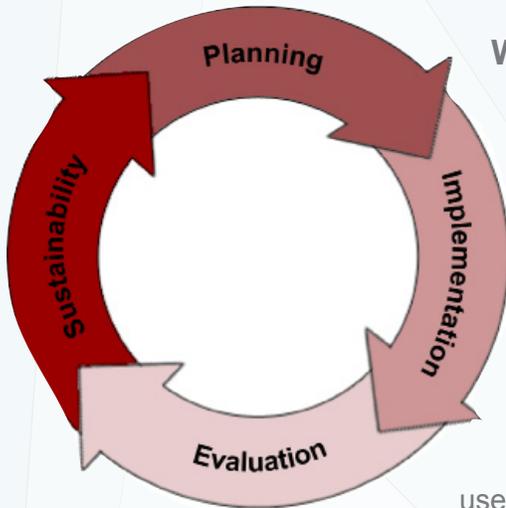




The purpose of this technical assistance brief is to provide an overview of evaluation and describe specific elements necessary for completing an effective evaluation report.



## What is evaluation?

Evaluation is assessing the merit of a planned series of activities or events that affect three key audiences: 1) individuals, 2) organizations, and 3) communities. Once planned coalition or program activities are implemented, evaluation centers on the process of these activities underway and how effective they are in changing people's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors on a specific topic, such as fall prevention (FP). It uses a variety of philosophies and techniques to determine if the activities “work” in achieving predetermined goals for a specific group of people.

Evaluations reveal the “vital signs” of FP activities, serving as a management tool to provide information needed for long-term decision-making about sustainability once initial funding is fully utilized. Evaluations are also designed for quality improvement—helping new coalitions or programs get off to a successful start and making existing ones better.

## Who cares about evaluation?

Evaluations may be understood through the eyes of different stakeholders such as coalition members, program participants, agency staff and administrators, boards of directors, and funding entities. All stakeholders involved are usually interested in how well FP activities “work” to achieve certain goals. Examples of multi-factorial FP goals are increased physical strength and flexibility, identification and resolution of medical and environmental issues that contribute to falls, and ultimately reduced incidence and risk for falls. In addition to successful outcomes, staff and administrators often focus on the time, effort, and expertise needed to develop, implement, and sustain FP activities. Administrators, boards of directors, and funding entities are also interested in the short and long-term costs of FP activities. Using the old adage, evaluations answer the question: “Is the juice worth the squeeze?”





## What are the different kinds of evaluations?

The most common kinds of evaluations are formative and summative evaluations, occurring at slightly different times in planning and implementation stages.

**Formative** evaluations are completed in the planning and early implementation stages:

- Review coalition/program efforts to date in FP
- Complete a needs assessments
- Assess feasibility of implementing FP activities in particular setting
- Conceptualize operations of FP activities, including developing a logic model (*a graphic describing coalition or program activities and intended outcomes*<sup>1</sup>)
- Complete a *process* evaluation that considers how FP activities are being implemented and how and through what mechanisms community stakeholders have participated

**Summative** evaluation occurs during and after implementation:

- Identify specific outcomes and if, how, why, and by whom FP goals were achieved
- Assess impact of FP activities on individuals, organizations, and community
- Calculate direct or indirect costs of developing and implementing FP activities

## What are the key steps in completing an effective evaluation?

Evaluation should begin during the planning stage of any coalition or program project, using formative evaluation approaches. Throughout the life of the project, it should assess FP achievements using summative evaluation techniques. Six key questions<sup>2</sup> to be answered during planning and reviewed regularly are:

1. What are the main FP activities, who will carry them out, and how exactly will these be assessed?
2. What aspects of FP activities will be considered when judging performance?
3. What standards must be reached for FP activities to be considered successful?
4. What information will be used to complete the evaluation?
5. What performance conclusions are justified by comparing available information to selected standards?
6. How will lessons learned from planning, implementing, evaluating, and sustaining FP activities be used and by whom?

## Other important questions may include:

- Who are the people served by FP activities?
- Who are the stakeholders who will assist in developing, implementing, evaluating, and sustaining FP activities?
- How will stakeholders know if FP activities are successful?
- Do the FP activities have SMART objectives? SMART=Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely
- Does the funder require evaluation? Who is responsible for completing it and are funds set aside for this purpose?
- Will the evaluation consider impact at the individual, organizational, and community levels or focus on one or two of these?
- How can evaluation serve as continuous quality improvement for the project's sustainability?



## What kinds of information need to be collected for an evaluation?

Information collected for evaluations comes in numeric (quantitative) and verbal/written (qualitative) forms. Both types can provide rich, meaningful information about the “who”, “what”, “where”, “when”, “how”, “why”, and “so what” of your FP efforts.

