

Evaluation Methodologies Primer

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1. SOME BASIC EVALUATION RULES

- Evaluation is not about finding someone to “blame”. Evaluation means everyone involved engages in critical discussion about the work – which requires people to be thinking and talking about what worked, what didn’t and why, and what changes can be made.
- Your evaluation must have a plan that outlines the evaluation goals, what kind of information is going to be gathered, from whom, and when.
- All questions and topics to be used in questionnaires or interviews are developed and agreed upon ahead of time – not made up on the spot.
- Evaluation data must be gathered systematically, in the same way from everyone. If different questions are asked of the same group of people, you will not be able to compare their responses.
- The evaluation’s confidentiality must be respected. Steps to take to do this: ensure the evaluation files are closed to anyone not involved in the evaluation; protect the privacy of those giving information to the evaluation by not asking for their names, or using coded responses; do not talk publicly about the evaluation data until it is all gathered and analyzed.
- Evaluation is not easy to do, nor is it hard to do – but it is complex, requiring the ability to look at your work from another perspective.
- Take the time to do evaluation properly, don’t try to do it “off the corner of your desk” or as an afterthought.

Adapted from Ellis, Diana. A Participatory Evaluation Method for Family Resource Programs. The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs: 1997. page 11

2. Glossary of Terms

Terms for use when completing and Learning and Evaluation Framework

A **Learning and Planning Framework** is a project planning tool that assists organizations to clarify the purpose of their projects, and to state the long and short-term results that are expected. The tool will also support the development of a practical plan for learning and assessment.

Goals are statements of the overarching purpose of your project. They are long-term in scope and state the challenge that your project is working to resolve.

Objectives are specific, measurable statements of what you want to accomplish by a given point.

The "SMART" rule is useful here – Objectives should be:

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Realistic

Timely

A **Strategy** organizes your work, ensuring that all activities are focused and directed towards accomplishing your objectives.

Activities are the specific tasks that you do to accomplish your strategies.

Outputs are short-term results, the direct product of your activities.

Outcomes are the long-term results of your initiative in your community.

An **Indicator** is a pointer that informs you about what results have been accomplished. It can be a measurement, a number, a fact, a perception or an opinion that identifies changes in a condition or situation over time.

A good indicator is:

Practical - measurable, easy to identify

Sensitive - change can be measured over time

Specific - focused on one result (either qualitative or quantitative – see definitions below)

Appropriate - measures only what is important to the project.

"**Tracking Progress**" or **Monitoring** is the routine collection, organization and review of information about the progress of your initiative.

"**Assessing Results**" or **Evaluation** is the review and assessment of information about the expected or unexpected results of your project or program. It allows you to assess your progress towards your objectives and helps you learn what factors are affecting business retention and expansion in your community.

Commonly used terms in learning and evaluation processes.

These definitions were adapted from of Ellis, Diana. [A Participatory Evaluation Method for Family Resource Programs](#). The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs: 1997. Pg. 17 – 19

Participatory Action Research: is the systematic collection, review and assessment of information that insures active participation of community members for the purpose of taking action and making change.

Quantitative Information: provides information that is numerically based or a statistical description of something. The information can be counted or measured.

Qualitative Information: provides information that is based on verbal, narrative, pictorial descriptions, comments or observations of a situation or event. Sometimes this information can be grouped and counted.

Informants: the person interviewed is called the “informant” – because they are *informing* you.

Respondent: the person filling out a questionnaire or survey is called a “respondent” – because they are *responding* to you.

Evaluation Tool or Instrument: any measurement device, such as a pre or post test, participant survey, review of records and documents, used to collect or record data in a systematic way.

Statistics / Statistical Data: information developed by counting the number of similar answers to the same questions, the number of people holding similar views, having similar problems, participating in an event etc.

Sample: a part of, or subset of the population. When asked “what’s your sample in this evaluation?” you might say “the parents *using our service*” as they are a subset of a population of parents.

Open-Ended Questions: questions that ask a person to describe something in their own words. The questions often begin with “what” or “how” or “why”.

