

MENTORING

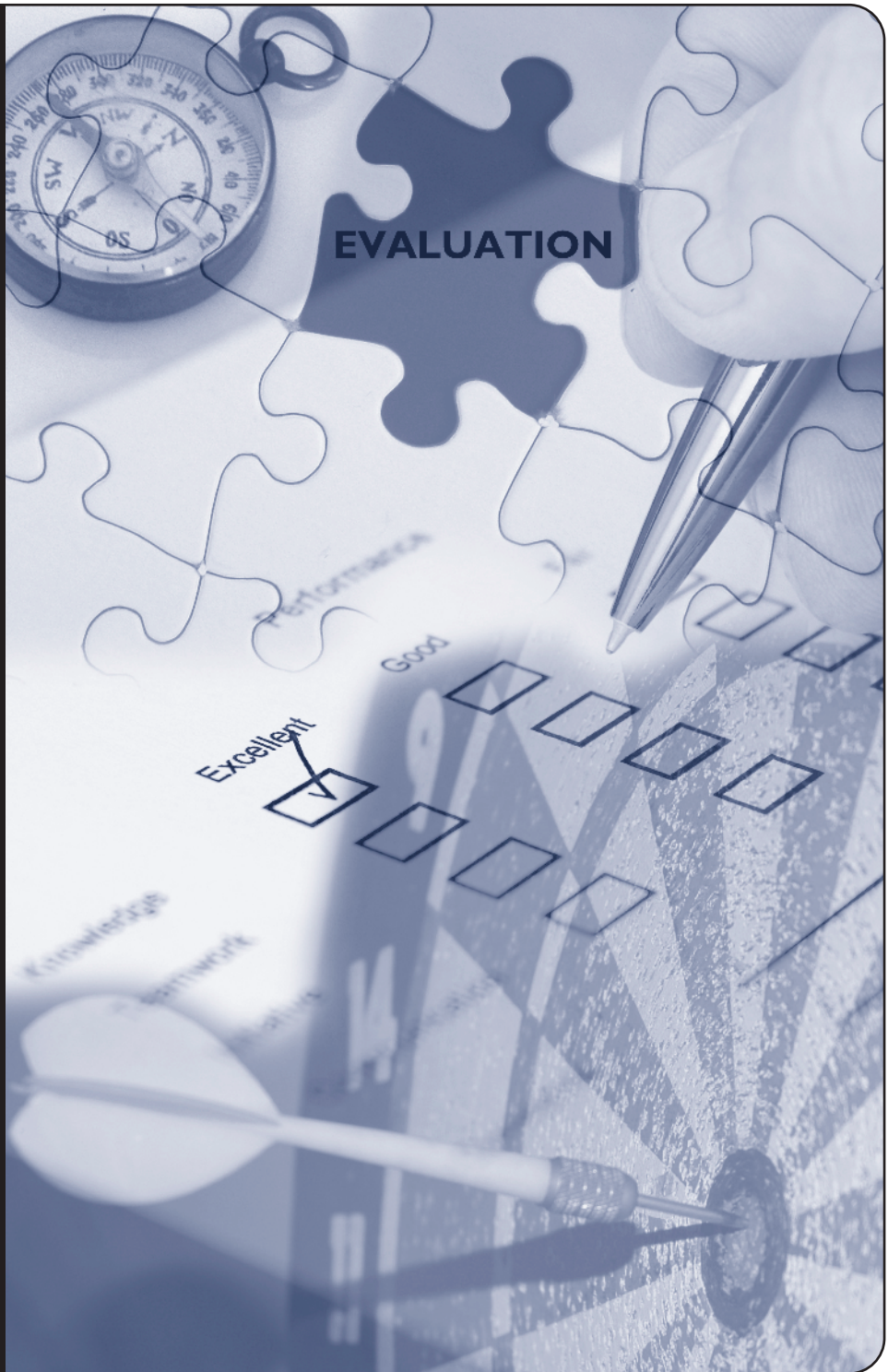
Tactics

This Issue

Are We There Yet? A Road Map for Navigating the Evaluation of Your Mentoring Program

changing a life forever

MENTORING



DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING A GROUP MENTORING PROGRAM

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PURPOSE

As program evaluation becomes a standard component in mentoring program infrastructure, service providers are becoming informed participants as the contractors of evaluators, if not the evaluators themselves. Developing capacity to make strategic choices about how to assess program implementation and program outcomes allows service providers to conduct evaluations that are pertinent to their programs, as well as contribute to the body of knowledge that informs the advancement of the mentoring field. The purpose of this tactic is to give service providers concrete tips and strategies for customizing their local program evaluation. It is a roadmap navigating your path towards the program evaluation of your choice.

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I. MEASURING MENTORING

Currently a focus of national attention, the mentoring paradigm has experienced a proliferation of programs over the past 15 years.¹ Mentoring programs are available in response to a diverse range of demands: general academic support and supplementation, literacy-specific needs, substance use prevention, violence prevention (including gang and bullying-related violence), provision of stable role-models, vocational apprenticeship, community/civic service promotion, and cultural and language assimilation. Promoting youth development across a range of targeted areas and populations has led to the diversification of mentoring program formats. Mentoring occurs one-on-one, in groups, at school sites, at community sites, at home, in structured and unstructured interactions, with and without supervision, and for varying durations and frequencies. Mentor screening, training, support, and approach to making matches is as diverse as the programs. The mission of mentoring – to nurture a young person through a relationship with an older person – unites the field. Mentoring programs, however, come in all shapes and sizes.

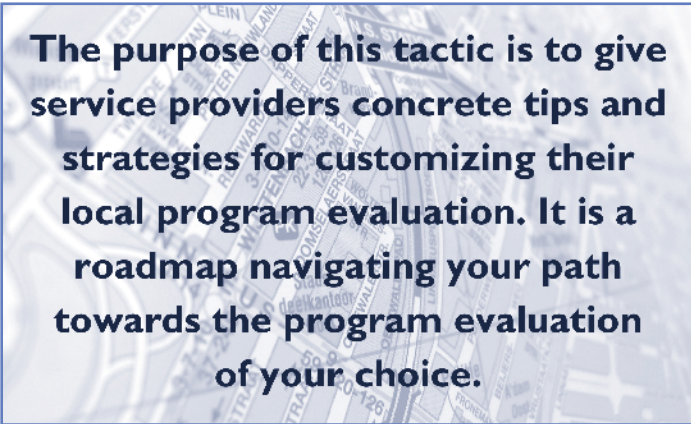
There are a large number and variety of existing mentoring programs, and the call for mentoring services continues to be heard from local to national levels. This has led to more scrutiny of (and, thus, accountability from) programs and funders. Leaving out the “which came first” debate, service providers are motivated to implement mentoring strategies with proven success, and funders are inclined toward supporting programs that demonstrate desired impacts on youth. The result is greater frequency and level of rigor with which mentoring programs are evaluated for effective implementation and outcomes. In addition, service providers are integrating program evaluation into their mentor program plans. Local level program evaluations give service providers insights into program improvement

opportunities, strategic refining of services, and delivery and evidence-based bragging rights to implementation and outcome successes.

