



Contra Costa County Health Services
Mental Health Division's
Program Evaluation Framework*

* The Mental Health Division's Evaluation Framework is based on the CDC's "Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health", 1999 available at: <http://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Publications/mmwr/rr/rr4811.pdf>

Introduction

Contra Costa County Mental Health Division utilizes program evaluation as a systematic tool for improving its programs by assessing their usability, feasibility, accuracy, propriety and effectiveness. Administrators often use evaluation to assess the value of a program by measuring its quality, cost-effectiveness and importance. It is possible to assign value to a program by asking the following questions and obtaining the necessary evidence to answer them:

- What programs and aspects of each program will be evaluated?
- What parts of the program will be considered when judging program performance?
- What standards must the program reach in order for it to be considered successful?
- What evidence will be used to measure the performance of the program?
- What conclusions regarding program performance are justified by comparing the available evidence to the selected standards?
- How will the lessons learned from the inquiry be used to improve the effectiveness of the program and/or the Mental Health System of Care?

Evaluation ensures: 1) the County uses science as the basis for making decisions; 2) services are socially equitable; 3) service agencies perform effectively; 4) services are outcome-oriented; and 5) the County and agencies are accountable for the services each provides. It occurs through the use of clear plans, inclusive partnerships and feedback mechanisms designed to allow ongoing learning and improvement. Evaluation follows a defined set of standards to promote its effectiveness (see below).

Standards for Effective Evaluation

- **Utility**

Serve the Information needs of intended users of evaluation plan

- **Feasibility**

Be realistic, prudent, diplomatic and frugal

- **Propriety**

Behave legally, ethically and with regard for the welfare of those involved and affected by the evaluation

- **Accuracy**

Reveal and convey technically accurate information

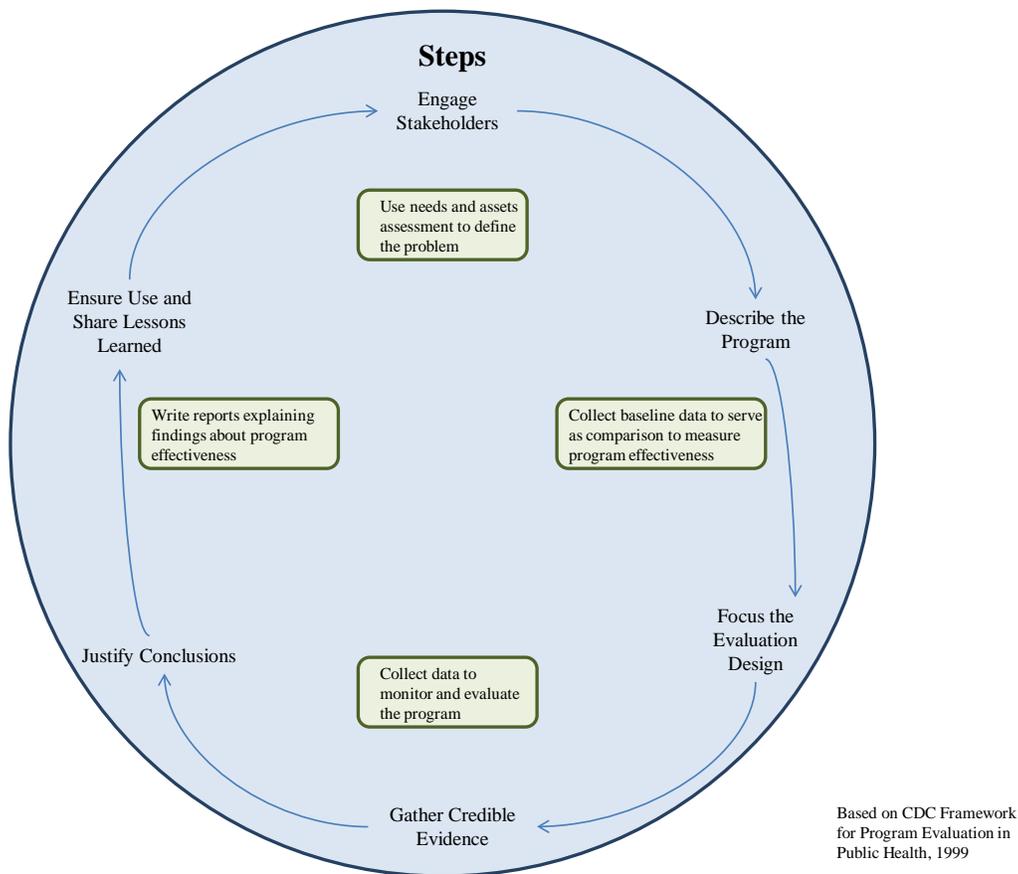
Evaluation begins before the County or its contractors develop a program. In order to define the issue the program seeks to address, evaluators, in partnership with stakeholders, must first assess the needs and assets of the community it is targeting (this is known as a needs assessment).

