many questions can be asked?

Step 9. Gather and record data

Again, just as the design of a project requires the consideration of various logistics (e.g., staff schedules, availability of facilities), the data collection process for an evaluation must be thoroughly scoped. The evaluation team will need to determine how data will be collected and recorded, and by whom. Depending on the expertise of those responsible for data collection, it may be necessary to train interviewers, focus group facilitators, and/or observers. Additionally, evaluators will need to design a system that assures anonymity and that conforms to all aspects of ethical standards.

Stage III: Data Analysis and Reporting

Step 10. Perform data analysis

Analyzing quantitative and qualitative data is often the topic of advanced research and evaluation. It is always a good idea to include a planning team member with survey and statistical analysis and/or qualitative data analysis expertise on the evaluation team. When that isn't possible, there are a few basics that can help in making sense of the data:

- Have a plan in place for how to analyze, synthesize, store, and manage the data *before* starting the data collection.
- Develop a plan to guarantee an unbiased analysis and reporting of the data.
- Always start analyzing the collected data with a review of the evaluation goals and objectives. (Why was the evaluation undertaken? What question did the team want answered?)
- Make copies of all data, and store a master copy of the original data in a safe place.
- For qualitative data, anticipate responses (the pilot test will help with this), and have a plan for categorizing and coding the data.

Step 11. Manage data

After the data are collected and even after the data have been analyzed, a plan must be put in place to continue the effective and ethical management of the data. In most cases, data remain viable for some period of time. After reading the evaluation report, decision-makers, other stakeholders, and other evaluators may generate questions that can be answered by revisiting the data. Consequently, it is important to develop a plan for continued access to uncorrupted data. If data are to be retained for some period of time, the project must also make certain that the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents is maintained. Finally, intellectual property rights – including the question of who “owns” the data – need to be defined.

Step 12. Synthesize information and create report

After the data have been collected and analyzed, an evaluation report must be written. Obviously, knowing when the evaluation report and its recommendations will be needed impacts the overall timeline as well as decisions related to evaluation design and data collection strategies. Although the nature of the evaluation report (e.g., length, style of writing) is determined to some extent by its intended audience, there are standard components to any evaluation report. For example, the report must include a description of the evaluation methods used: How were the samples drawn? How was data collected and analyzed? In addition, the report must include a discussion of the problems encountered and errors made with the design and implementation of data collection tools. Readers of the report must feel confident that the results of the evaluation are credible and the recommendations sound.

Who Should Conduct the Evaluation?

Early on in the evaluation planning process, the decision will need to be made whether or not to hire an outside evaluator. In some cases, the decision may have been made for the team. Many managers require that an outside evaluator be contracted. An outside evaluator is seen as an objective third-party who may be able to bring a fresh perspective to the project. In addition, a professional evaluator has expertise that may not exist in-house. If evaluation expertise does exist and an outside evaluator is not required, it is possible to run major components of the evaluation in-house. However, managers should proceed with caution. Those with strong ties to the project (i.e., project manager, staff members, volunteers, advisory committee members) may find it difficult to shed their biases, particularly if evaluation results are to be used in decision-making. Project staff members, volunteers, and other stakeholders should be involved in determining the focus and objectives of the evaluation. However, at a minimum, an outside evaluator should be responsible for data analysis and interpretation.

Evaluation Costs

Depending on the size and complexity of the project, it is typically recommended that 5 to 15% of project costs be set aside for evaluation. Costs may be lower if some or even most of the evaluation is conducted in-house. (Remember, though, that even though a check may not be written to an outside evaluator, staff time still involves costs.) It should also be remembered that a great deal of data may already exist – for example, in annual reports or participant exit interviews. Obviously, building an evaluation around existing data has its pitfalls, but a critical examination of quality sources of existing information that can help answer the evaluation questions should not be overlooked.

Guidelines for Conducting a Successful Evaluation

1. Invest heavily in planning.
2. Integrate the evaluation into ongoing activities of the program.
3. Participate in the evaluation and show program staff that you think it is important.
4. Involve as many of the program staff as much as possible and as early as possible.
5. Be realistic about the burden on you and your staff.
6. Be aware of the ethical and cultural issues in an evaluation.

From: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Program manager's guide to evaluation.*

Ethics

Virtually all evaluations involve collecting some information, directly or indirectly, from individuals. In designing the evaluation, the project team must ensure that the individuals involved are treated with respect and sensitivity. Not only should the maintenance of confidentiality and/or anonymity be a high priority, but the time and effort expended by evaluation participants should be respected. It is not appropriate, for example, to collect data from individuals when there is no specific plan to use that data. Respondents' physical and psychological well-being must be assured throughout the data collection process. Interviews, surveys, etc. must be designed in such a way that evaluation participants are not embarrassed or asked to do something that might put them in jeopardy. Whether they are providing demographic data on a survey, completing a test, or responding to an interview, respondents are disclosing personal information about themselves. Respectful data collection is not enough, however. Evaluation ethics require that respondents understand that they are participating in an evaluation and give their permission (with minors, a parent or guardian must provide informed consent).

Types of Evaluation

As with many ventures, there are several different types of evaluation. Depending on the stage of project planning, managers may conduct a needs assessment (sometimes referred to as front-end evaluation), formative evaluation, or summative evaluation.

Needs assessment (front-end evaluation)

As might be expected, front-end evaluation or needs assessment takes place prior to undertaking the project. A needs assessment:

- Gathers information/data about the gap between the current and desired level of audience skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.
- Takes place *before* the project is designed.
- Helps confirm or negate assumptions of audience characteristics and appropriate content, define goals and objectives, and identify stakeholders and potential collaborators.

Questions that might be addressed by front-end evaluation include:

- What are the nature and scope of the problem? Where is the problem located, whom does it affect, and how does it affect them?
- What is it about the problem or its effects that justifies new, expanded, or modified projects or programs?
- What feasible actions are likely to significantly ameliorate the problem?
- What is the appropriate target audience(s)?

For more information on needs assessments, consult Part I of this document.

Formative evaluation

Formative evaluation is conducted throughout the project, during project design, development, and implementation. Most often, formative evaluation is used to test methods and materials. At its best, formative evaluation can be an essential decision-making tool that transforms the project. Formative evaluation:

- Gathers information/data about an audience's reaction to and learning from a project's pilot or prototype products/materials. Changes may be made as a result of formative evaluation.
- Gathers information/data about problems with project delivery and assesses progress towards outcomes of a project during implementation.
- Helps provide information that can be used in making decisions about modification, continuation, or expansion of the project. (Results of a formative evaluation may be used to decide how to move forward with an existing project.)

