

Program Evaluation Plan Checklist

A Comprehensive 18-Point Checklist for a Successful Program Evaluation

1. Identify the purpose of the evaluation plan

An evaluation purpose provides a clear direction, scope, and stakeholder engagement, ensuring that the evaluation generates meaningful insights to inform decision-making and program improvement.

- Will the evaluation aim to make decisions about program **impact, efficiency and/or effectiveness**?¹
- Will the evaluation be a **program effectiveness** or **learning outcomes assessment**? Or **both**?
- Will the evaluation be **formative** or **summative**?²
- Is the EA for **accountability** or **improvement**? Or both?
- Ask purpose questions:
 - How will the results be used?
 - What changes to the program do you anticipate as a result of the evaluation?
 - Is leadership willing to make improvements?
 - What are the epistemologies of the evaluation team?

2. Write evaluation questions

Clarify what is important, relevant and doable. And eliminate noise.

Characteristics of good evaluation questions:³

- Pertinent*: clearly related to program information needs.
- Relevant*: evaluation is the best way to answer the question, rather than some other nonevaluative process.
- Answerable*: reflect real-world constraints.
- Feasible*: capacity exists to answer the question and use the results in a timely manner.
- Complete*: address the evaluation purpose and evaluation users' needs.

¹ Boultemis & Dutwin, The ABCs of Evaluation.

² Formative assessment provides continuous feedback before a program concludes. Summative assessment provides feedback at the end of a program, close or at its conclusion.

³ CDC, Checklist for Assessing Evaluation Questions; Wingate & Schroeter, Evaluation Questions Checklist for Program Evaluation.

Program Evaluation Plan Checklist

Evaluation question types:

- Needs*: are we meeting our participants needs'?
- Evaluability*: is now the right time to do an evaluation?
- Process*: how well is the program operating?
- Fidelity / implementation*: is the program being implemented as intended?
- Tracking*: to what extent are the program's activities being used?
- Outputs*: how many people participated in the program?
- Outcomes / Impact*: what impact does the program have on participants?
- Effectiveness*: is the program doing what it claims to be doing in goal, mission and other statements?
- Efficiency*: is the program worthy of the resources put into it?
- Climate*: what are the attitudes and sentiments of diverse program participants?
- Benchmarking*: how well is the program operating or participants being impacted compared to similar programs?
- Goal-free*: sfa
- Satisfaction*: how satisfied are participants with the program?
- Meta evaluation*: how well did the evaluation process itself go?
- Accountability, accreditation and program review*: how well did the program meet internal or external standards?

3. Empathize & incorporate social justice principles

Empathy reminds us we are working with people. It also guides ethics, checks our biases and increases stakeholder engagement.

- Ask asset-based questions.
- Disaggregate data.
- Utilize critical quantitative methods.
- Question evaluation frameworks.

4. Budget

The evaluation plan should be consistent with available resources. Now is not the time to be ambitious.

- Direct costs: money, equipment, training, capacity to analyze results, etc.
- Indirect costs: motivation, uncertainty from implementing results, etc.

Program Evaluation Plan Checklist

5. Identify stakeholders

Stakeholders frame issues and values. And increase the likelihood of results being used.

- Use a method for identifying and prioritizing stakeholders and decision-makers.⁴
 - Decision-makers: direct power over program decisions.
 - Implementers: direct responsibility for the program.
 - Participants or beneficiaries: those who have something to lose if the program does not exist.
 - Partners: supporters and advocates.
 - Hidden: historically ignored or not obvious to program leadership.

6. Describe the program

Describing the program clarifies staff and stakeholders' perceptions and makes implicit parts of the program explicit.

- Clarify the theory of change.
 - Example: Schlossberg's transition theory.
- Clarify the theory of action: how the theory of change is operationalized in action.
 - Example: A transition program for transfer college students.
- Create a logic model.
- Create a curriculum map.

