

Step by Step – Evaluating Violence and Injury Prevention Policies

Brief 7: Applying Policy Evaluation Results

This brief provides key suggestions for effectively using the results of your policy evaluation as well as ways to foster policy evaluation among state and local partners. The information provides resources for implementing Step 6 of the evaluation Framework as it applies to policy evaluation.

Using Evaluation Findings

To ensure that you use your policy evaluation results effectively, consider the objectives of your evaluation during the planning stages. Clear evaluation objectives will help to guide selection of strategies to use the evaluation results. Ideally, the results of the evaluation will provide feedback to all aspects of the policy process (problem identification, policy analysis, policy development, policy enactment, and policy implementation).

Internal applications of evaluation results include the following:

- Continuous feedback on policy implementation.
 - Gaps in implementation.
 - Areas for change, or improvement.
 - Barriers and facilitators.
 - Training and technical assistance needs.
 - Support for long-range planning.
- Insight into interpretation of other evaluation results.
- Insight into future evaluations.
- Internal support for policy implementation.
- Increased communication between stakeholders.

Although internal use of evaluation findings may not require a formal communication plan or report, it is important that you consider how the results can be translated into recommendations. The process of justifying conclusions (as described in Brief 6) can help to generate recommendations for internal use. This process should include the input of a variety of stakeholders and consideration of all of the available data to ensure that the recommendations are based on the best information available and consider a variety of different perspectives.

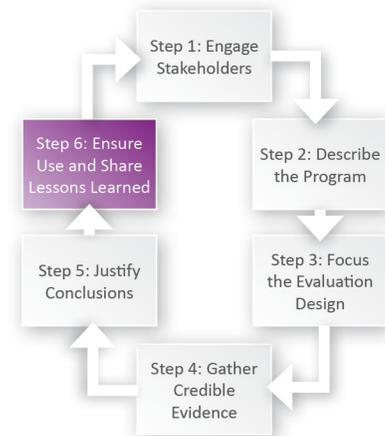
External applications of evaluation results include:

- Providing information about effective policy components.
- Ensuring that information on the effectiveness of a policy is accessible to decision makers.
- Increasing the evidence base.
- Increasing awareness about policy.

Effectively Communicating Evaluation Results

Because many factors may influence the level of use of evaluation findings, it is important to think strategically about reporting and dissemination.¹ Reporting on evaluation procedures and results starts with the fundamental principles of communication and understanding:

- Know your audience.
- Identify your objectives in communication.



1 Newcomer, K. E. (2009, June). *Communicating results effectively* (National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research [NCCOR] Obesity-Related Policy Evaluation Webinar Series, Session 4). Retrieved from <http://conference.novaresearch.com/ObesityPolicy/index.cfm>

- Consider the best frame for your message to meet the communication objectives.
- Consider the methods you will use to deliver your message.
- Consider any restrictions on involvement in the policy development process and ensure that you do not violate them when developing communication objectives and materials.

When presenting evaluation results, it is essential that you convey the information in an objective and unbiased manner. This approach can be especially helpful when presenting information that may contradict existing practice or popular opinion.

Figures 1 and 2 present information on the target audience, communication objectives, format and focus, and considerations for communicating with two common types of audiences: policymakers and evaluators.

Figure 1. Communicating With Policymakers	
Target audience	Policymakers
Communication objectives	Ensure that policymakers have the best available evidence on a topic available to them when they are making decisions.
Format and focus	Use a concise, relatable, and easy-to-understand format such as a one-page policy brief, fact sheet, or a short question-and-answer document.
Considerations	<p>Policymakers are often inundated with reports leaving little time for analysis and interpretation. The following reporting suggestions can facilitate communication with this critical audience.^{1,2}</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Frame data in relation to local context. ▪ Provide real-life illustrations to help policy makers relate to the findings. ▪ Illustrate statistical data in clear, simple charts and graphs. ▪ Present data from case studies or compelling stories. ▪ Consider the use of Social Math (presenting data in a contextually relevant format) to make statistics and numbers meaningful.³ ▪ If results are mixed or complicated, present them accurately while striving for clear and succinct communication of the major findings. ▪ Cost-benefit analyses can be a critical component for demonstrating the economic value of a policy. ▪ Base information presented on evaluation findings rather than on value-based recommendations or suggestions. ▪ Present information in an accessible format to assist in translating and transferring information.

2 CDC, Division of Adolescent and School Health. (2009). *Preparing an evaluation report* (Evaluation Briefs No. 11). Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief11.pdf>

3 NCIPC. (2008; rev. 2010). *Adding power to our voices: A framing guide for communicating about injury*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/framing/CDCFramingGuide-a.pdf>

Using Graphics to Convey Results

Graphics can be a powerful tool for communicating evaluation results. The Extension Program Development and Evaluation Program at the University of Wisconsin provides suggestions on how to use graphics to report evaluation results in their guide *Using Graphics to Report Evaluation Results*, available at <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/G3658-13.PDF>.

