

Evaluation for Performance:

Toolkit for Title IV Safe and Drug-Free Schools Programs

2005 (2nd edition)

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Preface

How does evaluation fit in the “big picture” of a prevention program?



The big picture of a prevention *program* is often provided as a conceptual picture or “logic model”¹, which is used by ODCP with their local SDFS Coordinators (Note: For further information about and assistance with program logic models, see your ODCP grant advisor.) The logic model below includes a sequence of essential elements needed for successful programs, beginning with program needs/assumptions, followed by resources and activities, and outcomes. Notice that with each element of the logic model there is a corresponding evaluation activity to help monitor the quality and execution of the logic model. In other words, evaluation is critical at each step of the program process – it is not something that should be done only after the program is completed.



Who should use this toolkit?

This toolkit is designed for all school coordinators or other community grantees of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (SDFS) programs[†] funded by the Office of Drug Control Policy (ODCP), Michigan Department of Community Health. The information should be useful for coordinators with varying degrees of evaluation experience, from novices to seasoned veterans, as well as coordinators of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and consortia (hereafter referred to as local SDFS Coordinators). Recipients of Governor’s Discretionary Grant funds also will find this toolkit to be very useful as they also share the goal of violence and drug prevention, albeit in a community setting.

“Accountability is essential for SDFS programs and is one of three key themes of ODCP. This evaluation toolkit is designed to facilitate accountability among LEAs and consortia, which will further reinforce the use of effective programs that truly benefit youth and support the message that prevention works in Michigan.”

*Yvonne Blackmond, Director
Office of Drug Control Policy
Michigan Department of Community Health*

In addition, it would be very helpful to share this resource with others involved in designing and implementing the evaluation, especially your professional evaluator if you have one. Because

[†] The term “program” may include any organized action, including (but not limited to) curricular programs, activities, service provision, educational services, prevention strategies, public policies, and research programs. In this toolkit, program will be used to refer to all these actions.

evaluation can involve various concepts and methods, each evaluation “stakeholder” should know the particular concepts and methods recommended for SDFS programs so that everyone can share a common understanding and language.

This toolkit also might be useful for evaluating programs funded by other federal and state agencies, or private foundations - just make sure you check first with the funder(s) beforehand. However, because the focus of this toolkit is program evaluation, it will not provide sufficient information and methods to conduct evaluations of community coalitions or other initiatives that target community-wide impact or system-level change. Check with ODCP for information on evaluating such initiatives.

Why should I use this toolkit?

There are three reasons: time, money and expertise.

Your time is valuable, and this toolkit is designed to save you time and effort in evaluating your programs and activities, so that you know that they truly benefit children. Please be advised that there are several ready-to-use measures and checklists designed specifically for evaluating prevention efforts and outcomes. In addition, this toolkit will help you fulfill the evaluation requirements of prevention programs funded by ODCP and possibly other agencies or foundations.

This toolkit is also designed to help you evaluate *smarter*, not harder. For example, a helpful hints section in each chapter will help you avoid some common evaluation problems that waste your time and money. Many of these helpful hints arose from problems experienced by SDFS Coordinators just like you, so they are most likely the same problems you might encounter in evaluating your program.

Finally, for the true do-it-yourself SDFS Coordinator or community-based grantee, the toolkit will help you develop a working knowledge of evaluation, ranging from identifying a good pre/post measure, to analyzing and reporting data. However, if do-it-yourself evaluation doesn't sound appealing, the toolkit will at least guide you in identifying your district's/consortia's evaluation capacity and delegating tasks to others.

In addition to saving you time, money and expertise, you might want to use this toolkit because it's designed to be user-friendly. For example, you'll notice the use of metaphors from the automobile industry. Why? Besides the obvious homage paid to our state's central role in the automobile industry, there are some concepts in evaluation that might be new to you, and cars are a familiar – and hopefully interesting - way to conceptualize good evaluation. The following car adages are used in later chapters and will be very useful for understanding evaluation (and programs/strategies, too):

- **“Don't re-invent the wheel”** An old but important concept, this applies to every aspect of evaluation. For example, you'll learn about methods and instruments that have been “road tested” by prevention experts – including SDFS Coordinators - and work well for a variety of school districts. They are ready for you to use, so take advantage of them! Also,



Testimonial
“Even with little experience in evaluation, I found that I could do most of the evaluation work myself or with the help of others in the school districts, which saved money. However, when it came to “crunching the numbers” and summarizing qualitative data, I saved time and headaches by hiring an outside evaluator to do that work. The evaluator also provided valuable advice on planning and implementing the evaluation.”
<i>Polly Brainerd SDFS Coordinator, Eaton ISD</i>

using the “same wheel” as others – the same pre/post survey, for example – will help you and ODCP make comparisons across programs to identify regional and statewide impact. Of course, if you find that the wheel you choose needs a little “customizing” for your program, your ODCP consultant can guide you through that task.

