# ASKING QUESTIONS THAT MATTER

## ...and some tools to answer them
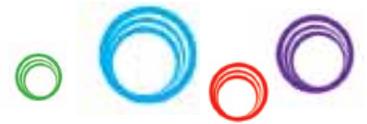
A toolkit for community-based
program evaluation in Yukon
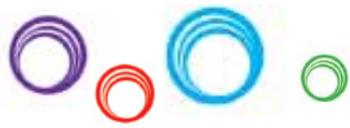
McCreary
Centre Society

McCreary Centre Society is a BC based non-profit committed to improving youth health. The Society undertakes independent evaluation projects and provides consultation and training around community-based evaluations. For more details please contact evaluations@mcs.bc.ca.

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# Introduction

This toolkit was devised for the use of Yukon service providers who want to incorporate evaluation into their work with young people.

It is the result of two workshops which were facilitated by McCreary Centre Society.

## The toolkit aims to:

**1** Increase understanding of the basics of evaluation including the use of different methodologies.

**2** Assist readers in developing the skills to prepare an evaluation plan.

**3** Provide tools to carry out an evaluation of a local community project.

# Some useful evaluation terms

**Indicators** tell us whether the expected outcomes have been achieved. Indicators need to be measurable. For example, if our expected outcome is a reduction in substance use, then our indicator will measure lower levels of substance use among participants.

**Formative Evaluation** is when questions about the program are answered while the program is still running. This way, the findings can help to inform and improve the program while participants are still taking part.

**Logic models** give an illustration of what is being evaluated. Their purpose is to give a clear picture of the project and its goals. There are different names used to describe logic models, including 'program model' and 'theory of change.'

**Outcome Evaluations** or **Summative Evaluations** describe to what degree expected outcomes of the program were achieved.

**Process Evaluations** look at how a program is carried out and why it may have achieved its results, instead of focusing on whether or not the outcomes were achieved.

**Quantitative** is about numbers and things that can be counted.

**Qualitative** is about gaining a more in-depth understanding that is often not captured by numbers alone.

**Scales** can be used in evaluation surveys and feedback forms. They allow participants to choose their answer from a range of response options, and can measure the intensity of people's opinions or feelings.
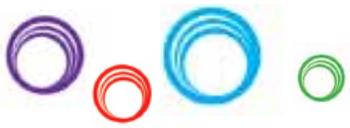
# What is program evaluation?

We often think of program evaluation as looking to answer the questions 'Does the program work?' and 'How can it be improved?' However, there are other important questions that evaluation can address, such as:

✦ 'Is the program worthwhile?'

✦ 'Are there alternatives that would be better?'

✦ 'Are there unintended consequences?'

✦ 'Are the program goals appropriate and useful?'

Therefore, an evaluation can help a program to improve its services, but it can also help to ensure that the program is delivering the <u>right</u> services.

## Reasons for evaluating

There are various reasons for doing program evaluation. These might include:

✦ To help you understand how your program is coming along;

✦ To find out what is, and is not, working in your program;

✦ To share with others what has worked (to share promising practices);

✦ To show your funders that your program has been doing what it was funded to do;

✦ To bring in additional money for your program by providing evidence of its effectiveness.

# Common evaluation concerns and how to handle them

There are a number of common concerns that program staff and managers might have about evaluation.

**1**    EVALUATION WILL CREATE MORE WORK

Program staff are often responsible for collecting evaluation information because they have the most contact with participants. As a result, they can be worried that evaluation will add to the mounting paperwork that they have to complete. A related worry is that evaluation activities will take away from valuable one-on-one time that staff could be spending with their clients or project participants. A way to reduce the evaluation burden is to incorporate evaluation activities into ongoing program activities. This way, evaluation activities, such as filling out surveys or doing focus groups, become part of what staff and participants expect to happen as part of the program.

**2**    EVALUATION QUESTIONS MIGHT BE TRIGGERING TO PARTICIPANTS

For example, the worry may be that people with past substance use challenges might be triggered to use drugs again if they are asked questions about their past use. There may also be concern that asking about personal and sensitive topics, such as past sexual abuse, may be upsetting and traumatic.

Studies have found that asking people about risky behaviours, like drug use or suicide attempts, does not increase the chance of them engaging in those behaviours (see *Any harm in asking* available at www.mcs.bc.ca). However, it is important to use sensitive wording when asking personal questions. It is a good idea to 'pilot test' the questions ahead of time by asking a small group of people (e.g., a subset of program participants or participants from a similar program) to answer the questions and then to share with you their thoughts about the questions. You can ask them if they think some of the questions might be upsetting to some people, and for suggestions on how the questions could be reworded and improved. Changing the questions based on this feedback will lower the risk of upsetting participants when the evaluation activities are rolled out. However, some evaluation participants may still become upset by some questions. It is important for program staff to be aware of this possibility and to be available to support participants if needed. It is also important to let potential participants know about any possible risks of taking part before they agree to do so.

**3** EVALUATION CANNOT TRULY CAPTURE PROGRAM SUCCESS

This idea comes from the belief that the program, and changes in the program, cannot be reduced to quantitative data (e.g., percentages). One solution is to include qualitative methods into the evaluation to ensure that rich information, such as observed changes among participants and dynamic processes within the program, are captured along with the numbers.

**4** THE PROGRAM COULD LOOK BAD OR LOSE ITS FUNDING

This can be a fear if the evaluation shows unfavourable results. Evaluations are usually the most useful when they not only highlight the strengths and successes of a program, but also point to areas that could be changed for the better. An evaluation that includes this information can help a program to better meet its participants' needs. Further, this information can help guide other programs on how they can change and improve.

**5** AN EVALUATION MONITORS STAFF'S PERFORMANCE

This concern is particularly common when programs consist of very few staff members. In this situation, any feedback about the program could be seen as a reflection on how staff are doing their job. In these instances, it is important that an evaluation reports information about staff in such a way that individual workers cannot be personally identified. It is also key to clarify with staff and participants at the outset that the focus of the evaluation is on the program and how well it is meeting participants' needs, and not on staff performance.

Although staff may sometimes have reservations about evaluation, they often come to appreciate its benefits over time. Sharing evaluation results with the whole staff team can be a useful way for all members to gain a better understanding of participants' needs and for them to tailor their work to best meet these needs. Hearing the results can also be validating for staff when the findings are consistent with the informal observations they have made of program participants.

**RESOURCES**

Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation, 2nd Ed. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/program_managers_guide_to_eval2010.pdf
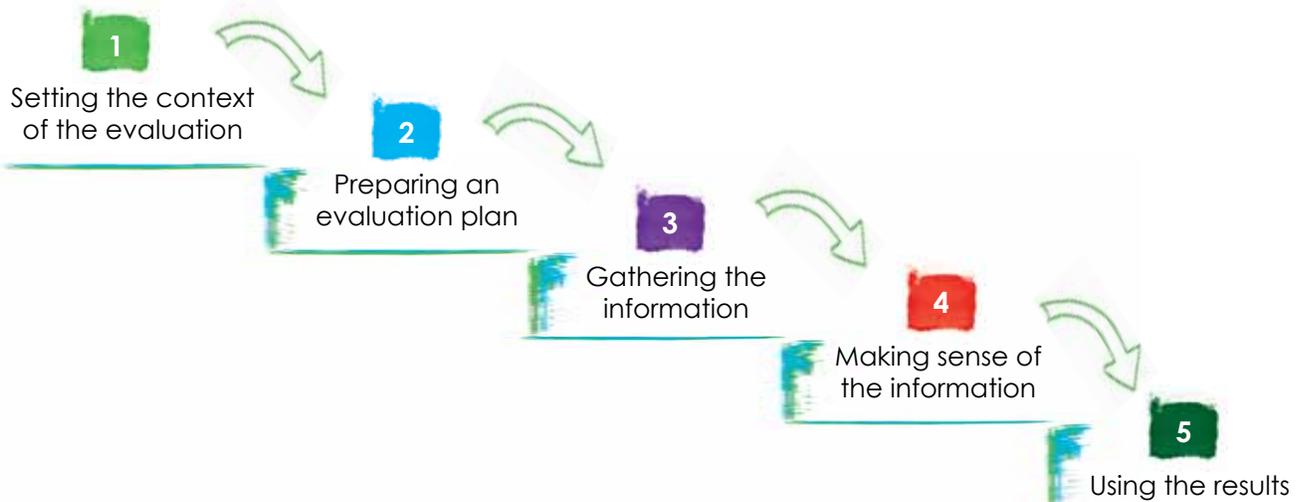
Asking Questions that Matter

# Types of evaluation

There are many different types of evaluations. Some focus on how the program is carried out (**"program implementation"** or **"process evaluation"**). Examples would be focusing on whether the services that were initially planned have been carried out; if the intended target population has been reached; and to what degree any planned collaborations with project partners have been developed. If these questions are answered while the program is still in operation (**"formative evaluation"**), the findings can help to inform and improve the program while participants are still taking part.

Other evaluations focus on participant outcomes. Outcome evaluations (or **"summative evaluations"**) describe to what extent any expected outcomes of the program were achieved. For example, an outcome evaluation can assess the degree to which participants are showing the expected changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours, and whether these changes can be attributed to the program.

In other words, outcome evaluation will show if participants achieved the expected objectives of a program. However, if we are interested in how and why certain results were achieved, we need to evaluate the process. It is possible and often desirable to include both process and outcome questions in the same evaluation.

## Steps involved in evaluation

**1** Setting the context of the evaluation

**2** Preparing an evaluation plan

**3** Gathering the information

**4** Making sense of the information

**5** Using the results

# Setting the context of the evaluation

Setting the evaluation context helps to clarify what we need and expect from the evaluation process. It also ensures that the evaluation goals are set from the beginning.

Setting the context involves deciding <u>why</u> we want to evaluate; <u>what</u> we want to evaluate; <u>when</u> an evaluation should take place; <u>who</u> will carry out the evaluation and who the participants will be; and <u>how</u> the evaluation will be carried out.

**"Why"** refers to the purpose or goals of the evaluation. For instance, the goal may be to gain a better understanding of the personal development that participants experience through the program. Alternatively it may be to better understand how the program functions within the organization, or the impact of the program in the community. It is important that an evaluation is of interest and value not only to funders but also to those involved in implementing the program and those benefiting from it.

**"What"** refers to the scope or areas to be evaluated. A common reason for avoiding evaluation is the belief that it has to cover all aspects of a program. However, an evaluation can focus on one or two aspects. It is important to make a decision at the start about which aspects are most important to evaluate.

**"When"** an evaluation should take place is also important to consider. Ideally, evaluation questions should be answered while a program is still running because it allows for improvements to be made while they can still be of benefit to participants. Also, waiting until after a program ends can be challenging when it comes to locating and motivating past program participants and other stakeholders to take part in an evaluation.

It is also ideal to canvass participants at different time-points. Time-points are often at the start of participants' involvement, to measure <u>baseline</u> behaviours, attitudes and expectations; midway through the program; at the end of their involvement; and ideally also six months or a year later, to see if any changes have been maintained over time. It is important to note, though, that the more time-points that are included, the more time-consuming, expensive and complex an evaluation can become. However, doing evaluation activities at different time-points can produce valuable and useful information about the program and participants.

**"Who"** involves assigning evaluation roles and deciding who will have overall responsibility. This might be internal staff member(s) or may involve an outside consultant who can provide suggestions and guidance along the way.

As much as possible, program staff directly involved with participants should not be the ones engaged in evaluation activities with participants, such as interviewing them for the evaluation. Participants might not feel comfortable being open and honest with staff in this situation, and may worry that what they say about the program may impact the support and care they receive. Ideally, evaluation activities should be carried out by another staff member or manager who does not have much direct contact with those program participants.

In addition to deciding who will carry out the evaluation, it is important to think about who the participants will be and how to motivate them to actively take part.

