

You're Worth the Investment: Now Prove It. Six Steps to Effective Evaluation Planning

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Your evaluation plan can make or break your grant funding proposal and chances for future funding and growth. These inter-related steps are key to planning an effective evaluation. An evaluator can support you with these steps.

1. Convene an Evaluation Work Group or Project Advisory Group.

An evaluation work group can provide critical input like the best ways to reach people and encourage them to complete a survey or potential outcomes and relationships that you might not have considered. They can also give input about how they might use the findings for planning and action and the most useful ways to present results. This helps ensure that your results will be relevant and useful. Example participants include your organization's staff and leadership, partnering organizations, customers/participants, families, community members, and evaluators. Another option is to convene a Project Advisory Group to include in planning and implementing as well as evaluating the project.

2. Clarify Understanding of Your Project.

Understanding what you're evaluating is critical to ensuring that the evaluation measures and questions align with the realities of what you are doing and achieving. This can be challenging because goals are often unclear, goals and activities may change over time, and people may have different perceptions of goals and objectives. Hence, the first step of an effective evaluation is to learn all you can about the project from multiple perspectives. Sources may include discussions with stakeholders and people familiar with the program history and review of program materials (website, strategic plan, press releases, etc.).

3. Assess What Others Have Done.

A broad range of academic studies, industry reports, and findings from other fields that have addressed similar types of issues can often provide valuable evidence. They can tell you what studies suggested as unanswered questions to explore and promising methods for future research that you might consider. Assessing what others have done before starting your research helps you avoid re-testing what others have already demonstrated.

4. Identify Unanswered Questions that Need Answers.

In addition to the funder's questions, your evaluation work group and past related studies can give ideas of specific questions to ask and hypotheses to test. Make sure that your questions will get you results you can use for planning and action. This lets you avoid a useless evaluation study that says, "More research is needed."

5. Determine Strategies to Answer Each Question.

The next step is to create a set of strategies or “recipe” to answer each question. Remember, no method is always more rigorous or scientific than any other. The best method is whatever best fits your specific questions and your unique situation. Your evaluation work group, past related studies, and the evaluation research literature can give ideas of data sources and strategies that might work for you, including new and lesser-known tools and techniques.

6. Create a Dissemination Plan.

After doing all the work of planning and conducting your evaluation, you don't want to end up with a report just collects dust on a shelf. Sharing results with your stakeholders, others in your field, and researchers expands your impact. Asking the evaluation work group and potential evaluation users how they would like to see results increases chances that results will be used. To reach all audiences, consider making findings available in multiple formats, such as in a newsletter, blog, website, poster, and live and virtual presentations.

**You know that what you do is worth the investment.
The next step is to follow your evaluation plan to show people how.**

If you have any questions or would like assistance, contact us at:
info@meaningfulevidence.com. Your success is our goal!



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