As program evaluation becomes a standard component in mentoring program infrastructure, service providers are becoming informed participants as the contractors of evaluators, if not the evaluators themselves. Developing capacity to make strategic choices about how to assess program implementation and program outcomes allows service providers to conduct evaluations that are pertinent to their programs, as well as contribute to the body of knowledge that informs the advancement of the mentoring field.

As the mentoring community moves toward systematically evaluating programs, service providers are assuming the role of overseeing outside evaluation teams. Some providers take on the role of evaluator themselves. For service providers, the “evaluation hat” is one of many “hats” worn in an effort to support and sustain a mentoring program. Continuing with the hat metaphor, evaluation is not a one-size-fits-all. Service providers can think of evaluation as a process that can be customized to their program in the way that hats can be tailored to suit individual weather conditions (sun, rain, cold), different styles (elaborate, simple, innovative, traditional), and personal preferences (versatile, stylized). Just as one buys a hat that is suitable for the situation, service providers buy into a program evaluation that is appropriate for the program. The point of this metaphor is to underscore the idea that service providers need not walk around wearing an ill-fitting “evaluation hat.” Customizing a local program evaluation, while a bit of an upfront investment, insures a comfortable and effective fit.

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2: DECODING EVALUATION JARGON: KEEPING IT REAL

Evaluation lingo can seem like a foreign language. Without a translation of the jargon, it is difficult to (a) identify the concepts and practices involved in a program evaluation and (b) feel confident making strategic choices about or conducting a program evaluation. In an effort to bridge the gap, do away with the blindfold, and spread the wealth, we are providing a glossary of common evaluation terms translated into everyday language.

Attrition	Loss/reduction of participants for any reason during treatment or program timeframe.
Baseline	Starting point. The point prior to which treatment or program begins.
Change score	Value of the difference between two scores (over time, etc.).
Cleaning data	The process of excluding data points that are out of range, incomplete, or do not make sense for the purpose of conducting analysis.
Coding	Assignment of numeric value to response options for data entry.
Comparison Group	A group equivalent in key characteristics (e.g., age, gender, race) to the target group. The comparison group does not receive the target program. Groups are compared on outcome indicators.
Content analysis	Organization of open-ended item responses or other qualitative data into meaningful categories.
Control Group	Participants randomly assigned to not participate in program to be compared to group randomly assigned to participate in program. More rigorous than comparison group because of random assignment.
Count	Tally or sum of values.
Data	Information.
Data analysis	The process of compiling qualitative or quantitative information in order to answer evaluation questions.
Database	Computer program (or sometimes handwritten log) used to manage and store information. Each cell contains a single piece of data.
Demographic	Information describing a population.
Design	The structure of the evaluation including time line (see “Pre Test” and “Post Test”) and any comparison group (see “Control Group”).
Dosage	Amount of participation in or exposure to program/service.
Frequency	The number of times a given response occurs (in raw, ratio, or percentage format).
Follow-up Test	A data collection point (e.g., survey administration) after the post test, usually a substantial period of time after conclusion of program participation (e.g., 3 months after completing the curriculum).
Instrument	Measure used to assess information for evaluation purposes.
Likert Scale	A survey response option format that provides a range of choices usually spanning a high to low spectrum (e.g., very true, true, not true, very untrue).
Logic Model	Diagram that represents the program plan and the relationships between program elements.
Mean	The average of numeric values derived from dividing the sum of all values by the number of values.

Measure	The process of assessing information (verb). The instrument used to assess information (noun).
Median	It is the value that is the mid-point in a set of values where half the values are smaller and half are larger.
Missing data	Pieces of information that are unavailable because they were not collected, they were lost, or they are undecipherable.
Mode	The most frequently occurring value in a group of values.
Normal Distribution	Normal distribution refers to a group of data points that occur symmetrically and with a bell-shaped density and one peak.
Outlier	A data point that does not cluster with other data in the group.
Outcome Evaluation	Assessment focused on the effects of participation on participants (also known as impact evaluation).
Post Test	A data collection point (e.g., survey administration) after program services/content has been delivered. It may be at a completion or termination point or during the program participation period.
Pre Test	A data collection point (e.g., survey administration) before any program services/content is delivered (see “baseline”).
Process Evaluation	Assessment focused on the implementation of a program or service.
Psychometrics	Statistical analyses used to test the characteristics of assessment instruments.
Qualitative Data	Information gathered in non-numeric form (e.g., journals, paintings, focus groups).
Quantitative Data	Information gathered in numeric form (e.g., checklists, surveys).
Random Assignment	The process by which potential participants are designated for participation (experimental group) or non-participation (control group) in a program or service. Each individual has an equal chance of being in either group. (Note: random assignment can be conducted by school or site as well.)
Reliability	The extent to which an instrument measures consistently and dependably.
Response Rate	The number/percent of participants solicited for information who actually provide that information.
Reverse Coding	Changing the codes assigned to responses so that the coded values reflect the inherent value of the response.
Sample	The population represented by the participants (also known as sample size).
Statistical Analysis	The process of testing information using mathematical strategies in order to interpret data.
Statistical Significance	The probability that the outcome of data analysis indicates an effect when there is not one.
Subscale	A specified cluster of instrument items within a broader set of items.
Validity	The extent to which an instrument measures what it claims to measure and not something else.
Variable	A specified data point whose value depends on individual participants or subjects (e.g., “gender” is a variable whose value changes depending on the person).

