

CDC Coffee Break: How Do I Write an Evaluation Plan?



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National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention

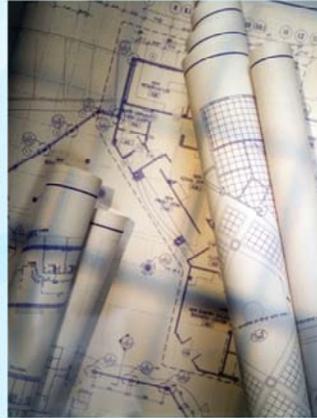


*Note: Screen magnification settings may affect document appearance.

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What Is an Evaluation Plan?

- ❑ **A living document**
- ❑ **A blueprint that provides:**
 - *An overall picture of the evaluation*
 - *Information on the evaluation steps and activities you plan to carry out*



Oftentimes you're presented with the task of developing an evaluation plan as part of funding requirements or simply to guide your own evaluation activities. You might then ask, "what is an evaluation plan and how do I get started?"

An evaluation plan is a written plan that can serve to clarify what you plan to evaluate, how you will carry out the steps of this evaluation, and how you plan to use the evaluation results. Ultimately, it guides you through each step of the process of evaluation, helps you decide what sort of information you and your stakeholders really need, keeps you from wasting time gathering information that isn't needed, helps you identify the best possible methods and strategies for getting the needed information, and helps you come up with a reasonable and realistic timeline for evaluation.

Think of it as a blueprint that captures the overall picture of what your evaluation will address and the evaluation steps and activities that are needed to carry out the evaluation. The great thing about evaluation plans is that they are living, ever-changing documents that can be updated throughout the project.

You should take time to carefully consider your plan and engage stakeholders so that they have agreement on how to move forward.

How Do I begin?

□ **The DHDSP Evaluation Plan Template is based on the CDC Framework for Program Evaluation**

- Step 1: Engage Stakeholders
- Step 2: Describe the Program
- Step 3: Focus the Evaluation Design
- Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence
- Step 5: Justify Conclusions
- Step 6: Ensure Use and Share Lessons Learned

Various evaluation plan formats exist, and some find it useful to use a template. CDC's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention (DHDSP) has developed an evaluation plan template for our funded programs that can be used as a framework to build an evaluation plan that is grounded in sound evaluation principles and practice. This template is based on the CDC Framework for Program Evaluation.

Sample Template

EVALUATION PLAN TEMPLATE					
<p>This template was developed using the CDC Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention WISEWOMAN Program Evaluation Overview document. The template is designed to help WISEWOMAN funded programs develop an evaluation plan using the CDC Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health (CDC Evaluation Framework). This framework includes six steps: Engage Stakeholders, Describe the Program, Focus the Evaluation Design, Gather Credible Evidence, Justify Conclusions, Ensure Use and Share Lessons Learned</p>					
<p>Evaluation Stakeholders and Primary Intended Users of the Evaluation: Describe individuals who have a stake in the evaluation and who will use the evaluation results.</p>					
<p>Activity You Plan to Evaluate: List and describe the specific activities you have chosen to evaluate (i.e., activity components, contextual factors, etc.). This can be done through a narrative description, flow chart, or logic model.</p>					
<p>Focus the Evaluation Design: Describe the purpose of the evaluation, how you plan to use results for program improvement, and the process used for developing your evaluation questions</p>					
Evaluation Questions What you want to know	Indicator(s) What type of data you will need	Data collection			Data Analysis What type of analysis you will do to the data.
		Source Where you will collect the data?	Method How you will collect the data	Timing When you will collect the data	
1.					
2.					
<p>Communication/Dissemination Plan: Describe your plans for communicating/disseminating your findings (i.e., distribution products, channels, and timeline) and the ways in which this evaluation will be used in your overall program.</p>					
<p>Evaluation Activities Staffing Plan (include staff name and the activities being held accountable for)</p>					

There is no specific format or design that your plan needs to have, so your plan may not look like another program’s plan. However they may contain similar types of information.

Here is an example of a template that the WISEWOMAN program has used. It includes a space to list your evaluation stakeholders, activities, purpose, questions, data methods, and communication plan. Keep in mind that your plan does not have to be elaborate.

Evaluation Stakeholders

- ❑ **Identify and list individuals or entities who have a stake in the evaluation results:**
 - *Who is sponsoring or requesting the evaluation?*
 - *Who could make programmatic decisions based on the findings?*
 - *Who might be potential data sources for the evaluation?*

The first thing you'll want to do is determine your evaluation stakeholders. This corresponds to Step 1 of CDC Framework for Program Evaluation.