Questions that might be addressed by formative evaluation include:

- Is a particular project reaching its target audience?
- Is the project being implemented well? Are the intended activities, products, or services being provided?
- Is the project effective in attaining the desired objectives or benefits?

Summative evaluation

Again, as might be expected, summative evaluation is typically conducted at the *end* of the project. A formal report is developed that can be submitted to decision-makers and other stakeholders. Summative evaluation:

- Gathers information/data about the audience's skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors at some point in time *after* project implementation begins. Results of a summative evaluation are used to inform stakeholders about the value of a project.
- Informs decision-makers about the value or worth of the project.
- Helps provide the information necessary to make decisions about the continuation, revision, or expansion of the project (Results from a summative evaluation are used to determine if the project was "successful").

Questions that might be addressed by summative evaluation include:

- Did the project reach its target audience?
- Was the project implemented well? Were the intended activities, products, or services provided?
- Was the project effective in attaining the desired objectives or benefits? How did the project impact the intended audience(s)?
- How much did the project cost?
- Is the project cost reasonable in relation to its effectiveness and benefits?

Levels of Evaluation

There are a number of levels on which to evaluate projects. Each level provides different information about the impact of a project, from the simplest and most immediate reaction level to a longer-term, more complex evaluation (such as return on investment).

Five Levels of Evaluation

Level 1. Reaction: *What are the participants' responses to the project or activity?*

Level 2. Learning: *What did the participants learn?*

Level 3. Behavior or Application: *Did the participants' learning affect their behavior?*

Level 4. Results: *Did participants' behavior change move the original situation towards the objective (i.e., the desired outcome)?*

Level 5. Return on Investment (ROI) or Cost-Benefit: *Is the cost of implementing this project reflected in the level of benefits received from the results?*

*The 5th level, Return On Investment (ROI), is often included among the levels of evaluation, although the original Kirkpatrick (1994) model does not include it.

Source: Kirkpatrick, D. (1994). *Evaluating training programs: The four levels*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

It is important to note that although these methods are presented in a hierarchy of increasing complexity, the hierarchy does not indicate relative value. All of the levels provide useful information. The project team should select levels of evaluation based on the type of information needed to evaluate the project accurately. The levels are discussed in more detail below.

Level 1. Reaction

Reaction evaluation measures the audiences' immediate positive or negative response to the project or learning experience. This is the most common level of evaluation.

Often referred to as "smile sheets," these evaluations ask participants to rate their perceptions about the quality and impact of the specific project or activity. Smile sheets can range from a handful of questions regarding the project delivery, facility, and/or usefulness, to forms that ask participants to rate all aspects of the activity. Reaction evaluations are an important tool to measure participants' satisfaction. They are relatively easy to administer, tabulate, and summarize in a results report.

Example Questions for Level 1: Reaction Evaluation

Attending the workshop was:

Poor use of my time 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 Good use of my time

Length of workshop in relationship to the materials presented was:

Too long 1.....2.....3 (just right)4.....5 Too short

Workshop facilities were:

Inadequate 1.....2.....3 (adequate)4.....5 Great

What were the strengths and weaknesses of the workshop?

Level 2. Learning

Learning evaluation measures whether participating in the project increases the audience's knowledge and awareness of the issues addressed.

A number of different tools can be designed to measure what project participants have learned. Before and after tests, simulations or demonstrations, or other in-class (observable or measurable) methods allow instructors or project designers to determine if the knowledge or skills identified in the objectives were learned. It is important to remember that regardless of the method used to determine this, the "test" must relate directly to the course objectives.

Learning evaluations are more difficult to design and administer than reaction evaluations. One reason for this is that they must be customized for every instructional activity or project and must reflect the conditions of the specific job or real-world application of the learning. It is also important to remember that learning evaluations measure the level of knowledge or skills of participants at the time the test is administered. These evaluations do not measure long-term knowledge or skill retention, nor are they an indication of how these will be applied to a real-world situation.

Example Questions for Level 2: Learning Evaluation

What was the most important thing you learned by participating in the workshop?

List three benefits of an estuary:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

True or False: An estuary is the same thing as a bay.

Level 3. Behavior or application

This level measures whether the participant has been able to use the new knowledge and skills learned.

Application evaluation is significantly more complex than the first two levels in that it requires contacting participants after they have had time to apply the new knowledge and skills. As with other evaluation levels, many different tools can be used to collect the data. Each tool has different strengths and limitations. Tools include surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, and written document review. Regardless of the tool, the questions should present specific skill and knowledge areas and ask participants if and how they have applied these areas since learning them. Questions should focus on relevance of the program, whether participants have gone back and used materials provided by the learning experience, how new knowledge has been applied, and the use of new skills.

Measuring the application of the new knowledge and skills learned is becoming more accepted as an aspect of evaluation. It is important to know not only that participants understood the material during the learning experience, but that they were then able to go back to their homes, communities, or jobs and apply it. This level of evaluation provides evidence of whether transfer of learning has occurred. It is much more powerful to justify a project by demonstrating that participants used the information than by reporting the number of participants that “liked” the project. Many decision-makers are now demanding increased accountability of resources spent educating the target audience.

Example Questions for Level 3: Application Evaluation

Have you applied the skills you learned at the workshop to your current projects?

Not at all 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 Extensively

Have you referred to the materials in the past 6 months?

Not at all 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 Extensively

Have you implemented the action plan developed at the workshop?

Not at all 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 Extensively

Please describe one way you have used the materials in the past 6 months:

Describe one component of your action plan that you have implemented fully:

Have there been barriers in applying the information learned during the workshop?

No Yes Please explain your answer:

Level 4. Results

Results evaluation measures the degree to which any behavioral changes have affected the environment or the audience's lives.

There is constant pressure within agencies to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of their projects. In order to actually conclude that a project has had its desired effect, the participants have to "successfully" apply the new skills or knowledge. That is, the application of new skills and knowledge leads to the desired result or impact on an audience or the environment. This level of long-term feedback is becoming increasingly important, particularly when priorities are being set or when decisions to continue or discontinue the project are being made.

Results evaluations are typically feasible only for large-scale projects designed to produce specific results for a specific audience. For example, if the goal was to measure the *results* of teaching participants how to be a facilitator, the evaluator would need to focus on the people who experienced facilitation conducted by the project participants. This requires that measurements be at least one step removed from the initial participants in the project. Because it can be quite difficult to isolate the effect of the project, this level of evaluation can be complex.