Closed-Ended Questions: questions that ask for a “yes” or “no” answer or a rating.

Interview Guide: a list of open-ended questions or topics for interviewers to ask of or review with people when interviewing them.

Questionnaire: a series of specific open or closed ended questions asked of participants. A questionnaire can be administered 1 – 1, (in person between the person and evaluator, or over the phone), completed individually, in writing, by the participant.

Survey: a large and systematic investigation of people’s attitudes, behaviours and demographics, using interviews, questionnaires etc.

Focus Group: a group of 7 – 10 people, who meet with a facilitator to discuss a specific topic or topics.

Data: facts or information about a particular situation, issue or problem.

Hard Data: measurable data, usually numbers.

Soft Data: opinions and attitudes about something.

Demographic or Sociographic Data: social statistics used to describe people by age, marital status, culture income, occupation, household size, etc.

3. Overview of Different Ways to Collect Information

To track and assess results use any of the following methods. These vary in difficulty, but can be simplified so non-experts can do a good job.

1. Focus Groups

Focus groups are interviews with seven to 10 participants. Unlike an open discussion, focus groups are highly structured, with a set list of questions and systematic recording of responses. It is important to have an experienced focus group moderator/facilitator, as well as an efficient recorder to capture the information generated. Focus groups are usually at least two hours long. This allows participants enough time to feel comfortable and to think through the questions carefully.

Be clear about whom you are interested in consulting — the group you choose should be able to give you the information you need.

Usually, two or three focus groups are organized that address the same set of questions. This allows comparison of group results. Make sure you take each focus group through the same set of questions. Composition of the groups can vary, depending on whether you want:

- representation from different stakeholder groups in the community (e.g. industry, local government, educators, retailers, the disabled, etc.), or
- to obtain the collective views of members of one stakeholder group (e.g. retail merchants).

Planning focus groups can be time consuming. You need a convenient venue and time, invitations, recording equipment/ material, refreshments for participants, and time to review and analyze responses. Try to limit each session to no more than three general themes of questions, so you can explore the questions in some depth. This also helps organize your information for reporting purposes.

2. Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews are conducted with individuals who have access to particular information you need. These individuals may possess expertise or confidential information that cannot be shared in a group setting. Such interviews are most effective when conducted in person, since facial expressions and body language can clarify both questions and answers. However, the interviewer's note taking can interfere with effective eye contact. This is one reason for having two interviewers for the BR+E survey — one to take notes and the other to listen and make eye contact. Telephone interviews avoid the note taking issue, but non-verbal clues are lost.

It may be necessary to interview several people to get different perspectives on a particular issue or question. For example, if you are evaluating an initiative to provide free parking facilities in the downtown, consult all groups affected by the initiative (positively and otherwise). These might include downtown merchants and office workers, as well as residents, visitors to the downtown, traffic control officers and business owners outside the downtown. Each of these stakeholder groups would have a perspective on the parking issue. Try to interview a couple of people from each group.

Prepare your questions ahead of time.

Your questions need to be clearly worded with no ambiguous meanings. If possible, send the questions to the interviewees in advance so they can prepare.

When conducting interviews it is important to record what is said in a useful format. For example, a tape-recorded interview makes it easy to pick out the main themes and note them accurately. However,

transcribing taped interviews can take a lot of time.

3. Mail-Out Surveys

In a mail-out survey, a questionnaire is sent to a representative sample of the people from whom you want to learn something. Respondents complete the questionnaire using written instructions on the form.

A survey may seem like a straightforward way to collect information, yet it is actually one of the more technically complex research methods. It is very difficult to design a survey that will produce statistically accurate information. This is true for interviews and focus groups as well. However, unlike focus groups or interviews, probing by the researcher to clarify a response is not possible, unless the survey is followed up by an interview.

Since respondents are usually on their own when filling out the survey, it is critical the wording of questions be clear and unambiguous. In multiple choice questions, it is equally critical to carefully select the answers that respondents have to choose from. Avoid using questions requiring complex thinking. Asking respondents to rank their answers from one to 10 is both hard to answer and complicated to analyze.