3: LET'S BE LOGICAL

Logic models are an ideal launching pad for evaluation planning. Logic models provide a concise representation of the logical and linear relationships that link each component of a program plan. Logic models are the graphic representation of the program plan. A good logic model diagrams the relationships between an identified need or issue (e.g., lack of supplemental academic support in a particular middle school), what services/programming have been identified to address this need (e.g., after-school homework club at the

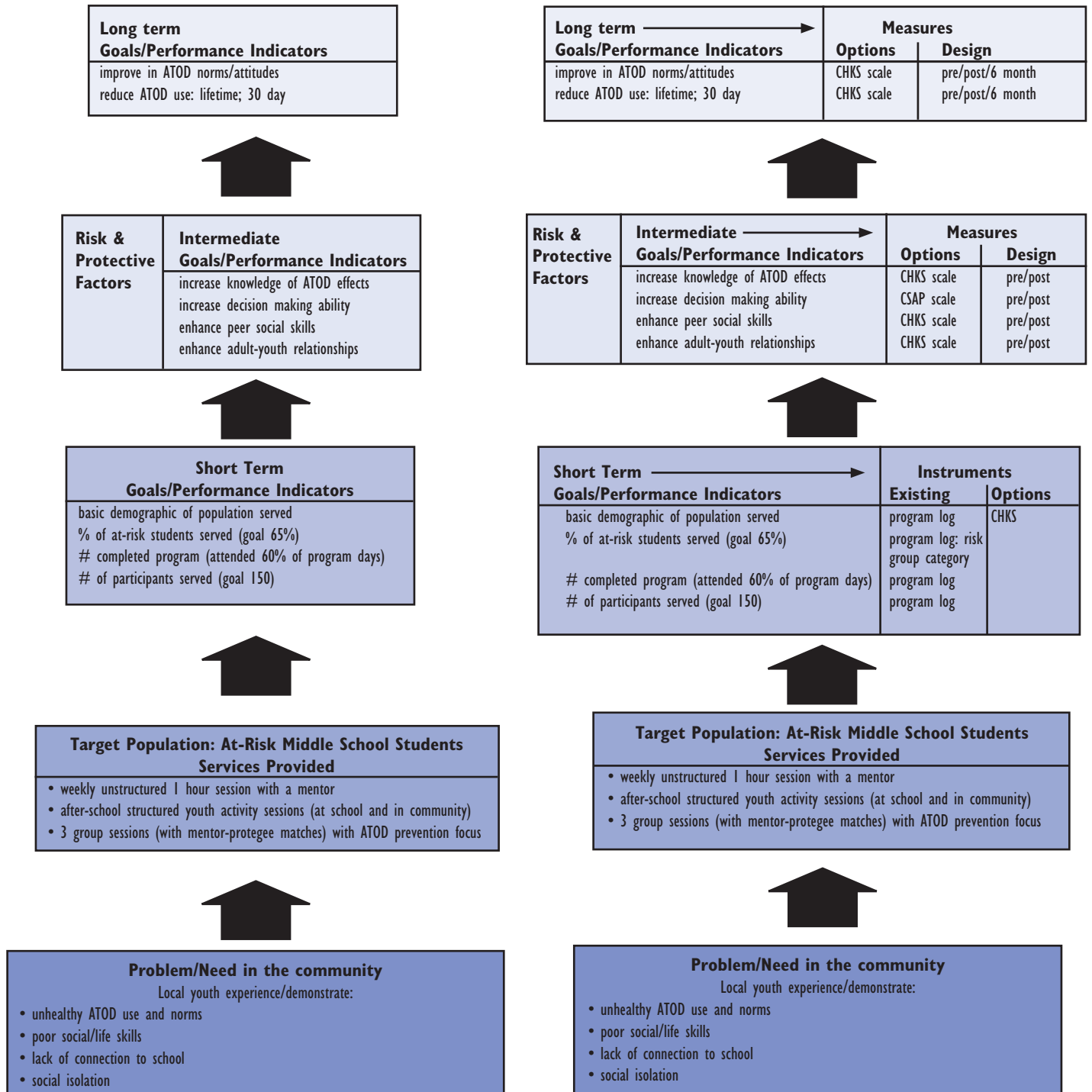
middle school), and what impacts (i.e., outcomes) are expected from participation (e.g., improved school bonding, fewer students performing below grade-level). Sometimes this process is referred to as a program's "theory of change."¹ Programs usually identify their theory of change by consulting existing research, evidence, and strategies relevant to their mission or service focus. Using a logic model format translates text and "theory" into concrete visual depiction (think: flow chart) of what a program proposes to do and how it will do it.

BASIC STEPS TO DEVELOPING A LOGIC MODEL

- 1. Identify a need or issue, including the target population/location and why it is a need or issue (i.e., the broader implications).**
- 2. Determine what services or programming will be implemented to address the need/issue. Be as specific as possible (e.g., who gives and receives services, where, when, how much/often, etc.).**
- 3. Based on services delivered and according to previously demonstrated effects (i.e., existing evidence), propose the impact of services on participants. These outcomes can be broken into effects likely to occur immediately (short term) and in the intermediate- and long-term period relative to the program duration.**
- 4. Once proposed outcomes are clearly articulated (e.g., 80% of youth will improve their annual attendance records after participation; not youth will do better at school), specify how (what evaluation instrument or method) progress toward each outcome will be assessed (e.g., comparison of 2004 to 2005 school attendance records).**

For more detailed guidelines on designing a program (and program evaluation) logic model, see W.K. Kellogg Foundation's *Logic Model Development Guide*, www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf) or The Community Tool Box's *Developing a Logic Model or Theory of Change*, http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/section_1877.htm

One of the benefits of using logic models to represent program structure is that it is easy to identify missing links, “leaps of faith,” and illogical relationships defining the program model. Using logic models can initially seem daunting. Once you get the hang of it, it is a user-friendly tool for keeping the program model in effective working order. It is important to keep in mind that logic models come in a variety of shapes, colors, and systems. If the first one you see does not resonate with you, keep looking until you find one that does. Below are examples of one form of logic model, using an alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) sample program. The first is the program plan only; the second demonstrates how the evaluation plan is directly linked to the program model.



4: FINDING THE “VALU” IN EVALUATION

Program evaluations should be designed to maximize their benefit to service providers. This requires some “up front” planning on the part of the service provider. Specifically, service providers and program staff involved in the evaluation process should take the time to ask themselves, “What matters to me that can be addressed through this evaluation?” The evaluation plan should evolve as a merging of “what matters” according to all parties involved: participants, program staff, program directors/administrators, partner agencies, funders, community members, and other associated parties (e.g., parents or teachers of youth participants). This “organic” shaping of evaluation insures that those contributing to the evaluation process have a vested interest in the implementation and final product(s).