- **“You can pay now, or pay later”** Like the old commercial for a muffler company, this proverb applies to avoiding evaluation short-cuts, which might seem appealing and cost-effective, but actually create more problems than they solve. For example, it might save money and time to assess students’ attitudes or behaviors only after they completed the program (called a post-test only design), rather than before and after the program (called a pretest/posttest design). However, without a pretest assessment, it’s not possible to determine objectively whether the students changed their attitudes/behaviors, so you’ll pay later by not being able to demonstrate successful program outcomes if they occur. 
- **“Economy models” and “high-performance models”** This concept will apply mostly to two types of evaluations presented in this toolkit: an “economy model” and “high performance” model. Both models are rooted in evaluation requirements of the federal Title IV Principles of Effectiveness (PoE) and include the minimum standards necessary to assess adequately the degree to which students are drug- and violence-free (outcome evaluation), and the program efforts related to those goals (process evaluation). In other words, both models will get you from “from here to there” - from process to outcome evaluation. The economy model includes basic evaluation methods that all coordinators will utilize. The “high-performance model” is included as additional features for those who, based upon the needs of their students, should “add options” to the evaluation. The more options you employ, the clearer the picture of how much your program benefited students. 

Where should I begin?

Essentially, this toolkit is designed as a reference book in which you read the answers to FAQs. The best place to start is to review the Table of Contents and choose FAQs that will help you fill some potholes in your evaluation knowledge or activities.

Each chapter highlights a different component of the evaluation process. Chapter 1, “Owner’s Manual: Everything You Wanted to Know about Evaluation but Were Afraid to Ask,” is designed to answer questions about program evaluation and its importance to successful programming. Go to this section if you need a primer or “tune-up” in evaluation.

Chapter 2, “Car Talk: Basic Evaluation Concepts,” introduces process and outcome evaluation, including a 4-step process for conducting a successful evaluation, which is covered more specifically in Chapter 3 and 4.

Chapters 3 and 4 are the how-to portions of the toolkit, which focus on evaluating progress towards your program goals, or “*performance measures*” as referred to in Title IV Principles of Effectiveness. In Chapter 3, “Process Evaluation” you’ll learn step-by-step how to conduct a process evaluation, which involves assessment of all the steps in programming, such as planning, implementation, improvement, and stakeholder reactions. The focus of Chapter 4 is outcome evaluation, which involves assessment of participant performance. (Note: We’ll define process and outcome evaluation more thoroughly in the Introduction). For Chapters 3 and 4, you’ll be guided

with examples, helpful hints, trouble-shooting information and a checklist. These chapters also reference the use of Appendices containing a glossary, measurement instruments, sample ODCP reports, and online resources.

For those who decide to contract for some or all of your evaluation activities, “Chapter 5: Finding a Good Mechanic: External Evaluators,” is designed to help you ask the right questions to find a knowledgeable, competent evaluator for part or all of your program.

Notes: In each chapter, technical words are italicized when first used; their definitions appear in the Glossary. For your convenience, a blank section is provide at the end of each chapter for notes or questions that you want to ask your ODCP coordinator and/or evaluator.

Introduction

What is evaluation and how can it help?

The staggering social and health problems of drug use and violence transform our youth and community in disturbing ways: a diminished sense of safety in schools and neighborhoods, desensitized attitudes toward violence and victims, drug-related diseases, physical and sexual assault, delayed or impaired brain development, and increased risk for addiction, suicide and homicide. From district classrooms and family dining rooms to government meeting rooms and executive boardrooms, society suffers from the far-reaching impact of these problems. In all segments of society, the goal is to put forward the most careful efforts to prevent violence and drug use and abuse in the current and future generations. Reducing drug use and violence is the full intention of Title IV as well as the primary goal of ODCP, as part of its partnership with each participating LEA and consortium in Michigan.

How does evaluation help to improve our students' chances for healthy development? Consider the following scenario regarding aggression/violence in a local school district:

As an administrator in the Sydney School District, you have become fully aware of the pervasive problem and traumatic impact of violence among your students. You've heard from several sources that elementary and middle school students are "less respectful than kids in years before" and you have witnessed more students acting aggressively toward each other. The media, including local news reports, have highlighted some extreme cases of teen violence in your community. Parents at school board meetings are now more vocal about the need to "do something about it." A survey of students reveals high levels of fighting and fear of violence. The method of violence also has changed as more students than in previous years are fighting with weapons. Weapon use has especially increased among females, who carry them for protection. The recent principal's meeting revealed that referrals to the office have increased dramatically - even from teachers who are effective classroom managers. Faculty in-services on violence prevention have focused on discussions about the extent of the problem, why kids are violent and how to prevent it. (You have identified a clear need to improve student conduct)