To encourage respondents to fill in and return the survey, keep the questionnaire as short as possible — ideally one page.

Send the survey with a letter from a respected community member, clearly outlining the benefits of completing the questionnaire. Always include a postage-paid, self-addressed return envelope. Potential respondents may need a friendly reminder about completing the survey, through a phone call or card.

- Keep questions focused.
- Only include questions that give information you really need to make decisions.
- "Test" the questionnaire with volunteers. Can it be completed alone? Or is someone needed to walk respondents through it? Testing the questions also helps identify those respondents who are not comfortable answering.

Annual Evaluation

Starting at least one year after your action plans have begun, carry out an annual evaluation of your efforts. This process involves systematic research to identify the progress made towards desired outcomes, and identifying those factors that have influenced achieving certain outcomes. This is also a useful time to go back to your logic model to see how you are doing and make changes as appropriate.

Use the annual review to think about and report on your completed activities and actual results achieved (both outputs and outcomes). Think about and record factors that contributed to, or hindered, achieving your expected outcomes. Some factors are controllable (e.g. doing adequate planning of strategies), while others are not (e.g. ice storms). This is an important part of the evaluation process, as you can use this knowledge to improve your chances for success in a future projects.

4. Using Face Sheets to Gather Information

What it is?

- A face sheet provides basic information about informants, such as age, gender, etc. This information is called demographic data.
- All interviews, focus groups, or questionnaires should include a face sheet.

How to develop a face sheet?

- Ask only what you need to ask. Often informants are uncomfortable with these questions and may, in fact, decide not to respond to some of them.
- Information that is always included on the face sheet:
 - Informant's code name / number
 - Interviewer's name
 - Date, place and time (start/finish) of interview
- Information that is sometimes included on the face sheet:
 - Why informant chosen
 - Number / type of contacts made to informant (phone, letter, etc.)
 - Informant's relationship to project
 - Informant heard about research from.
- Demographic information to consider asking, depending on need:
 - Age
 - Relationship status
 - Education
 - Income
 - Number of children
 - Geographic/neighbourhood area informant lives in
 - Length of time lived in area
 - Occupation.

Example of a Face Sheet

The information we are asking for on this sheet will be kept confidential. It will be used to help us plan and develop new services and programs at _____.

We appreciate your cooperation.

Code _____ Date _____

Address _____

Interviewer _____

How long at this community? _____

Marital Status

- Single
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Common Law

Age Group

- 15 – 24
- 25 – 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 64
- 65+

Education

- High School
- College
- University
- Other (specify) _____

Number of Children and ages

- 0 – 3 yrs
- 3 – 6 yrs
- 6 – 12 yrs
- 12 – 18 yrs

Do you work for wages? Yes _____ part time _____ full time _____ No _____

If yes, what is your occupation? _____

What is your income level?

- Less than \$5,000
- \$5,000 - \$10,000
- \$10,000 – 15,000

- \$15,000 – 20,000
- \$20,000 – 25,000
- \$25,000 – 30,000
- Over \$30,000
- No response

If no, what is your source of income?

- Unemployment Insurance
- Social Assistance
- Pension
- Other (specify)

Does your spouse / partner work for wages?

Yes part time full time No

If yes, what is his / her income level?

- Less than \$5,000
- \$5,000 – 10,000
- \$10,000 – 15,000
- \$15,000 – 20,000
- \$20,000 – 25,000
- \$25,000 – 30,000
- Over \$30,000

If no, what is his / her source of income?

- Unemployment Insurance
- Social Assistance
- Pension
- Other (specify) _____

Barnsley, Jan and Ellis, Diana. Research for Change: Participatory Action Research for Community Groups. The Women's Research Centre: 1992.

5. Gathering Data Using a Focus Group

What it is?

- A focus group is a group of people with similar experience whom you can call together to discuss topics related to the research.
- Using a focus group is a way of interviewing a group of people at one time, rather than individually.
- Focus groups make it possible to get a group's perspective on an issue. One advantage is that participants can compare experiences and encourage each other to discuss concerns.
- Focus groups are effective as long as the topics are ones people feel comfortable talking about in a group.