7. Plan for evaluating implementation fidelity

Fidelity clarifies if the outcomes of a program are attributable to the program and to what extent.

- Was the program actually implemented? (yes/no/unsure)
- Were participants exposed to the program and to what extent? (time)
- Was the program implemented with quality? (direct / indirect evidence)
- How responsive are participants to the program? (low/medium/high)
- Evaluate the fidelity assessment:
 - positive outcomes/positive implementation
 - positive outcomes/negative implementation
 - negative outcomes/positive implementation
 - negative outcomes/negative implementation

⁴ Bryson, Patton, & Bowman, Working with Evaluation Stakeholders; Thomas & Campbell, Evaluation in Today's World.

Program Evaluation Plan Checklist

8. Conduct a formal or informal evaluability assessment

Evaluability assessment systematically evaluates the readiness of a program for evaluation, identifies potential challenges and clarifies the organizational, political and historical contexts. Check the toxicity of your program before proceeding.

- The climate is healthy and toxicity is low.
- There is a clear rationale for the evaluation.
- The program has clearly defined outcomes.
- The questions are evaluable.
- It is feasible to attribute outcomes to the program.
- Data is available and reasonably reliable and valid.
- Stakeholders are identified and engaged.
- Staff capacity for doing the research and evaluation.
- Resources are available to do the evaluation effectively.
- An appropriate timeframe is used.
- Leadership is willing to act on results.

9. Clarify or write statements of intentionality

Statements of intentionality determine what data will be collected and analyzed.

- For program goals, consider the SMART goal method.
- For learning outcomes, consider the ABCD or learning outcomes template method.⁵

10. Determine what evidence you need to answer your evaluation questions

The goal of evaluation is to answer questions and improve a program, not satisfy curiosity.

- Conduct a data audit / inventory. Find potential sources of already-existing data.
- Determine if you need to collect new data.
- Collecting existing data: Do you have it? If not, who are the data stewards? Will they work with you?
- If collecting data about people, who are the population?

⁵ [Writing Learning Outcomes: 2 Easy Methods.](#)

Program Evaluation Plan Checklist

11. Determine how to collect the evidence

Data does not exist freely or objectively on its own. People collect and steward it.

- Create a rationale for your data collection strategy.
- Collect new data.
 - Survey
 - Interview or focus group
 - Experiment
 - Tracking and monitoring
 - Observations
 - Archives/documents
- Collect existing data: who are the data stewards? Will they work with you?
- Specify who is responsible for collecting the data.
- Specify where the data will be stored.
- Create a strategy for organizing the data.

12. Decide what type of analysis will be conducted

Decisions about analysis should be made early in the study. Analysis should be consistent with the evaluation purpose and epistemology.

- Choose an analysis strategy: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed or other.

13. Identify potential ethical or bias issues

Research ethics ensure the protection of participants, lend credibility to the evaluation and enhance the validity of your results.

- Check for bias in the instruments.
- Check for bias in the individuals leading the evaluation.
- Verify the need for an IRB.
- Ensure data privacy and storage.
- Clarify whether the data will be anonymous or confidential.
- Create a consent form, if necessary.

Program Evaluation Plan Checklist

14. Determine a process for using the results / storytelling

“Stories are how humans build empathy. Stories inspire action.”⁶

- Anticipate results and changes.
- Create a format for sharing results.
- Address potentially negative results.
- Ensure leadership is willing to act on results.
- Find the big ideas in the data.
- Incorporate storytelling techniques in sharing results.

15. Plan for sustaining the evaluation plan over time

A sustainable plan allows programs to view how changes lead to program improvement and participant learning over time.

16. Create an evaluation matrix and timeline

An evaluation matrix lays out the evaluation project details in one visualization and shows alignment between all the parts.

Matrix on next page.

17. Plan for meta-assessment

Meta-assessment evaluates the quality, effectiveness and characteristics of an assessment.