Example Questions for Level 4: Results Evaluation

After training on estuary restoration:

How many acres of estuary have been successfully restored?

After staff members participate in customer service training, customers would be asked:

How satisfied are you with the level of service provided by XXX?

Not satisfied 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 Extremely

Level 5. Return on investment (ROI), or cost-benefit analysis

Cost-analysis approaches in evaluation

Cost-benefit analysis (CB): Cost-benefit is the evaluation of a project/product according to its cost and benefits when each is measured in monetary terms. A project/product must show benefits in excess of costs. In selecting from among several alternative projects, the team would choose that particular one that had the highest benefit-cost ratio (or, conversely, the lowest ratio of costs to benefits.) For example, let's say the project produced a CD on nonpoint source pollution. The total costs of production, marketing, and distribution and an estimate of beneficial outcomes are tracked. From those data, a benefit-cost ratio is developed and the value of that product is assessed based on the ratio. (Note: The major disadvantage to cost-benefit is that it is very difficult to assign costs to benefits.)

An alternate approach is:

Cost-effectiveness analysis (CE): Cost-effectiveness is the evaluation of alternative projects/products according to both their costs and their effects with regard to producing some outcome (Levin & McEwan, 2001). The most preferable alternative would be the one that shows the lowest cost for the desired changes in outcome. For example, the project produces two products on nonpoint source pollution: a Web site and a brochure with a CD. The total costs and outcomes of both are tracked, then compared to determine which product provides the maximum effectiveness per level of cost (or, conversely, the least cost per level of effectiveness).

Part III Wrap-Up

Kirkpatrick's levels of evaluation provide an interesting and useful taxonomy, but in the end, what matters are the evaluation results and how they are actually used. Evaluation is not a frill or luxury for education programs, to be conducted if there are sufficient funds remaining. Rather, an evaluation phase should be built into the plans for a project from the start. A well-crafted project evaluation helps decision-makers make decisions by determining if the project works and whether or not it is worth the investment of time and resources. Evaluation results help justify worthwhile projects in future funding cycles and help discontinue projects that have outlived their usefulness. Equally important, the data from a well-conducted evaluation can also help shape future efforts so as to provide more effective, better targeted, and more widely used programs to the public.

The next section of this manual provides an overview of some of the most commonly-used data collection methods.

Part IV.

Data Collection Methods



Introduction

Project developers and evaluators have an array of data collection methods available to them. Although selecting the most appropriate method requires thought and careful consideration, the selection process is also shaped by a number of decisions that have already been made. The type of evaluation being considered (i.e., needs assessment/front-end, formative, or summative) will determine, to some extent, the most appropriate data collection tool(s). Likewise, the level of evaluation being conducted (e.g., learning, application, results), the audience involved (e.g., children vs. adults, casual visitors vs. organized groups), and the amount of resources available (e.g., time, money) will all help determine which tools should be used. Each data collection strategy comes with strengths and weaknesses.

Matching Data Collection Tools to What is Being Assessed

It is often the case that an evaluation would want to address the degree to which participants increased their level of understanding, developed a particular set of skills, or further considered their attitudes on a topic. Some data collection tools are particularly adept at assessing knowledge gain. Others are appropriate for documenting skill or attitude development. The following chart provides some ideas of the appropriateness of using specific kinds of data collection tools to assess knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior.

Data collection method	Knowledge	Skills	Attitude	Behavior
Interview	X		X	(X)
Focus group	(X)		X	
Questionnaire and survey	X	X	X	(X)
Observation		X		X
Literature review*	X	X	X	X
Test	X	X		
Concept maps	X		(X)	
Document or product review	X	X	(X)	X
Case study	X	X	X	X

Notes:
 (X) Indicates that this technique may be, but is not always, appropriate to evaluate the indicated type of learning.
 * For comparison from past to initial condition.
 Adapted from: American Society for Training and Development (1989). *Evaluation tool use*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Validity and Reliability of Evaluation Tools

Validity and reliability are critical to the development and use of evaluation tools. The validity of an instrument is the extent to which it measures what it purports to measure. A test (or other instrument) may be valid for one purpose, but not another. The reliability of an instrument is the extent to which it measures a variable consistently time after time. An instrument can be valid and reliable, valid and not reliable, or reliable and not valid. Obviously, care must be taken to ensure that any data gathering methods are both valid and reliable.

Mixed Methods

Mixed methods, in evaluation, refers to the practice of using some combination of both quantitative and qualitative data gathering. Quantitative methods allow us to count events or number of participants, determine cost/participants, perform statistical analyses (mean, median, mode, standard deviation), and complete other calculations. Quantitative methods allow us to generalize the findings beyond the actual respondents to the relevant population.

Qualitative methods allow us to record explanations, perceptions, and descriptions of experiences – often in the participants’ own words. Qualitative methods allow us to create narratives that provide an in-depth view and a more complete understanding of the context of the evaluation. Typically, a small number of individuals participate in a qualitative evaluation. Consequently, the results of this small number of participants cannot be generalized to the population.

Each method has its own strengths and weaknesses. Using quantitative methods or qualitative methods in isolation limits what can be learned from the evaluation, what can be reported, and what can be recommended, with any confidence, as a result of the evaluation. Used in combination, however, the individual strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods can be maximized and the weaknesses minimized. More importantly, a synergy can be generated when using mixed methods. Results from more than one method of data collection can be “triangulated,” providing greater validity and enhanced understanding. A survey of participants may provide a great deal of information about what services are most desired (and least desired); an interview of a small number of the participants may provide in-depth information concerning why those services are most desired (or least desired) and, importantly, what characteristics make a particular type of service most desired.

Types of Data Collection Methods

The following table summarizes the purpose, advantages, and challenges of using different data collection methods. Remember that since data gathering instruments are developed for a specific purpose and project, they rarely represent a pure form. For example, a survey or interview may include test items. A case study often incorporates observation, document review, and in-depth interviews. Appendix A contains detailed fact sheets for each of the nine data collection methods summarized here.