How to do it?

- The focus group meeting can take place anywhere as long as you provide privacy for the discussion. You can meet in people's homes, around the kitchen table, for example.
- A researcher (or two) will facilitate the focus group's discussion, and take notes.
- Usually one of the researchers records the discussion in the group on flipcharts for all the participants to see while they're talking. Bear in mind, however, that some participants may not be able to read or may not be able to speak the language being used. A flipchart may not be appropriate. Instead, one of the researchers may choose to take notes of the discussion. An interpreter may be necessary.
- The researcher who facilitates the focus group will use an agreed upon list of topics to guide the discussion.
- You can combine the drawing method of data-gathering with a focus group discussion.
- Write up the flipchart notes (or researcher's notes) afterwards. Try to record the whole discussion rather than just key points.

How to facilitate a focus group?

Before you start

1. Contact the potential participants. Explain the research goals and ask them if they would agree to participate. Briefly describe the topic to be covered. Explain the confidentiality arrangements.
2. Prepare a discussion guide.
3. Decide which researcher will facilitate the group and who will take notes of the discussion. Notes can be written on a flipchart or in a notebook.
4. Be sure to have the necessary equipment (flipchart, pens, tape etc.) on hand.
5. Arrange the seating so that the participants sit facing each other.

6. You may want to provide coffee and muffins.

During the discussion

1. Remind participants that you are interested in their experience and their stories. Make it clear that there are no right or wrong statements. Do not argue with the views they put forward.
2. Keep the group on the topic, but be open to a wide-ranging discussion.
3. Don't worry about silences.
4. Draw out information by asking the person more questions or inviting the person to say more. Tell participants they can do the same.
5. Depending on the topic, discussions can sometimes be upsetting. Participants can feel vulnerable at sharing personal information. Be supportive.
6. At the close of the discussion, ask participants for feedback. Ask them if the discussion has missed anything.
7. Thank them all for their time and their contribution. Explain how you plan to let them know about the results of the research.

After the discussion

1. Write up the discussion notes as soon as possible.
2. Type, or write in legible ink that is copyable. Be sure to double space.
3. Add facilitator notes as appropriate.
4. Make a copy of the notes. File the original and use the copy for ongoing work.
5. Write a thank you note to each participant.

Barnsley, Jan and Ellis, Diana. Research for Change: Participatory Action Research for Community Groups. The Women's Research Centre: 1992

6. Using Interviews to Gather Information

What are interviews:

- A series of fixed but open-ended questions asked with probes to cover different aspects of the topic. Asking the same questions ensures consistency, and covers the same topics in each interview.
- You can ask additional questions during the interview if necessary. Just be sure to include them in the final write-up of the interview.
- Try to have no more than 6 or 7 basic questions in your interview guide.
- Interview guide questions are open-ended. You ask the informants to answer in their own words and you write down what they say. The purpose is to let people tell the researchers about their experience and their understanding of the issue.
- Each interview usually lasts about an hour-and-a-half to two hours.
- Doing intensive interviews with twenty to thirty people usually gives a very clear picture of people's experience of an issue.

How to develop an Interview Guide

- Identify the major issue areas you need to cover.
- Turn each into a broad open-ended question, or several questions.
- Be sure that each question area stands on its own. Revise to see that you're not asking the same question twice.
- Review the questions and delete any unnecessary ones.
- Develop a list of points for each broad area to help you probe for more information if you need it.

How to do an Interview?

Before you start

1. Contact informants. Explain the research goals and ask them if they would agree to be interviewed. Tell them how long the interview will take. Briefly describe the topics to be covered. Explain the confidentiality arrangements.
2. Make arrangements to interview them, preferably alone, without partner, children or colleagues around.
3. Be sure to get their full name and home address so you can send a thank-you letter after the interview.