Before program agencies can begin to implement their programs, they must first create a “picture” or qualitative and quantitative assessment of what target populations, communities and resources exist before the program began (this is known as baseline data). Agencies can then compare this to “pictures” or assessments taken periodically throughout the course of the program (program monitoring) to determine if the program is effective or not. To create these post-implementation “pictures”, evaluation continues throughout the life of the program and does not conclude until after the program ends. After either program completion or a set period of time evaluators will write a final (summative) report about the program’s effectiveness and replicability.

While the method and tools of evaluation are program-specific, the County constructs each evaluation plan by applying the following framework to its development process.

Framework for Program Evaluation[†]

Figure 1: 6-Step Framework



[†] The following document and steps are based upon: The Mental Health Division’s Evaluation Framework is based on the CDC’s “Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health”, 1999 available at: <http://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Publications/mmwr/rr/r4811.pdf>

Steps in Program Evaluation

Step 1: Engaging Stakeholders

Stakeholders are persons and/or organizations that have an investment in what will be learned in the evaluation and how the knowledge will be applied to future programming. Engaging stakeholders in evaluation fosters input, involvement and power-sharing among individuals and organizations with an investment in the evaluation findings[‡]. Each program evaluation should engage the following three groups of stakeholders:

- those involved in program operations
- those served or affected by the program
- primary users of the evaluation

Engaging stakeholders allows their unique perspectives to be heard and ensures the evaluation addresses the program's objectives, operations and outcomes[§]. It also increases the likelihood the evaluation will be useful, enhances the evaluation's credibility, promotes cultural competence, protects human subjects and helps to circumvent real or perceived conflicts of interest. Stakeholders should remain engaged throughout the remaining steps.

How Does the County Do This? – Step 1: Engage Stakeholders

The County uses a variety of approaches to engage stakeholders:

- **Focus Groups**
- **Formal and Informal Interviews**
- **Consolidated Planning Advisory Workgroup (CPAW)**
- **Committees and Advisory Bodies**
- **Community Forums**
- **Public Comment**
- **Public Hearing**
- **Public Requests for Ideas**

[‡] CDC. "Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health". *MMWR Weekly Report*. September 17, 1999. 48 (11):8. Available at: <ftp://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Publications/mmwr/rr/rr4811.pdf>. Accessed on June 15, 2010.

[§] CDC. "Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health". *MMWR Weekly Report*. September 17, 1999. 48 (11):5. Available at: <ftp://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Publications/mmwr/rr/rr4811.pdf>. Accessed on June 15, 2010.

Step 2: Describing the Program

The program description defines the goals, objectives and strategies of the program being evaluated. It includes:

- Statement of Need (describes the nature and magnitude of the problem or opportunity and the affected population)
- Expected Effects
- Program Activities
- Resources
- Program Stages
- Setting and Environmental Influences
- Logic Model (synthesis of the main program elements showing a picture of how the program will work)

The description discusses the program's capacity to bring about change, the stages of development and how the program influences the larger organization and/or community. An effective program description will allow comparisons with similar programs and attempts to connect program components to their effects.

The program description:

- Improves evaluation fairness and accuracy
- Permits balanced assessment of strengths and weaknesses of program
- Aids stakeholders in understanding how the program pieces fit together and relate to larger context

How Does the County Do This? – Step 2: Describing the Program

The County uses Service and Work Plans to describe programs as well as to define objectives and desired outcomes.

Step 3: Focusing the Evaluation Design

Evaluation is used to:

- Gain insight
- Change practice
- Assess effects
- Affect participants

An evaluation plan should answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the purpose of the evaluation?
- 2) Who will use the evaluation findings?
- 3) What are the specific uses of the information generated by the evaluation?
- 4) What questions will the evaluation ask? What will the evaluation measure?
- 5) What methods will the evaluation use to provide information about the program and its outcomes?
- 6) What agreements need to be made to clarify roles and responsibilities among individuals and organizations executing the evaluation?