Uses, Benefits, and Limitations of Various Data Collection Methods

Methods	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Interviews	To fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides full range and depth of information • Develops relationship with respondent • Allows for follow-up questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can take much time • Can be hard to analyze and compare • Can be costly • Interviewers can bias responses • Generalization may be limited
Focus Groups	To explore a topic in depth through group discussion, e.g., about reactions to an experience or suggestion, understanding common complaints. Useful in evaluation and marketing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly and reliably obtain common impressions • Can be efficient way to gather range and depth of information in short time • Can convey key information about projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be hard to analyze responses • Need good facilitator for safety and closure • Difficult to schedule 6-8 people together • Strong individuals may influence others' responses
Questionnaires and surveys	To quickly and/or easily obtain a lot of information from people in a non-threatening way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can complete anonymously • Inexpensive to administer • Easy to compare and analyze • Can administer to many people • Can obtain lots of data • Many sample questionnaires already exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Might not get careful feedback • Wording can bias client's responses • Impersonal • In surveys, may need sampling and statistical expertise • Doesn't yield full story
Observation	To gather accurate information about how a project actually operates, particularly about processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can view operations of a project as they are actually occurring • Can adapt to events as they occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to interpret behaviors • Observations can be difficult to categorize • Can influence participant's behaviors • Can be expensive

Uses, Benefits, and Limitations of Various Data Collection Methods (cont.)

Methods	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Literature Review	To gather information on the audience and/or the issue. Identify what previous investigations have found about the knowledge, skills, behaviors, or attitudes of the intended audience with relation to the issue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide much information in relatively little time • Has most likely been reviewed or seen by audience • Makes use of already gathered information • Helps to sort changes over time • Provides evidence about the problem • Minimum effort or interruption of audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be out-of-date (e.g., technology needs) • Data synthesis can be difficult • May not address specific questions of concern • Not a flexible means to get data; data restricted to what already exists • Statistical data may not address perceptions of the problem, or may not address causes of the problem • Reports may be incomplete
Tests	To determine the audience's current state of knowledge or skill regarding the issue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps identify a problem or a deficiency in knowledge or skills • Results are easily quantified • Individual performances can be easily compared • Helps determine if the problem is a training issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited availability of validated test for specific situations • Results can be influenced by attitudes • Language or vocabulary can be an issue • People may be concerned about how results will be used • Adults may resent taking tests
Concept Maps	To gather information about someone's understanding of, and attitudes towards, a complex subject or topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can offer a more comprehensive and complex view of someone's thinking than a test does • Could be a better tool for visual learners or test-phobic people • Produces qualitative and quantitative data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes training to complete properly • Takes training to administer • Can be challenging and time consuming to score • Can be difficult to analyze and interpret
Document or Product Review	To gather information on how the project operates without interrupting the project; comes from review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yields historical information • Doesn't interrupt project or client's routine in project • Information already exists • Few biases about information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often takes much time • Information may be incomplete • Need to be quite clear about what one is looking for • Not a flexible means to obtain data; data restricted to what already exists
Case Studies or Peer Review	To fully understand or depict client's experiences in a project; to conduct comprehensive examination through cross comparison of cases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully depicts client's experience in project input, process, and results • Powerful means to portray project to outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually quite time consuming to collect, organize, and describe • Represents depth of information, rather than breadth • Information gathered represents a single individual or event; cannot be generalized

Adapted from McNamara, C. *Basic guide to program evaluation*. (Retrieved from http://www.mapnp.org/library/evaluatn/fnl_eval.htm December 27, 2003.)

Selecting the Right Data Collection Method

The tables below provide a convenient reference for the selection of appropriate evaluation data collection methods for different types of projects and activities. These tables provide general observations about the types of data gathering methods. The specific design and use of any particular method will be dependent on the particular context and the types of information needed.

A. Method versus Audience							
Evaluation Methods* Audience	Interview	Focus Group	Survey	Observation	Test	Concept Maps	Case Study
Adults/who know you or your organization	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Adults/who don't know you or your organization	Good	Good	Good		Fair to Poor	Good to Fair	Fair
Decision-makers/ policy makers/ community leaders	Good	Fair	Good to Fair	Good to Fair	Good to Fair	Fair	Good
Cultural groups (other than your own)	Fair to Poor	Good to Fair	Fair to Poor	Good to Fair	Poor	Good to Fair	Fair to Poor
Teachers	Good	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good
Teens	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good
Eight to twelve year olds	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
Three to seven year olds	Fair to poor	Fair to poor	N/A	Good	N/A	N/A	Fair to poor

* Literature review and document review utilize existing sources of information that are not dependent on audience type.

B. Method versus Activity/Project

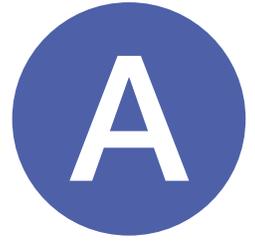
Evaluation Method*	Interview	Focus Group	Survey	Test	Observation	Concept Map
Project/Activity						
Talk/lecture (short, single event)	Poor	Poor	Fair	Good to Fair	Poor	Fair
Workshop (single event)	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Poor	Good to Fair
Series (multiple meetings)	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Fair	Good
Training (skill building)	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good to Fair	Fair
Tour (adults)	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Tour (3-16 year olds)	Fair	Fair	Poor	Poor	Fair to Poor	Fair
Event/festival	Good	Fair	Good	N/A	Fair	N/A
Interpretive sign(s)	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good to Fair	N/A
Exhibit	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good to Fair	Good
Curriculum packet/materials	Good	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Good
Kits/activities	Good	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Good
Publications	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Poor	Poor
Media (e.g., video)	Good	Good	Good to Fair	Fair	N/A	Fair
Interactive media (e.g., CD)	Good	Good	Good to Fair	Fair	Good	Good
Website	Good	Fair	Good to Fair	Fair	Good	Good

*Literature review and document review utilize existing sources of information that are not dependent on the type of activity. Case study involves creating a detailed description of a project or a participant's experiences with a project. Data for a case study can be collected through a combination of methods. The appropriateness depends, consequently, on the combination of methods used.

Appendices

Appendix A.

Fact Sheets on Data Collection Methods



The appendix contains individual fact sheets that describe in more detail the nine data collection methods – interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and surveys, observation, literature review, tests, concept maps, document or product reviews, and case studies. For each method, the number of participants, time and cost factors, and benefits and limitations are described.

Interview

What is it?

Active interchanges between two people either face to face or via technology (e.g., telephone, email).

How many respondents/participants?

Typically 5–20. The number of individuals interviewed can be increased, but time and cost also increase.

Time issues?

Interviews can last 15 minutes to 2 hours, depending on depth. Data analysis is often slow and time consuming. (Data analysis can take weeks, especially if long interviews are transcribed and initial analyses are returned to respondents for a check of accuracy.)

Cost issues?

Project managers must factor in the cost of hiring/training interviewers, transportation costs (if interviewers must travel to meet those being interviewed), and substantial data analysis time.