Quantitative (“the numbers”) information provides numerical representation of FP activities, allowing for measuring change through data analysis. Examples are:

- Number of “actively” participating stakeholders and types of resources brought to a coalition
- Number of people who attended FP activities/events and are using what they learned
- Average scores and improvement on screening tests or other scales
- Percent of stakeholders with certain characteristics (e.g., percent who had a fall in the previous three months or % of coalition members infusing FP principles in home organizations)
- Other associations, such as comparing fall injuries of men and women and characteristics of coalition member organizations most effective in implementing FP activities

Qualitative (“the stories, impressions, and anecdotes”) information provides verbal/written feedback from stakeholders not easily measured using numbers, offering the “flavor” of FP activities and giving it a human face and voice.

- Distills key lessons learned over the life of a project including planning, implementing, and sustaining FP activities, and their impact on individuals, organizations, and community
- Examples: open-ended satisfaction surveys, leadership analysis, personal interviews, stakeholder meeting minutes, quarterly reports, or observation, video/audio recordings, content analysis, administrative logs, and many more

## What are the main evaluation measures?

**Outputs** – number of stakeholders participating in FP activities, such as number of older adults served by FP program or coalition members trained in FP

**Outcomes** – effects of FP activities including how activities improved stakeholder knowledge, attitudes, and behavior, and positively impacted the community

## How do you know if your FP activities are successful?

To identify success, it is important to collect quantitative (numbers) and/or qualitative (words) information *periodically* from stakeholders. The information collecting process should be designed in the planning phase and consist of:

1. Choosing what types of information to collect;
2. Planning with key stakeholders how and when information will be collected;
3. Collecting, organizing, and tabulating information; and
4. Analyzing information and making sense of results.

Collecting evaluation information *must* coincide with implementation of FP activities. However, the key to evaluation is not just documenting who attended activities (outputs), but gathering information that will describe *meaningful change* that occurred by virtue of your activities (outcomes). This information is then *analyzed* and *interpreted* in light of your project’s original goals to understand the impact of FP activities on individuals, organizations, and the community.

## What can you do with all this evaluation information and analysis?

Once information is assessed and understood, the most important step is to communicate your findings. The standard communication tool is an evaluation report. Reports can vary in length and depth, but all have several common characteristics.

A solid evaluation report includes the following:

- Background and general description of FP activities, often using a logic model<sup>3</sup>, to represent graphically the key structural components of resources needed, activities accomplished, population served, and anticipated outcomes;
- Appraisal of the project's desired goals and objectives;
- Clear description of information and methods used to complete the report;
- Detailed discussion of evaluation findings including individual, organizational, and community level outcomes achieved;
- Detailed discussion of lessons learned and other key insights;
- Interpretation that integrates findings from outcomes and lessons learned that reflect on how well the project met FP goals to date; and
- Recommendations for sustainability, including whether the project will remain in existence, seek additional funding and/or partnership support, redefine goals and objectives based on evaluation results, and how FP activities can evolve beyond its current success.

Ultimately, your evaluation report should tell a *compelling story* about your successful FP project, show off the most important work you have accomplished, and provide funding sources a clear reason why your FP efforts should be supported in the future.

## Evaluation Resources

Below are a variety of online evaluation resources to help you think through the basics and intricacies of evaluation. An asterisk indicates evaluation resources that may be best suited for non-researchers.

### American Evaluation Association

[<http://www.eval.org/>]

### \*Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) Evaluation Working Group

[<http://www.cdc.gov/eval/index.htm>]

### \*Kellogg Foundation Resources

Logic Model Development Guide [<http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf>]

Evaluation Handbook [<http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf>]

### \*Management Assistance Program to Nonprofits: Basic Guide to Program Evaluation

[[http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/fnl\\_eval.htm](http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/fnl_eval.htm)]

### \*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) courses

[<http://pathwayscourses.samhsa.gov/courses.htm>]

Evaluation for the Unevaluated: PE 101 & 102, Wadding through the Data Swamp: PE 201

### \*United Way of America: Outcome Measurement Resource Network

[<http://www.unitedway/outcomes>]

### University of Wisconsin Extension – Program Development and Evaluation

[<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodelexamples.html>]

### U.S. General Accountability Office (GAO)

Special Publications: Evaluation Research & Methodology [<http://www.gao.gov/special.pubs/erm.html>]

<sup>1</sup> See Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from CDC Evaluation Working Group

<sup>3</sup> See Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide; FPCE Logic Model Brief in development

