

## COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION GUIDANCE NOTE No 5

### EVALUATING YOUR PROGRAM

Whatever program or activity is being undertaken, it is important to be able to demonstrate the real value of your intervention. This not only validates the original strategic decision to apply resources and effort, it also justifies the expenditure of taxpayers' money in a public/political environment. Good evaluation can actively engage your stakeholders and secure further support – success can breed success.

#### What Is Evaluation?

It is the systematic and objective review of a project or program that looks at design, implementation and results. Has it done what you expected – and what evidence can you offer to support that judgment? Evaluation will determine the real value and impact as well as the relevance and sustainability of your program of intervention.



#### THE ACUITY MODEL – where evaluation fits

A good program will establish the criteria for evaluation at the outset and set up the monitoring processes needed to gather the relevant information. Those criteria will be directly related to clear objectives for the program. Effective monitoring should not be seen as onerous or intrusive, nor should it be seen as an “added extra” or “nice to have” – it is an essential ingredient of the program. Good evaluation also implies that there is a willingness to intervene to change or improve things both during and after a project or program.

## Why Evaluate?

Aside from demonstrating the overall value of your intervention, or justifying the application of resources, there are intrinsic reasons for evaluating your program. These can include;

- are we meeting our objectives?
- is the work we're doing of intrinsic value to those for whom it is designed?
- are we actually doing it well?
- are our resources being used efficiently and effectively?
- what differences can we see on the ground?
- what else is there that needs to be done?

## What Should We Evaluate?

You need to be clear about what it is precisely you are most interested in evaluating. Examples could include;

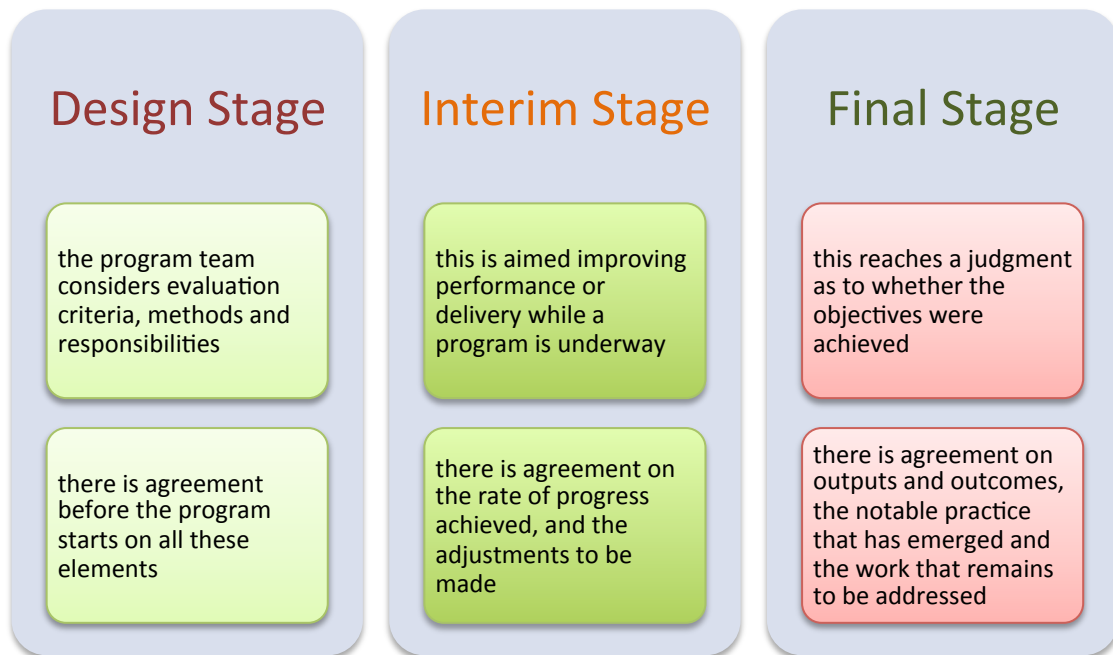
- the overall program and/or specific activities and initiatives;
- how well staff delivered the program initiatives;
- how well partner agencies (if involved) worked with you;
- how well the program administrative arrangements worked;
- whether resources are being applied efficiently and to best effect;
- the costs of the intervention versus the benefits that accrue.

Where the program is clearly part of a broader strategic initiative for the organization, you will also need to bear in mind how the observable results of the program are contributing to these broader objectives. So, in effect, you are evaluating at the "micro" as well as the "macro level, i.e. "not only can we see that this program delivered specific results, it also has significantly contributed towards our key organizational objectives".

Where you are working alongside partner agencies in a joint program, it will be important to ensure that everyone is fully signed up, not only to the evaluation criteria and what is being evaluated, but also to the methods of monitoring. Trust in partnerships will also tend to improve if the evaluation process is conducted openly and involves all interested parties.

## When Should We Evaluate?

This, in part, depends upon the scope and range of the program or project. For simple or relatively limited interventions, it may be sufficient to evaluate once it is complete. However, for more complex or longer-duration programs this is unlikely to be adequate, principally because it will be important to intervene if results do not seem to be happening. For these more involved programs, it is generally good practice to build in evaluation activity at three stages;



Common faults in evaluation processes usually occur at the planning stage, when criteria are badly defined and badly understood, and at the interim stage where important opportunities to make decisions about changes are missed due to poor processes and information.

