Youth Justice Programs Framework 2016–2019 ‘Fact Sheet G’

Evaluation

# What is Program Evaluation?

Program evaluation is a systematic method of collecting, analysing, and using information to answer questions about a program’s effectiveness and efficiency. Youth Justice has an obligation to ensure the programs provided to young people are producing the intended outcomes, and the program is facilitated in a manner in which it was intended when submitted to the Youth Justice Program Review Panel. Program evaluation helps identify how a program could be improved, whether the program goals are being achieved and whether there are any unintended or unexpected outcomes.

Program evaluation is a formal process. The evaluator is expected to be independent of the program facilitation, and possess the experience and expertise to thoroughly assess a program's content, its facilitation, outcomes and integrity in order to provide an unbiased assessment.

Evaluation is the responsibility of the program provider and the type of evaluation will be dependent on the program type and the desired insight to be gained from the evaluation process.

# Outcome Measures

The measurement of a young person’s functioning on key measures prior to and after participation in a program is an important way of gauging whether or not the program has benefited partcipants in a meaningful way. As such, pre/post measurement is an essential criteria in the Program Review Panel’s endorsement process. However, the particular outcome measure procedures for a particular program are left to the discretion of the program developer/provider.

An outcome measure is used to objectively determine a young person’s baseline function prior to their participation in an intervention. Once the intervention has commenced, the same instrument can be used to determine the young person’s progress, and thereby treatment efficacy.

Practice which is informed by evidence is essential to ensuring the integrity and efficacy of interventions provided to young people who receive Youth Justice supervision. These evidence-based outcomes also provide Youth Justice with credible and reliable data to justify participation in programs and to attract future referrals.

An effective outcome measure protocol should be practical to use by the program facilitator, while being easy for the young person to use and understand. Most importantly, it should reliably and validly measure whatever it is that the program is intending to change.

For example, if a program is intending to teach information about harmful use of drugs and alcohol, an outcome measure should assess knowledge about harms of drugs and alcohol. If a program is intended to promote connection to culture, an outcome measure should assess how connected a young person feels to their culture. If a program is intended to address thoughts and beliefs which contribute to offending, then an outcome measure should assess the extent to which a young person holds relevant thoughts and beliefs about offending. If a program is intended to develop independent living skills, then an outcome measure should assess a young person’s knowledge and use of particular skills.

For any assistance or further information related to program evaluation expectations, contact:

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The following table provides an outline and explanation for the different types of program evaluation.

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| Evaluation Types[[1]](#footnote-1) | When to use | What it shows | Why it is useful |
| Formative Evaluation   | During the development of a new program. When an existing program is being modified or is being used in a new setting or with a new population.  | Whether the proposed program elements are likely to be needed, understood, and accepted by the population you want to reach. The extent to which an evaluation is possible based on the goals and objectives.  | Allows for modifications to be made to the plan before full implementation begins. Maximizes the likelihood that the program will be successful in meeting its stated goals.  |
| Process Evaluation | As soon as program implementation begins.During operation of an existing program.  | How well the program is working.The extent to which the program is being implemented as designed. Whether the program is accessible to its target population. | Provides an early warning for any problems that may occur. Allows programs to monitor how their program plans and activities are working.  |
| Outcome Evaluation   | After one or more persons have participated in the program.  | The degree to which the program is having an effect on the target population.  | Tells whether the program is being effective in meeting its objectives.  |
| Impact Evaluation | At completion or during an existing program at appropriate intervals | The degree to which the program meets its ultimate goal. | Provides evidence for use in policy and funding decisions.  |

1. “Types of Evaluation”, Centre for Disease Control. Accessed online at: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/Program/pupestd/Types%20of%20Evaluation.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)