

DEVELOPING A PROGRAM EVALUATION

Most funders will require that applicants include some kind of plan for evaluating (and reporting on) the success of the project. A strong evaluation will include measures to monitor program implementation and operation as well as measures to determine your success in meeting the program objectives. In the evaluation section of your proposal, you will present your plan for evaluating your program's operations and your program's success in meeting the objectives that you proposed. You will describe to the funder what steps you will take to ensure that your project is being / has been successful.

- **Formative / Process Evaluation**

The plan for evaluating your program's operations is generally called a "formative" or "process" evaluation because it is designed to evaluate the structure and activities of the program. The formative / process evaluation is conducted throughout the program period to monitor implementation, successful program activities, etc.

The formative evaluation plan will often include a description of the records that you will keep to monitor attendance and participation (sign-in sheets, participant rosters, in-take forms, etc.); implementation of the program (documentation related to hiring employees, documentation of recruitment activities, etc.); and other indicators of successful implementation and operation, as appropriate to your project.

- **Summative / Outcome Evaluation**

The plan for evaluating your program's overall success at meeting the objectives is called the "summative" or "outcome" evaluation because it is designed to evaluate your success at achieving the objectives or outcomes that you proposed. Although data for the summative / process evaluation are collected throughout the project period, the evaluation itself is generally completed at the end of the funding period or in annual increments for multi-year grant awards.

The summative evaluation plan will typically include a description of how you will evaluate the program's success at meeting the outcomes / objectives that you established in the proposal. The summative evaluation plan will include measures that are tailored to the objectives that you set. For example, if one of your objectives was to increase the literacy skills of kindergarteners at your target school, then one evaluation strategy might be to use a pre- and post-testing instrument to measure literacy skills. The more detail you can provide in your evaluation, the more credible your plan will seem to reviewers. Include names and, if possible samples, of the evaluation instruments you will use.

- **Directly linked to Objectives & Activities**

Your evaluation strategies and instruments should be clearly and directly related to the objectives that you established and the activities that you planned.

- **May require that you use or describe your plan to use quantitative and qualitative data.**

In many cases, reviewers will expect to see that your evaluation plan includes the use of both quantitative data (e.g., test scores, etc.) and qualitative data (focus group responses, etc.).

- **May require or benefit from an external reviewer.**

In some cases, the funder may require that the applicant contract with an evaluator external to the project—or external to the institution—to conduct the summative evaluation. External evaluators are

often willing to help design the evaluation plan, and this can be a considerable benefit to proposal writers. The links below may also be helpful as you plan your program evaluation:

- **The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University:** Provides resource support, as well as a directory of potential evaluators. Can search by project focus, evaluation methods, region of the country, etc. <http://ec.wmich.edu/evaldir/Search/evalinfo.htm>.
- **Resources for Evaluation of National Science Foundation projects:** Provides several guidebooks for designing evaluation plans. <http://www.nsf.gov/ehr/rec/nsfresources.jsp>