When to use it?

Interviews are best used when in-depth information or a variety of perspectives about a topic, experience, or service are desired. Often, interviews are selected when the issue(s) is complex. Since broad, open-ended questions can be asked, interviews are appropriate when project evaluators do not feel that they can adequately anticipate types of responses. Interviews should also be used when literacy is an issue.

What are some of the benefits?

- Variety of perspectives can be elicited
- Can be very useful way to build rapport with audience/participants
- Can generate broad and deep data about system or product
- Interviewer can clarify questions and ask for clarification of responses (follow-up questions)
- Interviewer can receive additional information in the form of nonverbal clues
- Questions can be adapted if difficulties arise
- Open-ended questions and a reduced amount of structure allow for new (unplanned for) information to be gathered
- Interviewer can ask for more information than people would want to write in a survey
- Respondents use their own words

What are some of the limitations?

- Bias due to data collector's interest and interpretations
- Time intensive
- Self-reporting of participants may bias data
- Discussion can wander from purpose of interview — results may not be focused
- Unskilled interviewers can make respondents feel self-conscious
- Unskilled interviewers may gather poor data
- Variations occur if there's more than one interviewer
- Open-ended responses can be difficult to organize and analyze
- Difficult to capture everything said unless taping the interview
- Small sample
- Replication is difficult

Focus Group

What is it?

A structured, interactive exchange between an interviewer/facilitator and a small group of people.

How many respondents/participants?

6–10 participants per focus group. More than one focus group is often helpful, especially if there is more than one audience involved in the project (e.g., parents, teachers, administrators).

Time issues?

Focus groups typically last about 1 to 1½ hours. Data analysis requires transcribing the focus group discussion and pulling trends from it. This process is relatively quick if only one or two focus groups has been conducted.

Cost issues?

Relatively inexpensive unless a focus group facilitator is hired. Other cost considerations include: transportation for participants, room rental, food or other refreshments for participants, honorarium for participants.

When to use it?

Focus groups, like interviews, are best used when a variety of perspectives about a topic, experience, or service are desired. Because focus groups involve several individuals, they are particularly useful when there is reason to believe that peer pressure and/or the social nature of the situation will stimulate creativity and/or encourage discussion of conflicting points of view. Focus groups are best used when the topics are narrow or individuals have a limited amount of information about the topic to share – that is, the discussion is focused. A rule of thumb is that focus groups are best used when any one participant could only talk about the topic for ten minutes.

What are some of the benefits?

- Input can come from wide range of people and perspectives
- Participation may have positive public relations impacts
- Can clarify different points of view
- Can really provide a good indication of the root of a problem

What are some of the limitations?

- May represent special interests

- Participants may use as “gripe session”
- May heighten expectations beyond what can be realistically provided
- One participant may influence attitudes and opinions of others
- Need to transcribe and code information for analysis; hard to quantify
- Cannot capture all information without taping session; not all people are comfortable being taped
- Small sample size

Questionnaire and Survey

What is it?

Data collection instrument through which individuals respond to printed or oral questions. May be recorded by either respondents or data collector.

How many respondents/participants?

25–1000 (typically). The number of surveys is limited primarily by time and money. Some methods (e.g., email surveys) can be sent to any and all members of the audience who have access to email.

Time issues?

20–45 minutes to complete; two to three months to collect data (for a typical mail survey; much shorter for phone, group or email surveys); one or more months to analyze data (assuming most questions are closed-ended).

Cost issues?

Costs include printing, postage, return postage, follow-up postcards. (Costs increase with a large sample size.) If surveys are administered in person (either individually or in small groups), costs can diminish dramatically. Email surveys are least costly, but the number of questions that can be asked is limited.

When to use it?

Surveys allow for the systematic and standardized collection of data that can be generalized to the population (assuming proper sampling procedures were followed). Surveys are appropriate when self-reported data about knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors are desired. Because of their format, surveys can be administered to a large number of people individually (e.g., in person, email, mail) or in groups (e.g., participants in a workshop). In addition, surveys are particularly useful when potential respondents are dispersed geographically. When evaluators have a good idea of the types of responses expected, surveys offer an efficient method of collecting information.

What are some of the benefits?

- May be easiest to quantify, summarize, and report on the data
- Time-effective for use with geographically dispersed or large sample (respondents complete and return)
- Large sample size; data can be generalized to population
- Range from inexpensive to expensive (depending on design and administration)

- Can provide opportunity for expression without fear of embarrassment (anonymity)
- Can (should) be designed to be relatively bias-free
- Questions from other instruments can be used or modified
- Can gather qualitative and quantitative data
- Respondents can complete at their convenience (for written instruments)
- Useful at all evaluation stages
- High level of return for interview-style and most group-style surveys
- Good for gathering information that requires sequencing (respondents can't read ahead if given as an oral survey)
- Survey administrators can clarify questions if conducted in person or over the phone
- Easily adaptable to a wide variety of environments

What are some of the limitations?

- May have limited provision for unanticipated responses
- Not adaptable once the survey is distributed
- Requires significant time and high level of expertise to develop valid surveys
- Low return rates for some survey formats (e.g., phone, mail) can skew data
- Can be impersonal (written, self-response format)
- Questions may miss true issues
- Questions and answers can be interpreted differently
- People have been negatively conditioned to the value of surveys
- Language or vocabulary may be an issue
- People tend to want to get the "right" answers (even if the questions is asking for attitudes)
- The survey administrator can influence the respondents
- People may hurry through answers without thinking about them

Observation

What is it?

Data collection based on watching a process or skill and systematically recording events. These observations may be made in person (at the time of the event) or using media (e.g., analysis of a video tape recording).

How many respondents/participants?

Typically 5–20. The number of people or objects/events observed depends on the subject being observed (e.g., short, discrete activity such as use of a recycle container vs. complex, lengthy activity such as the ability to facilitate a lesson).

Time issues?

Varies depending on what is being observed. Counting the number of cans recycled during a single event (e.g., community festival) requires little time commitment. Observing group interactions over the life of a project requires more complex data collection (and therefore analysis), and a longer time commitment.

Cost issues?

Varies with the complexity of the subject.

When to use it?

Observation allows evaluators to document behavior. When evaluators want to know how people behave (e.g., demonstration of skills, recycling, fishing) or the results of specific behavior (e.g., diversity of plants or animals in a restoration area), observation should be used. Actual behavior (or the results of the behavior) is documented, not what people say they do or are planning on doing.

