

# An Evaluation Process

## EVALUATION APPROACH

An evaluation can measure the extent to which a program has attained its goals. Let's say that in the case of a volunteer driver program, the purpose of the evaluation is to produce information about the program's performance with respect to the efficiency or effectiveness of its services. In planning its evaluation process, the first task may be to decide the time frame for the evaluation. For example, is the evaluation going to take place on an annual basis with the evaluation of year one occurring in year two? Whatever the time frame, it will be important for decisions to be made about what will be evaluated, how it will be evaluated, who will participate in the evaluation, when the evaluation will take place, when it will be completed, and where the results of the evaluation will be distributed.

## EVALUATION PROCEDURES AND PROCESS

There are several fundamental evaluation procedures that programs may (and probably should) follow. The most important are outlined in these seven steps: 1) state the planned outcome, 2) identify possible unintended outcomes, 3) define indicators, 4) determine the time frame, 5) collect data, 6) analyze data, 7) report the outcome. These are described in 7 Evaluation Steps in the evaluation section of the TurnKey Kit.

Planning the evaluation process needs to include elements such as:

- description of the process for supplying and gathering the data
- description of how the program was designed and implemented
- description of the operations and process of the program
- description of events that affected the implementation and outcomes
- documentation of events (meetings or crashes), reports (about riders, drivers, and funding), meetings (board, staff, volunteer), and outreach (PSAs and newsletters).

## EFFECTIVE MONITORING

Effective monitoring will aid the program in ensuring that the evaluation plan and related activities are maintained as planned or adjusted as necessary and that evaluation results meet goals and objectives. Some examples are included below.

- How far back in time should baseline data be collected, and how long should the program operate to give it a fair opportunity to show results?
- Did the analysis go beyond describing what happened and provide convincing explanations of why it happened? Did it anticipate outcomes and whether it resulted in any unintended effects?

- Was the program effect large enough to make a substantial difference, and were enough benefits derived to justify program costs?

The analysis should present the evidence that helps determine whether the program has reached its goals. Once a program is found to have consistent effects in several areas, the program may have confidence in the results, and those results will assist in making informed decisions.

### **IDENTIFICATION OF UNANTICIPATED CONSEQUENCES**

In some volunteer driver programs, one outcome may be expected to occur as a consequence of another outcome. For example, the program will recruit additional drivers and thus be able to increase the number of rides its volunteers provide to passengers. In this case, one stated outcome is anticipated to result in another. In other volunteer driver programs, the evaluation may identify some unintended outcomes such as volunteers deciding they do not want to provide rides on weekdays, passengers' lack of enthusiasm about being asked to make financial contributions to the program, reluctance of new funders to approve grant applications prior to data collection from the evaluation, existing older adult services viewing the volunteer driver program as a competitor to their transportation services, and key staff leaving the program.

These and other examples are unanticipated consequences of changes in volunteer driver program policies or activities that will undoubtedly occur during the course of an evaluation.

### **DOCUMENTATION OF OUTCOMES**

The evaluation also can ensure documentation of the program outcomes was not a chance occurrence. Once a program component is found to have consistent effects in several applications, the strategy may be used confidently with predictable results. This feature underscores the importance of evaluations.

Other materials in the TurnKey Kit indicate that it is best to prepare for evaluation during the planning state. By beginning while the program is being planned, a process for documenting and analyzing developments, objectives, strategies, and indicators for success can be put in place. Of course, if you are currently operating a volunteer driver program, it is too late to start in the planning phase. However, it is never too late to plan an evaluation. Some questions to consider:

- Was the volunteer driver program implemented as intended?
- What were the specific activities that were implemented?
- Did the activities lead to the accomplishment of objectives?
- Were the program's goals implemented?
- Were successes or failures related to the strategy or to other factors?

## **DETERMINATION OF SUCCESS**

In the case of a volunteer driver program undertaking an evaluation, it will help to determine if the strategy or strategies were implemented, and whether the expected results were actually produced. Five examples are included below.

- Did the program raise sufficient funding to enable the program to launch and operate?
- How many passengers and volunteer drivers were recruited?
- Was the volunteer driver able to schedule rides and manage its data?
- Were rides provided that met the needs of passengers?
- What outcomes resulted from the rides that were provided?

## **CONCLUSION**

An evaluation will document and analyze the actual implementation of the program and assess whether: 1) strategies were implemented as planned and 2) whether the expected output was actually produced. In the case of a volunteer driver program, it will be important to engage in an evaluation to determine whether program goals and activities have been implemented as intended.