4. Choose something hard to write on such as a clipboard, and use a coil bound notebook for writing in, as the pages are easy to turn. Take two pens that work!
5. We encourage researchers not to use tape recorders because the process of writing encourages you to pay close attention to what the informant is saying. Writing what the informant says is one of the best ways to learn to rely on your own head and train your memory. Tape recorders can also break down. If you do choose to use a tape recorder, be sure the entire interview is transcribed later so it can be used effectively in the analysis process.
6. Be sure you know what is in the interview guide beforehand. Plan to have it close by during the interview so you can refer to it comfortably. When writing the final interview notes, be sure to include each question you asked and every response. During the interview, you can write the number of the question beside the response rather than writing out the whole question. You need to record in full any questions you ask in addition to those in the interview guide. Include these additional questions in the final write-up as well.
7. Decide on the code name or number you are going to use.

As you begin the interview

1. Introduce yourself and describe the project again. Use the project description as an introductory handout.
2. Explain how the interview will remain confidential.
3. Briefly describe the topics you will cover.
4. Ask the informant to help you with the necessary demographic data for the face sheet that accompanies each interview. Sometimes completing the face sheet before the interview helps to "loosen" things up. However, some researchers feel more comfortable asking these kinds of questions at the close of the interview after a trust has been established. Reassure the informants about research confidentiality. If they are still uncomfortable they may choose not to answer all the questions.
5. Tell the informants if you will be writing their responses rather than taping them. Assure them that if you have trouble keeping up you will ask them to slow down a bit.
6. Remind your informants that you are interested in their experiences and their story. Make it clear there are no right or wrong statements. Remind yourself not to argue with your informants, or use them to prove or disprove personal theories!

During the interview

1. Record the informants' actual words by writing in the first person (use "I" not "s/he"). Do not write you opinion of what the informants say. Develop your own shorthand so you can write every word they say.
2. Listen carefully, but remember that since the interview is a kind of conversation you can relate to the informant in that way. Go where the informant leads you, but be disciplined so you don't go off

- topic. . or stay off for very long. This means you may have to say "That's an interesting view, but let's get back to . . ."
3. If the informants seem uncomfortable try to find out why. Is it your manner? Do they misunderstand the purpose of the interview? Perhaps they don't feel what they want to say is acceptable. Reassure them again that there are no right or wrong answers.
 4. Don't worry about silences. Wait for the informant to decide what to say. Often what comes after a silence is very significant.
 5. It is important that the informants focus on their own experience. If they talk about everyone else but themselves you can ask "How did you feel about that?" or "What did you do?"
 6. Draw out information by using more questions or asking for clarification. Phrases such as "Could you tell me more about that?" are useful.
 7. If the informant does not want to discuss a certain topic or question, do not push for a response. Instead, try, gently, to find out why they don't want to talk about it. Record this in your notes.
 8. Depending on the topic, interviews can sometimes be upsetting. At the very least, the informant may feel vulnerable at having shared personal information. At the close of the interview you may want to ask the informants how they are feeling. If it's appropriate, tell the informants they can get in touch with you if they think of anything else, or if they just want to talk.
 9. Thank them for their time, information, and for agreeing to talk to you.

After the interview

1. Write up the interview notes as soon as possible after the interview, preferably on the same day. The longer you wait the more you will forget.
2. Type or write the interview in legible ink that is copyable. Be sure to double space.
3. Write the interview notes in the same way you did the interview. Begin by writing down the first question you asked, then write the response to that question. If you used probes other than those in the interview guide, be sure to write them down as well. Write in the first person, using "I" rather than "s/he".
4. Add your own comments as appropriate. For example, if the interview was interrupted by the arrival of children, you should note "Children came home half way through the interview and informant was less focussed afterwards."
5. Write the code on the interview. Make a copy of the written-up interview. File the original in a master file and use the coded copy for ongoing work.
6. Write a thank-you note to the informant.

