

PHASE I

Preparing For The Evaluation

Making the effort to follow these steps in your evaluation project will be well worth the time and effort.

Step 1: Select a program to evaluate

- Choose a program that is worth the effort of evaluation.

Step 2: Identify key stakeholders

- Decide which stakeholders take priority in regard to this evaluation project.
- Identify information that the key stakeholders want to know from the evaluation project.
- Establish a relationship with key stakeholders in order to garner their support for the evaluation, particularly those who deliver the program.

Step 3: Establish an evaluation team

- Enlist district staff, school board members, teachers, school administrators, volunteers, members of collaborative community services, and evaluation consultants to serve as resources during all or part of the evaluation project.

Step 4: Consider a budget

- Make initial and adequate budget computations.

Step 5: Decide how to keep track of this evaluation project

- Establish a system to keep evaluation materials organized.

Step 6: Establish an initial timeline

- Schedule completion dates for each step.

Step 1



Select A Program To Evaluate

Each district should choose an Alcohol, Tobacco, or Other Drug (ATOD) or a Violence prevention program that addresses the district's SDFS Priority Goals. If only one SDFS program is funded, then the decision has already been made, and you can move on to the next step.

If that is not the case, consider the following list:

- Give preference to promising programs over proven programs. More systematic knowledge is needed to support the implementation of promising programs, since promising programs have a two-year limit to demonstrate a positive impact on program outcomes.
- Consider choosing a program in which you are spending the bulk of your funds. Determining the extent to which desired results are gained in a given situation is valuable information to have, especially when resources and personnel are limited.
- Consider choosing a program you are especially proud of in terms of its success. A sound evaluation will provide more support to your claims.

In addition, also consider:

- Is there a vested interest in a program within your school district and/or local community? Is it a program that is of particular interest to stakeholders? If so, consider choosing this program to evaluate.
- Can information that stakeholders want to know about the program be collected through your evaluation efforts?
- Is there a program that is highly charged politically? If so, will evaluation efforts be compromised? Or, instead, will the evaluation efforts provide means to a resolution of the political issue?
- Is this a program that is going to be continued? If not, is the evaluation effort worthwhile?
- Is this a program that may be easily modified, based on recommendations that emerge from the results of the evaluation?
- Are the goals and objectives of the program measurable, given the resources available?
- If you are using a commercial program, does it come with a packaged evaluation kit? Does it include pre and post test tools?

Worksheet 1.1
Notes for Program Selection

Name of Program:

(List reasons for selecting this program)

Step 2



Identify Key Stakeholders

Stakeholders within a district include any group of people or organization involved in or affected by the performance and results of the program under evaluation. These might include students, parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, local advisory councils, the local law enforcement agency, members of collaborative community services, or state and local agencies. When beginning this evaluation project, it is important to identify key stakeholders for the following reasons:

- ▶ **Stakeholders within a school district are a primary audience of the evaluation report.** Identifying their concerns will provide added focus when setting the goals of the evaluation.
- ▶ **Key stakeholders can help to determine relevant evaluation questions.** The types of information stakeholders want to know about the program depend upon their perspectives on the program. Drawing from a broad base of viewpoints when developing evaluation questions leads to more relevancy of evaluation results within the community.
- ▶ **Key stakeholders, particularly those who are directly associated with the program, must buy into this evaluation project.** Garnering the support of key stakeholders will not only facilitate the information and resources they can contribute, but will also lessen the resistance to the final product and its recommendations.
- ▶ **Key stakeholders can provide valuable resources to the evaluation project.** Involving stakeholders in the planning and execution of the evaluation project not only recognizes their vested interests but, may also provide your evaluation efforts with additional resources, e.g., parents or other community volunteers, data resources, computer support, in-house evaluation expertise, etc.

Worksheet 1.2 Identify Stakeholders			
Stakeholder	Vested Interest	Type of information stakeholder would like to know as a result of evaluation	Primary Audience Yes/No
SDFS Coordinator and SDFS staff			Yes

Step 3



Establish An Evaluation Team

Each district must establish an evaluation team consisting of stakeholder representatives who will take an active role in all or part of the evaluation process. There are many advantages to such an evaluation team:

- ▶ No single person has to take full responsibility of the entire project, although individual responsibilities have to be clearly designated.
- ▶ Spreading the responsibilities of the project among team members, particularly in the collection phase, can increase the amount of information collected.
- ▶ Inclusion of major stakeholders ensures that different perspectives and areas of expertise are brought to the project. Putting together a team with diverse areas of expertise and access to various network pools provides a diversity of resources and will benefit the evaluation project.

Even if a third party professional is hired to conduct the evaluation project, it is still a good idea to establish a team or committee to work with the evaluator to ensure that the scope of the evaluation is met and that relevant questions are addressed.

Whom should the evaluation team consist of?

- ☑ **One person from the district SDFS office**, preferably the coordinator, should actively oversee the entire project. This person should have sufficient background knowledge of SDFS program implementation within the district to make key decisions in developing evaluation questions and to provide oversight of the processes of this project.