## Who Should Evaluate?

This is a matter of judgment and will depend upon a number of factors such as availability, cost, qualification and whether or not there is a specific audience or group you are seeking to influence with the outcomes of your program. For most internal programs, experienced staff from your organisation are likely to be suitable to carry out this work. Occasionally, however, you may find it helpful to consider an external, independent evaluation if you are seeking to use the results of your program to exert a broader influence. Increasingly,

organisations are making use of academic institutions who will have research students as well as academic staff and can tap into broader experience in other sectors.

### Using Internal vs External Evaluators

External Evaluators	Internal Evaluators
Can bring a valuable “fresh pair of eyes” to your work, but they may also take time to understand the program fully.	Will know the program well so will need less time.
Will find it easier to remain objective as they are not personally involved.	Personally involved so they may find it harder to deliver “difficult” messages.
Usually trained in evaluation methods and likely to have experience that is valuable.	Usually not specifically trained but can build up expertise over time.
Usually unknown to staff so there is potential for their involvement to create anxiety or even an unwillingness to share experience.	Known to the organisation and therefore less of a “threat”.
Usually a direct cost implication.	Costs can usually be absorbed within existing budgets.

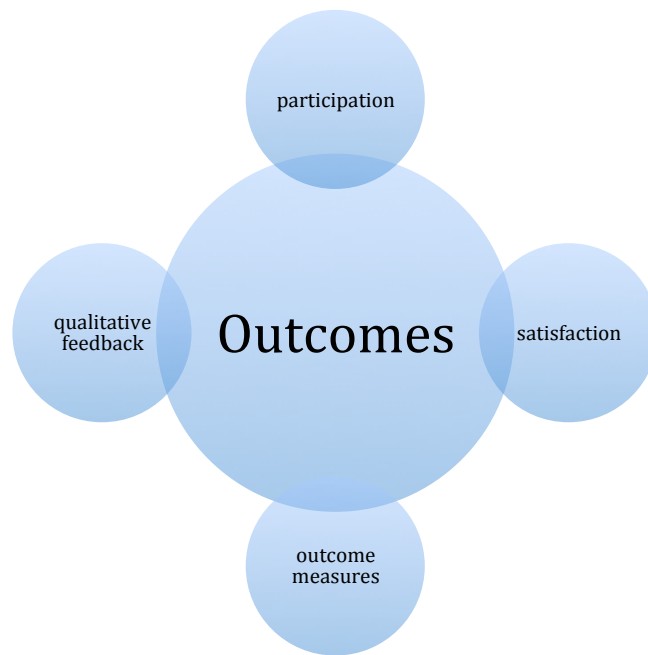
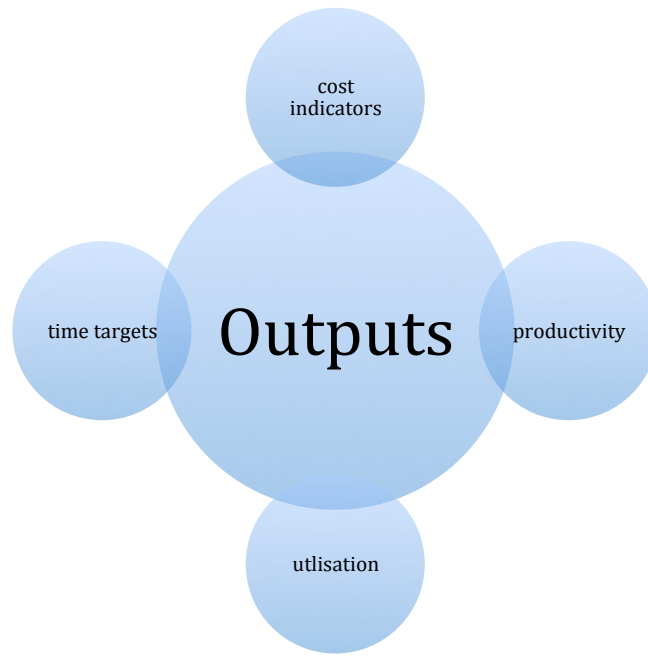
It is also worthwhile considering how you can engage people from the target group for the program to provide direct feedback and testimony as part of your evaluation process. This often yields valuable qualitative information which can provide a persuasive narrative to complement your quantitative data.

### Some Suggested Performance Criteria For Evaluation Studies

It is important to distinguish between outputs and outcomes. Outputs could be broadly described as “what happened?” whereas outcomes are more about “what was the beneficial impact?”.

It is important to look at both in order to assess both the efficiency of the programme (outputs in relation to inputs) and the effectiveness of the program (achieving the desired result). Outputs could include, for example, productivity indicators (e.g. how many smoke alarms did one operative fit in a given time?). Outcomes, on the other hand, would be more concerned with issue such as the overall impact on accidental deaths from fire in the home.

Examples of both are illustrated below.



## So, What Did We Learn?

The purpose of evaluation is to determine the worth of your program intervention and to learn more about what works for future programs. It is unfortunately true that many evaluation reports lie gathering dust on a shelf somewhere. This will usually be due to the fact that there was insufficient thought given at the outset as to how the organisation would use the information it gathered.

To avoid this fate, here are some tips;

<b>Responsibility</b>	make sure someone is directly responsible for implementing the findings of the evaluation where improvements are required;
<b>Mainstreaming</b>	make sure that findings from evaluation reports that generate further work are integrated into mainstream organisational planning processes;
<b>Summaries</b>	create short summaries with impact which can be used more easily for internal and external communication purposes;
<b>Sharing</b>	good evaluation will normally identify good practice and can be shared with other departments and organisations to build awareness and support.

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