

Measuring Your Success

Nine Strategies for Successful Program Evaluation

Executive Summary

You and your project deserve an accurate and well-designed evaluation. This publication describes nine strategies to help you design and run your evaluation efficiently and effectively: (1) be proactive; (2) think like your funder; (3) select proper metrics; (4) define success; (5) measure quantitatively and qualitatively; (6) select the appropriate method; (7) specify a start-up time to design your evaluation; (8) save time for your evaluation design; and (9) use outside expertise, if needed.

Hints for Successful Program Evaluation

The plan for evaluating your project is an integral part of your proposal, and its accuracy and comprehensiveness may greatly affect the overall quality of your proposal. The success of your evaluation will depend on how well you have managed, gauged, and recorded your achievements. It can be very time-consuming and may require special skills and capacity.

The best place to start your evaluation is by consulting the funding announcement and program guidelines to identify any program-specific evaluation requirements. If your organization is an eCivis Grants Network client, you can access all program materials and required forms in the Files section of each funding opportunity.

In addition, the strategies listed below will help you to successfully complete the evaluation of your project and to accurately record and interpret your achievements:

1. **Be proactive.** Evaluation requires both coordination and agreement among all decision-makers. This is especially true for situations in which the funding agency requires specific evaluation techniques, such as an existing information collection system, or offering financial incentives for voluntary participation in a national evaluation study.
2. **Think like your funder.** Your project may be looked upon more favorably if you design your evaluation according to the preferences of the funding agency. Check the section in the funding announcement that lists selection criteria so you can highlight them in your evaluation design. However, be realistic in terms of your capacity to accurately collect, analyze and report the data and results in accordance with the guidelines. Assess how well your ongoing program efforts and organizational needs and resources will align with evaluation efforts.
3. **Select proper metrics.** To measure your results more efficiently, you should define appropriate metrics. The process of your evaluation will go much smoother and your evaluation will be more accurate and convincing if you use project-specific metrics for measuring your achievements. Use numbers and avoid ambiguous statements. To begin, identify sources of information and data that are currently collected within your organization.

eCivis Tip

Always clarify program-specific requirements with the funding agency.

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With Metrics	Without Metrics
We will improve public safety in our city by reducing homicides and burglaries in 3 target neighborhoods by 5 percent during the project period, as measured by local crime statistics.	We will improve public safety in our city by drastically reducing the crime rate a short period of time.

4. **Define success.** Clearly state what your target is. What are you trying to achieve? To avoid misinterpretation of your objectives and the final result, carefully and clearly define what “success” is for your project. In the example above with metrics, success would be defined as a 5 percent reduction in homicides and burglaries in the 3 target neighborhoods. The example without metrics does not identify

the extent that the situation will change or the time period, which makes it subject to misinterpretation. After you clearly define the project goal and the metrics or indicators to be used to measure the end result, you can start comparing the project’s expected and actual outcomes. If the comparison is satisfactory, then your efforts have been implemented effectively and your project can be deemed a success.

5. **Measure quantitatively and qualitatively.** If you want to illustrate a more comprehensive assessment of your project, use both quantitative (e.g., hard data, statistics) and qualitative (e.g., interviews, surveys, observations) data, as appropriate.
6. **Select the appropriate method.** Your project may need only summative evaluation/product analysis (i.e., your end results and how well you achieved them) or a combination of both product and formative evaluation/process analysis (i.e., how the project was conducted, how consistent it was with the stated plan of action, and how well you achieved your goals through the activities within the plan). Try to determine which method fits best with the evaluation of your project. Additional information on evaluation methods is available in the eCivis KnowledgeBase “Evaluating Your Project” publication.
7. **Specify a start-up time to design your evaluation.** Evaluation designs may start at the beginning, middle, or end of your project. In any case, it will be helpful to decide on a start-up time. You will be able to present a more convincing evaluation if you collect baseline data before program operations and additional data during program operations.
8. **Save time for your evaluation design.** Spending sufficient time to define the problem and conduct a careful cause-and-effect analysis is needed to develop a good evaluation design. Even if your evaluation design has to be revised as your project progresses, it is much easier and less expensive to modify a good design. Some projects may require a pilot study to identify facts and relationships. Others will demand a thorough literature search.
9. **Use outside expertise, if needed.** An internal staff member can develop and run the evaluation of your project. However, if you have a project that will be implemented over an extended period of time and will have many complex, far-reaching effects, such as a project involving a program of curriculum development, you may also seek help from a specialized evaluation firm. Remember that outside expertise brings knowledge, rigor and fresh perspective to an organization, but they must partner with staff, not replace them.

Providing facts that measure the effectiveness and efficiency of your project and devoting sufficient time and effort to develop a good evaluation design will make your project highly qualified and increase your chances of securing additional funding in the future.

Keywords:

grant proposal, measurement, outcome, result, impact, criteria, data collection, qualitative data, quantitative data, statistical analysis, process analysis, product, gauge, effectiveness, efficiency