18. Celebrate

Program Evaluation Plan Checklist

Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Purpose: _____

Ex. Assess the impact of the conflict training program.

Evaluation questions:	Learning outcomes and / or program effectiveness goals	Participants	Data source (participants, records, secondary datasets, etc.)	EA Types	Is the data source direct or indirect	Data collection			Data analysis strategy	Where & when results will be discussed and how will they be used	Stakeholders	Results: What is the story for this question?
						By whom	By when	Where will it be stored	Analysis			
Ex. I want to know what staff gain from a conflict resolution training program.	Staff will state how satisfied they were with the training. ----- Staff will list three resources for resolving conflict.	Staff	Post training survey ----- Post training survey	Satisfaction ----- Outcomes	Indirect ----- Direct	Evaluation coor.	June	Eval coor's drive	Descriptive statistics & correlations Comparing groups	Annual staff retreat Agenda item on monthly meetings	Unit director VP	
Ex. I want to know what students learned in a leadership program.	Staff will state how satisfied they were with the training. ----- Staff will list three resources for resolving conflict.	Staff	Post training survey ----- Post training survey	Satisfaction ----- Outcomes	Indirect ----- Direct	Director	Feb.	Shared office drive (Q:)	Descriptive statistics & correlations Comparing groups	Annual staff retreat Agenda item on monthly meetings	Unit director VP	
Ex. I want to know if the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) are implemented with fidelity.	Students will be adequately exposed to the program ----- Staff implemented every feature of the program.	Students Staff	TFI – Tiered Fidelity Inventory for PBIS Observations Staff interviews Documents	Tracking ----- Tracking	Direct ----- Indirect	PBIS coach ----- PBIS coach	May	District database	Descriptive statistics Coding		District PBIS team District leaders Board	

Program Evaluation Plan Checklist

Meta Assessment Rubric

Criterion	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly developed
Purpose statement	The purpose is unclear or not well-articulated, causing confusion about the goals of the evaluation.	The purpose is somewhat clear but may require additional clarification to precisely convey the intended goals of the evaluation.	The purpose is clear and articulated, providing a solid understanding of the goals of the evaluation.	The purpose is exceptionally clear, precisely conveying the goals of the evaluation without ambiguity.
Evaluation questions	Questions are not aligned with the purpose and goals of the evaluation.	Some questions align with the purpose and goals, but not all contribute to a comprehensive assessment.	Most questions align with the purpose and goals, ensuring relevance and significance.	All questions directly align with the overarching purpose and goals, ensuring their significance.
Resources	No resources are available to support assessment.	Resources to support assessment are handled on an ad hoc basis.	There is budgetary support of assessment activities, but there is no overall plan for providing the full range of resources to support assessment.	The program has made a commitment to assessment and provides all necessary resources for assessment.
Logic model	Components of the logic model are unclear and poorly defined, making it challenging to understand the program's logic.	Some components are defined, but there is room for improvement in clarity and precision, hindering a full understanding.	Components of the logic model are clear and well-defined, facilitating a solid understanding of the program's structure and processes.	Components are exceptionally clear, specific, and leave no room for ambiguity, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the program's logic.
Stakeholder identification	Limited identification of key stakeholders, potentially missing important perspectives in the evaluation process.	Some stakeholders are identified, but the list may not be comprehensive, leading to potential oversights.	Clearly identifies a wide range of stakeholders, ensuring a comprehensive representation of perspectives in the evaluation.	Systematically identifies all relevant stakeholders, including those who may be traditionally marginalized or underrepresented.
Stakeholder engagement	Limited use of strategies to include diverse perspectives, potentially excluding some stakeholders from the evaluation process.	Some attempts to include diverse perspectives, but more inclusive engagement strategies are needed.	Utilizes a variety of inclusive engagement strategies, actively seeking input from diverse stakeholders and ensuring representation.	Employs highly developed, tailored strategies to engage a wide range of stakeholders, promoting inclusivity and equity in the evaluation.
Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes lack measurability, making it challenging to assess students' progress or achievement.	Some learning outcomes are measurable, but others may lack well-defined indicators.	Most learning outcomes are measurable, allowing for a meaningful assessment of student achievement.	All learning outcomes are easily measurable, with well-defined indicators for assessing student progress or achievement.
Social justice principles	Little acknowledgment of cultural context or responsiveness to diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences in the evaluation approach.	Recognizes cultural diversity to some extent but lacks consistent integration into the evaluation process.	Demonstrates cultural responsiveness by incorporating diverse cultural perspectives and adapting methods to cultural contexts. Incorporates some social justice evaluation tools.	Systematically and effectively integrates cultural responsiveness into every aspect of the evaluation, ensuring equity and respect for diverse cultural norms. Incorporates many social justice evaluation tools.
Data collection	Data collection procedures lack detail and may not be clearly outlined, leading to potential inconsistencies in implementation.	Some elements of data collection procedures are clear, but there is room for improvement in detail and consistency.	Data collection procedures are clearly outlined, with sufficient detail to ensure consistent and reliable implementation.	Data collection procedures are exceptionally clear, leaving no room for ambiguity, and are highly detailed to ensure rigorous and consistent implementation.