What are some of the benefits?

- Little interruption of work flow or group activity (if done properly)
- Generates data about actual behavior, not reported behavior
- Can see project in action
- Can provide good in-depth data
- Data collected in context
- An astute observer can recognize interaction problems not easily described by participants
- Observer can follow action at different points in the system
- Administrative costs can be kept to a minimum

What are some of the limitations?

- Requires process and content knowledge by observer
- Observer can disrupt or alter the system
- Observer can be considered a spy
- Data can be skewed by observer's biases (and skills)
- Data are not always quantifiable and may require judgments by the observer
- Typically, small sample size
- Usually time intensive
- Does not indicate how participants view their actions
- Replication difficult

Literature Review

What is it?

Existing information in the form of reports, historical data, planning and budget reports, organizational structure charts, workshop evaluations, career development reports. Also includes published research and other evaluation reports.

How many respondents/participants?

N/A

Time issues?

Varies – depends on the number of documents, their availability, and the amount of information being analyzed.

Cost issues?

Relatively inexpensive, using existing documents and data.

When to use it?

Literature reviews are used primarily in early stages of the development of an evaluation and are particularly useful in front-end evaluation. Existing literature (e.g., theory, research findings, previous evaluation reports) and data (e.g., test scores) can provide a baseline. Other forms of existing data (e.g., budget reports, workshop evaluations) can help paint a picture of the intended audience, their perceptions and their reactions.

What are some of the benefits?

- Can be less time consuming
- Makes use of already gathered statistical data
- Easier to chart changes over time
- Provides excellent evidence of problem (front-end evaluation)
- Minimum effort or interruption of workers

What are some of the limitations?

- Data synthesis can be difficult
- May not address specific questions
- Data on the causes of problems may not have been collected
- Reports may be incomplete (may lack meta-data)

- Organizations can be hesitant to share if results reflect poorly on the organization or a project
- Reports may have been adjusted or “selectively edited”

Test

What is it?

An exam that assesses knowledge or skill level. Can be essay, fill in the blank, true/false, and/or multiple choice formats.

How many respondents/participants?

From 25 to thousands. Numbers are limited by the length of the test (think SAT or GRE) and its format. Scantron (or bubble tests) can be administered to hundreds or thousands (assuming access). Essay tests are limited by the ability to score them.

Time issues?

10 minutes–1 hour to administer (although most participants would resist a test that takes more than a few minutes to complete). Development of a valid and reliable test instrument can take months. Data analysis, if closed-ended questions are used, should take a short amount of time.

Cost issues?

Inexpensive to moderately expensive. Greatest cost issues revolve around the development of the test (ensuring validity and reliability). If instruments exist or simple measures of knowledge/skills are used, development costs will be limited.

When to use it?

Tests are used when evaluators want to assess the audience's level of knowledge or skills. Tests measure a point in time; they cannot predict future or past performance. If administered at intervals, tests can provide an indication of change (e.g., increased understanding) over time (pre/post assessments; longitudinal).

What are some of the benefits?

- Helps identify level of knowledge or skill (achievement and accountability)
- Results are easily quantified
- Individual performances can be easily compared
- Helps determine if intervention has made a difference in knowledge or skill level

What are some of the limitations?

- Limited availability of validated tests for specific situations
- Validity issues – does it test the appropriate knowledge and skills

- Results can be influenced by attitudes
- Language or vocabulary can be an issue
- People can be very concerned with how test results will be utilized (especially adults)
- Adults sometimes resent taking tests, which typically have a negative connotation

Concept Map

What is it?

A graphic representation of how an individual thinks about a topic.

How many respondents/participants?

Typically 5–20. The number of individuals asked to produce a concept map can be increased, but time and cost also increase.

Time issues?

5–45 minutes. Before data can be collected, respondents will need to learn how to draw a concept map. Data analysis is slow and time consuming (can take weeks, especially if concept maps are complex – showing many relationships among ideas – or if a large number of individuals produced concepts maps).

Cost issues?

Analysis of concept maps requires expertise and training.

When to use it?

Concept map is best used when the evaluator wants to understand the relationships among ideas or attitudes. Because it is structured differently from a test or typical survey, constructing a concept map may be less intimidating for some (especially for those who are uncomfortable with tests).

What are some of the benefits?

- Provides a visual representation of how individuals see the topic and the relationships among ideas
- Tends to reduce test anxiety (people often see it as a fun exercise rather than a test of understanding)
- Allows respondents to illustrate complex ideas and relationships (particularly useful for visual learners)

What are some of the limitations?

- Difficult to score (data analysis must be completed by someone with specific expertise and training)
- Time consuming to score (each idea and relationship must be analyzed)
- Participants must be taught how to construct a concept map
- Can be difficult to determine commonalities (patterns) among participants or compare participant understandings

Document or Product Review

What is it?

Systematic examination of documents (e.g., rosters, time sheets, portfolios, photographs, participant work) collected during a project.

How many respondents/participants?

N/A

Time issues?

Varies – depends on the number of documents, their availability, and the amount of information being analyzed.

Cost issues?

Data collection relatively inexpensive, assuming that documents can be retrieved easily. Data analysis may be time consuming and therefore expensive.

When to use it?

Documents can be used to quantify particular project components (e.g., number of participants, amount of time spent on task, costs). Document review is unobtrusive and does not impact on the delivery of the project. Documents can provide multiple measures of the same construct, allowing evaluators to examine the process from more than one direction.

What are some of the benefits?

- Relatively cost effective
- Assuming documents have been archived, data analysis can take place at any time
- Documents can be used to monitor the development of a project
- Project history can be documented
- Data collection is often unobtrusive

What are some of the limitations?

- Collection and analysis of documents can be time consuming (especially if documents have not been archived in an orderly manner)
- Available information may not match evaluation questions and needs

Case Study

What is it?

Holistic, detailed narrative describing a project or the experiences and perceptions of a particular participant.

How many respondents/participants?

One (in some cases 2-3)

Time issues?

Time intensive. Data collection, typically using ethnographic data collection methods, takes place consistently and continuously over an extended period of time. For the most part, data are qualitative and require a great deal of time to collect, organize and analyze. May require the evaluator to be a participant observer.

Cost issues?

Data collection and analysis requires a significant amount of time and expertise. Evaluator time could be costly.

When to use it?

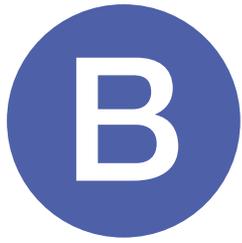
Case studies are particularly useful when decision-makers or other stakeholders would like a detailed understanding of the project or the experience of a project participant, and are willing to forego generalizability. Case studies provide a rich, in-depth description of a participant or a small group of participants, or a project and how it works. Case studies provide vivid imagery, pulling a variety of data gathered from interviews, documents, and observation into a cohesive whole. Patterns of experience can be highlighted. Case studies can help decision-makers understand project successes and failures within a well-described context.

What are some of the benefits?

- Provides a holistic understanding of the project
- Provides vivid imagery (narrative, paints a picture of the project)
- Detailed understanding of patterns and experiences

What are some of the limitations?

- Time intensive
- Detailed understanding of a particular participant, results cannot be generalized
- Strategies for data collection and analysis are complex and require extensive training



Appendix B. Determining Sample Size

The size of the sample is not nearly as important as the adequacy of the data collection design. Collecting large amounts of data from undefined sources is not recommended. If there is a bias in the data, it is unlikely to go away with more data collection. In conducting a survey, it is more important to obtain a representative sample than a large sample. Identify the groups to be sampled and put more effort into obtaining a high response rate (e.g., by phoning or sending reminders) rather than sending out large numbers of questionnaires and having a few undefined volunteers return them.

If time and resources permit, a more rigorous sampling scheme should be used. Identify a resource person who can assist the planning team with determining statistics such as margin of error, degree of accuracy, standard deviation, and mean degree of accuracy. With pilot data in hand, a resource person can work out the total sample size needed for the kind of accuracy desired.

If time or expertise is a constraint, use the following common sense guidelines:

- The size of sample needed depends upon two things: 1) how accurate the summary data needs to be (for example, for no sampling error at all, the entire population would need to be measured), and 2) how variable the data are. If the evaluator started measuring a variable and found that every measure was the same, there would be little need to continue repeating the measurements to increase accuracy. On the other hand, the more the data vary, the more data must be collected to get a reasonably accurate measure of the mean.
- Another consideration is acceptability to participants and audiences. For example, in collecting the views of staff, it might not be acceptable to take a sample, even though a sample would appear to be statistically adequate. Every staff member might need to be heard so that no one feels left out and there is no suspicion of bias.
- Sampling may also be unacceptable if it causes more disturbance than would measuring everybody. For example, it may disrupt a lesson more to withdraw six students than to test the entire class.

Determining Sample Size – Rules of Thumb

Population	Sample
50 or less	50 or less
500 or less	approx. 200
1,000 or less	approx. 275
10,000+	approx. 350
U.S. population	2,000 to 4,000

Source: Fitz-Gibbon & Morris. (1987).

Minimizing Possible Errors in Random Sampling

Type	Cause	Remedies
Sampling error	Using a sample, not the entire population to be studied.	Larger samples reduce but do not eliminate sampling error.
Sample bias	Some of those selected to participate did not do so or provided incomplete information.	Repeated attempts to reach non-respondents. Comparison of characteristics of non-respondents to determine if any systematic differences exist.
Response bias	Responses do not reflect “true” opinions or behaviors because questions were misunderstood or respondents chose not to tell the truth.	Careful pre-testing of instruments to revise misunderstood, leading, or threatening questions. No remedy exists for deliberate equivocation in self-administered interviews, but it can be spotted by careful editing. In personal interviews, this bias can be reduced by a skilled interviewer.



Appendix C

Logic Models and Performance Measures

Logic models provide an easy starting point for the selection of meaningful and realistic measures of performance. How the overall project “works” must be understood in order to identify what needs to be measured. Logic models show how the project operates.

Performance measures (or indicators) relate to how well a project performs, particularly with regard to the delivery of services (process and outputs) and achievement of results (outcomes).

Logic models “flesh out” projects and allow planners to select what should be measured directly from the model. Using the logic model allows project planners to:

- Select meaningful measures of performance.
- Select performance measures from all levels of outputs and outcomes.
- Recognize how individual projects can contribute to the larger scale (program) goals.

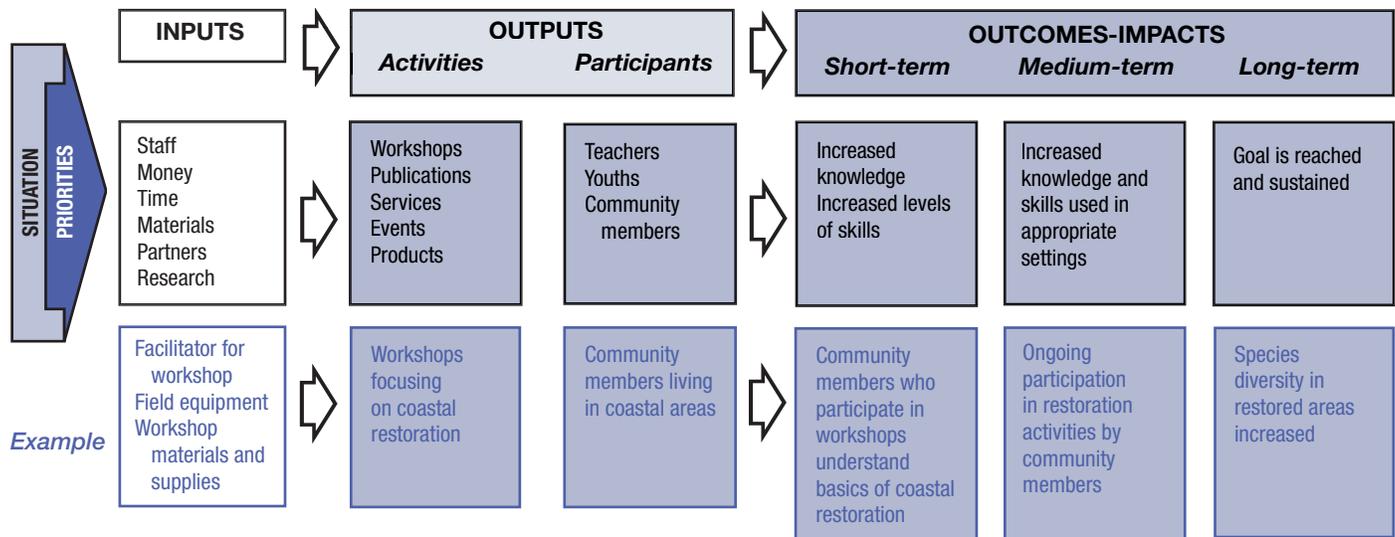
Common Types of Performance Measures

- **Outputs:** How many? What type? Audience size? Audience satisfaction?
- **Efficiency:** How many per unit time? Number per unit cost?
- **Productivity:** How much was produced?
- **Customer satisfaction:** How happy is the audience with the product, service, project, or impact?
- **Service quality:** What is the level of quality or accuracy?
- **Effectiveness:** How well were expected impacts achieved?
- **Cost-effectiveness:** Was this the best allocation of resources to achieve the impacts? Was there a less expensive or time-consuming method to get the same results?