- ☑ **Additional team members can be drawn from various stakeholder groups.** Some may serve as advisory members, while others, such as SDSF staff, or other district staff, must be capable of assuming responsibility for necessary activities during the course of the evaluation. Teachers, administrators, parent volunteers, and other collaborators may also serve in advisory or support roles.
- ☑ **A qualified evaluator** can ensure that the evaluation design plan has internal integrity and validity.

There are three ways to use an evaluator's services:

- 1 **The district can contract an external evaluator** to oversee the entire project; however, it is still essential that someone from the SDSF district office work closely with the evaluator as evaluation questions are developed.
- 2 **The district can recruit someone within the district staff** who has evaluation experience. This person can assist the evaluation team, providing technical assistance where needed.
- 3 **The district can hire an evaluator as a consultant.** The evaluation team can rely on this person for advise on methodological soundness and solutions to various problems as they arise.

Hiring an external evaluator provides the evaluation project with a valuable independent perspective. External evaluators may also have access to additional staff, database management resources, as well as sufficient time to conduct a quality evaluation. Whether using an external evaluator or an in-house evaluator, both should know the history and context of the program under evaluation.

NOTE

For those who will be using evaluator services, refer to Appendix 2 for suggestions on how to hire a qualified evaluator.

Step 4



Consider A Budget

Evaluations require money, and the amount of money depends on the commitment of district leadership, the size of the program, the number of specific evaluation questions that will be addressed, and the availability of evaluation resources, especially staff time. A dollar amount cannot be specified until an evaluation design plan is actually formulated. Theoretically, the more money a district is able to set aside for evaluation activities, the more program objectives the district can assess. Generally speaking, investing a small amount of money in the evaluation will allow a district to do little more than monitor some program activities and to count the number of participants. It will take more money to evaluate already existing data sources when assessing participant outcome objectives, and it will take an even larger investment of funds to conduct data collection by means of surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations.

General items to consider during budget development are:

- Salary for evaluation staff,
- Consultant fees,
- Travel expenses to cover travel to different sites, if necessary,
- Communication costs: i.e., postage, telephone calls,
- Printed materials: records and other documents, printing of data collection instruments, and the final reports, and
- Supplies and equipment.

NOTE

Remember that budget revision will have to occur as you make your evaluation design more concrete. In turn, you will need to track availability of resources as you develop your evaluation design plan.

Step 5



Keep A Record Of All Evaluation Project Activities

To avoid confusion during the evaluation project, a meticulous record of all evaluation decisions and activities must be kept. In particular special care must be taken during the data collection phase. Given the highly detailed nature of data collection, any disorganization problems can compromise the accuracy of your evaluation results.

There are numerous organizational methods for tracking projects. Since different styles work for different people, choose one or more that will work for your evaluation team.

A few examples include, but are not limited to:

- ☑ **A dated journal** that includes detailed information of decisions, tasks assigned, tasks performed, and notes about unplanned or unexpected situations;
- ☑ **A system of file folders** that are sorted by tasks, team members, dates, or sites;
- ☑ **A filing cabinet, or set of boxes** that are sorted by tasks, team members, data, or site;
- ☑ **Notations made in this handbook** for record keeping purposes or as a quick reference to the location of various project materials.

Keeping a well organized, clearly documented project will facilitate the ease with which the final report can be written.

Step 6



Establish An Initial TimeLine

Items 1 through 4 in the worksheet below pertain to the steps in Phase I. In addition, it is also part of the preparation phase to consider items 5 through 8 which broadly span the duration of the evaluation project. A more detailed timetable will be necessary later as more specific evaluation activities are planned.

Worksheet 1.3 Timetable During Phase 1	
Activity	Schedule finish date
1. Select a program.	
2. Identify stakeholders; talk to them.	
3. Assemble the evaluation team.	
4. Schedule meetings to formulate a design plan.	
5. Finished Design Plan	
6. Submit Evaluation Proposal to the Department of Education, Office of Safe Schools	Fall of the school year program activities are being evaluated
7. Finish Collecting Data	
8. Submit Final Report	

Things To Remember

1. Choose a program that is worthy of an effort of evaluation.
2. Remember that you, the SDFS coordinator and staff, are key stakeholders as well. To conduct this evaluation project with a measure of independence and impartiality (so as not to bias the results) it is important to understand, early on, your own vested interest in this program.
3. Each district must decide what type of evaluation team to put together based on local circumstances and available resources.
4. Including a representation from each and every group and sub-group in your community is not a realistic goal for your evaluation team. Nor is it practical to attempt to address every need of every stakeholder in the evaluation. Based on your own experience and knowledge of the nuances of your school district, you will have to prioritize both stakeholder representation and their concerns as is feasible.
5. Keep precise records of all the various activities and circumstances of the evaluation project. Not only is it a sound methodological practice, but it also serves as a mechanism to support credibility of your evaluation proceedings. If for some reason the evaluation data or findings are called into question, a detailed journal and a well-organized collection of data materials will verify that you were not falsifying information.

NOTES