When considering what matters regarding accountability, review the expectations relevant to program funders and key stakeholders. What is the focus of the funding initiative? What are the priorities of stakeholders? In addition, think about policy initiatives (or lack thereof) that may be informed by results of your program evaluation. How might information yielded by the evaluation provide support to a policy campaign or review? When considering what matters regarding program improvement, take into account what information will assist you in adapting and/or honing services or serve as a staff morale booster. What recruitment strategy was most effective? What impact did expanding teen center hours have on capacity to serve youth? Finally, when considering what matters regarding future opportunities, determine how to document needs and gaps in the community or in the programming. How did school-based mentoring impact student attendance, and what other school sites are candidates for program expansion? The program evaluation results can serve as evidence of future or additional funding. How many youth referrals would not be matched because of insufficient staff hours to devote to mentor recruitment?

Asking the “right” evaluation questions depends on figuring out what you want to know. Once that has been determined, the next step will be to identify options for gathering information that answers the designated questions.

5: TYPES OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

There are two primary types of evaluation: process and outcome. Integrating elements of process and outcome evaluation into a single program evaluation plan may be of value. Understanding the purpose of each will lead to more effective program evaluation.

PROCESS EVALUATION

Process evaluation is sometimes referred to as “formative” evaluation. It provides continuous learning about how the program is working as it is implemented. When optimally utilized, process evaluation measures serve dual purposes: to provide program implementation information and to help support outcome findings. Process evaluation is designed to

- Focus on describing and assessing program design and implementation and
- Answer questions concerning why and how programs operate the way they do and what can be done to improve them.

Examples of process evaluation results include the following:

Excerpts from Harvard Family Research Project. (2003). *A Profile of the Evaluation of Sponsor-a-Scholar*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Sponsor-a-Scholar is a college preparatory program that provides students with one-on-one, long-term mentoring, academic support and enrichment activities, college guidance, funds for college-related expenses, and ongoing staff support during high school and through college. About a quarter of the students experienced a change in mentors: 23% had one change in mentor, and 3% had two or more. These changes were due to mentors moving away, mentors’ personal circumstances, and occasionally mentors’ waning commitment, resulting in a request to leave the program. The average length of participation for the students studied in the evaluation was just under four years, with 52% participating for four to five years, 36% participating for three to four years, and 13% participating for less than three years. Of the 180 students in the evaluation, only 12 students completely left the program.

Excerpts from M. Nancy Romain. (1996). *A Formative Evaluation of the Save Our Students Program as a Component of a Teenage Parent Program: A Case Study*. Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the Save Our Students (SOS) Program, to identify areas needing improvement, to ascertain whether student performance and/or attendance had increased, and to recommend changes. Soon after the Save Our Students Program began, it was evident that attendance was the main focus. A new program director led to elimination of the consequence for not fulfilling the contract. Administrative support was minimal and staff development and student orientation lacking. Final recommendations included developing an overall positive school attendance climate with all the stakeholders involved, rewarding borderline attenders, and then establishing intensive counseling for chronic students. Teachers would be utilized by setting a good example, teaching, and consistently enforcing attendance program policies.

OUTCOME EVALUATION

Outcome evaluation is sometimes referred to as “summative” evaluation. It demonstrates the effects of the program on participants. Outcome evaluation is designed to

- Focus on producing clear evidence concerning the degree of program impact on program participants and
- Assess the immediate or direct effects of program activities (as compared to long-term impact).

Examples of outcome evaluation results include the following:

Excerpts from Jean B. Grossman and Jean E. Rhodes. (2002, April). *The test of time: predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring relationships*. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(2), Pp. 199-219.

An article entitled *The Positive Effects of Mentoring Economically Disadvantaged Students*, {Lee, J. & Cramond, B. (1999). *The positive effects of mentoring economically disadvantaged students*. *Professional School Counseling*, 2, 172-178.} investigated whether participation in a school-based mentoring program led to improvements in students’ self-efficacy, aspirations, and ideas of what they could be – their possible selves. They also examined

whether mentoring relationships must exist for a critical length of time before mentees show significant improvement. Mentored students were divided into three subgroups according to the length of time that they have been involved in the mentoring relationship:

1. students mentored for six months or fewer,
2. students mentored for seven to twelve months, and
3. those mentored for more than one year.

Students on the waiting list for mentoring served as controls. All students completed self-report questionnaires that assessed self-efficacy, aspiration and possible selves. Results indicate that participation in the mentoring program fostered improvements in student aspiration. Only students mentored for more than one year, however, had significantly higher aspirations than students on the waiting list. None of the findings with respect to self-efficacy and possible selves indicated a significant improvement in mentored students, irrespective of the length of time they had been involved in the relationship.

Excerpts from Chelsea Farley. (2004, February). *Amachi In Brief*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

The Amachi initiative [partners] faith-based organizations with public agencies and nonprofit service providers to identify the children of prisoners and match them with caring adult volunteers. Mentors had committed to spend at least one hour per week with their mentees. On average, Amachi’s mentors and mentees met fewer than the required four times per month (averaging two visits per month instead). But mentors spent more than the expected number of hours with mentees (an average of 7.3 hours per month). Through November 2003, Philadelphia’s Amachi program had matched a total of 726 children with mentors. Almost half of these matches (339) were still active at that time. Two hundred and six matches extended beyond the one-year mark (research shows that one year is a vital benchmark for mentoring relationships). BBBS [Big Brothers Big Sisters] conducted surveys after Amachi matches had been active for one year. Ninety-three percent of mentors and 82 percent of caregivers reported that their mentee had increased self-confidence. About 60 percent of mentors and caregivers said the child had an improved “sense of the future.”

OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION

PLANNING PHASE

1. Establish the value.

Determine why and how evaluating your program will be of value to the program.

2. Formulate evaluation questions.

Review any program evaluation/monitoring “requirements.”

Identify outcome and process evaluation questions.

3. Construct evaluation framework.

Determine what information is needed to answer the evaluation questions.

Identify data sources.

Establish the data collection methodology (measures), the timeline for data collection, and the responsible party for any logistics of data collection.

Outline data analysis methods.

CONDUCTING PHASE

4. Collect data.

Coordinate data collection.

Manage collected data.

5. Organize and analyze data.

Enter data into database and clean database.

Analyze data.

6. Interpret data.

Interpret data in terms of the evaluation questions posed and in terms of the context of the program and evaluation implementation.

Address program merit, worth, and/or impact.

Make recommendations.

Identify relevant feedback for key stakeholders in the program.

REPORTING PHASE

7. Disseminate findings.

Identify audiences to receive findings, the most appropriate format for communicating findings to each, and disseminate findings.

8. Evaluate the evaluation.

Reflect on the evaluation process, the knowledge and skills of the evaluation team, the resources and methodologies used, and the findings to improve future evaluations.