**"How"** the information will be gathered refers to the methodology you choose. When deciding on methods, things to consider are...

✦ The methods that are the most appropriate, given the people who are collecting the information and the people being asked to provide the information (the participants).

✦ The methods that are the least disruptive to your program and clients.

✦ The methods that you can do well and can afford.

Setting the evaluation context will help guide your Evaluation Plan.

**RESOURCES**

Amnesty International: Evaluation – A Beginner's Guide: http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/POL32/003/1999/en/923cbe2e-e0f0-11dd-be39-2d4003be4450/pol320031999en.pdf
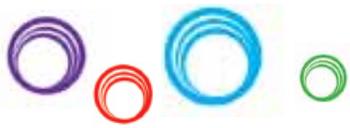
# Preparing an evaluation plan

## EVALUATION PLAN COMPONENTS

- ✦ Present project logic model
- ✦ Describe project goals
- ✦ Identify target group
- ✦ Identify evaluation questions
- ✦ Identify indicators

- ✦ Identify information sources
- ✦ Describe data collection methods
- ✦ Propose an analysis plan
- ✦ Describe the reporting strategy

After setting the evaluation context, the next step is to develop a plan, or framework, for your evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation plan is to help keep your evaluation focused and on track.

You may already be familiar with some sections of an evaluation plan because of funding applications that have asked for you to address these details.

Preparing an evaluation plan may feel like a lot of work up front, but it will likely save you significant time and aggravation later on.
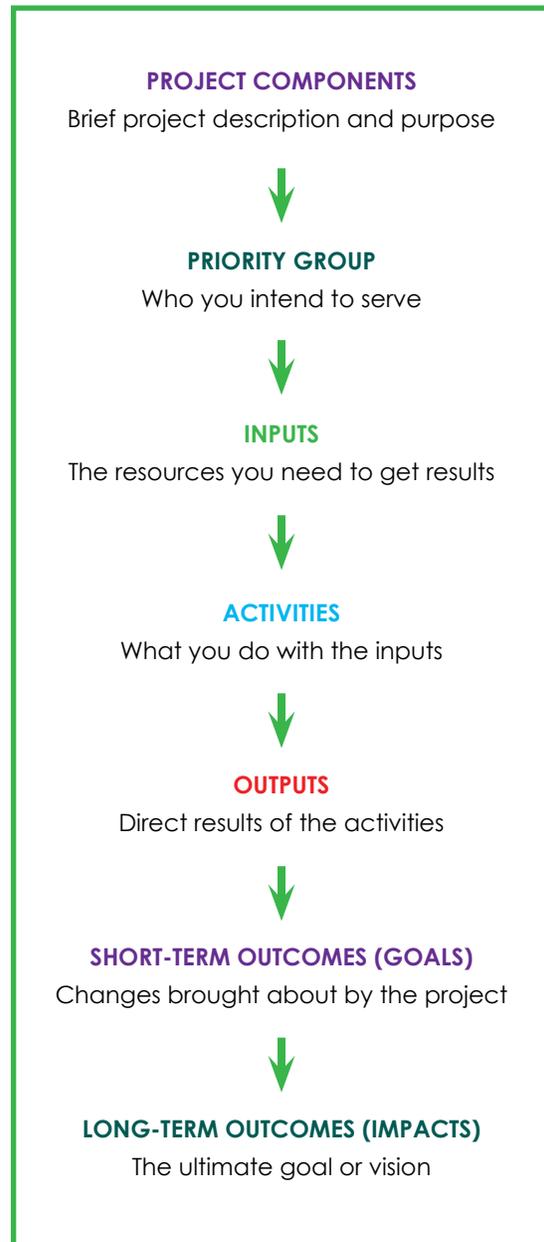
### 1  PRESENT YOUR LOGIC MODEL

One of the components of an evaluation plan is the logic model. A logic model provides a snapshot of what is being evaluated. Its purpose is to give a clear picture of the project and its goals.

There are different types of logic models and different terms used to describe them, including 'program model' and 'theory of change.'

## Parts of a logic model:

✦ **Project components** include a brief description of the project and its purpose.

✦ **Priority group (or target group)** refers to who the program is meant to serve.

✦ **Inputs** are the resources you need to make the project operate and to get the results you want. Inputs include human resources, such as staff, volunteers, and consultant time. Inputs also include material resources, such as supplies, room rental, and equipment.

✦ **Activities** are what you do with the inputs. Think about all the activities that make up your program.

✦ **Outputs** are the direct, most immediate results of the activities. Think about how much and what kind of products or services are generated from the activities. These are sometimes referred to as "deliverables" and are often in the form of numbers (e.g., "facilitate 10 workshops").

✦ **Outcomes** (or goals) refer to changes brought about by the project. In other words, how well were the activities carried out to create meaningful changes?

✦ **Impacts** are longer-term outcomes. They refer to the ultimate goal or vision and are the "big-picture" changes that the project is working toward. Impacts may be achieved beyond the lifetime of your specific project.

**PROJECT COMPONENTS**
Brief project description and purpose

↓

**PRIORITY GROUP**
Who you intend to serve

↓

**INPUTS**
The resources you need to get results

↓

**ACTIVITIES**
What you do with the inputs

↓

**OUTPUTS**
Direct results of the activities

↓

**SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES (GOALS)**
Changes brought about by the project

↓

**LONG-TERM OUTCOMES (IMPACTS)**
The ultimate goal or vision

## ACTIVITY:
## LOGIC MODEL

## OBJECTIVE:

## GAIN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIFFERENT COMPONENTS OF A LOGIC MODEL.

This activity might help you gain a better understanding of the different components of a logic model. Decide whether the information in each box is an input, activity, output, short-term outcome, or longer-term goal.

The example is a project which is aiming to increase youth engagement in the local community.

 "YAC" refers to the Youth Advisory Council.

| School drop-out rate decreases | Train adult allies | Part-time youth worker | Youth leadership skills training | YAC organizes 4 community events |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Transport | Youth-engagement workshops in schools | Youth crime rates decrease | Older youth mentor | Youth become engaged adults |
| Youth return to their home community after college | Create youth and Elder community event | Number of youth who attend community event | Meeting room | Youth feel empowered |
| 12 YAC meetings per year | Food | Number of youth who attend annual pow wow | 10 youth complete leadership skills training | Youth move into civic engagement roles |
| Create a YAC | Youth use community facilities more | Youth feel more connected | Gap between youth and elders is reduced | Youth and Elders event becomes an annual event |

**ANSWERS ON THE NEXT PAGE...**

## ANSWERS:

## LOGIC MODEL ACTIVITY

Doing this activity may help you realize that figuring out the different parts of a logic model is not always a straightforward process. For example, something that you might see as a short-term outcome might be seen by someone else as a long-term outcome. Also, there may be different interpretations of what constitutes activities versus outputs, depending on how the program is organized.

It can therefore be very helpful to get feedback and suggestions from others when developing your project logic model.
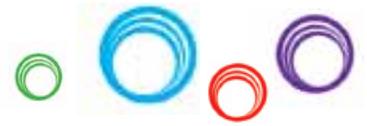
| INPUTS | ACTIVITIES | OUTPUTS | SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES | LONG-TERM OUTCOMES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Part-time youth worker | Train adult allies | Number of youth who attend community event | Youth use community facilities more | Youth become engaged adults |
| Older youth mentors | Create a YAC | 12 YAC meetings per year | Youth feel empowered | School drop-out rate decreases |
| Meeting room | Youth engagement workshops in schools | YAC organizes 4 community events | Youth feel more connected to their community | Youth return to their home community after college |
| Food | Create youth and elder event | Number of youth who attend annual pow wow | Youth move into civic engagement roles | Youth crime rate decreases |
| Transport | Youth leadership skills training | 10 youth complete leadership skills training | Youth and Elders event becomes an annual event | Gap between youth and elders is reduced |

# WORKSHEET:
# LOGIC MODEL

## OBJECTIVE:

## DEVELOP A LOGIC MODEL FOR YOUR PROGRAM.

You can use this worksheet to develop a logic model for the program you are evaluating.

| Inputs | Activities | Outputs | Short-term outcomes | Long-term outcomes |
|--------|-----------|---------|---------------------|--------------------|
|        |           |         |                     |                    |
|        |           |         |                     |                    |
|        |           |         |                     |                    |
|        |           |         |                     |                    |
|        |           |         |                     |                    |

# Preparing an evaluation plan continued…

**2** IDENTIFY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

It is important to form specific evaluation questions. These questions will be shaped by the goals of the evaluation.

Some examples:

✦ *"Was the project carried out as planned?"*
This question taps the process rather than project outcomes.

✦ *"Did the priority group take part in the project?"* This question gets at whether the project targeted the intended group of people and is another process question.

✦ *"To what extent did the project achieve its anticipated outcomes?"* Notice that this is not a 'Yes or No' question but gets at the degree to which expected outcomes were achieved.

✦ *"Were there any unanticipated outcomes (positive or negative)?"*

As these examples show, you can ask and answer both process and outcome questions within the same evaluation.

It is important to get feedback from all relevant stakeholders when creating your evaluation questions.

**3** IDENTIFY INDICATORS

An evaluation plan also requires us to identify indicators. Indicators are the ways we will know that the expected outcomes have been achieved. Indicators need to be measurable.

For example, if our expected outcome is a reduction in substance use, then our indicator will measure lower levels of substance use among participants.

It is also useful to explain how this reduction will be measured. For example, will participants self-report lower levels of substance use on a survey? Will their substance use behaviours be monitored and reported by someone else?

**4** IDENTIFY INFORMATION SOURCES

Identifying information sources refers to where and from whom you will get information. There are generally two types of information sources for an evaluation: People and documents.

People you may want to include in your evaluation are staff, participants, project partners, Elders in the community, and any other stakeholders or people involved in the evaluated project.

Documents you may want to include can be both from within your organization (such as log books, time sheets, case records, meeting minutes, annual reports), as well as outside your organization (such as government documents, literature reviews, community studies).

It is good to collect information from a number of different sources.

**5** DESCRIBE DATA COLLECTION METHODS

It is important to include details in your evaluation plan about how the data will be collected. This includes details about the methodology and procedures for collecting all the relevant information. It also includes a description of the people responsible for collecting each piece of information.

More information about evaluation methodology and procedures is included in the section Gathering the Information on page 18.

## 6  PROPOSE AN ANALYSIS PLAN

An analysis plan describes how you are going to make sense of your data once it is collected. For example, if you are administering a survey, will you use statistics to analyze the data? If so, which software program will you use and which statistics are you planning on using? Alternatively, if you plan on using qualitative methods, how do you plan to organize the data and make sense of it all?

Your analysis plan should be described as clearly as possible in your evaluation framework.

## 7  DESCRIBE THE REPORTING STRATEGY

Finally, the reporting strategy refers to how the information will be disseminated. If there will be an evaluation report, describe who will have access to it. Will it be a private document, shared only within your organization, or will it also be shared outside your organization?

Also describe if you plan to share the findings in other ways, such as through oral presentations and workshops, and community-friendly brochures.

# Gathering the information

## Overview of qualitative and quantitative approaches

We need to decide what type of methodology we will use to collect the evaluation information. Will the focus be on qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups? Alternatively, will quantitative methods be used, such as surveys to find percentages? Or will both types of methods be included?

> **If you are preparing an evaluation for a funder, it is important to know which evaluation methods are acceptable to your funder. For example, they may want only quantitative information, or may accept only certain types of qualitative information.**

**Quantitative methods** (e.g., surveys) address the "what" and "how much" questions. The benefit of using quantitative methods is that they can reach a larger number of people and are seen as more objective than qualitative methods. Quantitative data are usually also less time consuming to analyze.