Consider those individuals or entities that will ultimately use the evaluation outcomes. Evaluating with the end user in mind will also increase the likelihood that the results will be used. Examples of stakeholders are the evaluation sponsor, leadership within your organization, or the clients you reach.

Evaluation Activity

- ❑ **List and describe the specific activity or activities you have chosen to evaluate.**
 - *This may involve the use of a brief narrative description, a flow chart that outlines the process, or a logic model.*
 - *You may or may not be evaluating every activity that comprises your program; this is where you can refine the scope of your evaluation.*

Once you determine who has a stake in the evaluation you'll want to list and describe your evaluation activities. This corresponds to Step 2 of the framework.

Always be sure to check back with your stakeholders to make sure that they understand the purpose and scope of the evaluation throughout the planning process. Your activities should be well defined and measurable and should be directly related to your evaluation objectives. Narratives, flow charts, or logic models are examples of how you can describe your activities.

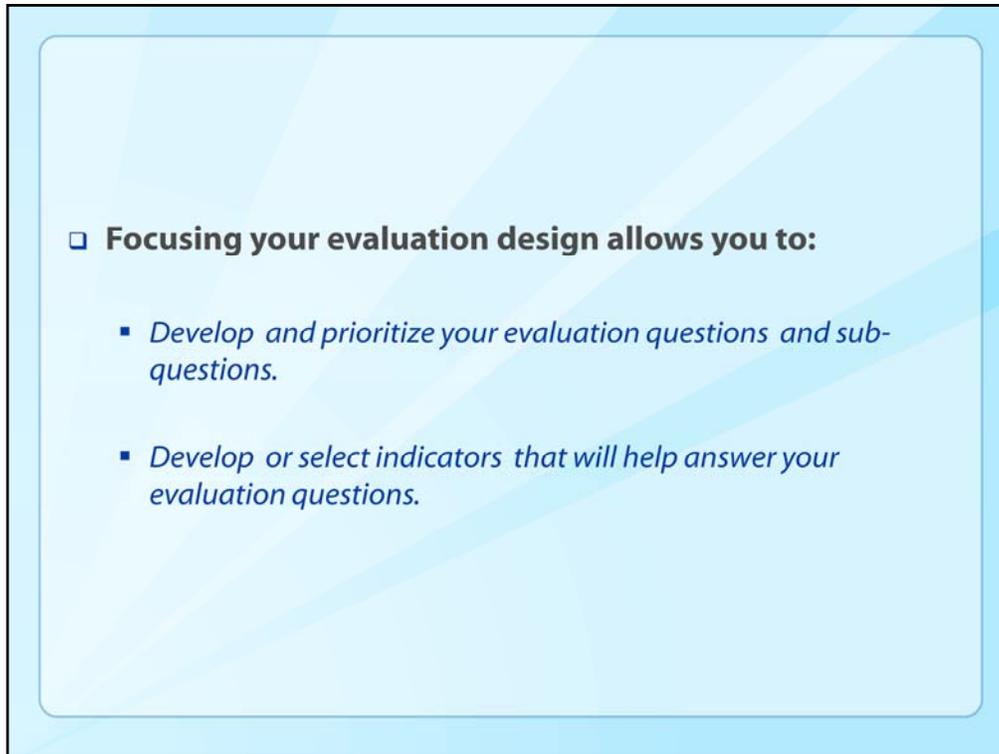
After you've created your initial list of activities, it is always beneficial to go back and refine the list.

Evaluation Design Focus

- **Clarify the purpose of the evaluation.**
 - *Identify the goals and objectives of the evaluation and its findings; doing so will help shape your evaluation questions.*
 - *Consider how you plan to use the results and what you would like to gain from the evaluation.*

Your next step in developing an evaluation plan is to think about the goals and objectives of the evaluation. This corresponds to Step 3 of the framework.

What is the intent of your evaluation? Clarifying the purpose of your evaluation may prevent premature decision-making regarding how the evaluation should be conducted. Doing this will allow you to assess the issues of greatest concern to stakeholders while using time and resources as efficiently as possible. When considering how the evaluation results will be used, plan and prioritize with input from stakeholders and with regard for the current environment of your program.



The template includes a space to write the purpose of the evaluation and the overarching evaluation questions; taken together, these depict a vision of where the evaluation will go and form the basis for evaluation planning.

Evaluation questions should focus on what happened, how well it happened, why it happened, and what the results were. Creating sub-evaluation questions helps get to a point where indicators are easier to identify and collect.