Initial stages of evaluation planning involve identifying what we want to know about our program. Refer to any relevant evaluation requirements or guidelines as a starting point. Seek input from program volunteers, staff, administrators, and key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, or partner agencies.

Evaluation Question	Measures (Sources)
<i>What are the demographic characteristics of the mentors and mentees?</i>	<i>Intake form, screening application, youth survey</i>
<i>What are the baseline risk and protective characteristics of the youth?</i>	<i>Youth survey, teacher or parent referral/survey</i>
<i>To what extent are program services aligned with the underlying theory of change? (see “Logic Model”)</i>	<i>Service observation, session/activity logs</i>
<i>To what extent was mentoring model adhered to? What adaptations were made and why?</i>	<i>Fidelity instrument, service observation</i>
<i>What were successes and challenges to implementing each service component (i.e., screening, recruitment, academic support)?</i>	<i>Staff interviews, service observations</i>
<i>What are participation, match, and attrition rates?</i>	<i>Recruitment, match, and participation logs</i>
<i>What is the level of participant satisfaction with the services that were received?</i>	<i>Satisfaction survey/focus groups: youth, parents</i>
<i>Do the mentees feel a connection to their mentors?</i>	<i>Alliance/bonding scale, journaling</i>

6: ASKING QUESTIONS, GETTING ANSWERS

Once evaluation questions have been established, identify potential sources for answers. Consider whether any existing measures will address the questions posed. If not, or if no measures are in place, consider what assessment methods will (a) work within the program circumstances and (b) yield viable information that will answer the evaluation questions. Regarding the former, take into account resources required for information gathering (e.g., staff hours needed to collect and process data) and pertinent characteristics of the participating population (e.g., reading ability, language and/or cultural considerations).

7: PLANNING SUCCESS

Often we know something works, but we cannot put our finger on why. When planning a program evaluation, avoid this phenomenon by covering your bases. You want to demonstrate effective implementation and program impact. In order to get the most from your evaluation effort consider the following tips.

WORKING WITH AN EVALUATOR

It may be possible to outsource all or part of your program evaluation to a professional evaluator. In this case, continue to be actively involved in the evaluation process. When seeking evaluation services,

- Ask colleagues and partner agencies for referrals,
- Incorporate an evaluator during the early/planning phase,
- Consider the evaluator part of the program team,
- Collaborate on the development of the evaluation plan,
- Define expectations clearly,
- Allocate resources for supporting your evaluator (e.g., staff time to collect data),
- Ask questions if something is unclear or if something does not seem right, and
- Provide input and context to evaluation reports.

Also consider graduate students with evaluation training who may provide similar services at more cost-effective rates.

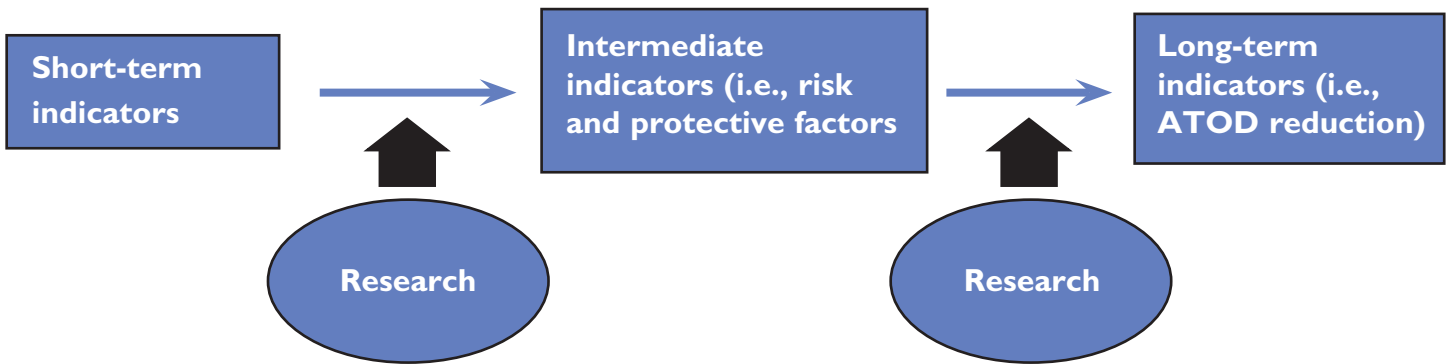
USE RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Avoid putting all of your outcome indicators into the long-term outcome basket. Long-term indicators are often the most challenging to demonstrate and to achieve. It is beneficial to be able to report on a number of research-based intermediary outcomes (known to be correlated with the target long term items). Consider incorporating a number of risk and protective factor indicators that are relevant to your mentoring design to serve as intermediary outcomes. Risk factors are circumstances that compromise an individual's opportunity for healthy outcomes. For example, this may translate to a dearth of appropriate role models for youth or their exposure to violence at home or in the community. Protective factors enhance an

individual's opportunity for healthy outcomes. Core protective factors for youth have been identified in the research literature as

- school bonding,
- bonding to one's community, and
- bonding with an adult.

Research literature addresses the correlation between outcome indicators. For example, use relevant research literature to inform and support the use of risk and protective factors as measures of progress toward long-term alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) reduction/prevention goals.

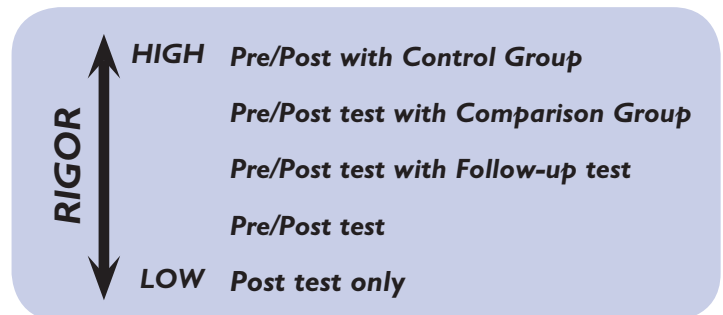


OPTIMIZE EVALUATION DESIGN

The utilization of multiple data points (e.g., every 6 months, 9 months, 15 months, or 21 months) is recommended depending on the expected (average or proposed) length of the mentoring relationship. For a fixed duration (e.g., a summer or a school year), consider integrating a mentoring relationship measure at the program's mid-point in order to capture as much information about changes in the nature of the relationship as possible. Using multiple data points increases the chance of demonstrating impact and reveals the trajectory of that impact. It is more difficult to monitor impact and administer pre/post assessments with continuous enrollment programs than with distinct cohorts of youth. In the former case, reliable tracking systems are necessary in order to track length of participation and administer assessments in a timely manner.