The evaluation process is iterative. In order to achieve the evaluation purpose, evaluation questions and methods may change over the course of the program.

How Does the County Do This? – Step 3: Focusing the Evaluation Design

In order to clearly define the County’s expectations for each program and service it evaluates, Service and Work Plans include sections detailing the objectives of each program and the measurements for each objective.

Step 4: Gathering Credible Evidence

Evaluations collect believable and relevant information to present a well-rounded picture of the program. This evidence leads to recommendations in programmatic changes. There are two types of data: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative data provides descriptions and one observes it. Quantitative data provides numbers and one counts or quantifies it. Evaluators often use qualitative data to inform the type and amount of quantitative data an evaluation should collect.

Examples of Qualitative Data

Interview Text

Focus Group Text

Examples of Quantitative Data

Recovery Scale Score

Consumers Enrolled in Program

Indicators are the basis for collecting evidence. These indicators are tangible, measurable quantities defined by a program’s objectives. Each indicator reflects a component of the program that is meaningful to monitor. Evaluations use indicators to track a program’s implementation and effects.

The following are examples of indicators and data collection tools:

- # of participants (meeting minutes)
- Body Mass Index (primary care patient health record)
- # of fruits and vegetables eaten each day (food diary)
- Change in recovery score (recovery survey)
- Consumers perception of services (focus groups)

In order to assess the performance of its programs and services, the County collects a variety of indicators. One example of an indicator from the Innovation Work Plan INN-01, is number of youth experiencing rejecting and accepting behaviors. The Work Plan will assess the number of behaviors experienced before, during and after Work Plan implementation. This will allow program staff to determine if changes in behaviors occurred during implementation and, in turn, determine if the program was successful in changing behaviors. Another example of an indicator is the number of culturally competent services provided by the County and its contractors. To measure this indicator staff first ask consumers what their cultural and linguistic needs may be and then compare these responses to the current methods clinics and contractors use to provide services. Staff then counts the number of culturally competent services provided by the County and its contractors.

How Does the County Do This? – Step 4: Gathering Credible Evidence

The County collects data using:

- **Surveys Administered by Paper and Online**
- **Consumer Medical Records**
- **Program Outcomes**
- **Program Tracking Forms**
- **Training Evaluations**
- **Focus Groups**
- **Interviews**
- **Forums**
- **Logs of Access Line Calls, Trainings, Outreach and Engagement, etc**
- **Penetration Rates**
- **Enrollment Forms**
- **Comment Boxes**

Step 5: Justifying Conclusions

One justifies evaluation conclusions by comparing the evidence gathered against agreed-upon values or standards set by the stakeholders. Justified conclusions are fundamental to an evaluation's usefulness and accuracy. Before an individual can justify conclusions he or she must:

- Analyze and synthesize the data
- Interpret the data
- Make judgments based on the data

After justifying conclusions it is possible to make recommendations about programmatic changes.

How Does the County Do This? – Step 5: Justifying Conclusions

The County measures its results by setting goals and objectives for each program. It also measures the programs by comparing the baseline data to data collected throughout the course of the programs' life or by comparing the data to data produced by comparable programs. The County bases conclusions about the effectiveness of the program on these comparisons.

Step 6: Ensuring Use and Sharing Lessons Learned

Ensuring the evaluation is useful and sharing lessons learned means:

- Stakeholders are aware of the evaluation procedures and findings
- The findings are considered in decisions or actions affecting the program
- Those who participated in the evaluation had a beneficial experience
- Providing technical and emotional support for users during and after evaluation
- Communicating procedures and lessons learned to relevant audiences

How Does the County Do This? – Step 6: Ensuring Use and Sharing Lessons Learned

The County ensures it shares lessons with the greater community by:

- Providing quarterly and/or annual reports of progress and outcomes to both the State and stakeholders
- Holding community forums and roundtables to share findings
- Sharing lessons learned with other counties during meetings and conferences

Conclusion

Evaluation allows the County to determine which programs are effective and which are not as well as to better understand how to improve programs. The County considers program evaluation to be essential to planning strategies, improving programs, demonstrating results, and justifying resource allocations. Using these steps as a guide makes certain evaluation plans are well-rounded, inclusive and effective.