Section 7.
Evaluating the Information Center

The Need for Self-Evaluation

Evaluating your library and information services is an important step in the process of continuous improvement. It is also useful as a means of communicating to funders and others evidence of the need for the program. People often become anxious over the thought of evaluation because many of us think of evaluation in terms of "accountability" or "judging." A more helpful approach to self-evaluation may be summed up in this statement: Evaluation is gathering, analyzing, and applying information to improve your program. In evaluation one asks questions about the services and finds the information to answer them. The answers are used not only to determine how well the center has done but also to identify areas for improvement, to make services more efficient and effective.

The Link Between Evaluation and Center Goals

It is important to tie evaluation to the mission and goals of the information center. What services most clearly exemplify its reason for being? Determine a short list of those services the center is most interested in learning about, rather than attempting to learn everything. Then think about questions of effectiveness and efficiency in regard to those services.

Reviewing Services

Also known as "process evaluation" or "monitoring," questions regarding the center's services document the effort the program has put into achieving the goals consistent with its mission. Some examples:

- How many information requests did we respond to in the last fiscal year?
- How many information packets were sent out?
- Did the center serve its primary clientele?
- What channels or methods were used to respond to information requests?
- How many library materials were lent?
- What subjects was the center asked most frequently to supply information on?

These questions are most easily monitored on an on-going basis rather than trying to assemble the information after the fact. One way of doing this is through the use of standard forms which describe the service as they are provided (see Figures 1 and 2). Having this information will make it easier to prepare periodic, such as monthly, reports of activities (see Figure X).

In designing forms to monitor center activity, be sure to include all relevant staff in the development stage of these forms. Ask them for feedback as they use the forms, so the forms may be modified over time.

Figure 1
Sample Form for Monthly Report

Alcohol and Drug Information Center
Monthly Report for:

Month: ______________________ **Year:** __________

\# of information requests completed __________

\# of free materials distributed __________

\# of photocopied items __________

\# of library materials used: In-house __________

Circulated __________

\# of videos lent __________

Significant contacts made with other ATODA information centers:

Special Projects:

Special events or changes in operations:

Date of report: ______________________ Staff initials: __________

Figure 2
Sample Form

Educational Materials Requested

Check all that apply:

Organization Type:

____ Private	____ Non-Profit	____ Voluntary Organization
____ State Govt.	____ County Govt.	____ Municipality
____ Community-based	____ Statewide	____ Other

Target Population:

____ Urban	____ Rural	____ Suburban
____ Children	____ Adolescents	____ Adults
____ Elderly		
____ Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual	____ Women	____ Disabled
____ Asian/Pacific Islander	____ African American	____ Native American
____ Hispanic/Latino		
____ Other ________________________________		

Figure 3
Sample Form

Description of Information Requests

SUBJECTS (Check all that apply)		SPECIAL POPULATIONS (Check all that apply)	
Alcohol, tobacco, drugs	(T01)____	Asians and Pacific Islanders	(P01) ____
Assessments, community	(T02)____	Blacks/African Americans	(P02) ____
AIDS/HIV	(T03)____	Children (0-12 years)	(P03) ____
Communication aspects	(T04)____	COAs, COSAs	(P04) ____
Community organizing	(T05)____	Economically disadvantaged	(P05) ____
Education	(T06)____	Elderly	(P06) ____
Evaluation and research	(T07)____	Gay, lesbian, bisexual	(P07) ____
Health, general	(T08)____	Handicapped/Disabled	(P08) ____
Laws and policies	(T09)____	Hispanics/Latinos	(P09) ____
Physiology/biochemistry	(T10)____	Native Americans	(P10) ____
Prevalence, patterns, and consequences	(T11)____	Rural	(P11)____
		Urban	(P12) ____
Prevention	(T12) ____	Suburban	(P13) ____
Programs, services, and systems	(T13) ____	Women	(P14) ____
		Young adults (18-25 years)	(P15) ____
Social issues, other	(T14) ____	Youth	(P16) ____
Training, technical assistance	(T15) ____	Other	(P17) ____
Treatment	(T16) ____		
Other	(T17) ____		

Information Request Response (Check all that apply)

Verbal information ____________
Number of free materials ____________
Number of photocopied items ____________

Library use of materials:
in-house ____________
loan ____________

Total number of pieces of materials distributed ____________

Note: The use of a numeric code allows fast tabulation of results.

Questions About Effectiveness

Once you have reviewed the center's services, queries regarding effectiveness will help the center answer the question: "Did our services work?" They are also referred to as "outcome evaluation." Some examples:

- How satisfied were users with materials received?
- How satisfied were users with information received? Was it timely? In a usable format? Thorough enough?
- What current materials and services are most useful to our users?
- In what areas can we provide more, and more useful, information?

These questions are often best answered through a survey of users.

