

1 Engage Stakeholders

The first step in program evaluation is to engage the stakeholders. Stakeholders are people or organizations who are invested in the program, are interested in the results of the evaluation, and have a stake in what will be done with the results of the evaluation. Their needs and interests should be represented throughout the program planning and evaluation process.

The stakeholders in tobacco-use prevention and control

There are three major groups of stakeholders integral to program evaluation:³

- Those served or affected by the program, such as patients or clients, advocacy groups, community members, and elected officials.
- Those involved in program operations, such as management, program staff, partners, the funding agency or agencies, and coalition members.
- Primary intended users of the evaluation findings—those in a position to make decisions about the program, such as partners, the funding agency, coalition members and the general public or taxpayers.

If you have been working in tobacco-use prevention and control for a while, you may feel that you already know your stakeholders. However, it is always a good idea to check your assumptions by asking a diverse group of people whom they see as important stakeholders. An inclusive and participatory approach to evaluation includes tapping the unique knowledge of lay people and nonprofessionals from the beginning. In addition, involving a diverse group of stakeholders helps to ground the evaluation in practical reality and better ensures that the information gained through the evaluation benefits all participants.¹⁹

Possible stakeholders in tobacco prevention and control programs

- Program managers and staff.
- Local, state, and regional coalitions interested in reducing tobacco use.
- Local grantees of tobacco-related funds.
- Local and national partners, such as the American Cancer Society, the Smokeless States Project, the American Lung Association, the American Heart Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Legacy Foundation, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
- Funding agencies, such as national and state governments.
- State or local health departments and health commissioners.
- State education agencies, schools, and educational groups.
- Universities and educational institutions.
- Local government, state legislators, and state governors.
- Privately owned businesses and business associations.
- Health care systems and the medical community.
- Religious organizations.
- Community organizations.
- Private citizens.
- Program critics.
- State agencies, such as the state department of education and Medicaid.
- Representatives of populations disproportionately affected by tobacco use.
- Law enforcement representatives.

Why stakeholders are important to an evaluation

Stakeholders are important to program evaluation for several reasons. Considering the perspectives and interests of your various stakeholders will increase the likelihood that your evaluation findings will be accepted and used. Tobacco prevention and control programs rely heavily on partnerships.

A participatory approach to evaluation...

- Reduces suspicion and fear.
- Increases awareness and commitment.
- Allows for differing perspectives.
- Integrates the knowledge and experiences of diverse stakeholders.
- Increases the likelihood that evaluation findings will be used.
- Acknowledges the unique situations of communities.

Understanding the value systems of your major partners helps maintain these relationships and ensures a useful evaluation. Involving diverse stakeholders will also deepen your understanding of the social and political contexts in which various components of the program operate.

Social and political contexts will likely have implications for the program and the evaluation. Stakeholders bring their own expertise to the table, and involving them in the evaluation process will give you access to a broad range of knowledge, from statistical methods to cultural understandings of tobacco use in a specific population. Stakeholders are much more likely to support the evaluation and act on the evaluation results and recommendations if they are involved in the evaluation process. The presence of stakeholders may also lend credibility to your evaluation. Without stakeholder support, your evaluation may be ignored, criticized, resisted, or even sabotaged.

The role of stakeholders in an evaluation

Stakeholders can be involved in the evaluation at various levels. For example, you may want to include coalition members in an evaluation team and engage them in question development, data collection, and analysis. Or, consider ways to assess your partners' needs and interests in the evaluation, and develop means of keeping them informed of the evaluation's progress and of integrating their ideas into evaluation activities. At a minimum, ensure that the larger network of stakeholders has the opportunity to provide input into designing evaluation questions and is kept informed of the progress of the evaluation. Again, stakeholders are more likely to support the evaluation and act on results and recommendations if they are involved in the evaluation process.

In addition, it can be beneficial to engage your program's critics in the evaluation. In some cases, these critics can help you identify issues around program strategies and evaluation information that could be attacked or discredited, thus helping you strengthen the evaluation process. This information might also help you and others understand the opposition's rationale and could help you engage potential agents of change within the opposition. However, use caution when interacting with the tobacco industry. It is important to understand the motives of the opposition before engaging them in any meaningful way.

Working with stakeholders

- Stakeholders should be consulted and, if appropriate, involved directly, throughout the evaluation process, within time and resource limitations.
- Stakeholders' interests, expectations, priorities, and commitment to involvement should be assessed at the outset of the evaluation.
- Communication between stakeholders should be honest and open.
- Evaluation should be sensitive to the social and cultural environment of the program and its stakeholders.

Engaging diverse stakeholders in the evaluation process is the first step toward a participatory approach to evaluation. A participatory evaluation combines systematic inquiry with the collaboration of diverse stakeholders to meet specific needs and to contend with broad issues of equity and justice.

The Study of Participatory Research in Health Promotion, commissioned by the Royal Society of Canada, attempted to clarify what is meant by a participatory process by providing a working definition and a set of guidelines for use by evaluators and by funding agencies when appraising projects purporting to be participatory.²² The guidelines emphasize how the normal ways of conducting health research in populations need to adapt to meet the educational, capacity building, and policy expectations of more participatory approaches. Some of the same challenges apply to program evaluation.

✓ Checklist for engaging stakeholders

- Identify stakeholders.
- Identify stakeholder role(s) in evaluation planning and implementation.
- Review the list of stakeholders to ensure all appropriate stakeholders are included.
- Represent individual stakeholders and stakeholder organizations.
- Understand and respect stakeholders' values.
- Create a plan for stakeholder involvement.
- Identify areas for stakeholder input.
- Bring stakeholders together as needed.
- Target key stakeholders for regular participation.
- Ask stakeholders to suggest evaluation questions.

Resources

1. CDC Evaluation Working Group
www.cdc.gov/eval
2. CDC Prevention Research Centers
www.cdc.gov/prc/index.htm
3. Health Promotion Evaluation: Recommendations to Policy-Makers: Report of the WHO European Working Group on Health Promotion Evaluation. Copenhagen, Denmark: World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe; 1998.
www.who.dk/document/e60706.pdf
4. Green LW, Lewis FM. Measurement and Evaluation in Health Education and Health Promotion. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company; 1986.
5. Study of Participatory Research in Health Promotion: Review and Recommendations for the Development of Participatory Research in Health Promotion in Canada. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Royal Society of Canada; 1995.
6. George MA, Daniel M, Green LW. Appraising and Funding Participatory Research in Health Promotion. *The International Quarterly of Community Health Education*, Volume: 18 Issue: 2
7. California Tobacco Control Update, August 2000
www.dhs.cahwnet.gov/tobacco/html/publications.htm
8. Delivering Results: Saving Lives and Saving Dollars Tobacco Prevention and Education in Oregon
www.ohd.hr.state.or.us/tobacco/arpt2000/welcome.htm

The resources listed here include links to some nongovernmental organizations' Web sites. These sites are provided solely as examples. Links do not constitute an endorsement of these organizations' materials or programs by CDC or the federal government. CDC is not responsible for the content of any individual organization's Web pages found at these links.

