This brief discusses the implementation of Step 3 of the CDC evaluation Framework as it applies to the second of the three main phases of policy evaluation: policy implementation evaluation.

**Purposes of Policy Implementation Evaluation**

Policy implementation evaluation can have multiple aims or purposes, including:

- Understanding how a policy was implemented.
- Identifying critical differences between planned and actual implementation.
- Identifying barriers to and facilitators of implementation.
- Documenting and comparing different intensities or variations of policy.
- Collecting information to support interpretation of future evaluations of policy impact.
- Documenting the relationships between logic model components and external influences.
- Improving the implementation process.
- Informing future policy development.

Policy implementation evaluation may focus on a number of different areas, including

- Components of the logic model, such as inputs, activities and outputs.
- Stakeholder attitudes, knowledge, and awareness.
- Facilitators of and barriers to implementation.

**Figure 1.** Illustrates where in the policy process implementation evaluation is focused.

**Sample Implementation Evaluation Questions**

Once the purpose and focus of the evaluation are determined, specific evaluation questions should be identified. The following are some sample policy implementation evaluation questions. Identifying the core components of implementation can be challenging, but doing so can be essential to focusing the evaluation. The evaluation questions selected will guide the selection of an appropriate evaluation design.

- Did the policy clearly identify the critical implementation steps?
- Was the policy implemented according to the policy requirements?
- What inputs and resources were required to implement the policy? Were all of these inputs and resources available?
- What key activities were completed during policy implementation?
Did the activities result in the anticipated outputs?
Was the policy implemented consistently across communities or environments?
Were there any unintended consequences?
What external factors influenced the implementation?

Evaluation Design Considerations

Describing Implementation

Implementation evaluation often relies on non-experimental descriptive or exploratory designs such as case studies and cross-sectional designs. The focus of the design is on accurately describing the implementation process rather than on “proving” any specific hypothesis or demonstrating relations between variables. The evaluation design may also include exploration of differences in implementation in different contexts or for different variations of the policy. Identifying the core components of implementation can be challenging, but this step is vital when developing the evaluation questions and measures. Components may be identified by describing the policy (Brief 2), conducting a policy content evaluation (Brief 3), or both.

The Effects of Implementation on Impact

To demonstrate the importance of measuring the influence of implementation on the impact of a policy, Blais and Gagne examined whether the number of traffic citations issued by police officers (enforcement of traffic laws) had an impact on the number of collisions. The evaluation used natural changes in enforcement over time (due to police union negotiations) and used neighboring communities as a comparison group. The evaluation found a 61% reduction in the monthly volume of traffic citations, which was associated with an increase in collisions involving injuries. If the implementation of the policy (levels of enforcement) had not been included in the evaluation, assessing its overall impact would have been difficult.

Policy Implementation Evaluation: Was the Policy Implemented as Intended?

Policy implementation evaluation examines the inputs, activities, and outputs involved in the implementation of a policy. It can also provide important information about stakeholder perceptions and awareness, as well as barriers to and facilitators of implementation. The relation of policy implementation evaluation to policy development phases is illustrated in Figure 1.

Policy Implementation Data

Qualitative and process evaluation data are useful in evaluating policy implementation, because each can provide detailed information about how a policy was implemented or provide insight as to why certain things happened during implementation. Data for implementation evaluation is usually intentionally descriptive and uses a variety of measures and types of data to complete a thorough picture of the implementation.

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1 Blais E., & Gagne M. P. (2010). The effect on collisions with injuries of a reduction in traffic citations issued by police officers. Injury Prevention, 16(6), 393-397.
Policy Implementation Indicators

Policy implementation indicators often measure activities or accomplishments that are part of the policy implementation. Examples could include:

- Number of organizations with written policies.
- Adjudication.
- Number of citations issued.
- Effectiveness of training materials.
- Awareness of policy.
- Survey of compliance with core components.

Comparing Implementation in Different Settings

If the key components of the policy or levels of its implementation varies across settings, evaluators can make comparisons between implementing jurisdictions. In these cases, a cross-sectional design or multiple case studies may be indicated. Measuring key contextual differences between the jurisdictions is important to interpreting results accurately. This information can be valuable in comparing the relative effectiveness of the various components.

Measuring Degree of Implementation

Depending on previous research and evaluation results, specific criteria or standards may be established to assess implementation. The standards should be established by the stakeholders and should cover required inputs, activities, and outputs. Each of the standards should have a corresponding indicator that will allow it to be measured. Comparing actual implementation to established standards can clarify discrepancies between planned and actual implementation, identify which components or features of implementation are barriers or catalysts for implementation, linked to policy impacts, or allow for comparisons between different levels and components of evaluation.
### Potential Policy Implementation Evaluation Challenges and Solutions

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<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rapid pace of policy</td>
<td>▪ Strive to develop the evaluation plan before implementation if at all possible; identify potential indicators up front to plan for their collection.</td>
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<td>Challenges of finding an equivalent comparison group</td>
<td>▪ Identify variables within the implementing community (such as level or degree of implementation) that may allow for examination of how individual variables influence implementation and impact.</td>
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<td>Lack of clear responsibility for evaluation</td>
<td>▪ Create a clearly written evaluation plan with specific roles and responsibilities.</td>
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<td>▪ Identify and partner with the stakeholder who has responsibility for monitoring the implementation (if that is not your agency).</td>
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### Action Steps

- Identify the core components and activities of implementation for a specific policy.
- Identify potential methods and indicators to assess whether or not each of the core components has been implemented.
- Identify key stakeholders involved in the implementation of the evaluation. What is the optimal method for obtaining information from each of the stakeholders?
- Identify the stakeholder responsible for monitoring implementation of the policy (if any) to find out if a process for tracking the implementation already exists or is under development.

### Additional Resources

**Introduction to Process Evaluation in Tobacco Use Prevention and Control (CDC Office of Smoking and Health).** Available at [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco_control_programs/surveillance_evaluation/process_evaluation/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco_control_programs/surveillance_evaluation/process_evaluation/index.htm)