



Chapter 12. Evaluation

Overview

This chapter discusses the design, development, and use of an evaluation component for your Weed and Seed strategy. It reviews how a well-designed evaluation provides a thorough description of the structure and operation of Weed and Seed activities and whether those activities were successful or need adjustment.

This chapter also examines the elements necessary to conduct an effective evaluation, looking not only at the desired outcomes but also at the resources used and the effectiveness of the program design.

Finally, this chapter focuses on local evaluations, which typically are less formal and rigid in approach than evaluations performed at the national level. You may, however, refer to the *National Process Evaluation of Weed and Seed* (1995) and the *National Evaluation of Weed and Seed* (1999).

Vision

Evaluation is the best way for the Steering Committee to determine whether the selected activities and programs are effective.

The evaluation process should be viewed as a tool to help you refine and improve activities and document successes rather than as a way to expose program failures. It can also help the Steering Committee improve its management and oversight of Weed and Seed and affect future decisions.

Evaluation reports can influence decisions about funding allocations and program selection.

These policy decisions are central to whether the long-term goals of reducing crime and promoting a safe and secure environment are achieved.

Implementation Process

Step 1: Identify a Coordinator and the Other Members of the Evaluation Team

An evaluation coordinator should be selected during the organizational phase of Weed and Seed. To ensure the objectivity and credibility of the evaluation, the coordinator ideally should be selected from an organization not participating directly in Weed and Seed.

Many organizations can help with the evaluation process at little or no cost. Organizations that may be able to assist include the following:

- Colleges and universities have students who can work on an evaluation project. The department to approach varies from one institution to another; among the possibilities are political science, sociology, business, and urban affairs.
- The planning section of your local government can help you develop an evaluation component. The city's economic development agency may also be able to assist you.
- Some nonprofit organizations, such as the local Chamber of Commerce, Urban League, and United Way, can help nonprofit groups such as Weed and Seed develop an evaluation process.

You will probably be able to identify other potential sources of assistance. Each community has its agencies that can perform these tasks.

Step 2: Agree on the Definitions of Terms Used in the Evaluation

Although these terms may be unfamiliar to you, they simply refer to program components you use. By using and agreeing on these definitions, you can ensure a better collaborative effort and avoid misunderstandings.

- **Input:** Resources dedicated to the program (e.g., human resources, funds, physical space).
- **Activity:** The types of services the program provides to achieve its goals (e.g., what the program does with its resources [inputs] and how it changes these resources into products).
- **Output:** The products of the program (e.g., classes offered, training provided, counseling).
- **Outcome:** The benefits for the targeted population during and after participation in the program (e.g., changed attitudes, behavior modification).

Step 3: Review the Priorities To Be Measured

A close relationship between site development and evaluation should exist. Clearly defined goals are the key to both a successful site operation and an informative and useful evaluation. Each strategy component should have measurable goals from which the evaluation framework is constructed.

When you developed operational plans, you identified desired outcomes tied to your goals. You also developed the following supporting pieces:

- The tasks to be performed in moving toward the goal.
- The organization or individual responsible for the tasks.
- The timeframe for accomplishing these tasks.

The following is an example illustrating how your program design and evaluation plan should relate to each other.

Identify steps necessary to operate and evaluate your program:

Objective:	Decrease the dropout rate.
Goal:	Decrease dropout rate by a certain percentage.
Activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enroll targeted number of students. ● Track attendance in classes. ● Compile class completion rate. ● Measure the reduction rate of school dropouts.

These measures are quantifiable. The number of students involved can be measured against the established goals. These are the program outputs.

Important as they are, the quantitative measures should not be used in isolation. When assessing program performance, schedule checkpoints at regular intervals to ensure that you are on course to achieve your objectives. If you are achieving all measures, there is no need to make changes. If some measures, however, are falling short of your expectations, consider some of the following questions to determine if you should make midcourse corrections:

- Were the numbers/goals realistic?
- Was outreach adequate?
- Were the schedule and program adequate to the task?
- Were interim adjustments made as needed?
- Were resources adequate for program needs?



