



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

Interfaith dialogue is an increasingly popular response to religious conflict and religious nationalism. While practitioners employ a variety of approaches, the underlying purpose of all interfaith dialogue projects is to enhance religious tolerance and promote peaceful coexistence. Despite the increasing popularity of interfaith dialogue, rarely are these dialogue projects subjected to rigorous efforts to evaluate their impact and effectiveness. To help address this gap, the Religion and Peacemaking Initiative of the U.S. Institute of Peace commissioned a study that resulted in this publication. The project director and author of this report is Renee Garfinkel, a practicing clinical psychologist and Research Scientist at the Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management at George Washington University. She has considerable experience in the field of project evaluation including evaluating interfaith dialogue projects. She was assisted in this project by Kerry Zymelman.

**The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.**

## What Works? Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs

### Summary

- Religion has been, and will continue to be, a powerful contributing factor in violent conflict. It is therefore essential to include religion and religious actors in diplomatic efforts.
- Interfaith dialogue brings people of different religious faiths together for conversations. These conversations can take an array of forms and possess a variety of goals and formats. They can also take place at various social levels, and target different types of participants, including elites, mid-level professionals, and grassroots activists.
- Interfaith dialogue programs may resemble secular peacebuilding programs in some ways. In other ways, though, religious content and spiritual culture are infused throughout the programs, distinguishing them from their secular counterparts.
- Evaluation requires that a program develop a clear statement of its goals, methods, and outcomes. Making these explicit at the outset helps sharpen thinking by providing an explicit yardstick by which to measure a program's success.
- Over time, the knowledge accumulated through these types of evaluation will expand our understanding of the actual and potential roles of religious dialogue in international peacemaking.
- At the individual program level, evaluation is concerned with three components: context, the factors in the general environment that may influence program implementation and outcome; implementation, the core of the program's activities; and outcome, the effect of the program on the participants, the local community, and the broader community.
- Proposing a relationship between a particular intervention or program and a desired outcome assumes a theory of change. A logic model, which links outcomes (both short- and long-term) with program activities and processes, is one way to clarify the theoretical assumptions behind a particular program design so that it can be shared with all stakeholders as well as with the evaluator.
- Evaluation must be an integral part of program planning from the beginning and should be an ongoing process throughout the life of the project, providing feedback to program managers and staff that enable them to improve their ongoing work. Because change happens over time, it is important to evaluate the program beyond the completion of the project.
- Evaluation must include, but not be limited to, personal, face-to-face interviews with program participants. Other outcome measures might include the number and type of

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participants, program spin-offs, and post-program meetings, as well as the amount of media activity and ultimately, of course, a demonstrable reduction in violence.

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## Introduction: Why Evaluate Interfaith Dialogue Programs?

Whether in its own right or as a proxy for political battles, religion has long contributed to violent conflict around the world. But only recently has interfaith dialogue provided a way to serve peaceful goals within the context of religious faith. Interfaith dialogue can unlock the power of religious traditions and provide the inspiration, guidance, and validation necessary for populations to move toward non-violent means of conflict resolution. Such dialogues have become an increasingly important tool for those who seek to end violent conflict worldwide.

Through interfaith dialogue, each faith group can make its unique contribution to the common cause of creative co-existence. But this is far easier said than done, and to do it well, interfaith dialogue programs must be evaluated so that lessons, good and bad, can be learned for future applications.

A politician interviewed for this report explained, "There's no guarantee that including religion in diplomatic efforts will work. What is guaranteed is that without it, diplomatic efforts have no chance of working. Religion is here to stay; ignoring it won't make it disappear."

Formal intervention in areas of conflict by interfaith groups has taken place in contemporary times since 1965 at least, when the Appeal to Conscience Foundation was founded by Arthur Schneier and a group of high-level clergy representing Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths. (Formal interventions are those planned and designed as an intervention, in comparison to informal interventions that might occur, for example, when a friendship that has developed between people of different faiths turns out to be helpful in resolving conflict.) The primary approach of the Foundation is to reach out as a neutral third party to religious leaders in areas of conflict and thereby facilitate interfaith communication.

