

**CREATING AN EVALUATION PLAN FOR YOUR  
AGE IN AMERICA PROJECT**

Touchstone Center for  
Collaborative Inquiry

August 2008

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# STEPS IN PLANNING AN EVALUATION:

## AN OVERVIEW

### Step one: Determine the focus

1. Begin with broad questions
  - What story of about your work do you want to tell?
  - What are your learning questions? What evidence will you need to answer them?
2. Clarify
  - Who will use the information?
  - Who will be involved in the evaluation process? What roles will they play?
3. Build a theory of change or logic model
  - What are the early, middle, and late stage benchmarks to indicate progress?

### Step two: Collect data

4. Identify sources of information
5. Select a mix of tools (methods) to gather qualitative and quantitative information
6. Develop timeline for data collection
7. Collect data

### **Step three: Analyze and interpret data**

8. Organize records and other data gathered using your theory of change framework
9. Analyze data using appropriate quantitative and qualitative methods
10. Engage stakeholders in conversation that makes meaning of the information particularly as it relates to the learning questions
  - What has been learned?
  - What are the limitations?

### **Step four: Communicate findings**

11. Use the information to guide program improvement; to refine the theory of change; to communicate with stakeholders
12. Determine how best to present the findings for various groups; prepare written reports

# WORKSHEET 1

## Determine the focus – Early questions

Think broadly as you answer. These are preliminary questions for consideration.

1. Evaluation helps to tell the *story* of your project. What story do you want to be able to tell -- what outcomes do you hope to achieve and how will you accomplish them?

2. Evaluation can also help increase the effectiveness of your work. What questions do you have about improving the way you work?

Learning Questions	Evidence Needed

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Who will use the information?

Evaluation planning provides opportunity to cultivate stakeholders and engage them as invested participants. Plan your evaluation to include information useful to key stakeholders. Who are your project's stakeholders and what will they care about (their interests)?

<b>Project Stakeholders</b>	<b>Interests</b>

3. There are many roles in the evaluation process. Who will play these roles in your project?

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Who</b>
Design/select data collection tools	
Collect data	
Organize qualitative data	
Enter data in database	
Analyze data	
Interpret findings	
Write reports/communication	
Coordinate overall process	

Other	
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## BUILDING A THEORY OF CHANGE

A theory of change or logic model is just that – your *theory* about what you think will happen. It shows relationships among the project components and the anticipated trajectory or evolution of the project. In addition, a theory of change asks you to state assumptions about *why* and *how* change will happen.

- A theory of change or logic model serves multiple purposes. It helps focus the evaluation by providing:
  - A framework or map to show relationships among objectives, strategies and outcomes.
  - A common language related to assumptions and intended outcomes.
  - A set of identified benchmarks of change for early, middle and late phases of the project.
  - A tool to convert a broadly stated vision into concrete strategies that can accomplish it.
  
- Logic models can be created in many different formats, and although they are frequently depicted in linear form, the project evolution is almost certainly not linear. Remember it is a shorthand tool or roadmap for often very complex projects.
  
- Creating a theory of change can be an opportunity to galvanize people involved with the project. It is often an iterative process, with a larger group identifying the vision and major components, and a smaller group synthesizing the information generated. When data are collected and analyzed, it may be necessary to refine the theory of change.
  
- There are many readily available internet resources to guide this process. Here are several suggestions to get you started.

[www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html)  
[www.managementhelp.org/np\\_progs/np\\_mod/org\\_frm.htm](http://www.managementhelp.org/np_progs/np_mod/org_frm.htm)  
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/WC041>

## WORKSHEET 2

### Determine the focus – Establish benchmarks

Projecting the benchmarks of change at different stages in your project will be part of your logic model. In this exercise, identify one key outcome for your project. List the anticipated benchmarks in concrete terms, using the following example. (Some find it helpful to work from late to the early stage.)

**Anticipated outcome:** Youth will be active participants in the community

Early stage benchmarks	Mid stage benchmarks	Late stage benchmarks
<p>Youth participate in at least one neighborhood learning opportunity</p> <p>A map of organizations and resources for youth opportunities exists and is widely available</p> <p>The neighborhood develops an approach to youth engagement used in all programs attentive to cultural values</p>	<p>More youth participate in multiple learning opportunities</p> <p>Every neighborhood program offers opportunity for youth to fill and learn leadership roles</p> <p>Youth staff know common elements of the approach</p>	<p>Youth assume leadership roles in planning/running youth programs</p> <p>Programs show signs of change due to youth engagement in planning and implementation</p> <p>The identified approach is implemented at multiple sites</p>

How will you know?	How will you know?	How will you know?
Attendance records	Attendance records Program records	Attendance records Program records

<p>Neighborhood map of programs/schedules is available at multiple sites</p> <p>An approach to youth engagement with core principles is articulated</p>	<p>Observations Staff focus group Youth focus group</p> <p>Staff training is developed to teach core principles</p>	<p>Provider interviews/surveys Youth interviews/surveys</p> <p>Staff at diverse organizations embrace the common approach</p>
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**Anticipated outcome:**

Early stage benchmarks	Mid stage benchmarks	Late stage benchmarks

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How will you know?	How will you know?	How will you know?