- Was cooperation from other community resources sufficient for program needs?

Assess qualitative measures using evaluation process results. Talk with the students about their perception of the success of the program. What suggestions do they have to improve future programs?

Step 4: Collect and Analyze Information

Evaluation reports should not be confined to only numbers and percentages. The Steering Committee should have access to both quantitative and qualitative information to help assess progress. Numbers relating to crime statistics show a precise picture of the results of activities in the target neighborhood and can be used to allocate resources for law enforcement and community policing activities. Statistics can also reveal the number of people served by programs related to seeding activities; however, do not overlook the qualitative aspect of evaluation.

Do residents feel safer and more comfortable in their neighborhood? Does the neighborhood look better? Residents' perceptions are an important part of evaluating progress.

Analyzing evaluation reports should yield valuable information about what was successful and what needs to be adjusted. If the evaluation is properly designed, it will not be used to place blame. Success is always the desired outcome; however, much can be learned from mistakes. An important role of an evaluation process is

to show where improvements need to be made.

Some findings that may result from an evaluation

- There is insufficient funding to cover necessary program costs. If you want to continue a program, you may have to reduce the number of people served, limit the scope, or raise funds.
- There is not enough information about the causes of the targeted problem. With additional information from the evaluation, you can adjust your focus. For example:

A goal is to reduce drug sales around a school. Your program design provides classes about substance abuse. Drug sales, however, were not affected by the program because drugs are sold by people from outside the neighborhood, not students who attended your classes. The classes may be effective in teaching students about substance abuse; however, they missed their main target because of insufficient information about the problem.

- The organization or individual selected to operate the program does not have the skills or experience to succeed. With experience gained from operating the program, the coordinator may improve how the program is run. You may, however, need to make more extensive changes.
- The goal is reached and you will operate it for another year, or it is no longer considered a priority issue and your focus gets redirected.

Implementation Issues

Deciding What To Evaluate Will Be Your First Issue

Priorities are the most important aspect to evaluate. It will not be easy to get everyone to agree; however, use your strategy as your guide.



Methodology Can Sometimes Be an Issue

As discussed earlier, some people believe statistics are the most important measure of program success. Quantitative measures can be an accurate method, but do not ignore qualitative results. Both qualitative and quantitative measures are important.

Costs Are Often the First Issue Raised When the Evaluation Is Discussed

Find an organization or individual not involved in Weed and Seed to conduct the evaluation. If

it is not possible to hire an outside consultant, an internal evaluator can perform the task. If you must use someone who is part of Weed and Seed, it is important to document the findings carefully.

Signoff From the Steering Committee May Not Be Easy if Members Feel the Report Depicts the Site Unfavorably

This issue should be addressed before the evaluation starts to assure everyone that it will not be an indictment. You may need to convince the Steering Committee that the report is an important management tool.

Local site evaluations feed into the larger view of Weed and Seed and help to make the case for the positive aspects of the strategy nationwide. The local information is a vital part of the larger picture.

Exhibit 12-1. Program Outcome Measurement Model

Input	Activity	Output	Outcome
<i>Resources</i>	<i>Services</i>	<i>Products</i>	<i>Benefits</i>
Money	Training	Classes taught	Gained new knowledge
Staff	Education	Counseling sessions held	Increased skills
Volunteers	Counseling	Educational material designed	Changed attitudes or values
Equipment	Mentoring	Hours served	Modified behavior
Supplies		Participants served	Improved conditions for participants
Building/space for program use			
Donations			

Exhibit 12–2. Monthly Participant Attendance Form

Month of _____ 20 _____

Site: _____

Day	Number First Time	Total Number Signed In	Number Signed In For Each Activity																				
1																							
2																							
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Days Open																							
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