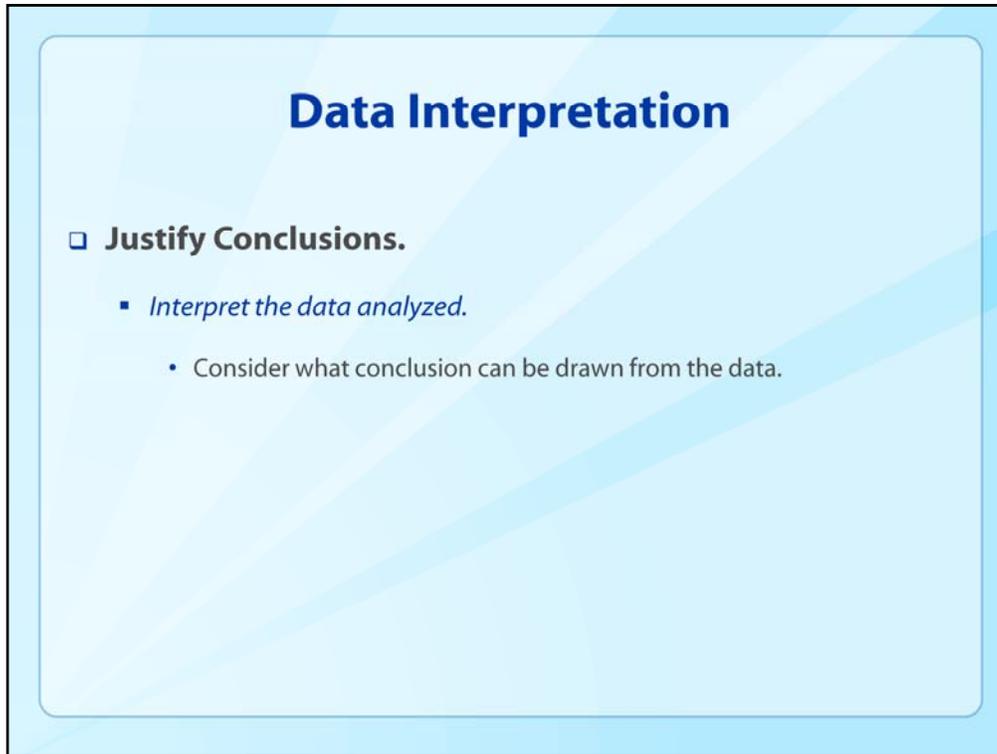
Evaluation Data

- ❑ **Identify data sources.**
 - *Consider where you will collect the data (i.e., administrative records, web survey, interviews, etc.).*
- ❑ **Identify data methods.**
 - *Consider how you will collect the data (i.e., abstraction from spreadsheet, record reviews, focus group transcription, etc.).*
- ❑ **Specify a timeframe.**
 - *Consider when you will collect the data (i.e., start/end date and frequency).*
- ❑ **Analyze the data.**
 - *Consider what type of analysis you will do to the data (i.e., frequencies, logistical regression, thematic analysis, etc.).*

The next section of the evaluation plan template has a place to describe the data source that will be used to answer the sub-question and to provide details about who, when, and how such data will be obtained and analyzed. This is consistent with Step 4.

When thinking about the method to use for collecting data, it is useful to consider which method is:

- More likely to secure the information needed.
- More appropriate given the values, understanding, and capabilities of those who are being asked to provide the information.
- Least disruptive to the program and target populations.
- Most feasible given the available resources (money, personnel, skill level, etc.).



Data Interpretation

- **Justify Conclusions.**
 - *Interpret the data analyzed.*
 - Consider what conclusion can be drawn from the data.

Data interpretation is part of Framework steps 4 and 5.

Interpretation is the process of attaching meaning to analyzed data. Oftentimes we analyze data but fail to put the results in context and draw conclusions. Be sure to remember that numbers do not speak for themselves; they need to be interpreted based on careful and fair judgments. This holds true for narrative/qualitative statements as well.

Once you've gotten to this step in the template think about who should be involved in and the basis for interpreting your data.

Share Evaluation Outcomes

- ❑ **Describe your plans for communicating/disseminating your findings (i.e., distribution products, channels, and timeline) and the ways in which this evaluation will be used in your overall program.**

The final step in completing the template involves considering how you will communicate and share the results of the evaluation.

When deciding how to share evaluation results, think about the following:

- What sort of decisions will you and your stakeholders be making related to the results?
 - This will help to ensure that you've included all of the appropriate stakeholders and key decision makers.
 - Who else might, or should, be interested in the evaluation results?
- How do you plan to communicate the results?
 - This method will depend upon your audience.
 - You may choose a written report, a short summary statement, a slide presentation, etc.

Remember that not all information resulting from your evaluation has to be provided to all of your stakeholders. Sometimes you just want to share the key messages that are relevant to your audience.