However, a drawback is that more complex quantitative analyses usually require an understanding of statistics. Also, important information may be missed, as well as the chance to develop a greater understanding of an issue, if we rely only on quantitative methods.

**Qualitative approaches** (e.g., interviews, focus groups) answer the "why" and "how" questions. They can yield rich information about people's experiences and perspectives, and they may reveal new insights and ideas that had not previously been considered.

The main disadvantages of qualitative approaches are that data collection can be time-consuming and expensive. For example, a lot of time and money is often needed for an evaluator to travel to meet individually with participants. Also, analyzing and interpreting qualitative information can be challenging, and this process is not seen as objective as working with quantitative data.

It is useful to use both quantitative and qualitative methods in evaluations, whenever possible. Different types of information can be collected with each method, and when integrated they can provide a more complete picture and answer evaluation questions in a more comprehensive way.

**RESOURCES**

Shackman, G. What is program evaluation?

http://gsociology.icaap.org/methods/
Evaluationbeginnersguide_methodsoverview.pdf

# Surveys

If you decide to gather information with a survey, a lot of thought should go into the wording and construction of the questions. Again, it is important to consult with all relevant stakeholders (e.g., staff, project partners, youth participants) to get feedback on how the questions should be worded.

## SUGGESTIONS WHEN DEVELOPING SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

### Use simple language

✦ Sentences should be short and clear, without losing the intended meaning.

✦ Avoid jargon (technical terms).

### Avoid double negatives

✦ An example of a double negative would be asking youth how much they disagree or agree with the sentence "I don't feel like a member of my community." Instead, you could ask them how much they disagree or agree with the sentence "I feel like a member of my community."

### Be specific

✦ For example, if you want to know if participants found a workshop fun and informative, ask the questions separately.

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ✘ The workshop was fun and informative | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| ✔ The workshop was fun | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| ✔ The workshop was informative | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

### Consider the order of the questions

✦ Starting your survey with more neutral questions and items that do not require a lot of thought, as opposed to personal or abstract questions, will give participants a chance to warm up and feel more comfortable with the process. For example, asking "How did you hear about this homelessness project?" is a better warm-up question than immediately asking participants about their own homelessness experiences.

There are different types of scales or response options that can be used in a survey.

**2 response options**

✦ Participants choose between two options

✦ Good for getting at general opinions.

✦ Good when sample size is small.

✦ May not accurately capture participants' views because there are no in-between options.

> Agree/Disagree
>
> Yes/No

**3 response options**

✦ Might include a middle option in between two extreme views.

> Agree/Disagree/Neither
>
> A lot/Some/Not at all

**4- or 5-point scale**

✦ Useful for measuring the intensity of an opinion or feeling.

✦ 5-point scales, or any other scale with an odd number of response options (e.g., 7-point scale) allow participants to mark a middle or more neutral option. As a result, they may not feel forced into taking an extreme position. However, the risk is that participants mark the middle response option for each question without taking the time to read the items or think about their answers. For this reason, a 4-point scale may be more useful.

> **4-point scale**
> 1. Strongly Agree
> 2. Agree
> 3. Disagree
> 4. Strongly Disagree

> **5-point scale**
> 1. Strongly Agree
> 2. Agree
> 3. Neutral
> 4. Disagree
> 4. Strongly Disagree

# TIPS FOR WORKING WITH SCALES

✦ Make sure your scale is balanced. An example of an unbalanced scale would be having three response options on the Agree side (Completely Agree, Strongly Agree, Agree) but only two response options on the Disagree side (Strongly Disagree, Disagree). This unbalanced scale may bias respondents into giving an Agree response.

✦ Ensure your scale is a good fit for the question. For example, if you would like participants to respond to the statement, "I had fun at the workshop," you could ask them to mark how much they agree with the sentence, on a scale ranging from 'Not at all to 'Very much.' In contrast, giving them a scale with the options of 'Excellent,' 'Good,' 'Fair' or 'Poor' would not be a good fit for this item.

✦ You do not need to use the same scale for all items (questions) in a survey. Different questions will likely need different scales.

✦ Consider leaving out a "Not applicable" option unless it is necessary. For example, if all survey respondents attended a particular workshop and you want to know if they had fun at the workshop, do not include a "Not applicable" option because the question applies to all respondents. You will be unable to use 'Not applicable' responses when you analyze and make sense of the data. However, if you are asking about their school experience, for example, and you know that some participants do not attend school, then including a "Not applicable" option would be appropriate.

✦ Consider using pictures or other images if participants might have a hard time with reading or understanding words.

✦ Pilot test the scales and questions with a smaller group before distributing the survey more widely. This way, you can get feedback on what works well and what might need to change.

## MORE SCALES…

### 4-point scales

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ❍ Excellent | ❍ Strongly Agree | ❍ Very much | ❍ Very Satisfied | ❍ ☺ |
| ❍ Good | ❍ Agree | ❍ Quite a bit | ❍ Satisfied | ❍ ☺ |
| ❍ Fair | ❍ Disagree | ❍ A little | ❍ Dissatisfied | ❍ ☹ |
| ❍ Poor | ❍ Strongly Disagree | ❍ Not at all | ❍ Very Dissatisfied | ❍ ☹ |

### 5-point scales

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ❍ Always | ❍ Strongly Agree | ❍ Very much | ❍ Very Satisfied | ❍ ☺ |
| ❍ Often | ❍ Agree | ❍ Quite a bit | ❍ Satisfied | ❍ ☺ |
| ❍ Sometimes | ❍ Neither agree nor disagree | ❍ Somewhat | ❍ Neutral | ❍ ☺ |
| ❍ Rarely | ❍ Disagree | ❍ A little | ❍ Dissatisfied | ❍ ☹ |
| ❍ Never | ❍ Strongly Disagree | ❍ Not at all | ❍ Very Dissatisfied | ❍ ☹ |

Here are some question banks that you can refer to when creating your evaluation survey. They can give you ideas of questions to include but will likely need to be modified to fit the specifics of your program and the goals of your evaluation.

**Q** **Community Action Initiative (CAI) Project Evaluation Toolkit: Community Level Questions and Measures**

http://www.communityactioninitiative.ca/about-the-cai/news-and-updates/publications/

**Q** **Youth engagement (University of Wisconsin-Extension: Youth Leader Survey)**

http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/pdf/landolakeSurvey.pdf

**Q** **Self-Assessment**
https://www.nationalserviceresources.org/files/selfassessmentquestionbank.pdf

**Q** **A Compendium of Survey Questions for Recreation Practitioners**
http://lin.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/question1.pdf

# Interviews and Focus Groups

If you decide to use qualitative methods, you might ask yourself whether you should carry out individual interviews or focus groups. Flexibility in your approach is important. Some people may not feel comfortable in group settings and may prefer a one-on-one approach, whereas others might feel more comfortable sharing with peers in a group.

## INTERVIEWS

Interviews are generally appropriate when you want to capture detailed perceptions, opinions, and attitudes. They are also good for tapping unique experiences or someone's particular story.

In addition, interviews are appropriate for sensitive topics that participants may not feel comfortable sharing in front of others.

There are also situations in which bringing people together in a group may not be safe. In this case, conducting interviews would be more advisable than doing a focus group.

As with any situation where you are one-on-one with youth, you should follow ethical guidelines. You should consider the welfare of the young people themselves—they must not be disturbed or harmed by the experience of being interviewed.

You should also consider if you should be getting parent or guardian permission to interview youth. If you need that permission, you need written consent.

The interviewer should be protected against any misunderstandings or possible allegations of misconduct coming from their interactions with young people taking part in the project.

## TIPS

✦ It is generally not appropriate for the person who is running the program you are evaluating to be the one doing an interview, as the youth may be intimidated to answer honestly.

✦ It is important to have a list of questions prepared ahead of the interview and to be clear why you are asking these questions.

✦ The questions should be age appropriate and focused on youth's experiences and their ideas for improvement. For example, as youth get older they are more able to think in an abstract way and about long-term consequences.

# FOCUS GROUPS

A focus group can be described as a carefully planned discussion that is designed to get thoughts and feedback on a specific area of interest, in a non-threatening environment.

A focus group is like a structured, small group interview. It is a good idea to prepare a discussion guide (questions) ahead of time, but to allow for flexibility within the session.

Focus groups are appropriate when you want to gain multiple perspectives in an interactive group setting. One of the main benefits of focus groups is that they encourage participants to brainstorm and feed ideas off one another.

Before conducting a focus group it can be helpful to think about the time you have, the likely number of participants, the special characteristics of the group, the dynamics that you know or anticipate, how you will capture the information that comes from the group, and other things that might influence the information you are trying to capture.

It is also important to think about who will facilitate the focus group. Ideally it should not be the person who runs the project or program being evaluated. Effective facilitators have good communication and observation skills, can foster open and honest dialogue among diverse groups and individuals, can remain impartial, and are sensitive to dynamics within the groups.

Young people generally prefer hand-written notes because they may not wish to have their discussion recorded word for word. It can be really helpful to take along a note taker who can capture what is being said in the focus group and allow the facilitator to focus on conducting the group.

Effective note takers have good listening, observation and writing skills; take notes that are comprehensive but not word-for-word; and can remain impartial.

The facilitator and note taker should agree before the focus group if the note taker is to take on any facilitation role (e.g., if there are small group discussions within the focus group).

**RESOURCES**

Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development. Evaluating 4-H youth development programs. What makes a focus group a focus group and how do you conduct one? Powerpoint retrieved from http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/evaluation/methods.cfm.

## FOCUS GROUP TIPS

✦ Ideally, focus groups should consist of 6 to 12 participants.

✦ There should be a trained facilitator and a note-taker whenever possible.

✦ Whenever possible, separate focus groups should be held for each set of stakeholders. For example, youth participants should be in one focus group and staff should take part in a separate focus group. The reason is that youth or other participants may feel uncomfortable sharing their feedback openly and honestly in front of staff. There is also a risk that one group might dominate.

✦ It is best to use open-ended questions rather than questions that only require a yes or no response. Open-ended questions are more likely to encourage discussion.

✦ Offering food, and breaks when appropriate, is usually very much appreciated by participants.

## FACILITATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

✦ Be familiar with the project and have a basic knowledge and understanding of the group/community where the focus group is being held.

✦ Keep participants focused, engaged, attentive and interested.

✦ Stimulate safe and respectful discussion.

✦ Ensure all key topics are covered.

✦ Respectfully enforce community agreements.

✦ Ensure all participants have the opportunity to speak and at a level that is comfortable for them.

✦ Be aware of what steps to take if a youth gets upset.

✦ Be aware of any personal biases and assumptions which might impact the group.

✦ Debrief with note taker immediately after the focus group.

✦ Review notes.

## NOTE TAKER RESPONSIBILITIES

✦ Be familiar with the project and have a basic knowledge and understanding of the group.

✦ Bring materials (e.g., pens and paper, flip chart, markers of different colors, tape for affixing flip chart pages to the wall, name tags, copies of any documents that will be discussed).

✦ Assist the facilitator in arranging the room.

✦ Distribute honoraria and track as required.

✦ Take notes throughout the focus group and write them up afterwards.

✦ Ensure all notes contain name of project, number of participants, location, date and any other necessary demographic information.

✦ Ensure notes are extensive and accurately reflect the content of the discussion, as well as any observations of nonverbal behaviour, group dynamics, questions which were not answered, etc.

✦ Clarify discussion items with the participants to ensure notes are accurate.

✦ Ensure the community agreements for the focus group are written clearly on a flip chart and are visible throughout the group.

✦ Clearly identify direct quotations from themes and summaries in the notes.

✦ Debrief with the focus group facilitator immediately after the focus group.

✦ Review notes with the focus group facilitator.

✦ Capture any new insights that emerged as a result of this discussion with the facilitator.

✦ Ensure notes of the focus group discussion are securely stored.

