What To Evaluate

What to Evaluate: Indicators

When evaluating indicators, it is imperative to have a firm understanding of how data for that indicator are to be collected and reported. In particular, when evaluating a team program effort the team should be clear on the source of data, any type of formula or method needed to calculate indicator data, and who is responsible for collecting and reporting data (George Washington University's Strategic Management & Performance Systems Certificate Program, 2019). Let's look at some sample key indicators from a sustainable energy team:

Indicator	Data Source	Method for Calculating	Responsibility
Number of utility rebate applications facilitated	Client confirmation	Count when receive a confirmation that a rebate application has been submitted by the client	Individual staff who facilitate applications
Number of households implementing cost-effective solar energy	Client self-reporting via survey	Count when surveys indicate a household has installed solar with an expected payback period of <10 years	Extension specialist on behalf of program team

While more detail is needed for a member of the program team to be able to collect indicator data (like which survey is referenced and how is it accessed), this table should give you a sense of what will ensure the reliable collecting of indicator data. It should be also noted that more mature programs are likely to benefit from thorough collection of indicator data because indicators tend to be used more for measuring impact and telling stories (summative) than for improving programs (formative).

What to Evaluate: Program

While collecting indicator data can help you measure your impact, program evaluation allows you to gain insight into your logic model/theory of change and client satisfaction. To test your logic model/theory of change, you'll want to understand whether a certain output may have led to a short- or medium-term outcome or whether a certain short-term outcome may have led to a certain medium- or long-term outcome. In an example for a sustainable energy program, you may wish to test whether a list of contractors you provided helped clients find a contractor or whether easier access to rebates facilitated installation of a cost-effective solar energy system. Similarly, you can gauge whether your sustainable energy workshops, website, and energy assessments increased knowledge of sustainable energy best practices. In another example, you may want to test whether your Extension newsletter had its intended impact of referring clients to funding opportunities. Although typically you can only establish causation with a well-funded, robust research effort and in-depth data analysis, you can ask evaluation questions that may start to establish correlations regarding your theory of change.

In addition to testing your logic model or theory of change, you can also gauge client satisfaction with the various elements of your program. For instance, you can try to understand how easy it was to navigate the sustainable energy website, how satisfied clients were with the solar assessments, and what else they would recommend for your program. It is essential to allow for open and honest feedback and suggestions to come forward during this piece of the evaluation so that you can continually improve and grow your impact. Providing your clients space to share open-ended feedback is a great way to do this, and quoting clients anonymously or with consent can be an effective way to show support for Extension programs.

What to Evaluate: Scope of Work and Issues

Evaluation offers an opportunity to check in with your clients about the appropriateness and effectiveness of your scope of work. Did you define the problem, goal, and target audience in a way that aligns with the reality on-the-ground, or do you need to calibrate?

In a sustainable energy example, we can use a sample scope of work as ***Households (*****target audience*****) adopt sustainable energy best practices (*****goal/outcome*****) in order to save energy and money (*****problem*****).*** To understand whether or not you reached your target audience, you can find out if you served clientele representing a household, business, or the energy industry. You may choose to go deeper to understand whether the households that participated rent or own their homes. Evaluating your target audience also includes asking demographic questions such as race, ethnicity, and gender. Although these demographic questions are required for reporting to USDA, answers can also shed light on who you are reaching well and who else you may want to target for future programming efforts. It may take extra effort to reach traditionally underrepresented/marginalized populations with Extension programming, and evaluation can help gauge your success.

A simple inquiry into client motivation for programming can help you evaluate the appropriateness of your goal/outcome and focal problem. For example, did the households attend the sustainable energy program in order to save energy and money, or were they motivated by something else like climate change? You can also inquire as to whether clients are interested in Extension programming on other issues. Questions such as these can take place as part of a formal evaluation or through less formal methods associated with an environmental scan.

What to Evaluate: Checklist

To summarize, a comprehensive evaluation will collect information on:

- ✓ Indicators
- ✓ Your logic model/theory of change
- ✓ Client satisfaction (including open-ended feedback)
- ✓ Client demographics and attributes
- ✓ Your scope of work
- ✓ Other issues that may be of interest to your clientele