Questions About Efficiency

Questions about effectiveness lead directly to questions about efficiency. These questions are about the cost of reaching the desired outcome. The cost can be in terms of dollars, staff time, planning time, or any other measurable resource. Some examples:

- How many dollars in grant money were accrued by your clientele as a direct result of information dissemination on grant funding?
- How many users saved funds by borrowing videos for preview, rather than paying for preview?
- How many community programs have used or developed handouts or curricula by using free materials you distribute, rather than purchasing such items?
- How much staff time have programs saved in tracking down statistics, program information, addresses, other sources of information by using your services?

When calculating the costs of a particular service, be sure to include all possible expenses. For example, photocopying of library items for users entails not only the cost of paper but rental of the copier, repairs, toner, staff time, wear on library materials, etc. Knowledge of actual costs of services is useful when planning. Coupled with what one learns about the users' expressed value of individual services, this knowledge helps the center make decisions about which services are most cost-effective. This is especially useful when faced with difficult choices in service priorities.

Surveying Users

A survey of users is one means of gathering information about the center's services. In designing a survey, limit it to questions that will provide information the center can and will use. Consider how the center will use the information provided. For instance, if the survey asks a question about clientele served, does the center intend to modify services in order to better serve particular groups that may be missing? Be sure to limit questions in order to get answers to the most important ones and to insure a greater likelihood of response. When the center chooses a question for the evaluation, it must be able to repay the effort involved in asking and answering it. The questions need to be tied to the center's mission and most important goals.

In designing a survey there are two types of questions: "closed" and "open-ended" questions. Closed questions force the respondents to fit their answers into the categories that are provided. Open-ended questions allow respondents to create their own categories. Closed questions provide information that is easier to tabulate; one can simply count the number of responses to various choices. Open-ended questions have the advantage of allowing for things that you may not have considered.

Questions that relate to satisfaction (happy-unhappy), or frequency (often-never) can be constructed using a Likert Scale. In creating such a scale it is helpful to define the different choices. Limit the number of choices because the center will not get any more information if there are 10 choices than if there are only four. Also, do not use an odd number of choices. Inevitably, the middle one is over-selected and treated as if it represents "average." (See Figure 3 for examples of this kind of scale.)

Designing a Survey

In designing a survey consider what information is already available through the record-keeping system of the center. Special questionnaires may be administered in person, by mail or over the telephone. Response rates will vary, depending on the method used. Each method has strengths and weaknesses, and varies in terms of cost. Interviews, by telephone or face-to-face, allow for interaction between the questioner and the respondent, and thus the ability to ask for more detail or clarification. Another method for eliciting information is through the use of a focus group. This is in essence a group interview, conducted by a facilitator, intended to cover a predetermined number of topics while also allowing for topics to arise which seemingly are important even if they are not part of the initial interview outline.

Selecting a Sample

After the center has determined the questions to be asked, the next issue is determining to whom these will be directed. If it is everyone served by the center, that represents a population study. This is only possible if the center serves a small number of users, up to 100. When larger numbers of people are served, the center will only be able to survey a portion. Then the issue becomes

Figure 4
User Survey: Sample Questions

A. The center makes available the following materials. Please indicate how satisfied you have been with the materials you have received. Circle the number that most closely matches your assessment using the scale below.

0	1	2	3	4
Not Applicable	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Dissatisfied

Free Materials					
Books, pamphlets, resource guides	NA	1	2	3	4
Newsletter	NA	1	2	3	4
Bulletin of new materials	NA	1	2	3	4

Suggestions or Additional Comments: ____

____

Materials For Sale					
Responses to telephone information inquiries	NA	1	2	3	4
Information about workshops and training	NA	1	2	3	4
Videotape rental	NA	1	2	3	4
Borrowing books from the center	NA	1	2	3	4

Suggestions or Additional Comments: ____

____

B. Please rate the following services offered by the center.

Customer service when ordering materials	NA	1	2	3	4
Responses to telephone information inquiries	NA	1	2	3	4
Information about workshops and training	NA	1	2	3	4
Videotape rental	NA	1	2	3	4
Borrowing books from the center	NA	1	2	3	4

Suggestions or Additional Comments: ____

____

C. On which subjects do you feel you need more information? (Check all that apply.)

____ Alcohol and other drug abuse prevention
____ Program evaluation
____ Prevention strategies, other than AODA
____ Special populations (specify)
____ Other (specify)
____ General treatment
____ Fund raising
____ Community development

D. From these items in the above list, what are the two subjects of greatest interest?

E. Have the center's services been of assistance? _____Yes _____No
In what ways?

selecting those to be surveyed. The center may be particularly interested in those who use a particular service or represent a sub-group of clients. The task becomes selecting a sufficient number to have a range of responses and assuring that there is representation from all groups whose opinions are of interest. The *Suggested Reading* list includes materials on survey design and sampling.

Analyzing the Data

Before beginning to collect data, the center needs to have an analysis plan. This plan summarizes the ways in which the information collected answers the questions that were asked. If the center waits until after collecting the data, it may find that the analysis it wants to do demands data it did not collect. Or it may have collected data which has no real use.

Figure 5 summarizes major points in developing a plan for analysis.