# WORKSHEET 3

## Collect Data

Using the early stage benchmarks identified in Worksheet 2, what are the sources of information/evidence needed and how it will be collected? (The first two columns carry forward responses from worksheet 2.)

**Anticipated outcome:**

Early stage benchmarks	Relevant evidence	Sources of evidence	Data collection tools/methods	Who/when

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## DATA COLLECTION TOOLS/METHODS

In planning your evaluation, it is best to include a mix of qualitative and quantitative sources of information. Following is a partial list of data collection tools and/or sources of information that fall in each category.

### Quantitative methods

- ❑ Survey/questionnaire
- ❑ Participation data
- ❑ Demographic data
- ❑ Pre-post tests
- ❑ Other

### Qualitative methods

- ❑ Interviews
- ❑ Focus groups
- ❑ Observation logs
- ❑ Journals/blogs
- ❑ Reflection guides
- ❑ Media reports
- ❑ Photographs

- Other

# WORKSHEET 4

## Analyze and Interpret Data

After data are collected, the information is analyzed and interpreted -- a judgment made about the meaning of the information in the context of the project. Analyzing data requires a *systematic process*, which should be considered at the planning phase. Data analysis and interpretation should align with the learning questions and project's theory of change. Begin by thinking about:

1. What kind of information will need analysis (data entry, summarize themes, display quantitative data, etc.)?

Evidence	Qual? Y/N	Quant? Y/N	By Whom/When

2. How will you organize the information collected to facilitate the analysis?

3. Who will participate in interpretation/utilization process?

## MANAGING DATA

Creating a way to organize and think about information is an important step in evaluation planning. The project theory of change with its early, middle, and late benchmarks is one important tool for organizing information. It is not uncommon that projects collect information but are unable to use it because it has not been effectively organized. Following are some considerations in working with data.

### Qualitative data

Qualitative information is an important component of any evaluation because it helps explain processes, relationships, and differing perspectives that can be difficult to understand through quantitative data alone. Qualitative data includes information from reflection journals, meeting notes, focus groups, interviews, observations, and other sources like written documents of case studies or media reports. Approaches include:<sup>1</sup>

- ❑ **Code and categorize information**

There are some computer programs available to help identify and sort recurrent themes that appear in transcripts and other documents. The “old fashioned” method is make copies of the written materials, read through them to identify themes using colored highlighters, then cut and paste passages that represent themes in categories you’ve identified.

- ❑ **Analyze information with context in mind**

Simply categorizing information to determine patterns and themes may not account for *how* or *why* events have occurred. This is where understanding context becomes important. Case studies or written narratives focused on components of the project can shed light on the specifics of context.

- ❑ **Analyze information with biases named**

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<sup>1</sup> Information on managing data is adapted from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Evaluation Toolkit.

<http://www.wkkf.org/Default.aspx?tabid=90&CID=281&ItemID=2810017&NID=2820017&LanguageID=0>

It is important to be clear about the values and biases of those who help analyze and interpret information and to make it visible to all who participate. Analyze how biases may affect what information is collected and what is not collected, and how information is understood. These checks help improve the “objectivity” of the evaluation. One process noted in the W.K. Evaluation Toolkit is reflective memo writing – a technique whereby those involved in evaluation record and share their values and biases.

## **Quantitative data**

Quantitative information includes that which can be counted i.e. participation rates, demographic statistics, forced choice survey responses (surveys may include both qualitative and quantitative information). When people think about analysis, they often imagine a sophisticated statistical analysis for which they feel unqualified to do. There are however, simple techniques that can be used, sometimes to supplement more complicated statistical analysis.

### **□ Use a database**

A straightforward database created on *Excel* can provide a fairly simple analysis of such things as who participates, in what, and how often. It can tabulate demographic information as well as responses to surveys. Its usefulness will depend upon the data entered. If your project uses a database, make sure there is a systematic way to enter data in a timely fashion.

### **□ Calculate percentages**

Project evaluators can review responses to surveys and questionnaires or look at participation data and convert to percentages. Do these figures match the actual experience of those most involved the project?

### **□ Engage multiple perspectives in understanding data**

Project staff, evaluation team, and sometimes stakeholders should work together to understand data in the context of the project by asking questions such as:

- What are the results? Do they make sense in the context of this project?
- What are the surprises? What could account for them?
- What are the limitations of the data? What benchmarks were missed?
- How will the numbers/results inform future action?

## WORKSHEET 5

### Communicate Findings

Determine a plan for ongoing communication among evaluators, staff, and stakeholders (including funders). Depending on the purposes, communication can be written (press releases, memos or policy briefs, reports) or oral (discussions at team meetings, roundtables with larger audiences).

Communicating findings serves multiple purposes: it helps inform decisions about the project or other similar projects; it provides an accounting to the foundation; it can generate interest and support of the project from stakeholders; it informs the general public about the work.

Form is also determined by purpose, but most communications should address:

- ❑ What – project description, what happened
- ❑ Who – sources of information
- ❑ How – data collection methods
- ❑ When – timeframe
- ❑ Conclusions – what was learned

In the evaluation planning phase it is not too early to determine how the evaluation findings will be communicated to target groups.

<b>Audience</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Who/When</b>
Ex: Foundation, general audience, policy makers, health professionals	Ex: Achievements, lessons learned, results of survey	Ex: memo, policy brief, press release, grant reports	

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