Advantages to Writing An Evaluation Plan

- ❑ Facilitates shared understanding of the evaluation purpose, implementation, and use of findings among key stakeholders
- ❑ Helps keep the evaluation on track
- ❑ Provides a historical record of the different levels or types of evaluation undertaken
- ❑ Helps when planning budgets and staffing

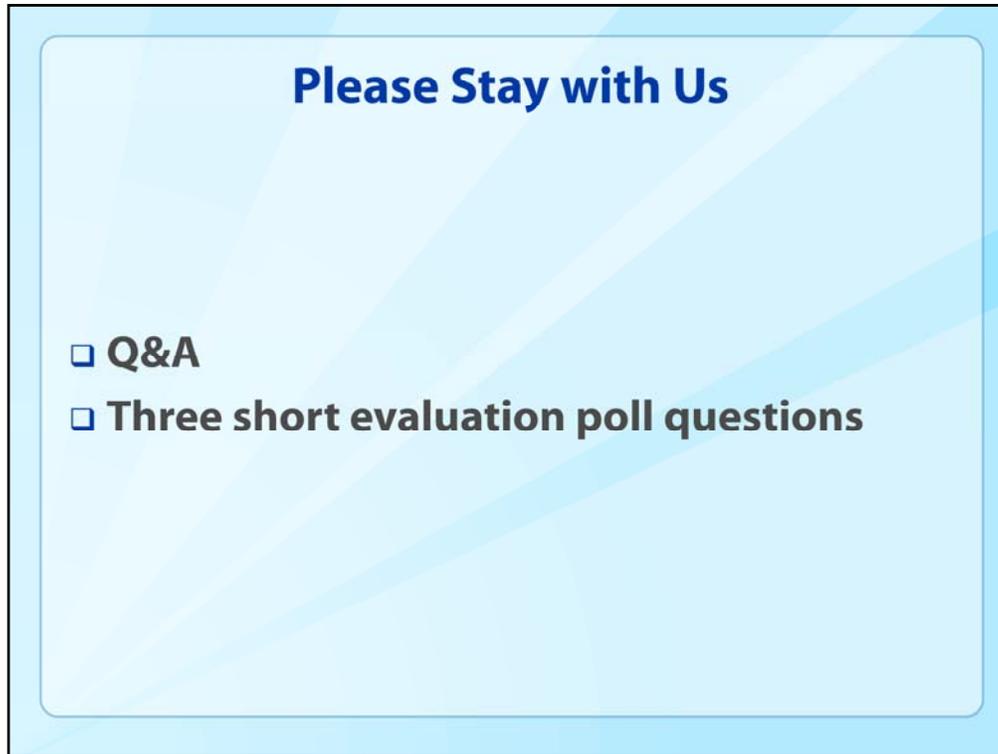
So now that you've completed your template, let's recap some of the advantages to developing an evaluation plan:

- You gain a shared understanding among key evaluation stakeholders about the purpose of the evaluation, how the evaluation will be conducted, and what to expect in terms of results.
- The plan provides a reality-check on timelines, costs, and staffing as well as a guide for managing the evaluation activities and staying on track.
- Evaluation plans clearly identify what data are needed to answer your evaluation questions.
- It serves as a historical record that reflects the different levels or types of evaluation that have been conducted through your program's lifetime.

Although there are different ways to approach writing an evaluation plan, using a template provides a practical approach to capturing all of the key elements that need to be addressed.

Resources

- ❑ DHDSP State Program Evaluation Guide: Developing an Evaluation Plan
www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/state_program/evaluation_guides/evaluation_plan.htm
- ❑ Learning & Growing through Evaluation: State Asthma Program Evaluation Guide (May 2010)
www.cdc.gov/asthma/program_eval/guide.htm



How long should my plan be?

- A plan could be as short as a one page template or an infinite amount of pages.
- The length is not really as important as the content of the evaluation.
- You want your plan to have the necessary details for anyone to be able to pick up your plan and carry out the intended evaluation.

When should I develop my evaluation plan?

- The ideal time would be before you've implemented your program or intervention, when possible. You should start developing the plan as soon as possible.
- The sooner you begin developing and implementing your plan, the better.
- Early implementation allows you to start making improvements to your program before huge problems arise. Or, if you have successes, you'll be able to see what's working early on. You'll also be able to see if there are additional areas of your program or intervention that need to be investigated or additional data collection that needs to be undertaken.

How many evaluation questions should I have?

- There is no set number, however you want to be sure to that it is feasible and you have the resources to answer your evaluation questions.
- I've found that it's helpful to go back to your program work plan to ensure that your activities will allow you to answer the questions.

Thank you!

For more information please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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