LEVEL OF RIGOR IN PROGRAM EVALUATION

Evaluation design is tied into the level of rigor with which a program is evaluated. Other factors, such as the reliability and validity (or "psychometrics") of measures, also play a part in determining evaluation rigor. With regard to level of rigor in program evaluation design, consider the following:



MAKING THE MOST OF LIMITED EVALUATION RESOURCES (I.E., FUNDING)

When considering how to use (limited) resources allocated for evaluation, identify the program component with the highest intensity of services (e.g., match support). The area with the highest level of service intensity is the most likely (in most cases) to demonstrate an impact on outcomes (e.g., sustained matches or quality of match relationship). A pre/post evaluation of this program component would be a good use of evaluation resources. Less service-intensive program pieces (e.g., field trips or newsletters) may be evaluated using more (resource) simple methods. Rather than use evaluation resources for a pre/post design, the evaluation may consist of descriptive accounts or quantifying of services. Prioritize evaluation resources according to components most likely to impact participants.

8: GET TO IT: MAKING YOUR EVALUATION A REALITY

MEASUREMENT METHODS

Tools for assessing the status of evaluation outcome indicators are often referred to as measures or instruments. There are various measurement methods, each with benefits and limitations. In selecting the right measure for your evaluation, consider the information required for answering your evaluation questions, the nature of the participants, the environment of the program setting, the logistics for implementing data collection with a given measure, and the resources (including expertise and time) required to use a measure. There are a vast number of assessment methods available for program evaluation, including self-administered surveys, telephone surveys, face-to-face structured surveys, archival trend data, observations, record review, focus groups, peer-led focus groups, face-to-face open-ended interviews, and archival records research. Below is a brief description of methods² typically applied in evaluation of mentoring programs.

Instrument	General Purpose	Pros	Cons
questionnaires, surveys, checklists	Quickly and/or easily get lots of information from people in a non-threatening way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete anonymously • Administer to groups • Easy to administer to many people • Inexpensive to administer • Easy to analyze and compare • Provides a lot of data • Many already exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wording can bias client's responses • Impersonal • May need sampling expert for surveys • Provides limited insight
interviews: structured or unstructured	Provides broad understanding of someone's impressions or experiences or learn more about their answers to questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In depth and wide range of information • Develops relationship with participant • Flexible with participant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming • Difficult to analyze and compare • Can be expensive • Interviewer can bias participant's responses
focus groups	Allows in-depth group discussion on single topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly and reliably get shared impressions • Efficient way to get range and depth of information in short time • Conveys key information about programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to analyze responses • Requires trained facilitator • Difficult to coordinate scheduling
observation	Provides information about how a program or participant actually operates, particularly about program processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View operations/behavior of a program/participant as they are actually occurring • Adapt to events as they occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be difficult to interpret observed behaviors • Complex to categorize/score observations • Observer can influence behaviors of program staff/participants • Can be expensive

HOW DOES YOUR MEASURE MEASURE UP?

Selecting an optimal instrument is tricky. Measures are sometimes provided by program developers, are in a file from another program, or are provided by partner agencies or colleagues. It is tempting to use an instrument that is convenient. Doing so without scrutiny, however, runs the risk of it yielding data that does not address pertinent evaluation questions. To ensure the time and resources involved in collecting data are worthwhile, be certain that you have an instrument that meets your needs.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Does it measure required elements of evaluation?
- Will it yield data that will address the evaluation questions?
- Is it appropriate for the participating population (age, ethnicity, language, education level, etc.)?
- What is the cost associated with using the measure (including materials, training, data collection hours, etc.)?
- Is the method research based? Are psychometrics available for the measure?
- How much time required for completion of data collection (including consideration for participants' time)?
- What is required to score this measure?
- How will the information gathered by this measure be used? What steps are required to prepare the information for this use?
- Does the measure offer any opportunity for comparison to other groups?

If there is not an existing evaluation tool, or the one that is “easy” to obtain is not optimal for your evaluation, there are simple means for exploring measure options. The following Web sites provide access to a variety of evaluation instruments:

The National Mentoring Center

<http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/forms.html>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

http://www.preventiondss.org/Macro/Csap/dss_portal/templates_redesign/module_home.cfm?sect_id=1&topic_id=5&CFID=213280&CFTOKEN=43415760

The Colorado Trust

<http://www.coloradotrust.org/repository/publications/pdfs/ASIToolkitJun04.pdf>

Healthy Kids Survey Source

http://www.wested.org/pub/docs/chks_surveys_summary.html

The After School Corporation

<http://www.policystudies.com/studies/youth/Evaluation%20TASC%20Programs.html>

9: PIECING IT TOGETHER

In the same way that it is possible to customize your overall evaluation plan, it is possible to customize specific evaluation instruments. When using a survey or structured interview method of collecting information, you may not find a full instrument that captures all of the information you are seeking. Alternatively, a single instrument may be too comprehensive for the focus of the evaluation. It is possible to select or combine pieces or subsets of a variety of instruments into a cohesive whole. Specifically regarding the latter, items or groups of items (scales or subscales) from more than one existing instrument may be incorporated to create a seamless, customized measure. Here are some guidelines:

RECORD-KEEPING

Keep track of the origin of all the individual components (measures, scales, items).

- A Record of each component's source – whether you came up with the question yourself or it is a scale from a broader instrument.
- Documented source information is useful for program evaluation report or if need to replicate or explain your methodology.

PUTTING PIECES IN PLACE

In order to maintain the integrity of your instrument, you must preserve the reliability and validity of each component.

Do use relevant subscales.

These are predetermined clusters of items (e.g., subscales of an “aggression” instrument are “aggression towards people” and “aggression towards property”). There may be any number of individual items that make up the subscale (e.g., items # 3, 4, 5, 11, and 17 represent a subscale on a 50-item survey). Pick and choose subscales if the complete measure exceeds your needs.

Do not change wording in items or response options.

Any minor tweaking should be done strategically so that the original intent is preserved.

Do not subtract items from subscales.

The cluster of items that comprise a subscale have been derived through extensive testing of pilot measures. Eliminating items eliminates the soundness (i.e., reliability and validity) of the subscale.

Make sure the scale is appropriate for your population!

Consider the relevant characteristics of your participants when selecting a scale. Is the language, content, and structure suitable for their

- Age,
- Reading level,
- Attention span,
- Primary language or language preference, and
- Culture?