# CREATING A SUCCESSFUL FOCUS GROUP

A focus group is more likely to run smoothly and give you the information you are looking for if you create a safe physical and emotional space, are clear about the reason for the focus group, ask the right questions, make the group fun, and honour the participants for their time and input.

## Creating a safe space

Between 6 and 12 participants is generally ideal but not necessarily achievable. Smaller groups can still be helpful but may result in a limited range of ideas and opinions being represented. Groups larger than 12 may be hard to manage and record (although can be managed with additional facilitators and more small group discussions).

When recruiting for focus groups, it is important to be sure that participants fit the criteria established for inclusion in a particular focus group. Participants should know what reimbursement they will receive for attending a focus group. Healthy snacks or meals and transit passes are usually provided. Gift cards can sometimes be provided.

Having participants develop community agreements (ground rules) at the beginning of the focus group will help to ensure a safe space is created for all participants, and can be referred back to in order to keep the discussion respectful and safe.

Sometimes youth participants will hold very different values, attitudes and opinions to the facilitator. It is important to remain neutral wherever possible and be accepting of these differences, unless these are affecting the safety or rights of anyone else. The goal of a focus group is to gather information that is as honest as possible. If participants sense that the facilitator is disagreeing or judging them, they may not say what they truly believe or feel about a topic.

A safer physical space can be created by ensuring the focus group take place at a youth friendly location which can be set out in a circle, and is free from interruptions. Providing refreshments and going over housekeeping issues, such as the location of the bathrooms and at what time the breaks are, can also help to create a safe and respectful atmosphere.

**RESOURCES**

For more details about creating a safe space see *Supporting youth in our communities: A manual for adult allies in Yukon,* available at http://www.yukonwellness.ca/pdf/supporting_youth_in_our_communities_manual.pdf and www.mcs.bc.ca.

### Confidentiality

It is important to be clear ahead of time what information you can and cannot keep confidential (see Duty to report on page 62) so that you can explain this to participants before the focus group begins.

When reports are created based on focus group data, be careful to ensure there are no identifying comments or information contained in the report.

### Getting started

At the beginning of the focus group, introduce yourself and any other adults in the room, including their roles. Explain the purpose of the focus group, what information is being gathered and how this is going to be used. Ensure participants are aware of potential risks and benefits of participation, and that they may withdraw from the focus group at any time.

Youth participants must understand that their participation is voluntary and that there are no consequences for refusing to take part in the focus group or to answer specific questions. Even if they have written consent from their parents to take part, they still have the right to withdraw.

Participants should also be informed that they can look at the note taker's notes, and that if they do not want some of their information recorded or want it removed from the record, it will be removed.

## COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

It is helpful to agree on ground rules with participants through community agreements. Participants should be encouraged to come up with their own agreements. Examples include:

✦ Only one person talks at a time.

✦ Share the floor (be aware if you are talking more than others).

✦ "Vegas rule" (i.e., What is shared in the room stays in the room and remains confidential).

✦ There are no right or wrong answers to questions – just ideas, experiences and opinions, which are all valuable.

✦ Participation is voluntary and participants should not volunteer others to answer questions.

✦ Do what you need to do to be comfortable, as long as you're respectful to others.

## SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

The purpose of the group discussion and the nature of the questions have been explained to me.

I consent to take part in a focus group about XXXX.

My participation is voluntary. I understand that I am free to leave the group at any time.

If I decide not to participate at any time during the discussion, my decision will in no way affect the services that I receive from XXXXX

None of my experiences or thoughts will be shared with anyone outside of XXX unless all identifying information is removed first.

 [Signed and witnessed],                    Date


_____              _____


_____              _____

# Asking the right questions

The essential questions and format for a focus group are **What - So what - Now what**.
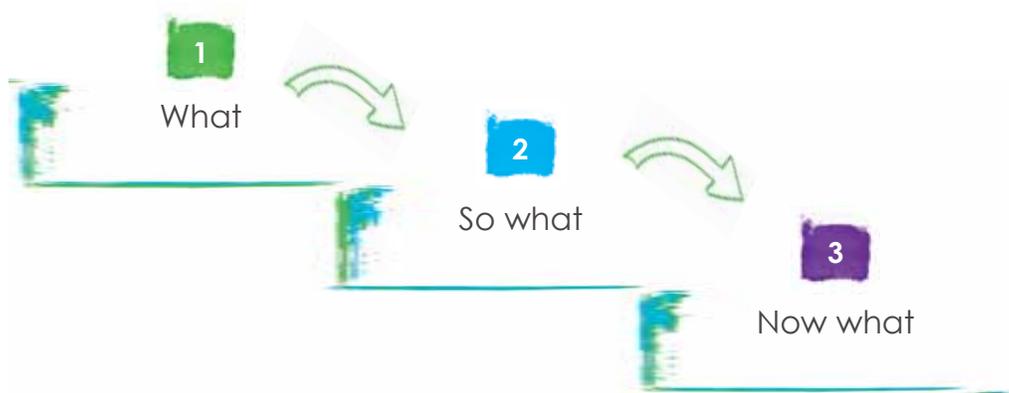


**1** **What happened as a result of the program?**

**2** **So what do the results really mean?**
- ✦ Why do these results matter, and to whom?
- ✦ How did the program make a difference?

**3** **Now what will you do with the results?**
- ✦ Now that we know what is working and what is not, what changes can we make within the program?
- ✦ Now that the program is over, what will happen?
- ✦ Who should we share this information with and how should we share it?
- ✦ What would we like to see happen next?

**Asking questions the right way**

## Open-ended questions

It is important to use open-ended questions such as "How" or "What" whenever possible as these encourage participants to provide more information than they would in response to a close-ended question which could be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."

A closed-ended question followed up with a "How" question may also be helpful.

For example:

"Did taking part in the tobacco cessation program help you quit smoking?" can be followed by "Can you tell me how it helped?"

It is also important to ask only one question at a time so as not to confuse or overwhelm participants or miss out on answers to each question.

**If participants give incomplete or irrelevant answers, the facilitator can probe for fuller, clearer responses. A few suggested techniques are:**

✦ Repeat the question – repetition gives more time to think.

✦ Pause for the answer – a thoughtful nod or expectant look can convey that you want a fuller answer.

✦ Repeat the reply – hearing it again sometimes stimulates conversation.

✦ Ask when, what, where, which, and how questions – they provide more detailed information.

✦ Use neutral comments – "Anything else?"

## Listening skills

Good listening skills are important when conducting focus groups, and the facilitator should demonstrate that he or she is paying attention to what is being said. This includes not only hearing what someone is saying, but also noticing body posture and facial gestures (i.e., any changes in nonverbal behaviour) that might provide clues as to the appropriate or necessary ways to engage participants.

Signs that you are paying attention may include leaning forward slightly, looking directly at participants while they are speaking, or nodding at appropriate times. Such behaviours not only indicate that you are more engaged, but also help maintain the engagement of the participants themselves.

Allowing silence at times encourages elaboration by participants because it gives them a chance to think about what they want to say. More often than not, participants will fill the silence with more information. However, it is important to strike a balance between keeping the conversation moving and allowing participants enough time to share and process what has been shared.

## Paraphrasing or reflecting back

Paraphrasing can be a helpful a technique which is used to repeat back the content of what a participant has said and to clarify that you have understood the meaning of their statement.

For example, to paraphrase the message "'No one listens to us youth, they say that things are going to change but they never do, they don't even meet at times when we can attend" a response might be "What I am hearing you say is the meetings are held at times when young people cannot attend..."

While paraphrasing helps you to clarify the content of what someone has said, reflecting can help you to clarify how they are feeling.

For example, from the same message, you might respond 'You seem to be feeling discouraged'". This lets the speaker know that you understand their feelings and frustrations.

## Clarifying questions

Using probing or clarifying questions reinforces the message that the participants have expert knowledge, and lets them know that you are listening to their answers and that you would like to know more detail.

As a general rule, you want to interrupt the participants as little as possible. If you feel you need to follow-up with something they said by using probes, make a mental note of it and ask them about it when they have finished their thought.

If a participant strays off course, encourage them to finish their thought then bring them back to the question you asked to make sure that they have answered it completely.

Using clarifying questions helps you to gather information while avoiding the assumption that you understand the meaning of a key word, phrase, or perspective.

---

**Clarifying questions and probes gives the participants clues as to how specific you would like their answers to be by asking them for details and examples.**

✦ Avoid asking leading questions

It is important to avoid asking questions that reflect your opinions or assumptions about a topic. An example of a leading question is "Don't you think…"

✦ Some good examples of probes to help clarify what a respondent has said include:

- "Please tell me (more) about that…"
- "Could you explain what you mean by…"
- "Can you tell me something else about…"

---

## MAKE THE FOCUS GROUP INTERACTIVE

The use of interactive techniques including Ice breakers and Energizers can be helpful for creating an atmosphere where participants are engaged in the group. Icebreakers should be brief and easy to do. It is best to avoid activities that involve memory, physical touch, or win/lose.

Here are some activities that can be used in an interactive focus group.

### ACTIVITY:
### BIKE RACK (PARKING LOT)

### OBJECTIVE:

### RECORD DISCUSSION TOPICS THE GROUP WOULD LIKE TO REVISIT.

Have a flip chart paper on the wall with the title "bike rack." This is used to record issues which are not directly relevant to the topic being discussed but which participants wish to come back to later.

The bike rack should be revisited at the end of the session to ensure all topics have been covered.

### RESOURCES

A selection of ice breakers and energizers can be viewed at http://www.mcs.bc.ca/youth_participation_projects.

## ACTIVITY:
## TRIVIA GAME

## OBJECTIVE:

## SHARE DATA AND HEAR PERSPECTIVES.

The Trivia Game is designed to introduce participants to statistical data and survey results and to get their responses to it.

The game works best when played in small teams of 3-4 people. The teams are asked to guess the percentage of youth who answered a question a certain way, and then to explain their answer.

## EXAMPLE:

The facilitator will read out a question such as "100 youth who visited the Canada Games Centre were asked what their favorite activity was. What percentage reported that it was the specific youth events?" Participants then discuss their ideas among their team and decide on the answer.

After each question has been asked and every group has displayed their answer, encourage the participants to discuss the responses they have given.

## ACTIVITY:
## THERMOMETER GAME

## OBJECTIVE:

## SPARK DISCUSSION ON A RANGE OF TOPICS.

On one wall of the room is a sign which says "Agree" and on the other side of the room facing it is a sign which says "Disagree." The facilitator reads out a statement and youth stand anywhere on the continuum between the signs for "Agree" and "Disagree." Youth are then asked if they would like to share their reasons for where they placed themselves on the continuum.

## STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE PARTICIPANTS IN DISCUSSION

✦ Ask each group why they chose their answer to the trivia question.

✦ Ask the groups if they were surprised by the answer. Does it fit with their experience?

✦ If all the groups are incorrect, point out that it is clear that the correct answer is surprising to them, and ask them why that might be.

✦ If all the groups are correct, ask them why the answer was so obvious.

✦ For large groups, the room can be divided into four large squares marked A, B, C and D. Youth then move to the square with the letter corresponding to their chosen trivia quiz answer.

## AT THE END OF THE FOCUS GROUP

Before ending the discussion, give participants an opportunity to share any concluding thoughts in a closing round. This gives the facilitator the opportunity to 'take the temperature' of the group and to address any issues that may have come up.

### Feedback form

Focus groups usually end with a feedback form to ensure that youth have the opportunity to offer their thoughts about the topic being discussed or suggest any ways the focus group might be improved.

### Recognizing and appreciating participants for their time and contributions

If you are providing honoraria or transit tickets, this can be done at the time you thank participants for their time, participation and the information they have provided.

**1**

### Be aware of potential literacy issues in the group

Read aloud consent forms and handouts so that youth do not have to identify any literacy or comprehension challenges they may have.

**2**

### Minimize the pressure to conform to a dominant view point

Group pressure to conform may occur when an idea is adopted without any general discussion or disagreement. To minimize the chances of this happening the facilitator should probe for alternative views. For example, "Has anyone had a different experience that they want to share?"

**3**

### Someone is dominating the conversation

In focus groups, it is not uncommon for a few individuals to dominate the discussion. To balance participation, and ensure that every participant has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion, it may help to address questions to "Anyone we have not heard from yet."

It can also be helpful to respectfully acknowledge the contribution of the person dominating the conversation and to thank them, saying something like, "I really appreciate your comments and I'm very interested in hearing what other people think about this issue."

**4**

### No one responds to a question

It is helpful to try to understand why youth are not responding. For example, if the question is too difficult to understand, try asking it in a different way.

**5**

### Participants are tired of talking about the topic or have said all they have to say

In this case, simply state, "Is there anything else that you would like to share? [pause] If not, we can move on to our next question."

**6** **Participants feel uncomfortable about talking**

This is less likely to occur when focus groups start with an icebreaker or the facilitator is able to set a comfortable tone and put participants at ease in the beginning.

If participants feeling uncomfortable about talking is an issue during the focus group, you may need to back up and do a little work to make people feel more comfortable. Talk about easier or more comfortable/familiar topics, or things that you know are particularly interesting to them as this may help the participants begin to feel more comfortable talking in a group setting.

It is also okay to sometimes just wait it out and allow youth time to think. Often, someone will speak up, either to answer the question or to ask a question that allows you to have a better understanding of the silence.

**7** **The group talks about topics that are not relevant**

Although the facilitator wants to be sure to give youth the opportunity to provide information which has not been covered in the focus group questions but is relevant to the projects goals, it may also be necessary to politely move any conversation along when it gets too far off topic. When this happens, take advantage of a pause and say, "Thank you for that interesting idea. Perhaps we can discuss it afterwards but if it is OK, I would like to move on to another topic."

Other times, the facilitator may want to acknowledge how much time is left and that there are some other aspects of their experience that are important to learn about and explore, and for this reason it is necessary to move on.

**8** **Participants are having side conversations**

If participants are having conversations among themselves, it can disrupt the focus group by making the other participants feel uncomfortable, making it hard for people to hear what others are saying, and making it hard for the facilitator and note taker to focus on what is being said.

One of the best ways to handle this is to respectfully remind people of the community agreements and ask that they finish their conversations and rejoin the larger group discussion taking place.

This kind of disruption may also signal that it is time to take a break. Be clear on how long the break is and be proactive about bringing people back together so that the focus group can reconvene.

**9** **Participants are making derogatory or offensive remarks**

Again, remind participants of the community agreements and the need for mutual respect and confidentiality within the group. If this is unsuccessful and the remarks continue, you may have to ask a participant to leave.

**10** **Participants do not feel comfortable answering a question**

If a youth does not feel comfortable answering a question this must be honored. If they say that they are not comfortable, thank them and acknowledge their honesty.

Questions which can make youth feel uncomfortable include evaluation questions about a program's weaknesses. It may be helpful to let participants know at the beginning of the focus group that you will be asking these questions, and explain your reasons for doing so in order to reduce discomfort. The questions should be introduced gently and more generally, and then use more specific follow-up questions as the group becomes more comfortable.

Rather than focus on the negatives of sensitive topics, it is also important to phrase the questions in ways that emphasizes what could change for the better or what would help, and to phrase questions so that youth do not need to share their personal stories and can answer more generally. For example, you can ask "What challenges might young people have with…" rather than "What have been your challenges in this area?"

If a participant is upset or "triggered" by a topic, ensure they have access to resources and support.

**11** **Participants leave**

It is very important to try keeping participants as fully engaged in the discussion as possible and for the entire length of the focus group. Let participants know how long the focus group will take and ask the group at the beginning of the meeting if anyone has to leave early so that you can change the order of the questions to ask the most important questions before the first people leave.

Cultural norms should also be respected. For example, if the group is used to having regular breaks, then these should be incorporated into the focus group.

## GRAPHIC RECORDING

You may want to include a graphic recording component in your focus groups. Graphic recording involves capturing people's ideas and suggestions in words and drawings. It can be a useful tool to illustrate the process as well as the outcome of a focus group. Graphic recording can be done either by a professional graphic recording artist or by asking youth to capture the ideas coming out of their discussions in a visual way.

A good professional graphic recording artist works with a large piece of paper pinned on the wall and records the conversation as it happens, acting as a reminder of what has been discussed so far.

As the recording takes shape throughout the focus group, youth can see their ideas reflected in the images, and can see themes as they emerge.

Graphic recording can also be used to engage young people by having them draw the key points of their dialogue.



**RESOURCES**

The Centre for Graphic Facilitation
graphicfacilitation.blogs.com

Using graphic facilitation in a world café style workshop is discussed at: http://www.theworldcafe.com/pdfs/graphicBenefits.pdf

# Other Methodologies

There are a number of different methodologies (beyond surveys, interviews, and focus groups) that can be used to supplement other forms of data collection. Including personal and program stories or images can complement other data collected and can bring the impact of a program to life.

It is important to remember that if you are preparing an evaluation report for a funder, they may have set guidelines about how they would like the data to be gathered and presented. It is therefore important to talk with your funder before you settle on your final evaluation methodologies.

## COMMUNITY MAPPING

Community mapping can be adapted as a tool to engage youth in an evaluation. Evaluation participants are asked to create a physical map of their experiences and ideas about a certain location or geographical area, such as their home community.

Mapping can be used to identify assets or community supports and highlight gaps in services or programs.

Once youth have created their maps, these are used as a basis for a dialogue about what they have drawn. The maps and a write-up of the subsequent discussion can be included in the final evaluation report.



## ASSET MAPPING

Asset mapping focuses only on the program's assets and how these can be built upon, rather than on problems or deficits. These assets are drawn or written on a map.

Mapping engages youth in a visual way, so can be a particularly useful tool if there are language barriers, and for youth who are not comfortable talking in a focus group setting.

Mapping can be an inexpensive way of gathering information because all that is needed are time, space, paper, markers, and a note taker.

## EXAMPLE: MAPPING

In an evaluation of a local community centre, youth are given a map of the centre and asked to draw on the map the resources that they access. The evaluator can then ask them about the resources that they have drawn, as well as about available resources they did not include in their map and about what their ideal centre would look like.



RESOURCES

*Mapped: a youth community mapping toolkit for Vancouver.* This manual is aimed at adults who wish to engage youth in community mapping. It offers practical ideas that have been successfully used in rural and urban settings.

http://practicalradical.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/mapped-a-youth-community-mapping-toolkit-for-vancouver.pdf

DREAM TREE

A Dream Tree (or other symbol such as a house or Inukshuk) can be used to capture a program's or service's aims, ways of meeting those aims, and outcomes from participants' perspectives.

A photograph of the tree and a write up of what was included in the different parts of the tree can be included in a final evaluation report.

## EXAMPLE: DREAM TREE

Youth from communities across the Yukon are attending a weekend long youth leadership event in Whitehorse.

On first arriving, the group sets out the core values and large-scale aims for the weekend. These might include things like "learn facilitation skills," "meet youth from different Yukon communities " "gain skills I can use as a youth leader in my community," and "have opportunities to practice new skills." These are then written on the tree roots and form the agreed upon basis of the weekend.

Youth are then all given brown pieces of bark (or post-it notes) on which they write how they hope to achieve these goals and what they personally hope to get out of the weekend.

At the end of the weekend, youth revisit their overall aims and individual goals, as well as the things they got out of the weekend that they never expected to and they write these down on the green leaves of the tree.

PROBLEM TREE

The dream tree can be adapted to focus on one specific 'problem' or issue which youth would like to address. For example, if the problem is 'high youth smoking rates,' participants identify the problems they see and write these in the roots of the tree (such as peer pressure and anti-smoking laws not enforced). They then use the bark to identify, for example, how the tobacco cessation program is currently addressing the issue, and then the leaves are where they write their ideas for how else the program might address these issues.

## STORYTELLING

Storytelling can be a powerful way to obtain information about a project's outcomes from participants' perspectives and experiences. Storytelling can highlight the strengths and weaknesses of a project, program or service, as well as any unintended consequences.

Stories can be collected verbally in person, through written accounts, or through other ways such as videos or spoken word. Excerpts from stories can be used alongside graphs or in reports to provide a first-person voice about a project's impact.

### Ethical challenges

There are some ethical challenges to including stories as part of an evaluation. For example, it is not appropriate to ask people who are dealing with acutely stressful situations, have an acute mental illness or are experiencing PTSD to tell their story for an evaluation.

If participants are sharing stories which include painful life experiences, they should be supported to tell their story from a strengths-based perspective.

Before youth share their story they should be given all the information they need to make informed choices about providing a story for the evaluation, and this must include the right to withdraw their story.

### Informed consent

Storytellers should be informed of their rights if they consent to participate in the evaluation by telling their story. Before agreeing to participate the youth should be informed about why they are being asked to provide their story, who will read their story, what support will be available to them, and how they will be included in decisions about the inclusion of their story in any evaluation report.

Story tellers should also be encouraged to think about any risks that might come from telling their story, such as if they reveal private or personal information. They should also be informed that they have a right to withdraw consent for the use of their story (and what the limits of that might be if they are agreeing to sharing their story publicly).

It is good practice to have written consent before a youth begins to tell their story. (See sample consent form on page 48.)

## COLLECTING STORIES

From an evaluation perspective, it may be useful to have a structure to ensure the youth provide a story which falls within the parameter of the evaluation.

You may also want to collect stories from staff, caregivers (if appropriate) and other stakeholders. Although this can be time consuming, it can be a really helpful tool to illustrate the program's successes and any barriers to success.

**There are a number of different ways to collect stories which can be included in an evaluation:**

**1**

### Interviews

Structured one-on-one or small group interviews can be used to collect stories. The interviewer can explain that the agency wants to hear from participants about their experiences with the program in order to understand how the program is meeting youth's needs and learn what improvements might be necessary. The interviewer should ask questions to get the person talking, but not interrupt unnecessarily.

> Questions to consider might include:
>
> "What brought you to the program?"
>
> "What parts of the program do you participate in?"
>
> "How has this program made a difference in your life?"

**2**

### Story Circle

At the end of a staff meeting or a program session, each participant could share a story. To get the conversation going, the interviewer or facilitator can ask an open-ended question about participants' experiences with the program.

At the end of the session the group can summarize and record the most important lessons learned based on the stories told in the circle.

The story circle can be repeated every three to six months to assess the program's progress and involve diverse stakeholders.

> Questions to consider might include:
>
> "What have you learned from being part of this program?"
>
> "In what way has participation in this program changed your life?"

**3** ### Oral history interviews

Including the voices of the people who have familiarity with a program's history is a way to gather information on how it has changed over time. It can help to describe the historical, social and cultural context of the program as well as how it has evolved. In addition, it can help you identify strengths that existed in the past that can become resources for the future.

Oral history interviews may also be used to collect information on the lives of youth before the program existed or after it has concluded, to see how their lives may have changed as a result of their participation.

**4** ### Institutional memory

Collecting and cataloguing stories from participants and staff can be a way of recording the evolution of a program. This process can provide a wealth of useful information about growth in individual program participants, staff members, the program and the organization as a whole.

**5** ### Visual documentation

Stories can be told in pictures as well as words. Program staff and participants can be given cameras and invited to create a visual record of their participation in the program. These photos can be organized into a montage on a poster or presented in a digital slide show to demonstrate program activities and growth.

Photovoice is a method of visual documentation described in more detail on page 51.

**6** ### Scrapbooking and story-quilting

Scrap booking is a way of collecting program artifacts and images and placing them in an album to document program activities, process and outcomes.

Participants and staff can be asked to keep a scrapbook throughout their participation in a program to document their activities, challenges, accomplishments and growth. These scrapbooks can then be used as a form of portfolio assessment in program evaluation.

Quilting can also be used for telling stories. For example, in a quilt-making activity, each participant can contribute a square that contains a personal reflection on the program, its process and outcomes. The participants can discuss how to organize their squares to make a quilt that tells the story of their individual and collective experience.

Asking Questions that Matter

## 7   Story theatre

Theatre has been used effectively in the process of health and mental health service evaluations. Evaluation participants are asked to develop stories that they turn into scripts and perform, either for themselves or for the public. Most often, the script emerges from role-play exercises. Story theatre may be used every few months for program participants to role-play the programs process, challenges and accomplishments.

## 8   Case studies

Case studies are more in-depth, written stories of the lives of youth participants. They may also depict the places where they live, where the program is located, and how community life and factors such as school, ethnicity and substance use interact with the processes and outcomes that emerge as a result of participating in the program.

A case study may include program participants' biographical information; their reasons for getting involved; the activities they participated in; and their successes and outcomes.

Case studies can be powerful ways of demonstrating the impact of a program but should be used with caution, as it can be challenging to protect the confidentiality of participants.

## 9   Vignettes: Short stories

Vignettes are short personal statements that give a human face to collected data. These can work really well in an evaluation report.

> **It is important to remember that storytelling does not tell "the whole story." It should be complemented in an evaluation with other sources of information, such as survey and focus group information.**

## EXAMPLE: VIGNETTES

After presenting statistical information on the activities of a youth moose hunting camp in Yukon, adding a vignette can enrich the statistical data, such as one from a staff member or program participant describing the team work and friendships that were developed through the camp.

## SAMPLE CONSENT FORM - STORYTELLING

[Insert name of organization] wants to evaluate the impact of your participation in [insert name of program] to learn more about what worked and what did not work, and why. This learning will help us to improve our programs and services.

Stories will be collected by [Note how you will collect stories e.g., audio recordings, video, written]

We may share your story with our funders and [insert names of any other stakeholders with whom the stories will be shared]

We may publish your story through various media—including but not limited to print, electronic and audio-video recordings. Examples of these publications may include but are not limited to newsletters, reports and PowerPoint presentations.

❍    I GIVE (organization's name)_____
permission to publish my name/child's name (if youth is under age 19), image, written work and/or artwork for the purposes stated above.

❍    I DO NOT GIVE permission to publish my name/child's name, image, written work and/or artwork for the purposes stated above.

Date of Birth: _____ (day/month/year)

Today's Date:_____

Name of Program Participant: _____

Name of Parent/Guardian (if applicable): _____

Signature _____

Witness:_____

## MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

'Most significant change' is a way of collecting, analyzing and evaluating stories that is being used increasingly in evaluating projects because it provides data on a program's impacts and outcomes.

Youth, staff and other stakeholders are all asked to note the most significant change they have experienced or seen as a result of the project.

### Participants are asked to answer focused questions such as:

✦ Looking back over the past six month, what do you think was the most significant change for you as a result of taking part in this program?

✦ Why is this significant to you?

✦ What difference has this made now or will it make in the future?

## RESOURCES

The 'Most Significant Change'(MSC) Technique; A Guide to Its Use by Rick Davies and Jess Dart

http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf

A good example of Most Significant Change being used in evaluation is highlighted in this video. Young people talk about the most significant change that occurred for them as a result of engaging in a project aiming to break down barriers between two culturally different groups.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEM0EV0GRCE
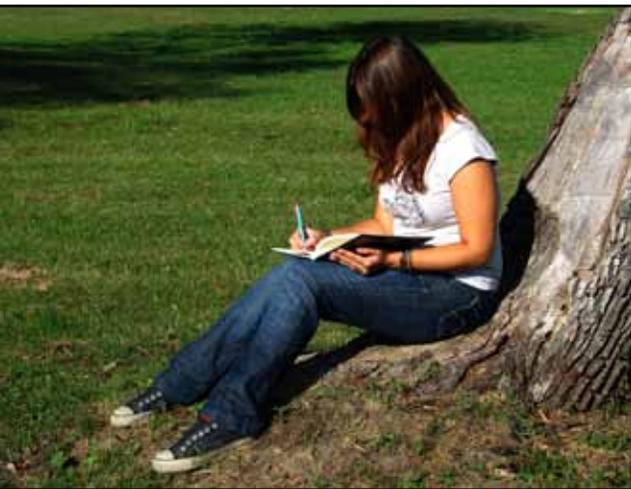
## PROJECT DIARIES

A project diary is a written record of significant activities, events or processes that occur during the life of the project. It can be done by staff or participants, or both. It has the advantage of identifying challenges early and of not relying on memory later. However, it requires project staff or participants to be diligent about keeping their diary up to date, and may be challenging to analyze.

Combining diary keeping with regular meetings where people reflect on what is working well and less well can be an efficient way to collect data and decide on the priorities that need to be addressed.

By keeping a project diary from the beginning, staff can develop an accurate account of time commitment and budget for the project as well as the actual delivery of the project.

**RESOURCES**

## PHOTOVOICE

Photovoice is a process of blending words and pictures (narrative and photography). It has gained popularity as an evaluation tool.

Similar approaches can be done with video cameras, and when shared through computers, the approach is called "Digital Storytelling."

For evaluation participant, photovoice offers new ways to share their ideas and experiences, as well as the opportunity to build skills including photography, communication and critical thinking skills.

For the evaluator, valuable information and different ideas can be generated that might not be gathered using some other evaluation methodologies.



> "Getting involved in the mental health support group means I leave the house twice a week which is a big deal for me. I took this photograph with the door open because I am more open to new experiences now."

### Ethical considerations

The use of photographs that include people requires careful ethical consideration to ensure the rights of those being photographed are not violated.

There are some other important questions to consider before using photovoice, such as:

✦  Is this method going to get you the information you need?

✦  Do you have enough resources for a photovoice project?

✦  Do you have youth who will be interested in participating in this project?

✦  Do you know how you will use the information once you collect it?

✦  What are the guidelines for photographs? What will be included, what will not?

✦  What are the benefits and risks of taking part for any person being photographed?

✦  How can the photographers' safety be ensured? (e.g., are you going to say no photographs of illegal activities?)

**Other Important considerations**

It is important to get the funder on board if planning to include photovoice as part of an evaluation report.

It is also important to sort and analyze the key messages resulting from data collection and ensure that the photographs and narratives are presented in a way that accurately portrays the participants' views and experiences.

## Informed consent

It is advisable to restrict photographs to not include people. However if the project does include photographs of people, it is important to get informed consent from anyone who is photographed. A consent form should include an explanation of why the photographs are being taken, what they will be used for, what else they might be used for, and any possible risks of agreeing to be photographed.

The sample consent form is on page 54.

## Data collection

Data collection is more than just taking photographs – it is adding the narrative too. Adding the words can be done after the photographs are taken through group discussions or by the individual who took the photograph. It might include pure narrative or might use spoken word, song or poetry to go along with the photos.

**RESOURCES**

Photovoice: photovoice.ca

Photovoice Hamilton is a great example of photovoice being used with youth in Canada

http://www.youtube.com/
watch?feature=player_embedded&v=shrFa2c305g

## Data analysis

**Data analysis can be done in a number of different ways but following some methodical steps can help:**

Each photographer has the opportunity to present their photographs to the group participating in the evaluation, picking out the one or two that they think best answer the evaluation questions and best reflect their experiences within the program or project.

↓

Together participants can contextualize their photographs by telling stories about what the photographs mean to them individually and collectively.

↓

The photographs can be sorted into categories of issues, themes or ideas. Categories might include program strengths, where the program can improve, and unexpected outcomes of attending the program.

## Presenting the findings

The photographs and narratives can be included in a final evaluation report (alongside other methods of data collection). If participants are agreeable they can also be used in public exhibits to highlight the program and the photovoice project.

## SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

PHOTOVOICE PROJECT: PHOTOGRAPHY RELEASE FORM

**Title of Project:** _____

I, as a person with the legal right to give this consent, give specific permission to [name of organization] to use my image/photograph of me for the purpose of [insert project evaluation information]

This photograph will be used in the evaluation report and may be used in any promotional materials that may be developed by [name of organization] in relation to the [title of project] report.

I understand that this consent to use my image may result in further publication in newspapers, magazines or the internet by other persons, organizations or media beyond the control of [name of organization]. I will not hold [name of organization] responsible for use of my image by others. I waive the right to inspect or approve the photograph before it is used or made public.

**I have carefully read this document and consent is freely given.**

**Agreed to and accepted by:**

**Person being photographed:**

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

**[name of organization]  representative:**

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

## APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry as a technique is based on the belief that focusing on what works gets you better results than analyzing what went wrong.

**Using Appreciative Inquiry in an evaluation involves asking questions such as:**

✦ Describe a time when your program worked really well.

✦ What was it about that time that worked so well?

✦ What were the core components that made it work so well?

✦ What three things from that time would you like to see in the program today and in the future?

Appreciative Inquiry can also be used within storytelling as part of an evaluation by asking youth participants to answer the above questions from a personal perspective. For example, participants could be asked to describe a time when they got the most out of the program.

"*Appreciative Inquiry can get you much better results than seeking out and solving problems…Don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating mindless happy talk. … Appreciative Inquiry is a complex science designed to make things better. We can't ignore problems—we just need to approach them from the other side.*"

Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000



## RESOURCES

An Overview of Appreciative Inquiry in Evaluation

Anne T. Coghlan, Hallie Preskill, Tessie Tzavaras Catsambas http://www.rismes.it/pdf/Preskill.pdf

## SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT analysis can be a useful tool to engage youth in the evaluation process whether as participants or as partners and leaders (see Engaging youth in evaluation on page 74. It is often best done in a group setting.

Participants can talk about what is going well ('Strengths') and less well ('Weaknesses') with the program or project. They can also discuss what opportunities there are for growth and ways these might be achieved ('Opportunities'), as well as what elements there are within and outside the program that might see youth disengage or threaten the program's future ('Threats').

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|
|  |  |

| Opportunities | Threats |
|---|---|
|  |  |

## MYSTERY SHOPPER

When engaging youth in an evaluation, the Mystery Shopper can be an effective tool for gauging how youth friendly a service, program or project is and how easy it is for young people to access.

Before youth are asked to rate the service, train them to be clear what they are being asked to look for, and how they should record it.

After youth have been on their mystery shopping expedition, they can be brought back together to discuss common and unique experiences and how to capture their feedback in an evaluation report.

## EXAMPLE: MYSTERY SHOPPER

You have created an on-line resource to provide young people with easy access to information about what community events and youth programs are going to be happening over the summer.

Mystery shoppers would be asked to find the site, and would answer questions about the information they find there, as well as give their input about how easy the site was to navigate, how quickly they found the information, etc.
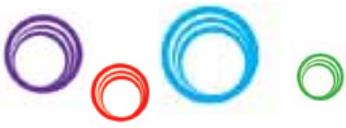
# Creating a Feedback Form

A feedback form given to participants at the end of a workshop or program can give valuable information about what worked well and less well, what youth enjoyed the most and what they liked least.

When creating a feedback form, it is important to link it to the aims of the workshop or event, in order to see if the desired outcomes have been achieved. For example:

**Please mark how much you agree with this statement:**

*After reading this toolkit, my knowledge of how to develop an evaluation plan has increased.*

❍ Not at all   ❍ Somewhat   ❍ A lot

The toolkit is a resource I can use when I am planning my program evaluation:

❍ True   ❍ False

There is no ideal number of questions but usually the fewer questions the better. For example, participants are generally more likely to fill in a one page form with tick boxes than they are a four page form with all open-ended questions.