There are many other approaches to interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding, but so far there has been very little research on their effectiveness. This is unfortunate, because those who design and implement interfaith programs need feedback to determine how to maximize their efforts and resources.

Given the range of approaches and techniques currently practiced and the wide variety of geographic, political, and social contexts in which they take place, it is increasingly important to develop methodologies to evaluate what works.

## What Is Interfaith Dialogue?

At its most basic level, interfaith dialogue involves people of different religious faiths coming together to have a conversation. "Conversation" in this sense has an expansive definition, and is not limited to verbal exchange alone. In his seminal work, *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah placed conversation at the very heart of civilization, defining cultures as "dramatic conversations about things that matter to their participants."

The notion of interfaith dialogue encompasses many different types of conversations, settings, goals, and formats. But it is not an all-encompassing concept: interfaith dialogue is not intended to be a debate. It is aimed at mutual understanding, not competing; at mutual problem solving, not proselytizing. In his introduction to *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, David Smock lists a variety of ways interfaith dialogue has been organized and targeted:

- High-level religious leaders (elites) have convened to speak collectively as advocates for peace;

- Elite interfaith bodies have engaged in conflict mediation between combatants;
- Grassroots participants have come together across religious divisions to promote cross-community interaction and to develop participants into agents of reconciliation;
- Theological and scriptural similarities among hostile religious groups have been highlighted to mitigate the hostility engendered by theological differences;
- Dialogue during conflict has been organized as a step toward ending the conflict or, in the post-conflict period, as a step toward reconciliation;
- Conflict resolution training for an interreligious group has served as a vehicle for interfaith dialogue.

Some writers note, however, that even this expansive definition of “dialogue” or “conversation” is too narrow if confined to the merely verbal. They argue that demonstrable deeds of reconciliation are usually much more effective than engaging in conversation. But these deeds may also be classified under the rubric of interfaith dialogue, in the broadest of senses, because they share one underlying feature: reverence, the shared devotion to high ideals. Reverence enables participants from different faith traditions to jointly affirm transcendent ideals such as honor, justice, compassion, forgiveness, and freedom.

One way of categorizing programs is along the dimension of the participants’ occupations: *Elites* are people in top-level positions in politics, religion, academia, and other fields who have the potential to influence widely the group’s ideas, practices, and values. Mid-level people whose occupations are thought to have influence over smaller groups of people, in a more personal way. *Mid-level* programs might be aimed at teachers, for example, or local clergy. *Grassroots* participants or activists are individual citizens. Their experience is more intimate, having an impact on their families, friends, customers, and others with whom they have personal relationships.

***One way of categorizing programs is along the dimension of the participants’ occupations.***

### ***Case Studies: Brief examples of different types of interfaith dialogue programs.***

#### **A PROGRAM FOR ELITES: THE ALEXANDRIA AGREEMENT**

In January 2002, top religious leaders, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, the dean of the el-Azhar seminary in Cairo, and a chief rabbi of Israel, met in Alexandria, Egypt and laid the foundation for a new coalition of moderate religious leadership. (The Institute has been a major financial supporter of the Alexandria process.)

Peace, of course, has yet to come to the region, but the interfaith effort succeeded in developing high-level relationships that continue to yield positive results. In one case, for example, violence was averted because of a relationship that developed during the Alexandria process between a Hebron Muslim leader and the well-known Israeli Rabbi Michael Melchior.

Local anger, never far below the surface in Hebron, was aroused when Jewish schoolboys posted anti-Muslim drawings around a neighborhood. Local Imams organized in response to the provocation and were preparing inflammatory sermons for Friday services. However, because of a personal relationship developed through the Alexandria process, the Mufti of Hebron called Melchior to try and prevent the violence. Melchior saw an impending crisis, and took his concerns straight to the top of the political structure. In response, the Israeli Prime Minister publicly disavowed the schoolboys’ actions. But because he was secular and political, he was not trusted, and preparations in Hebron continued unabated. So Melchior contacted Israeli Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron who traveled to Hebron—an important gesture of honor—and met with the Mufti. Bakshi-Doron personally assured the Mufti that not only were the boys’ actions not in accordance with Judaism, but the disrespect they displayed constituted a particular category of sin, a shameful act (*chilul hashem*). This action and explanation satisfied the Mufti, and for that moment, at least, the anger abated and no violence ensued. Thus, even if interfaith dialogue does not lead directly to peace, it can often have positive effects.