Figure 5

Developing a Plan for Data Analysis

1. Write -- THE QUESTION -- here.

2. Who is interested in my results?

3. What descriptive information will I report?
    1.
    2.
    3.
    4.
    5.

4. What methods of analyzing relationships will I use?
    a. Contingency tables?
    b. Comparisons of means?
    c. Correlation?

5. How will I define a difference that is meaningful ina practical sense?

6. Which test of significance will I use? Why?

From: Hawkins JD; Britt Nederhood. Handbook for Evaluating Drug and Alcohol Prevention Programs: Staff/Team Evaluation of Prevention Programs (STEPP). Rockville, MD : Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, Division of Demonstrations and Evaluations, 1987.

Statistical Analysis

Data can be analyzed in two ways. The information can be considered descriptive or it may endeavor to look at relationships. (The latter is less likely to be applicable to the information center.)

Descriptive statistics answer questions such as:
- ❋ How many information and referral requests were completed?
- ❋ How many library materials were lent?

- What is the composition of users, e.g. individuals or organizations, and what kinds of individuals or organizations?
- What topical areas represent the largest numbers of information re quests?
- What are the characteristics of those served by our users?

Relationship statistics examine possible relationships between things. An example might be that book circulation declines as videotape use increases. If you wish to find effects that are statistically significant you should start by consulting publications on the *Suggested Reading* list to learn about data analysis and then work with an evaluator.

Summarizing the Findings

It is important to communicate the findings of the evaluation in ways that are usable and appropriate. Questions to be addressed include: Who needs to know what, when, and for what reason? What is the best way to communicate specific findings to specific audiences? Sometimes it is helpful to present the findings orally as well as in writing. Is a final report required? If so, what will be included in the final report?

Using the Results

It is important to view an evaluation not as a judgment of the program or services but as an effective tool for continuous improvement. Involve all staff in using evaluation results to change programs and their priorities. Connect any planned changes to specific information gained from the evaluation. Prioritize changes based on effort involved in carrying them out and the potential for improvement of user satisfaction. Making actual improvements based on the data is an important step in confirming for staff and respondents that their time was well spent.

Suggested Reading

Evaluation Casebook: Using Evaluation Techniques to Enhance Program Quality in Addictions. Toronto, Canada : Addiction Research Foundation, 1994. 274 pp. CAN $39 (20% discount to libraries).
Straightforward advice on conducting effective program evaluation. Step-by-step format to receive clear answers to questions, collect data, present findings and apply the results. For novices and experienced program evaluators. Available in French as well as in English.

Hawkins JD; Nederhood B. *Handbook for Evaluating Drug and Alcohol Prevention Programs: Staff/Team Evaluation of Prevention Programs (STEPP).* Rockville, MD: Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, Division

of Demonstrations and Evaluations, 1987. DHHS Publication No. (ADM) 87-1512.
A step-by-step guide for organizing and carrying out an evaluation, and analyzing and reporting the results. An excellent tool for those new to evaluation.

Herman JL; Morris LL; Fitz-Gibbon CT. *Evaluator's Handbook.* (Center for the Study of Evaluation, UCLA, Program Evaluation Kit 1.) Newbury Park, CA : Sage Publications, 1987.
Part of the CSE Program Evaluation Kit (9 vols.), this publication provides an overview of evaluation activities. It includes specific guides for accomplishing three types of studies: a formative evaluation, a standard summative evaluation, and a small experiment or pilot test.

Muraskin LD. *Understanding Evaluation: The Way to Better Prevention Programs.* Washington, DC : United States Department of Education, 1993.
Includes steps in designing program evaluations and implementing an evaluation design. Illustrates principles with an in-depth case study.

Robbins J; Zweizig D. *Are We There Yet? Evaluating Library Collections, Reference Services, Programs, and Personnel.* Madison: University of Wisconsin – Madison, School of Library and Information Studies, 1988.
This publication came out of a series of five tutorials on evaluation for libraries, and includes lessons in several areas with associated readings. It connects evaluation to planning. The authors suggest that evaluation needs to be used as a tool for moving toward library goals, rather than simply answering the question "How good is it?"

Van House, NA; Weil, BT; McClure, CR. *Measuring Academic Library Performance: A Practical Approach.* Chicago, IL : American Library Association, 1990. 140 pp. $34. ISBN 0 8389 0529 3.
An excellent resource when asked questions about accountability. Presentation is very clear with overviews for each topic. Strength of book is the statistical measure section which includes charts, tables and very good "how to" instructions.

Williams RV. Productivity measures in special libraries. *Special Libraries* Spring 1988; 79(2): 101-114.
This article looks at productivity measures as a performance assessment tool. It compares productivity measurements with other evaluation tools used in special libraries, such as cost-benefit analysis, value appraisals, and quality measures.

Zweizig D, et al. *Evaluating Library Programs & Services: TELL IT!* Madison : University of Wisconsin – Madison, School of Library and Information Studies, 1993.
This publication ties evaluation into the library planning process. It uses the TELL IT! approach, offering practical steps in doing library evaluation. The authors focus on evaluation as an improvement tool.