When creating the form, it can be helpful to make a list of everything you would like to learn, prioritizing the topics by the most pressing to the least. It can be helpful to ask someone not connected with creating the form to have a look to see if it makes sense to them and if it is capturing what you hope to capture.

You might be interested in additional information beyond whether or not your program has met its aims, as this can help you when planning future events.

It can be useful to include scales in a feedback form to get people to rank their experience. This can be particularly helpful if you want to report how many participants scored something a certain way.

There is more information about creating scales on page 20.

| The food was: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ○ Excellent | ○ Good | ○ Fair | ○ Poor |

| Please mark how much you agree with each item. The workshop venue was… | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Comfortable | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. Well located | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Using symbols can make a form more inviting. For example, a "Thumbs up" or "Thumbs down" can be helpful for getting information about what people liked most and least.

Images of a brain, feet and heart can be put alongside questions such as "What I learned today" (brain), "What I will do with what I learned "(feet), and "what I felt about today" (heart).

You may also want to collect qualitative information in the form of open-ended questions. This can be particularly useful if you wish to include quotes from participants.

> ✦ What will you do with what you learned today?
> ✦ What did you like best?
> ✦ What did you like least?
> ✦ What would you change about the workshop?

There are creative ways to create individual and group feedback forms which do not require participants to be able to read or write.

For example, using a target you can ask participants how close the workshop was to reaching its aims. The closer to the bull's eye they mark, the more positive the evaluation. If the workshop missed the mark, participants would mark outside the target.
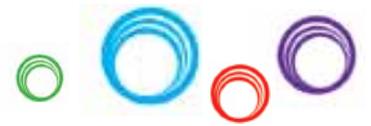
You can also divide the target into multiple sections, so that participants can put their arrows closer or further away from the bull's eye to rate the quality of the facilitators, what they felt about the venue, how they liked the activities, if their knowledge increased, etc.

# Ethical considerations

Regardless of how you choose to gather evaluation information, it is important to keep in mind the protection of participants. Protecting participants is key throughout the evaluation process.

It is important that an evaluation addresses the **voluntary** nature of participating. This means explaining to potential participants that they can choose to not take part, and this choice will not affect the support or services they receive. Also, participants can skip questions they do not feel comfortable answering, and they can stop taking part at any time.

If taking part in evaluation activities is a requirement of the program, then explain this to potential participants before they choose to take part in the program.

**Anonymity** refers to collecting and reporting information in such a way that does not allow for individual participants to be identified. For example, participants should not write their name on the survey, and surveys and documents with identifying information (e.g., consent forms) should not be stored in the same filing cabinet.

Also, if a participant talks about places, people or things that could identify them or someone else, these details should not be included in the report.

**Confidentiality** is also key. The person collecting the information should not share a participant's sensitive or personal information with others, unless required to do so by law (See Duty to report on page 62.

It is also important to consider how any completed surveys will be collected to ensure confidentiality. For example, if a staff member from the evaluated program collects the evaluation surveys, participants should be able to seal their completed surveys in an envelope so that their answers stay confidential and anonymous.

Potential participants should also be told what the **purpose** of the evaluation is. In addition, they should be informed about how much of a **time commitment** their involvement would entail, and what they would be asked to do. Also, any **possible risks and benefits** of taking part should be discussed. Finally, potential participants should be told about any **honorarium** for taking part, and details about the honorarium.

These details make up "informed consent," meaning that potential participants should be given enough information to make an informed decision about taking part.

# Duty to report

Whatever methodologies you choose for your evaluation, there is always a chance that a youth participant will reveal that they or someone they know have been abused or are at risk of being abused, or are at serious risk of harming themselves or others.

It is important to let youth know <u>before</u> you ask them any evaluation questions that if they tell you that they or someone they know (under age 19) have been abused or are at risk of being abused, or that they are thinking of seriously harming themselves or others, that you have to report this information in order to keep them safe. Explain to them what will happen and what supports will be available to them through the process.

If you have concerns about the safety of a child or youth, please contact Family and Children's Services at 867-667-3002 (collect calls accepted), or toll-free at 1-800-661-0408 ext. 3002. You can also call your regional social worker or the RCMP to report your concerns if they affect a child or youth under the age of 19.

**The duty to report applies to all Yukoners.**

✦ If you have reason to believe that a child has been or is likely to be abused or neglected, then the responsibility for making a report to a child protection social worker legally rests with you.

✦ It doesn't matter if you believe someone else is reporting the situation – you still have to report.

✦ It doesn't matter if you're aware that a child protection social worker is already involved with the child – you still have to report the matter. All new incidents must be reported as well.

✦ The legal duty to report overrides any duty of confidentiality, except a solicitor-client relationship.

✦ Time is of the essence in ensuring the safety and well-being of children. Report immediately.

✦ Do not contact the alleged perpetrator. This is the responsibility of the police or the child protection social worker. If an employer needs to contact the alleged perpetrator in order to protect children under their authority, this should be coordinated with the police and child protection social worker.

# Making sense of the information

Once the evaluation information is gathered, it is time to make sense of it. Making sense of the information involves analyzing and interpreting it.

## TIPS FOR QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

✦ Analyses do not need to be complex to be useful.

✦ It is important to think about your analyses from the start of the evaluation, rather than only after the data have been collected. This way, you will know what type of data to collect in order to analyze it the way you would like, and you will know what to do with the data once you have it.

✦ Quantitative data analysis is not necessarily more accurate than qualitative analysis. If the quality of the analysis is poor, then it will not be accurate regardless of which data collection method you use.

✦ You do not necessarily need a statistics background to do basic quantitative analyses. However, it is a good idea to have two people do the calculations, or at least check them, to make sure they have been done right.

✦ Data don't have their own meaning but need to be interpreted. Interpretations of quantitative results, just like those of qualitative results, can be biased and inaccurate.

✦ A related point is that stats are not facts. Statistics are not as objective as we may think. The same data might be interpreted in different ways. Therefore, it is good to involve other people in interpreting the findings and to hear how different people might interpret the same information.

✦ Stating limitations of the analyses or methodology strengthens the evaluation. All evaluations have weaknesses, and an evaluation will come across as more credible if you directly identify the limitations.

# Quantitative data

STEPS FOR QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

**1** **Organize the data**

- ✓ Check for completeness and accuracy

- ✓ Make decisions about what to do if you have collected incomplete surveys or information you think is invalid or inaccurate.

- ✓ Keep a record of your decisions.

- ✓ Assign a unique identifier to each form or survey

- ✓ Enter the data in a database (e.g., Excel, SPSS) without identifying information.

**2** **Do the analysis (calculations)**

- ✓ Ask someone else to check your analyses or calculations to make sure there are no mistakes.

- ✓ If your sample size is very small, you may need to report numbers in a descriptive way, rather than quantitatively, to ensure that individual participants cannot be identified. For example, you could state "Virtually none of the participants had been suspended from school in the past year." This way, people would not know the exact number who did get suspended, and would be less likely to guess who those individuals were.

- ✓ Refer back to the evaluation plan and logic model to make sure you stay on track.

**3**     **Interpret the information**

    ✓ Ask yourself what the results really mean. What are the implications of the findings?

    ✓ What did you learn about...
- The Program?
- The Participants?
- The Evaluation methodology?

    ✓ Were there any findings that surprised you?

    ✓ Are there areas where further study is needed?

**4**     **Explain limitations**

    ✓ Clarify limitations of the evaluation methods and analyses.

    ✓ Understand the claims we cannot make.

For example, we cannot generally claim that a program caused certain outcomes, as there may be other factors involved. However, if participants attributed improvements in their lives to their involvement in the program, then we could state just that. For example, "Participants reported improvements in their mental health which they credited to their participation in the program."

| | |
|---|---|
| **Frequency** | How many people reported each answer |
| **Percentage** | Proportion of people who answered in a certain way |
| **Mean** | Average number or average score |
| **Range** | Range in answers or scores |
| **Cross tab** | Compare one group to another |
| **Change score** | Changes from pre to post (before vs. after the program) |

See analyzing Quantitative Data: http://learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/G3658-6.pdf

# CALCULATION TIPS

**Make sure you use the correct total when calculating percentages.**

People may skip questions. Your total should include only those who answered the question you are analyzing. In other words, the total number of respondents may vary with each question in the survey.

---

## EXAMPLE 1: CALCULATIONS

100 evaluation forms were returned.

80 people reported satisfaction with the workshop.

However, 10 people did not answer that question.

**What percentage were satisfied with the workshop?**

A.      80/100 = 80%

B.      80/90 = 89%

C.      70/100 = 70%

D.      None of the above

Answer: B (89%). In this example, we need to subtract the 10 people who did not answer the question from the total of 100. So the total for this question becomes 90, and 80/90 = 89%.

---

**Reporting only averages might mask important details.**

Averages are affected by extreme scores (either very low or very high scores). Therefore, it may be misleading to report averages without other information.

---

## EXAMPLE 2: CALCULATIONS

Six people complete a test and their scores are: 80%, 82%, 84%, 84%, 84%, and 0%.

The average of these scores is 69%.

If only the average is reported, without other information, it might seem as though most of the people scored around 69%.

It can be useful to also report the range of scores (0% to 84%) and the mode – or the most common score—which is 84% in this example.
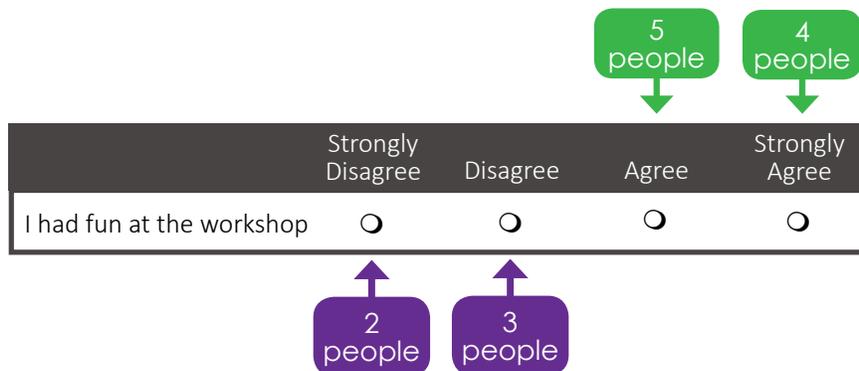
---

**Collapsing categories can be useful, particularly when working with small samples.**

For example, if very few people answer a survey question, then you may want to combine some of the categories. Collapsing categories in this way will reduce the risk of individual participants being personally identified.

However, it is important to keep in mind that collapsing or combining categories may conceal rich information. It often becomes a case-by-case judgment call on whether to collapse categories.

## EXAMPLE: COLLAPSING CATEGORIES

If very few people answer a survey question which has the response options of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree, then you may want to collapse these four categories into two categories. You can combine the categories of Strongly Agree and Agree (add those percentages together) and also combine the categories of Strongly Disagree and Disagree.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I had fun at the workshop | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

5 people → Agree
4 people → Strongly Agree
2 people → Strongly Disagree
3 people → Disagree

## RESOURCES

Taylor-Powell, E. Analyzing Quantitative Data: Program development and evaluation. Retrieved from http://learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/G3658-6.pdf

Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development. Evaluating 4-H youth development programs. How do I understand the data? Retrieved from: http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/evaluation/data.cfm

# Qualitative data

## STEPS FOR QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The steps for analyzing and interpreting qualitative information are similar to those for quantitative data.

**1** **Organize the data**

✓ Organize the data so that you can work with it in a methodical way.

- For example, type out your hand-written notes or transcribe recorded interviews.

✓ Become familiarized with your data, such as by reading and re-reading your notes or listening to your recorded interviews (if you recorded them).