District efforts to reduce violence have included a laundry list of programs, initiatives, and strategies. Teachers wonder whether other teachers and staff - and administrators - are aware of and use the program(s). New approaches to addressing the problem have emerged informally over the past few years, and the wide variety of programs in different grades and schools has created a far-reaching, albeit loose, patchwork of prevention efforts. With each new approach, it is unclear whether the programs/strategies are implemented as planned or if the students like them. Because not all teachers are trained in prevention, especially the new ones, the programs usually dissolve when trained teachers move to other buildings or retire. Some teachers have developed their own programs that are very well designed, but typically the program does not extend beyond the teacher's efforts. Every year, faculty and administrators are wondering if a newly implemented program/strategy will be around long enough to do any good. The low morale and buy-in for such programs are compounded by perceptions of some district officials and parents that prevention programs are too "touchy-feely" and interfere with academic initiatives and cognitive school improvement goals. (You are wondering what action needs to be taken to improve student conduct)

A recent school board meeting gets tense when a board member asks whether violence prevention efforts are working, because the district funding cuts have placed the board and administration in the difficult position of having to eliminate programs. In your search for evidence of success that student conduct has improved, you find that a third grade teacher has conducted a survey before and after her students completed a classroom-based program, but she doesn't have the knowledge or time to aggregate the data to reach conclusions. Also, she doesn't know if the changes are going to last because the students participate in a different program in 4th grade and not all the teachers are trained to implement it. Referrals for violence have decreased in two schools in the district, but it's not clear how much prevention programming occurs in those schools because the efforts are fragmented across classrooms and grades. (You are left with the feeling that something further must be done to reduce violence, but are not sure whether the current efforts work and what should be done next.)

Obviously, this scenario presents some serious problems regarding violence. But also notice that the problem is compounded by several evaluation shortcomings: (a) the lack of *program* coordination, (b) little information about program training or the quality of implementation, (c) virtually no information collected and analyzed to illustrate student outcomes, and (d) no process to determine which programs were worthwhile or in need of refinement. It's not uncommon to experience the problems in evaluation encountered by this district. When done well, evaluation provides the method and tools to identify and monitor the nature and scope of a problem (*needs assessment*), an appropriate process to address that problem (*process evaluation*), and the means to determine whether you are solving your problem (*outcome evaluation*).

Now reconsider the scenario on the previous page – revisited below - from the viewpoint of an evaluator and you'll see that each part of the scenario applies to one of three major evaluation activities:

Scenario

Evaluation Activity

As an administrator in the Sydney School District, you have become fully aware of the pervasive problem and traumatic impact of violence among your students. You've heard from several sources that elementary and middle school students are "less respectful than kids in years before" and you have witnessed more students acting aggressively toward each other. The media, including local news reports, have highlighted some extreme cases of teen violence in your community. Parents at school board meetings are now more vocal about the need to "do something about it." A survey of students reveals high levels of fighting and fear of violence. The method of violence also has changed as more students than in previous years are fighting with weapons. Weapon use has especially increased among females, who carry them for protection. The recent principal's meeting revealed that referrals to the office have increased dramatically - even from teachers who are effective classroom managers. Faculty in-services on violence prevention have focused on discussions about the extent of the problem, why kids are violent and how to prevent it. (You have identified a clear need to improve student conduct.)

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Needs Assessment

- Identify problems and strengths
- Identify existing and needed resources/ programs to address problems.

Process Evaluation

Monitor various aspects of programming: planning, training, implementation, participation, and stakeholder reactions.

Outcome Evaluation

Assess short- and long-term changes in the program participants.

This toolkit will help you with two primary evaluation activities: process evaluation and outcome evaluation. The remaining evaluation component, needs assessment, is beyond the focus

Safe & Healthy Students



of this toolkit because you have already completed a needs assessment as the critical first step in your grant proposal.

Please be reminded that your needs assessment activity is very important because your ultimate success in helping

your students hinges on the degree to which you have carefully and correctly identified a problem that negatively impacts the health and safety of your students. Once your needs have been properly identified, your subsequent efforts can focus on the appropriate means (process) for reducing or alleviating that problem (outcome). If you want assistance in conducting a more comprehensive needs assessment, refer to your Coordinator's Handbook and/or ask your ODCP grant advisor. If you need a copy of the Coordinator's Handbook, please contact your ODCP grant advisor or check the "Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services" section of the Department of Community Health website www.mdch.gov/mdch.

In the next few chapters, you'll learn the essentials of process and outcome evaluation that will keep you on the right road toward helping your students. It's not difficult to get lost when driving, but you need to recognize it and get directions, so refer to the examples, helpful hints and troubleshooting sections if you need help. If the directions are not clear, ask your ODCP consultant for assistance. Fasten your seat belts! Here we go!



The road to safe and healthy students and their academic success is much clearer and easier to navigate if you utilize needs assessment, process evaluation and outcome evaluation.

Notes: