

## **CDC Coffee Break: Involving Your Evaluator at the Program Planning Stage**



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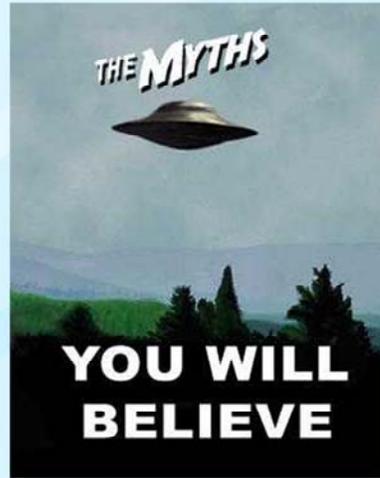
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**Disclaimer: The information presented here is for training purposes and reflects the views of the presenter. It does not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**

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## Evaluation Myths

- ❑ **Programs must be designed and implemented before any evaluation work can be done.**
- ❑ **Involving an evaluator early is too costly.**
- ❑ **Evaluators are overly critical and impede the program planning process.**
- ❑ **Conducting program evaluations is complex and burdensome.**



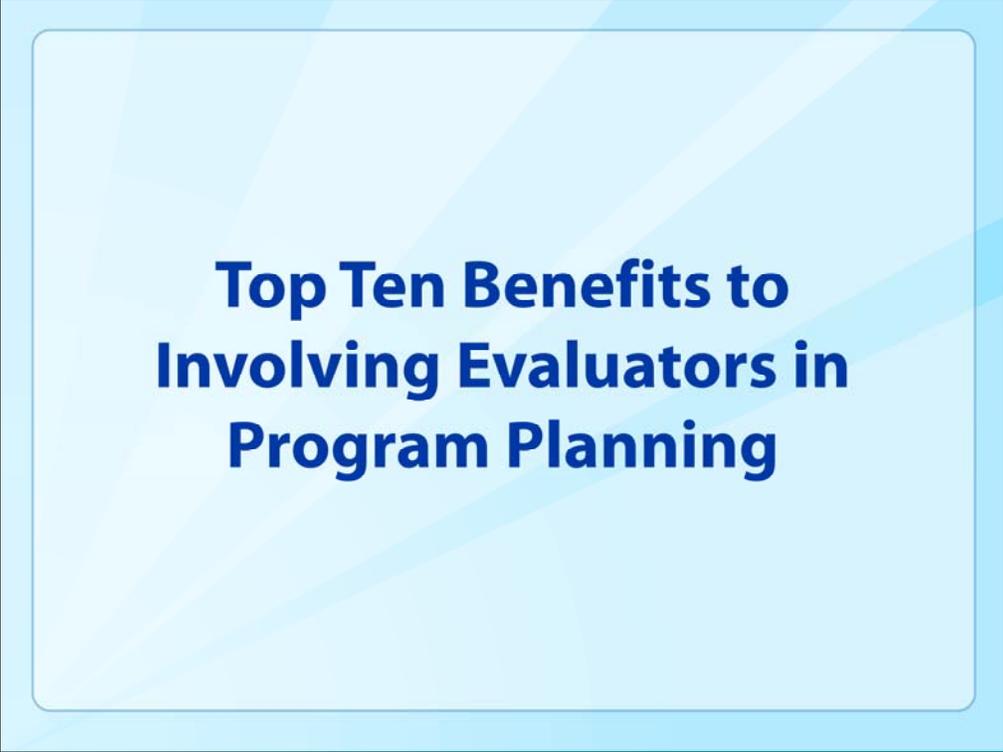
Thank you all who have joined us today. The process of incorporating elements of program evaluation at the same time a program is being designed and planned can be a challenge. Today I will discuss some of the benefits of involving an evaluator at the program planning stage and how evaluators' viewpoint and skills may help strengthen a program. Before we begin, I'd like to dispel some of the myths related to involving evaluators early in the program planning stage.

The *first* myth is that programs must be designed and implemented before any evaluation work can be done. It is true that a program must be in place before any desired outcomes can be measured. However, the evaluation process is ongoing and can occur at any point in the program's cycle.

A *second* myth is that involving an evaluator early is too costly! To the contrast, not involving an evaluator early can result in unclear objectives, delayed program implementation, and poorly aligned program components, all resulting in loss time and money.

A *third* myth is that evaluators are overly critical and impede the program planning process. Although this may not be a myth all the time, I do believe that involving program critics in program planning can lead to more detailed discussions that result in realistic outcomes—as well as a more robust program theory. Note: by “program theory” I am referring to how an intervention is understood to contribute to its intended or observed outcomes.

The *fourth* and final myth is that engaging in evaluation discussions during program planning will be overly burdensome and complex. In recent years, there has been a lot of discussion about the “gold standard” of randomized controlled trials in evaluation. Unfortunately, this has led to the misconception that to be worthwhile, evaluations have to be rigorous and generalizable to a broader population. This is simply not the case. Programs can engage in effective, small scale evaluations that focus on program implementation and processes that are not overly complicated or burdensome.



## **Top Ten Benefits to Involving Evaluators in Program Planning**

Now that we have addressed some of the myths associated with involving evaluators early in the program planning stage, let's discuss the benefits. In fact, from here on I will refer to these benefits as "The Top Ten Benefits to Involving Evaluators in Program Planning!"