Logic Models as a Tool for Program Development and Evaluation

The logic model provides a visual representation of the program and its evaluation. The logic model illustrates the relationships among the various program components: initial situation (e.g., degraded coastal areas with declining numbers of species), identified priorities (e.g., restoring coastal areas, increasing species diversity); inputs (i.e., resources needed to accomplish a set of activities); outputs (i.e., activities designed to accomplish the program goal, as well as the audiences that participate in those activities); and short-term (immediate), medium-term (2-3 years), and long-term (4-10 years) outcomes-impacts. The logic model can help guide program planning, implementation, and evaluation. It can serve as a tool for clarifying program elements, identifying evaluation questions and indicators, and conducting ongoing self-evaluation.

Logic Model, Evaluation Questions and Indicators



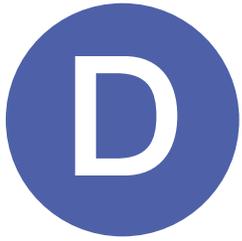
Evaluation Questions: What do you want to know?

Were the inputs sufficient and timely? Did they meet the program goals?	Did all activities occur as intended? What was the quality of the intervention? Was the content appropriate?	Did targeted community members participate? Who did not participate? Who else was researched?	Did knowledge increase? Did understanding of coastal restoration techniques increase? What else happened?	Are community members continuing to participate in restoration activities? Are they participating in other activities?	To what extent has the biodiversity of the targeted coastal area been increased? In what other ways has ecosystem quality increased?
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Indicators: How will you know it?

Number of staff; Funds invested; Delivery timetable	Number of workshops scheduled; Publications printed; Number of events	Number of workshops scheduled; Publications printed; Number of events	Number, percent with increased knowledge of coastal restoration; Additional outcomes: +, -	Number, percent using new knowledge and skills to monitor progress of restoration activities; Additional outcomes: +, -	Number of species recovered; Other positive environmental benefits; Additional outcomes: +, -
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Adapted from Taylor-Powell, E., Jones, L. & Henert, E. (2002) "Enhancing Program Performance with Logic Models." Retrieved December 1, 2003, from the University of Wisconsin-Extension web site: www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/pdf/WaterQualityProgram.pdf.



Appendix D

Using Rubrics for Scoring Performance

Designing meaningful ways of scoring performance is essential to the development and implementation of effective education projects. This seems to be particularly true when we wish to gauge whether expected learner outcomes have been achieved. Many educators have found rubrics to be a useful tool when evaluating learner outcomes. Rubrics can be thought of as a logical extension of project and instructional objectives. They provide a template for scoring performance on evaluation activities such as portfolios, open-ended questions, and group or independent research. With a well-written rubric, it is reasonable to expect that all performances will be measured with the same yardstick. Additionally, when rubrics are used in educational contexts, learners know what is to be expected of them.

Sample Rubric – Taking Water Samples				
Score	Safety: Degree to which learner follows correct safety procedures	Procedures: Degree to which learner follows proper mechanics in water quality analysis	Results: Degree to which learner obtains proper sample values	Interpretation: Degree to which learner develops likely hypotheses
4 Fully meets standards	Handles chemicals and glassware safely	Obtains uncontaminated samples and follows correct steps for pH analysis	Both samples within .3 points of the correct pH	Can list three plausible reasons why the pH of the two samples differs and can defend reasoning behind hypotheses
3 Partially meets standards	No serious safety issues during analysis, but procedures deviate from ideal	Has some problems following instructions, but procedure adequate for approximate correct test results	One sample within .3 points of the correct pH	Can list two plausible reasons why the pH of the two samples differs and can defend reasoning behind hypotheses
2 Major departure from some aspect of standards	Shows some concern or knowledge about safety issues, but is careless in handling materials	Major problems with procedures that will likely yield incorrect results	Neither sample within .3 points, but at least one sample within .5 points	Can list one plausible reason why the pH of the two samples differs and can defend reasoning behind hypothesis
1 Does not meet standards	Disregards safety concerns when handling materials	Does not follow necessary steps in analysis and cannot obtain useful results	Neither sample within .5 points	Cannot list even one plausible reason why the two samples differ

Glossary

Assessment involves gathering data (either formally or informally) to be used in forming judgments (adapted from Mehrens and Lehman, 1991).

Baseline data are collected at the beginning of the project prior to any services or activities being conducted.

Capability (PPBES definition) is the ability to do something. It is a combination of activities, processes, and skills.

Capacity (PPBES definition) is the amount of resources needed to undertake a project (input capacity) or the amount of products created as a result of the project (output capacity).

Evaluation is the systematic collection of information about activities, characteristics, and outcomes of projects to make judgments about the project, improve effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming (adapted from Patton, 1987).

Goal of a project is the ultimate, “big picture” impact desired. Goals are often difficult, if not impossible, to quantify.

Items are individual questions on an instrument.

Needs Assessment is a systematic investigation of an audience(s) to identify aspects of individual knowledge, skill, interest, attitude and/or abilities relevant to a particular issue, organization goal, or objective.

Objective of a project is a specific measurable outcome desired.

Population is the entire collection of individuals about whom one is trying to make accurate statements.

Program represents a coordinated and systematic effort to address a part of the agency’s mission.

Project is an effort or activity focused on specific issues and audiences. A set of projects, taken together, supports a program.

Qualitative Data are descriptive rather than enumerative. They are usually provided in the form of words, such as descriptions of events, transcripts of interviews, and written documents. Qualitative data can be transformed into quantitative data through coding procedures.

Quantitative Data are numeric data. Analysis of quantitative data involves looking at relationships between quantities.

Reliability is the extent to which a data gathering instrument measures a variable consistently time after time.

Response rates are the percentage of a selected sample from which data were collected (responses actually received). A further calculation can sometimes be made of the fractions of the population requested in the sample.

Sample is a subset of the population from which information is collected.

Survey Instruments are any consistent method or tool by which information is systematically gathered.

Validity of an instrument is the extent to which it measures what it purports to measure. A test may be valid for one purpose, but not another.

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