Figure 2. Communicating With Colleagues and Other Evaluators

Target audience	Other researchers, evaluators, policy peers, academicians, and leading experts in the field.
Communication objectives	Ensure that evaluation work is credible, replicable, and informs the field of expertise. Garner support from the scientific community and inform future research and evaluation efforts.
Format and focus	Prepare a comprehensive and detailed report outlining evaluation processes, methodologies, and outcomes.
Considerations	<p>When planning and drafting a formal evaluation report, it is important to do the following:^{4,5}</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Communicate all components in a clear, succinct format, without bias.▪ Provide background information, relevant historical data, and purpose of the evaluation.▪ Include a comprehensive description of the injury or violence prevention policy being evaluated.▪ Describe the context of the policy—demographics, timeline, and resources.▪ Outline data collection methods, type of data collected, and analysis process.▪ Summarize information about choices made and procedures used during design election and implementation.▪ Clarify how to use and interpret data, including limitations.

Communicating With Partners

Because policymakers rely on information and advice from many sources, it is important to include partners and other stakeholders in dissemination efforts.⁴ Partners may use evaluation results to influence policy decisions through consistent, targeted messaging via print and electronic media, social marketing tools, the press, and various other communications methods that can attract the attention of policy makers and their constituents.⁴ However, it is essential that evaluators communicate and disseminate information based on each

4 Nelson, S. R., Leffler, J.C., & Hansen, B. A. (2009). *Toward a research agenda for understanding and improving the use of research evidence*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory. Retrieved from http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/311

5 Brownson R. C., Royer C., Ewing R., & McBride T. D. (2006). Researchers and policymakers: Travelers in parallel universes. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 30(2), 164-172.

partners' specific needs and in easy-to-understand formats that can be replicated for other audiences. More information about communicating with partners is provided in **Appendix U**.

Communicating With the Public

Another potential audience for policy evaluation results is the general public. It is critical that you identify the purpose and objectives of communication with the public from the beginning. When developing materials for the general public, make the materials concise and easy to read. Simple graphics can also be effective in communicating with the general public.⁶ Details and considerations for communicating with the general public can be found in **Appendix U**.

Making Information Accessible

The Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University develops a yearly report titled *Preventing Injuries in Maryland: A Resource for State Policy Makers*. The goals of this document are to raise awareness about the toll of injury in Maryland, offer solutions to prevent and reduce the burden of injury in Maryland, and provide contact information for the Center for Injury Research and Policy and encourage readers to use the center as a resource. The guide makes information about evidence-based policies in the field of injury prevention accessible. It is available from <http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-injury-research-and-policy/PolicyResource2012/>.

Fostering a Culture of Policy Evaluation

To increase the occurrence of policy evaluation among all of the partners in your state, consider the following suggestions that can encourage and support policy evaluation.

- **Raise awareness of policy evaluation as a key part of the policy process.** Educate partners and decision makers on the importance of policy evaluation and on the ways that policy evaluation findings can inform the policy process. Consider ways of implementing policies that will facilitate comparison groups, such as phased roll-outs or pilot projects.
- **Consider policy evaluation methods when creating surveillance and reporting requirements and recommendations.** When refining or developing state data collection systems, consider how the data elements could potentially support policy evaluations when designing surveillance requirements and recommendations. Consider implementing mechanisms that facilitate access to datasets across state and local agencies.
- **Provide training and technical assistance on basic evaluation and policy evaluation.** Conduct presentations about the basics of evaluation as well as the key concepts and techniques of policy evaluation. Share these briefs with your partners at the state and local levels.
- **Provide information on data sources and methods for accessing data.** Provide overviews of existing surveillance systems and other state and local sources of data.
- **Support peer learning mechanisms and regional networks.** Provide a mechanism for partners to share effective strategies, ask questions, and brainstorm solutions.
- **Create a repository for policy evaluation results and methodologies.** Consider creating a library or repository of policy evaluation reports in your state. Since many policy evaluations are never formally published, it is important to reach out to partners and experts in the field to collect these evaluations and raise awareness about the database.

⁶ DuBay, W. H. (2004). *The principles of readability*. Retrieved from <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/readab/readab.pdf>

Action Steps

- Consider the goals and objectives of a potential policy evaluation. For each of the goals, identify how the results of the evaluation can be used to accomplish it.
- Identify the target audiences and the best mechanisms for reaching them.
- Assess the existing capacity for conducting policy evaluation at both the state and local levels.
- Use the resources and tools listed in this brief.

Additional Resources

Adding Power to Our Voices: Framing Guide for Communicating about Injury. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/framing/CDCFramingGuide-a.pdf>

Gateway to Health Communication & Social Marketing Practice (CDC). Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/>.

The Pink Book—Making Health Communication Programs Work (National Cancer Institute). Available at <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary/pinkbook>.