## 10. Assist with Engaging Stakeholders

- ❑ Obtain perspectives
- ❑ Increase understanding
- ❑ Identify supporters



### 10. Assist with engaging stakeholders.

Beginning with number ten. Many of you are familiar with the CDC Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health where the first step in the evaluation cycle involves engaging stakeholders. Engagement of stakeholders in the program planning stage helps ensure their perspectives are understood, increases understanding of relevant issues, identifies potential supporters, and increases the likelihood that a program will be successful.

## 9. Assess of Program Needs

- ❑ **Organizational needs**
- ❑ **Community needs**
- ❑ **Participant needs**

### **9. Assessment of program needs.**

Involving an evaluator early in program planning may help with identifying organizational, community and or participant needs. Evaluator skill and knowledge makes them well equipped to assess the often changing needs of communities. For example, an organization wants to implement a program to deliver free screenings to identify and ultimately treat hypertension and high cholesterol in a particular community. Early in the planning process, an evaluator might conduct community based interviews to determine the necessity of such a program. The results of the interviews may reveal there's already a program in the community that serves this purpose and the implementation of a new program may not warranted.

## 8. Determine Evaluation Capacity

- ❑ Internal resources
- ❑ External resources

### **8. Determine evaluation capacity.**

During program planning it would be helpful to know to what extent evaluation resources are available to measure outcomes. Therefore, determining evaluation capacity is of critical importance. It may be necessary for an organization to partner with others who have a similar interest. For example, an organization with very limited evaluation capacity may find a need to partner with a local university to conduct an evaluation of a program. Current evaluation capacity may also influence the scale of implementation. If evaluation capacity is very limited, statewide implementation of a program may not be ideal.

## 7. Develop Evaluation Questions

- ❑ Address key issues
- ❑ Inform evaluation plan
- ❑ Should be prioritized



### **7. Development of evaluation questions.**

Another benefit to involving evaluators early is the opportunity to begin considering evaluation questions. Evaluation questions help define the key issues that will be explored in the evaluation and contribute to the development of an evaluation plan. A useful approach to developing evaluation questions is to generate as many relevant questions as possible that are related to the program's goals and objectives, then prioritize the questions. Note: it is important to limit the prioritized evaluation questions to a manageable number.

## 6. Establish SMART Objective

- Specific**
- Measurable**
- Achievable/attainable**
- Realistic**
- Time-bound**

### **6. Establish SMART Objectives.**

I will not go into much detail here but many of you are familiar with creating Specific, Measurable, Attainable/Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound objectives. In addition to creating SMART objectives, an evaluator may assist with identifying process and outcome objectives early in the planning process.

Process objectives may focus on the activities to be completed in a specific time period. An example of a good process objective is: By August 9, 2011, provide training to 49 community health workers in the use of motivational interviewing .

Outcome objectives express the intended results or accomplishments of program or intervention activities and may range from short to long-term. An example of a good outcome objective is: By August 30, 2012, increase from 2 to 10 the number of community health centers that have implemented use of electronic medical records with provider reminders of high blood pressure treatment guidelines.

## 5. Data Collection Methods

- ❑ Questionnaires
- ❑ Interviews
- ❑ Direct observation

### 5. Consider data collection methods.

Discussions about what, when, and how data will be collected may help avoid delays. Additionally, the target group, time frame and question that's of interest may influence the type of method chosen (i.e., questionnaires, interviews, direct observation, and document review).

## **4. Data Management and Analysis**

- ❑ Small systems vs. large**
- ❑ Expensive vs. inexpensive**
- ❑ Simple vs. complex**

### **4. Data management and analysis.**

Programs that will serve large populations and generate large amounts of data will benefit from addressing data management and analysis issues early. The management and analysis of large volumes of data can be both expensive and complex. Therefore, programs should be prepared to spend some time addressing the possible challenges.

### **3. Dissemination of Findings and Results**

- What findings and/or results will be shared?**
- How will information be shared? And with whom?**
- When will information be shared?**

#### **3. Dissemination of findings and results.**

Program will benefit from any early discussion about:

- What findings and/or results will be shared?
- How will information be shared? And with whom?
- When will information be shared?

It may even be necessary to discuss what individual or group should share findings and results.

## 2. Address Questions That Unfold During Program Planning

- Feasibility
- Implementation
- Methods



### **2. Address questions that unfold during program planning.**

Any number of questions may surface during program planning. Questions about feasibility, program implementation, and methods to be used could possibly be addressed by an evaluator.

## **1. Clarify Program Theory**

**Logic models support program planning by:**

- ❑ Serving as a communication tool**
- ❑ Emphasizing a program's planned work**
- ❑ Guiding program evaluation**

### **1. Clarify program theory.**

And, the final benefit to involving an evaluator early is to help clarify program theory. The program theory should evolve along with the program and may be depicted through the use of a logic model or diagram. Logic models graphically represents the relationships between a program's resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Logic models support program planning by: 1) serving as a communication tool with stakeholder, 2) emphasizing the program's planned work, and 3) serving as a guide for program evaluation.

## **Conclusion**

**Not involving an evaluator at the program planning stage can result in unclear program goals and objectives, missed opportunities for key stakeholder involvement, delayed program implementation, and limited impact.**

In conclusion, not involving an evaluator at the program planning stage can result in unclear program goals and objectives, missed opportunities for key stakeholder involvement, delayed program implementation, and limited impact.

## Resources

- ❑ <http://beststart.org/events/detail/bsannualconf07/presentations/B5.pdf>
- ❑ [www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/evaluation/pdf/brief4.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/evaluation/pdf/brief4.pdf)

## **Please Stay with Us**

- Q&A**
- Short evaluation poll questions**

# Thank You

**If you have questions, please contact:  
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**For more information please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

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