Do not duplicate items! (unless you mean to)

For instance, if recording date of birth, gender, and race in the program registration log, do not include these items in your survey.

Do not over-measure!

Using a conflict resolution AND a problem-solving scale? Be sure that they are differentiated enough to add unique information on your program impact ... or else select the ONE scale that best targets your construct of interest.

GET ORGANIZED

Start off with simple (non-threatening) questions, like age, grade, gender, etc.

Break it up.

Avoid grouping all the sensitive items (e.g., ATOD use, sexual habits, experience of abuse) at the beginning or end of the instrument.

End on a positive (or at least neutral) tone.

Consider ending with items related to “hopes for the future” or “how I spend my free time.” This improves the participant’s evaluation experience.

Item-to-item fluidity is important for ease and accuracy of the respondent. Also, make sure changes in response option format are easy to follow.

GIVE INSTRUCTIONS

Use **common everyday language** to say what you mean. Customize to your target population.

Include information about participation being **voluntary and confidential**.

Indicate *why* completing the measure is valuable.

Using the piecemeal approach to developing a customized evaluation instrument entails a bit of polishing – it should not look piecemeal. The end product should have a uniform appearance (e.g., font style and size) and be organized in an easy to follow, logical order (e.g., items numbers, flow of response option styles and instructions). Anything you can do to make the instrument look appealing will go a long way. **This is not a test!** Use interesting font, icons, colorful paper, page borders, etc.

10: MAKING YOUR CASE

When planning your evaluation, it can be useful to consider the big picture. Anticipating how you will apply the answers to your evaluation questions may highlight gaps or opportunities for the data collection process. The following section provides an overview of considerations and strategies pertaining to reporting on evaluation findings.

CONSIDER WHO YOU ARE DEALING WITH ...

What do they care about?

How much time do they have?

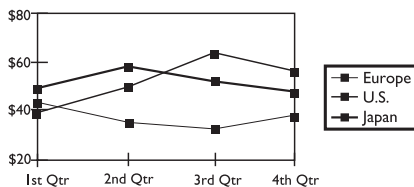
What level of report detail is ideal?

What do you expect to accomplish by sharing information with them?

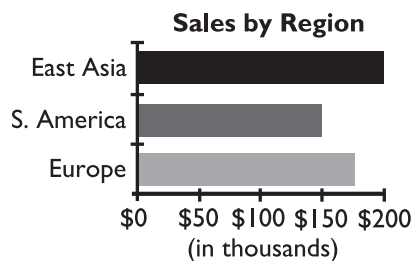
USE GRAPHS AND CHARTS TO ILLUSTRATE FINDINGS

- Use the **Automated** “chart” function in MS Word (2003), Excel, and Powerpoint
- **Label** everything
- Give each figure an **informative title** (“Mean survey scores of 10th grade Youth Meet Youth members at Oak Ridge High School”)
- Give **context** of data (e.g., “per 1000 population”)
- Indicate the **population/sample size** (e.g., “112 participants”)
- **Highlight key findings** displayed in figure
- Do not reiterate in text every detail of the figure

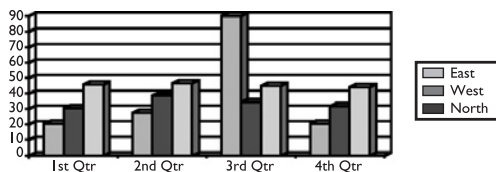
Line Graph: use to display values (data points) over time



Bar Chart: use to display a distribution of values across categories

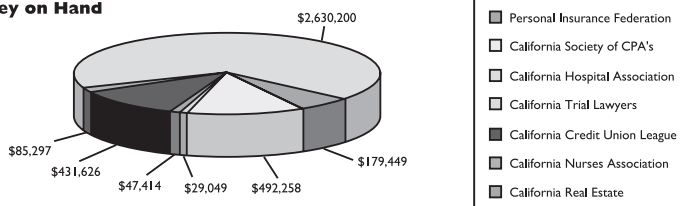


Grouped Bar Chart: use to display a distribution of values across categories for two+ variables



Pie Chart: use to display the distribution of cases across categories. Wedge = number or percentage.

**2006 Budgets
Money on Hand**



11: STRATEGIES FOR TOOTING YOUR OWN HORN

Say it in numbers

Don't: The mentor recruitment campaign was successful.

Do: The mentor recruitment campaign at 3 local colleges resulted in 30 potential contacts and yielded 14 successful matches.

Say ONE thing at a time

Don't: More than half of the original participants completed the 12-month program, and relationships with mentors improved over time.

Do: More than half (57%) of the original participants completed the 12-month program. These young people demonstrated a 62% increase in relationships with mentors over this period.

Be precise, not vague

Don't: Program participants included high-risk youth.

Do: Over one-third (36%) of program participants met at least one of three risk factors, including school expulsion/drop out, juvenile arrest record, or free-lunch status.

Connect proposed outcomes to performance measures to findings

Do: A primary goal of the program was to improve school attendance. School records indicate that absences and tardiness of youth participating in the school-based

mentoring program declined during Year 1 compared to the previous academic year.

Add interpretation or explanation to outcomes

Don't: Results from the Youth Survey indicate that teens showed healthier attitudes toward drug use but increased drug use behavior over time.

Do: Results from the Youth Survey indicate that teens showed healthier attitudes toward drug use but increased drug use behavior over time. It may be that the program is most effective in impacting youth attitudes, not behaviors related to drug use. Research suggests that appropriate attitudes is a first step towards changing behavior.

Use qualitative data to add depth to quantitative data

Don't: Program records indicate that after a mid-year dip in program attendance rates, regular participation exceeded expectations.

Do: Program records indicate that after a mid-year dip in program attendance rates, regular participation exceeded expectations. A focus group conducted with program staff at the end of the year revealed that a gang violence incident at the community center resulted in the temporary suspension of all after-school activity programs at the center. This corresponds with the dip in our program's attendance rates.

12: SPREADING THE WORD ON MENTORING: A CHECKLIST

Reporting

- Develop a 1-page summary to describe
 - program,
 - key impacts, and
 - recommendations or next steps.
- Do not just report findings: report how you found them. Specify measure development and administration details.
- Describe program or evaluation “lessons learned” and account for modifications.
- Insert statistics to describe the program, staff, and participants.
- Report overall outcome finds and include notable specifics. For example, “At program end, fewer youth showed favorable attitudes toward alcohol use (17% versus 25%), especially girls (13% versus 29%).”