Example of an Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your family. Probes:
 - Who's in it?
 - How long have you lived in the community?
 -
2. Tell me about what happens in your family's day. Probes:
 - Who goes to school / when / when home?
 - Who goes to work / when / where?
 - What happens to the children when they're done with school?
 - Rest of family?
3. What is it like for you and your family living in this community? Probes:
 - Do you know people / who / how do you know them?
 - How do you find out about services / activities / events in the area?
 - What services do you use? How do they work for you? What would be helpful?
4. Tell me about the arrangements you make for the care of your children now. Probes:
 - What, why, how needs change?
 - How do you feel about these?
 - Effects of childcare on other parts of your life?
 - Overall, how does this work for you?
5. What kinds of children's services would best meet your family's needs? Probes:
 - Interested in? Preferences?
 - Why would this be better?
 - If you were planning for children / families on your street / for people you know / your cultural community, what would you plan? Why?
 - How would you let people know about the programs?

Barnsley, Jan and Ellis, Diana. Research for Change: Participatory Action Research for Community Groups. The Women's Research Centre: 1992.

7. Using a Questionnaire to Gather Information

What it is?

- A questionnaire is a series of questions. They can be either open-ended questions, or a check-off list, or a combination of the two.
- You can use a questionnaire in a number of ways. You can give it to the informant to complete while you are present. Or you can ask the questions of the informant and fill in the information s/he gives you. Or you can send it to the informants by mail, or drop it off for them to complete on their own. The informants can mail back the completed questionnaire, or you can pick it up.
- Questionnaires provide a sketch rather than a detailed picture of people's experience.

How to develop a questionnaire?

- List the major items you want to ask questions about.
- Develop as many questions as you think you need for each theme area. Remember, long questionnaires can be intimidating. To make sure you get a good return, ask what you need to ask and no more!
- Decide which questions should be open and which should be closed, depending on your needs.
- Review the list of questions:
 - Each question must be clear
 - Each question must be one question, not two in one
 - Each question must relate to a theme area
- Take out questions which are:
 - Repetitive
 - Unclear
 - Unnecessary
- Number each question separately.
- Try out the questionnaire by pre-testing it on an informant.
- Discuss the results of the pre-test:
 - Was each question understood?
 - Did your overall research needs get met with the responses to the questions?
- Remove or add questions as needed.
- Decide how you will administer the questionnaires. Will the informants fill it out on their own and send it back? Or will they fill it out while you are with them? Or will you ask the questions and write down the answers?
- Think about how people will return the questionnaires. If you use a mail out, and ask for people to return them in the mail, you can send out a lot but you have less control over how many get back.

Hand delivering and picking up takes more time and energy but you'll get a better return. Follow-up phone calls to informants can also increase the number you get back.

How to Administer a Questionnaire

Before you start

1. Contact informants and make arrangements for them to receive the questionnaire. If they are to fill it out while you are there, you may wish to arrange an appointment time when they are alone, without partner, children or colleagues around. Be sure to get their full name and home address so you can send them a thank-you letter afterwards.
2. Be clear about how much time you think it will take for them to complete questionnaire.
3. Decide on the code name or number you are going to use.
4. If you are sending out questionnaires for informants to mail back, include a covering letter that explains the research you are doing. Tell the informants about the steps you are taking to keep questionnaires confidential. Remind them of the date by which you need the questionnaires. Make it easy for them to return the questionnaires by including a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Keep a master list of the questionnaires you sent out, and the number that came back.

As you begin:

1. Introduce the project and yourself. Use the project description as an introductory handout.
2. Explain how the questionnaire will remain confidential.
3. Ask the informant to help you with the necessary demographics for the face sheet that will accompany the questionnaire.
4. If the informants seem uncomfortable try to find out why, and make a note of it. Is it you? Do they misunderstand the purpose of the research? Are they worried that you will ask them questions they might not have answers to? Are they feeling that the questions are intrusive?

Reassure the informants by explaining that there are no right or wrong answers. Tell them that they don't have to answer anything they don't want to, or feel they can't.

During the administration of the questionnaire

1. Explain any unclear questions to informants.
2. When they have completed the questionnaire, thank them for their time, information and for agreeing to be involved.

Afterward

1. Check the completed questionnaire to be sure the answers are clear and complete. Contact the informant for clarification if necessary.
2. Make a copy of the completed questionnaire. File the original in a master file and use the copy for ongoing work.
3. Write a thank-you note to the informant.

