

Evaluation and Measurable Outcomes

Including an evaluation plan in a grant proposal provides the opportunity to discuss what the program should ultimately achieve. The evaluation is essentially a technical document used by staff and board members, as well as grantmakers, to evaluate the success of a program. But evaluations can also serve many other purposes, including garnering some very good press for your program's successes and serving as the basis for follow-on funding.

The evaluation design depends on what information you need to collect in order to make major decisions as the program matures and to write solid reports for the grantmaker, your board, and others involved in the program. To start writing the evaluation section, I suggest asking a few basic questions:

1. The evaluation results will be circulated to whom and for what purpose?
 - Does the grantmaker want the information in order to decide if they will provide future funding?
 - Will your board of directors refer to the evaluation to make program decisions?
 - Will you issue a press release, or post the information on the web?
2. What kinds of information are needed to help someone decide how to proceed with this particular program?
3. What sources will provide the most credible information?
4. What is the best way to collect and document this information?
5. When do you need the information collected, and an analysis prepared to distribute?

Once you've answered these basic questions, then your next step in developing a strong evaluation plan is to select the people who will design and oversee the evaluation process. There are three possible approaches to consider:

In-house evaluation team - This could include the program director, staff, a board member, and an on-staff, designated evaluator. This approach is the most cost effective, but it is also least objective.

An outside evaluation team - This could include a board member, a community leader, and someone in your field of work who is not directly linked with the program. Usually these individuals are offered a small honorarium (\$100 to \$500) for their work. You can incorporate the cost of the honoraria into your program budget. An outside evaluation team is more objective than an in-house team.

Professional evaluator - If the program is complex and the outcome measurements are important to quantify, contracting with a professional evaluator is recommended. Check with your nearest college or university for potential evaluators in your field. There are also freelance consultants in many communities whose skills include program evaluation. A professional evaluator will often prepare an evaluation plan at no cost in exchange for being written into the proposal as the evaluator. Professional evaluators can provide a relatively objective evaluation, along with a professional report.

Designing the Evaluation:

Qualitative vs. Quantitative Measurements

Keep in mind that in designing the evaluation component for the grant proposal there will be trade-offs in the breadth and depth of information you gather. The more breadth you want, usually the less depth you get (unless you have extensive resources to carry out the evaluation). On the other hand, if you want to examine a certain aspect of a program in detail, you will likely not get as much information about other parts of the program.

Qualitative evaluations are somewhat open-ended and examine a small number of cases in detail. This process often involves collecting vignettes, testimonials, and/or comments from program participants in answer to questions such as, “How did the school-to-work program affect your plans after high school?”

Quantitative evaluations are based on statistics and are more scientific in their approach. They are characterized by a large data-collection effort, coding of this data, and a standard analytical approach to conclusions.

Remember, the evaluation section of the grant request should stress that the evaluation method has been carefully planned and demonstrate that the evaluation plan can be implemented.

Here’s a checklist to make sure you’ve covered everything in the evaluation section of your grant proposal. Did you:

- Describe specific, measurable criteria for success?
- Describe the process to be used to collect data and monitor progress?
- Provide detail about how you will keep records?
- Provide a short bio of each evaluator, including their relationships to the program or your organization?
- Outline your reporting procedure providing specific due dates, and the format and content of evaluation reports?
- Include the evaluation timeline in the overall program timeline?
- Include the costs to evaluate your program in your budget?

In Summary

Accuracy, clarity, and tone are all important when writing the final evaluation as it may directly affect the future of your program and will definitely reflect on the professionalism and credibility of your organization. When developing the evaluation section of a grant proposal, you need to focus on what the grantmaker wants to hear. That means you have to understand in depth what the grantmaker is trying to achieve via a particular grantmaking program. A carefully designed evaluation section of a proposal is one of the most effective ways to connect directly with the grantmaker’s goals and objectives.