Generating Program Improvement

- Identify strengths and weaknesses.
- Use findings to inform strategic planning.
- Regularly report impact to project staff to for morale boosting sessions.
- Highlight modifications made based on lessons learned.

Report to Funders

- Use the specified format.
- Address the original grant initiatives as focal point.
- Use language that links back to original proposal.
- Highlight lessons learned.
- Review sustainability.

Inform Key Stakeholders

- Be concise.
- Use very basic statistics and graphics.
- Make information accessible to broad audience.
- Use exciting/interesting format.
- Acknowledge contributions.
- Highlight steps toward the future.

For Policy-Makers

- Keep it short.
- Make specific recommendations.

Get It Out

- Newsletter
- Press release
- Newspaper articles
- Local television station
- Organized meetings (program staff, city council, school board, PTA)

13: ARE WE THERE YET? EVALUATION AS AN ONGOING PROGRAM JOURNEY

At this point we have visited some of the landmark topics of program evaluation. Information about these subject areas is provided in hopes that it will make for a smooth journey that is in line with your expectations – one that gets you where you would like to be. However, in answer to the proverbial Are We There Yet?, no – you are getting there. Consider that your program evaluation is as dynamic as your program itself. Evaluation plans and implementation should continue to evolve as your program services evolve. In addition, your program evaluation can continue to advance in complexity and rigor as you see fit. There are opportunities to reward such efforts including program status designations (such as “model program” status per the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices) and recognition by the field (such as the Exemplary Program Award granted by the National Prevention Network). Of course, there is the inherent value to your program that rewards continued investment in evaluation.

As you continue to expand your forays into program evaluation, experiment with various designs, instruments, and reporting strategies. Finding “sure bet” routes, short cuts, scenic vistas, and “can’t miss” attractions on the evaluation roadmap will enable you to adapt and grow your evaluation plans to each evolving program. Exploring evaluation options will result in customized evaluation plans that highlight key program features. In addition, consider who is along for the ride. Integrating input and feedback from key stakeholders such as program staff, volunteers, parents, partner agencies, and youth (!) will also contribute to a successful local program evaluation. Along the way, do not hesitate to ask for directions (i.e., recommendations or advice from colleagues, technical assistance providers, etc.).

Where were we when we started out? In search of better mentoring programs, increased buy-in from program participants and partners, improved sustainability of programs. In short, we were seeking our evidence-based bragging rights! Program evaluation, while there are many possible routes, provides the link from that point A to point B. See you there!

14: RESOURCES FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

The National Mentoring Center

http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/faq_evaluation.html

This website provides general information to frequently asked questions about evaluation.

Evaluating Your Program: A Beginner’s Self-Evaluation Workbook for Mentoring Programs

<http://www.itiincorporated.com/showpage.asp?sect=prodserv&pid=8>

This free resource, developed by Information Technology International (ITI), is a guide to conducting a mentoring program evaluation. The guide covers all aspects of determining the measurable outcomes, collecting and analyzing the data, and using the results in a program’s marketing efforts.

The Program Manager’s Guide to Evaluation

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/other_resrch/pm_guide_eval/reports/pmguidetoc.html

The Administration on Children, Youth and Families developed this guide for evaluating programs that offer services to children and families. It provides detailed, step-by-step procedures for assessing the effectiveness of your program’s services.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook

<http://www.wkcf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf>

This handbook provides a framework for thinking about evaluation as a relevant and useful program tool. Written primarily for project directors who have direct responsibility for the ongoing evaluation of W.K. Kellogg Foundation-funded projects, it can easily be adapted for use in other settings.

Planning and Evaluation Resource Center (PERC)

<http://www.evaluationtools.org/>

PERC is an online clearinghouse of evaluation and planning tools designed for and by youth development practitioners.

Getting To Outcomes 2004: Promoting Accountability Through Methods and Tools for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation

<http://www.rand.org/publications/TR/TR101/>

This evaluation guide, originally designed for substance abuse prevention programs, offers a number of useful methods, tools, and worksheets. The guide is highly adaptable and flexible, and the sample forms and worksheets really can help a mentoring program think through evaluation scenarios.

Project STAR

<http://www.projectstar.org/star/index.htm>

Project STAR is sponsored by the Corporation for National Service (CNS) and provides training and technical assistance to CNS programs on evaluation issues. While most of the information on the site is intended for CNS programs, any youth service agency can benefit from looking at their sections on objectives and evaluation plans. The site offers sample plans and a detailed toolkit covering every aspect of program assessment.

Basic Guide to Program Evaluation

http://www.mapnp.org/library/evaluatn/fnl_eval.htm

This guide thoroughly presents all aspects of program evaluation for nonprofits, from different models and strategies to analyzing and reporting the findings to maximize the positive impact on your program. The guide can be found in the Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits on-line library.

User-Friendly Handbook for Mixed Method Evaluations

<http://www.ehr.nsf.gov/EHR/REC/pubs/NSF97-153/start.htm>

A comprehensive guide found on the National Science Foundation (NSF) website. Although written for NSF programs, this guide offers something for even the most experienced evaluators. Chapters include the evaluation of a hypothetical project (for greater understanding of the process) and an overview of common qualitative methods and data analysis techniques.

15: SOURCES

¹National Mentoring Center. (2004). Into the Crystal Ball: A Roundtable Discussion on the Future of Mentoring. *National Mentoring Center Bulletin*, 2(3).

²Atkinson, A.J. (2003). *Planning for Results: The Complete Guide for Planning and Evaluating Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act Programs*. Richmond, VA: Greystone Publishers, Inc.

³Adapted in part from the Web Resources section of the National Mentoring Center. Retrieved November 2005 from <http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/index.html>.



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Mentoring is an effective and increasingly popular approach for creating positive change in young people's lives. Early results from mentoring programs are promising, suggesting that positive, consistent attention from an adult, even a non-relative, can create change.

The Mentoring Technical Assistance Project provides free technical assistance and training to new and existing community and school-based programs that work with youth. The project also provides free Mentoring Plus workshops and regional trainings. Please contact CARS for more information.

To receive free mentoring consultation services please complete the online application at:
http://www.carsmentoring.org/TA/TA_application.php
Contact Erika Urbani, eurbani@cars-rp.org for further details at 916.983.9506.

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**Or send an email to
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Additional copies of this publication are available upon request or online at:
www.cars-rp.org

Mentoring Tactics is published periodically by CARS under its Mentoring Project contract with the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs. The purpose of this publication is to help agencies, coalitions, communities and programs in the mentoring field stay abreast of best practices emerging from current research and to provide practical tools and resources for implementing proven strategies.

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