

Evaluation in Substance Use Prevention Programming

Evaluation of programming is an essential step in enhancing prevention programming. The evaluation process should fit seamlessly into programming, being done on an ongoing basis over time. Providers and community partners must perform both process and outcome evaluation in order to insure the most effective efforts under what can, at times, be limited funding.

Process evaluation is ongoing. It begins as soon as the program enters the planning phases. Desired outcomes are being considered at this stage, and an evaluation of every step, from assessment to implementation is necessary.

When looking at a program such as a communication campaign, **process** evaluation asks the following questions:

- **Was the campaign implemented according to plan?**
 - Were materials distributed following a timeline? Were lockboxes placed according to plan? Did prescriber trainings occur with the forecasted audiences/outcomes?
- **What adaptations (if any) were made?**
 - Was the number of materials modified in order to increase reach? Did surveys indicate that materials were needed in alternate locations?
- **Were sufficient resources available?**
 - Resources include time, funding, people, and materials.
- **What obstacles were met along the way?**
 - Weather related events, staff illness or vacation, difficulty with prescriber trainings?
- **Who participated, and at what level?**
 - Coalition members, businesses, staff members, and other key stakeholders should be involved in this process.

Outcome evaluation looks at results, but that is not enough to get the big picture in prevention programming. Process evaluation is required, in order to show why a program did or did not work.

After programming has concluded, or has reached the end of a fiscal year, staff/key stakeholders will look at how things went from a community/results focus.

When done thoughtfully, evaluation results can assist in obtaining future funding. Outcomes can show funders the rationale in continuing these programs. Outcomes also play a role in gaining community support. As such, evaluation can be a key component in gaining sustainability for a program. These results are meant to be shared with key stakeholders.

Evaluation is not an overnight process, and everyone involved must always bear in mind that change happens slowly. Providers must recruit and maintain those partnerships with individuals who are patient, motivated, and willing to weather the storms that can happen with program evaluation over time.

Outcome evaluation can include:

- Surveys of the community to determine effectiveness of programming.
- Surveys of coalition members/key stakeholders to determine what processes produced the highest impact and what processes seemed the least effective.
- Focus groups of community members/target audience.
- Post-test results from Youth Prevention Education programming.

