Evaluation Planning for the Flex Grant Program

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Flex Monitoring Team
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For further information

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Purpose

- Discuss the context for evaluation planning and the role of evaluation in supporting project reporting activities
- Describe outcome-based evaluation
- Define basic components and key terms
- Review the differences between process and outcome measures
- Provide an evaluation planning checklist and other resources

Evaluation context

- One of five required Flex Grant objectives
- Accounts for 25 points (out of 100) among the six review criteria
- An integral part of effective program management and improvement
- Documents program outcomes and supports annual performance reporting requirement
- GPRA/PART

Outcome-based evaluation

- Aligns program strategies with desired outcomes
- Looks at impacts/benefits/changes to program participants during and/or after participation in the program
- Examines these changes in the short, intermediate, and long term
- Facilitates efforts to improve program operation and performance
- Documents program outcomes

Basic components and key terms

- Problem definition
  - Clear statement of what the problem is, why it exists and who it affects
- Inputs/resources
  - Investment needed to implement strategies and achieve desired outcomes
- Strategy
  - Approach adopted by program to address defined problems
- Activities
  - Necessary steps to carry out program's strategies

Basic components and key terms

- Outputs
  - Units of service stemming from program activities
- Outcomes
  - Actual impacts/benefits/changes form participants
- Outcome targets
  - Number and percent of participants that are expected to achieve desired outcomes
- Outcome indicators
  - Observable and measurable milestones towards an outcome target

Basic questions

- What decisions do you want to be able to make?
- Who are the primary audiences for the results?
- What kind of information/data is needed and when will it be needed?
- How will the information/data be obtained?
- What resources are available to collect, analyze, and report the information/data?
- How will the information be reported?

Step 1 – Getting Ready

- Access resources on evaluation and outcomes measurement:
  - Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach (UW 1996)
  - Creating Program Logic Models: A Toolkit for State Flex Programs (http://www.flexmonitoring.org/documents/PLMToolkit.pdf)
  - Outcome Measurement: Showing Results in the Non-Profit Sector (http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes/library/ndpaper.cfm)
  - W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook
  - (http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf)
- Engage outside evaluator, if using one, in the development of the evaluation plan
- Train at least one staff member in outcomes measurement and evaluation techniques

Step 2 - Choosing Outcomes

- Consider the development of a logic model
- Based on your program strategies and activities, choose the outcomes that will logically flow from these efforts
- Start with short-term outcomes rather than process or output measures (0-12 months), then move to intermediate outcomes (13-24 months), and longer term outcomes/impacts (25 or more months)
- “Chain” these outcomes by following the logic/assumptions that will drive these outcomes (e.g., connect the dots)
- Don’t worry about perfection, this process can be refined

Step 3 – Selecting Indicators

- Identify at least one indicator per outcome
- Identify how that indicator measures progress towards the desired outcome
- Include target numbers and percentages (outcomes have to be measurable)
- Consider the time frames for the desired outcomes and how soon progress can be expected

Step 4 – Getting data/information

- Identify potential data sources for each measure
- Assess practicality of collecting data and cost
- Consider timing of data collection strategies
- Data collection methods
- Assess the need for evaluation consultant or expertise
- Pre-test data collection methods
- Write a data collection procedure to specify what data will be collected, who will collect it, how will it be collected, when will it be collected, how it will be tested, and what will be done with it

Step 5 – Analyzing/Reporting

- Preparation (bring in expertise if needed)
- Analyzing data
  - Use appropriate quantitative and qualitative analytic techniques
- Reporting results
  - Remember your audience
  - Review results with staff and key stakeholders during the development of the report
  - Develop and executive summary
  - Outline the framework of the report in advance