Program Evaluation Plan Checklist

Criterion	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly developed
Data analysis	The data analysis plan is unclear or inadequately defined, lacking specificity and detail about the methods and procedures for analysis.	Some elements of the data analysis plan are clear, but there is room for improvement in specificity and detail to ensure a comprehensive approach.	The data analysis plan is clear, specific, and well-defined, outlining methods and procedures comprehensively for a thorough analysis.	The data analysis plan is exceptionally clear, leaving no room for ambiguity, and provides a detailed and nuanced guide for conducting a comprehensive analysis.
Fidelity assessment	Fidelity is not considered.	Some elements of fidelity measures are clear, but are anecdotal and only considered after the program has concluded.	Fidelity measures are defined and an initial attempt is made to measure.	Fidelity measures are defined and used.
Assessment ethics, including data privacy, informed consent and avoidance of harm.	The program evaluation lacks clear adherence to ethical standards, with potential ethical concerns not adequately addressed or acknowledged.	Some elements of adherence to ethical standards are present, but improvements are needed to ensure a more comprehensive and explicit commitment to ethical principles.	The program evaluation demonstrates clear adherence to ethical standards, with explicit consideration of and commitment to ethical principles throughout the evaluation process.	The program evaluation exhibits highly developed adherence to ethical standards, incorporating a thorough and explicit commitment to the highest ethical principles at every stage.
Assessment bias	Data collection methods may inadvertently contribute to bias or fail to capture the experiences of marginalized groups.	Some efforts to address bias in data collection, but improvements are needed to ensure equitable representation.	Prioritizes equitable data collection, using culturally sensitive methods and adapting approaches to capture diverse perspectives accurately.	Demonstrates highly developed strategies for ensuring equity in data collection, consistently centering marginalized voices and experiences.
Using results	There is little or no evidence that assessment results are used for improvement.	There is evidence that assessment results are occasionally used for improvement.	Evidence results are used for improvement in some processes. Program can articulate where results are discussed.	There is a commitment to using assessment results to inform improvements; the program presents evidence that assessment results, including student learning assessment, are routinely used for improvement, effectiveness and planning.
Culture of evidence	Limited evidence of a commitment to using data to inform decisions within the program.	Some efforts to incorporate data into decision-making processes, but a more consistent commitment is needed.	A clear commitment to data-informed decision-making, with evidence of regular use of data to guide program strategies and decisions.	A highly developed commitment to data-informed decision-making, with a consistent and ingrained use of data to drive decision-making at all levels of the program.

Some elements adapted from: State University of New York, Institutional Effectiveness Rubric; Western Association of Schools and Colleges Program Learning Outcomes Rubric.