**2** **Do the analysis**

- ✓ Review the purpose of the evaluation and what you wanted to find out.
- ✓ Group the information into categories.
- ✓ Pull out common themes and patterns within and between categories.
- ✓ Keep notes about the categories you create and about your decision-making process.
- ✓ Ideally, more than one person should be involved in analyzing the information.

**3** **Interpret the information**

- ✓ Step back and think about what the findings mean.
- ✓ What did you learn about the program, the participants, and the evaluation methodology?
- ✓ Avoid over-generalizing — do not use individual comments to make conclusions about the whole group.
- ✓ Address alternative explanations. What else might explain the results?

**4** **Explain limitations**

- ✓ Again, explaining any limitations or problems you had when collected or analyzing the information can help people understand how you arrived at your conclusions.

**RESOURCES**

Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development. Evaluating 4-H youth development programs. How do I understand the data? Retrieved from: http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/evaluation/data.cfm
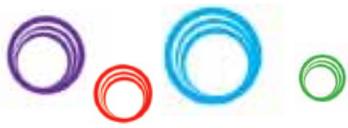
# Using the results

## Writing the evaluation report

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When it comes to writing the evaluation report, the style will depend on who will be reading it and how it will be used. Also, different funders might have different requirements, so it is a good idea to communicate with your funders about their expectations.

---

**One way of organizing your report:**

✦ Overview

- Brief project description and project goals
- Goal of the evaluation
- Logic model

✦ Evaluation methodology

- Participants
- Data sources (e.g., surveys, focus groups)
- Procedure (e.g., Who collected the information? Where was it collected?)
- Limitations

✦ Findings

- Present the results as objectively as possible
- Can integrate both qualitative and quantitative information

✦ Summary and Conclusions

- Summarize key findings
- Discuss the meaning of the results and possible alternative interpretations
- Note any lessons learned about the program, participants, and evaluation methodology
- Note any plans for future study or evaluation
- You can include recommendations to improve the programs

# Sharing the Results

The final step is using the evaluation results. This stage first involves reflecting with your project team about what worked and what the key factors were for success. Also think about what did not work and what should be changed. You can identify any actions to be taken, based on the evaluation findings and recommendations.

You can write up an action plan that outlines what will be done, who will do it, and when these activities will be carried out.

Finally, what was learned through the evaluation should be shared beyond the project team, with the rest of your organization.

It is also important to share the findings with the people who participated in the evaluation. This way, their participation in the evaluation can become more personally meaningful. Further, they can give feedback on the findings and share whether the overall results resonate with their experiences.

There can also be great value in sharing the evaluation results outside the organization. Different formats might be needed for different audiences. For example, there could be a section in your Annual Report that summarizes the findings; you could include key quotations on your website and brochures; or the findings could be presented at conferences or workshops.

**RESOURCES**

Church, C., & Rogers, M. (2006). Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict Transformation Programs. Chapter 10. Search for Common Ground: Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilt/ilt_manualpage.html
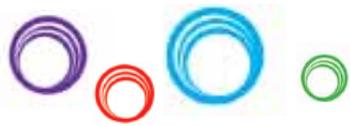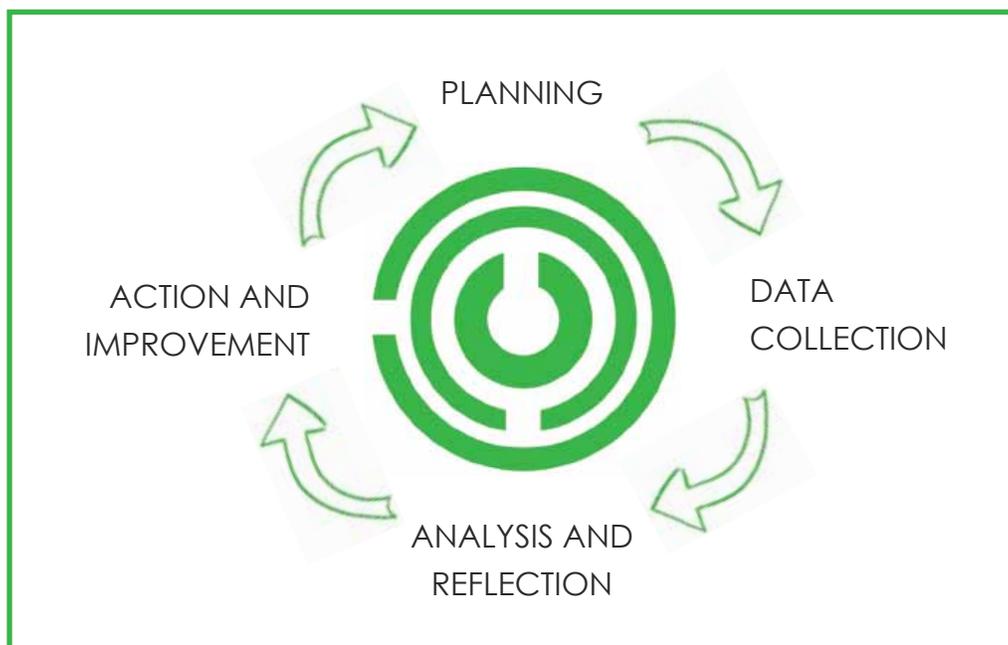
# Creating a culture of evaluation

Program evaluation can be seen as an ongoing learning cycle. Evaluation findings can lead to taking action and improving a program. Then we can plan the next evaluation cycle.

Ideally an evaluation should be planned when the program is being planned. This way, evaluation can become incorporated into the program as an ongoing activity.

Although there might be barriers to creating a culture of evaluation in your organization (see Common evaluation concerns on page 5), these barriers can be overcome.



Source: The Innovation Network. Logic Model Workbook.

**Some suggestions for fostering a culture of evaluation:**

✦ Acknowledge the informal evaluation that staff members already do.

✦ Decide which outcomes are the most important to evaluate, and focus on those. This focus will help to keep the evaluation manageable.

✦ Use evaluation methods that are a good fit for both the people carrying out the evaluation and those participating in it.

✦ Ensure that the evaluation is useful and meaningful not only to funders but also to staff, participants, and your agency.

✦ Regularly share evaluation results with staff and participants.

✦ Involve staff and participants in the evaluation process as much as possible.

**RESOURCES**

*Community Solutions Planning and Evaluation (2011). Building a culture of evaluation: 30 ideas to apply to your organization. Retrieved from http://communitysolutions.ca/web/resources-public/*

*Innovation Network. Logic model workbook. Retrieved from: http://www.innonet.org/client_docs/File/logic_model_workbook.pdf*
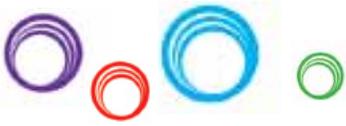
# Engaging youth in evaluation

It is important to engage youth in any evaluation of services or programs that they use or are involved with. By doing so, young people feel a sense of ownership and can offer their perspective on what should be included in the evaluation. However, young people will disengage if they put time and effort into an evaluation and then do not see change happening as a result of their input.

## DIFFERENT ROLES YOUTH CAN TAKE IN EVALUATION

### Youth as participants

Young people can be participants in an evaluation, such as by completing a feedback form or taking part in a focus group. This is the most common way they are involved and tends to happen after adults have developed the evaluation methodology and questions.

When young people see changes happening as a result of the feedback they provide, they can feel empowered and engaged in the evaluation process.

### Youth as consultants

Young people can also act as consultants, such as by providing feedback on surveys that adults have developed or by helping adults to find youth who can be participants in an evaluation.

When youth play the role of consultant on an evaluation, adults may or may not choose to use the information they get from the young people in the decisions they make.

### Youth as partners

When youth act as partners on an evaluation, it is usually an evaluation that has been initiated by adults. Youth are recruited and trained and are then supported by adults to take on tasks such as devising evaluation questions, collecting information, guiding report preparation, and disseminating the findings.

Youth and adults may be equal or unequal in their levels of participation. However, the more the power is shared in an equal way, the better the quality of the partnership.

### Youth as leaders

When youth take the lead on an evaluation they decide on the methodology and content of the evaluation. They also take responsibility for data collection, analysis, and report writing.

Youth-led evaluations generally have adults in supportive roles who can be available to mentor youth through the evaluation process.

# MATRIX OF PARTICIPATION

The Matrix of Participation shows the different ways that youth might be engaged in evaluation and can be a useful tool for thinking about the roles that youth currently have or could have in an evaluation. For example, a small group of youth who attend a drop in centre may act as leaders or partners on developing an evaluation framework but all youth who attend the centre may be invited to be participants in the evaluation.

| | As Participants | As Consultants | As Partners | As Leaders |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Goal of youth involvement | Develop knowledge about youth | Create youth friendlier process | Develop youth skills and collaborative working relationships | Empower young people and create community change |
| Developing evaluation questions | Adults define questions | Adults define questions | Adults and youth define questions | Youth define questions with or without adult input |
| Creating the instrument | Adults create instrument | Adults ask young people for feedback on their instruments | Adults and youth jointly create instruments | Young people create instruments with or without adult input |
| Collecting information | Adults collect information | Adults collect information | Youth and adults agree on best method of data collection. Either or both collect information | Youth collect information, adults may assist |
| Analyzing information | Adults analyze information | Adults analyze information | Youth and adults agree who will analyse information and assign roles | Youth take lead in analysis, adults may assist |
| Disseminating findings | Adult disseminates findings (often to professional audiences only) | Adults disseminate findings (with or without youth input) | Adults and youth agree on dissemination strategy, who will present the findings, and how it will be presented | Youth take lead in dissemination, adults may assist. Findings may mobilize other youth or create community change |

Adapted from Chekoway, B and Richards-Schuster, K. (2003). *Youth Participation in Community Evaluation Research*. American Journal of Evaluation.

It may be helpful to complete the worksheet Engaging Youth in Evaluation to work out if you can achieve your ideal when it comes to engaging young people. For example, if you are the only youth worker in town, do you have the resources to put into supporting youth through the most time consuming roles? If not, what can you do instead to engage young people?

For each possible role that a young person may have in an evaluation (i.e., participant, consultant, partner, or leader), you can write down what their specific jobs would be, as well as the benefits and challenges of engaging youth in this way, and ways to overcome these challenges.

### As you fill in the worksheet, you might want to consider the following:

✦ Are you clear about what you want to know through your evaluation, and clear about how you will use the findings?

✦ What level of involvement do you want from young people? For example, do you want them to provide feedback or do you want them to be designing and delivering tools to collect feedback?

✦ Do you have the resources to support the level of involvement you would like from young people?

✦ If youth are participating as leaders or partners how will you make sure they are properly supported?

✦ If you are going to engage youth in the evaluation, are you prepared to act on the information they give you?

✦ Are you prepared to feedback to the youth about the actions you take in response to the evaluation findings?

## WORKSHEET:
## ENGAGING YOUTH IN EVALUATION

### As participants

**Role:**

**Benefits:**

**Challenges:**

**Overcoming Challenges:**

### As consultants

**Role:**

**Benefits:**

**Challenges:**

**Overcoming Challenges:**

### As partners

**Role:**

**Benefits:**

**Challenges:**

**Overcoming Challenges:**

### As leaders

**Role:**

**Benefits:**

**Challenges:**

**Overcoming Challenges:**

# WORKSHEET:
# ROLES OF YOUTH IN EVALUATION METHODOLOGIES

The worksheet can also be helpful in deciding how young people can be involved. Think about the specific method or methods you plan on using to collect your data, and how youth can be involved as participants, consultants, partners, and/or leaders.

| | Participants | Consultants | Partners | Leaders |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Surveys | | | | |
| Interviews | | | | |
| Focus groups | | | | |
| Storytelling | | | | |
| Photovoice | | | | |

Asking Questions that Matter

**If you have any questions or comments about this toolkit or about evaluation in general, please contact evaluations@mcs.bc.ca.**

McCreary
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