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What is Project Evaluation?

Project evaluation is a process of collecting and analyzing information in order to understand the progress, success, and effectiveness of a project. Evaluation is an important aspect of project management. It can facilitate the successful completion of the project, and inform decisions about the future of both the project at hand and other projects.

How Can the Results of a Project Evaluation Be Used?

The purpose of any evaluation is to provide information for action (e.g., decision-making, strategic planning, program modification). Once evaluation information is available, it should be distributed among the project stakeholders and integrated into management practices. If this is not done, evaluation is a waste of organization resources. The results of project evaluation can be used to:

- identify ways to improve or shift project activities,
- facilitate changes in the project plan,
- prepare project reports (e.g., mid-term reports, final reports),
- Inform internal and external stakeholders about the project,
- plan for the sustainability of the project,
- learn more about the environment in which the project is being or has been carried out,
- learn more about the target population of the project,
- present the worth and value of the project to stakeholders and the public,
- plan for other projects,
- compare among projects to plan for their future, and
- make evidence-based organizational decisions.

What is Process Evaluation?

Process evaluation (also called Formative or Implementation Evaluation) examines the ongoing operations of the project. It focuses on what staff and participants do, whether the target population is being served, what parts of the project are working as expected, and what parts are not working. The results of a process evaluation can help the project manager improve the operation or implementation of the project.

What is Outcome Evaluation?

Outcome evaluation (also called Impact Evaluation) assesses the extent to which a project has affected participants or environment. It focuses on immediate, intermediate, or ultimate outcomes¹ that are attained as a result of completing the project. The results of outcome evaluation should identify or anticipate both the desirable and undesirable impacts of the project. Outcome evaluation can also determine how the needs that gave rise to the project were satisfied, or whether these needs still exist.

How to Choose an Evaluation Type?

The evaluation type can be selected based on:

- the objectives and priorities of the project,
- the purpose of the project evaluation,
- the nature of the project (e.g., whether it is process-oriented or outcome-oriented),
- the time frame for conducting the evaluation (i.e., during or after the project),
- how, and by whom, the results of the evaluation will be used, and
- the time frame and budget for completing the evaluation.

¹ Outcomes of a project are different from outputs. Outputs are the direct results or products of project activities (e.g., the number of services provided, the tools developed). Outcomes are the impacts or changes that can be attributed to the project activities (e.g., changes in participants' knowledge and attitudes, changes in organizational conditions and services). Outputs are relatively immediate and easy to observe or measure, while outcomes are usually gradual and challenging to observe or measure.

Steps in Conducting a Project Evaluation

Step One – Develop an evaluation plan:

1. Review the project goals and objectives.
2. Identify the stakeholders of the project and their roles.
3. Identify the project activities and how they are related to the objectives of the project.
4. Identify key evaluation questions (the answers to these questions should show the progress and success of the project).
5. Identify indicators (i.e., measurable factors) that can reflect the success of each step of the project.
6. Identify measurement tools needed to gather information. Try to use both formal tools (e.g., surveys, focus groups) and informal tools (e.g., meetings, checklists).
7. Identify sources for collecting data (i.e., who and where to get the information from).

Step Two – Conduct evaluation:

1. Develop a system to keep track of all information and observations.
2. Develop rapport with the project stakeholders, communicate the importance of project evaluation, and encourage them to participate in information collection.
3. Develop the planned evaluation tools and apply them.

Step Three – Analyze data and develop report:

1. Enter data into data analysis program (e.g., Excel or SPSS for quantitative data; N6 or NVivo for qualitative data) and analyze.
2. Create tables and graphs for presenting the results.
3. Interpret the findings and compare them against the project objectives and evaluation questions.
4. Develop answers to the evaluation questions.
5. Identify strengths, weaknesses, lessons learned, and changes that should be implemented.
6. Write the evaluation report and explain how it can be used.

Checklist for Completing a Project Evaluation

- Have you identified clear and achievable objectives for your project?
- Have you developed an evaluation plan that presents logical relationships between project objectives and project activities?
- Have you identified one or two evaluation questions for each project objective?
- Have you identified indicators and tools for gathering information?
- Have you used both formal and informal ways of gathering information?
- Have you reviewed and analyzed all available data?
- Have you revisited the project objectives and evaluation questions when interpreting the findings?
- Have you explained both the actual project activities and results, and evaluation activities and results, in your evaluation report?
- Have you suggested how the evaluation report should be used?

For More Information

- Zarinpoush, F. (2006, forthcoming). *Project Evaluation Tool for Nonprofit Organizations* Imagine Canada
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Funded through the Community Participation Directorate of the Department of Canadian Heritage as part of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

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