## A MULTILEVEL PROGRAM—THE TOLERANCE PROJECT

The Tolerance Project is designed to identify and explore the resources for tolerance and religious pluralism intrinsic in the three Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, with a particular emphasis on the relevance of these resources to educational practice. Its programs aim to reach out equally to religious academicians, practitioners such as program managers and teachers, and local grassroots activists.

The project, which has received financial support from the Institute, is implemented in three sites: Berlin, Sarajevo, and Jerusalem, with adaptations to fit each area's specific context (a Christian Orthodox/Islamic emphasis in Sarajevo, for example). Each program involves teacher training and the distribution in religious schools of handbooks on interfaith tolerance.

In addition to applied educational approaches, the Tolerance Project has held academic conferences on the subject of religion and tolerance, and has published conference proceedings in several languages. The project also conducts an international summer school program, which brings together people from as many as 22 countries, ranging from organization professionals to college students.

There are more aspects to interfaith dialogue and understanding, however, than simple interfaith mingling. True tolerance is contingent not only upon gaining a more sophisticated view of other groups, but also of gaining a similarly complex view of one's own. Experts have come to appreciate how meaningful it can be to meet members of one's own group who hold different orientations, and have begun to incorporate such experiences into their tolerance-building programs.

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## MID-LEVEL PROGRAM FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS: RELIGIOUS VOICES OF RECONCILIATION

A program run by the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel has a built-in evaluation component. It brings together local religious leaders, all of whom head congregations. The first group of rabbis and Muslim leaders to participate in the program met for intensive dialogue led by a psychologist experienced in reconciliation work. Following the initial meetings, the group continued to convene each month to discuss personal, communal, and societal issues. The program evaluator met with the group and also met with group members individually in order to maximize the opportunities to share information. The evaluator then brought the results back to the group for them to use in meeting their goals.

Since dialogue alone is not enough, the group also takes action together in their communities, for example by lecturing at one another's schools. In the process relationships are built; when the brother of one Imam passed away, all the rabbis who were in town went to visit the mourning family.

Ongoing evaluation will reveal to what extent this program achieves its stated goals, and what else may have been achieved that was not anticipated. Evaluation will examine the impact on program participants themselves and, beyond them, on their communities.

This program was built on the kind of sensitivity that true coexistence requires—which involves, in addition to appreciating the particular faith groups, understanding the complex relationship between secular modernity and religious tradition. To illustrate, all of the leaders in the group are male, and all belong to respected, mainstream Orthodox congregations. For this project to have credibility in the Middle East, it had to forgo the liberal values of inclusion and diversity and not invite women or less mainstream sects.

## GRASSROOTS PROGRAM

Pastor James Movel Wuye and Imam Muhammed Nurayn Ashafa direct a multilevel program in conflict management and peacebuilding in Nigeria, which has received financial support from the Institute. They are Joint National Coordinators of the Muslim/Christian Youth Dialogue Forum. Both had once participated as "youth leaders" in the violent clashes between their communities, and both had been wounded as a result. Because of

this involvement, however, their program had far more credibility in their communities than it might otherwise have had. They continue to be respected religious figures who now lead youth in a peaceful direction.

Their most pressing concern is with school dropouts and drug addicts, who can be easily turned to violence. Working at this grassroots level involves giving young people a secure place to learn about other groups, teaching them ways in which their own religious tradition supports peaceful coexistence, training them in conflict resolution skills, and addressing their personal, practical life issues. The program will give these at-risk youth the basic skills they need to have a better life. Leaders of other grassroots interfaith dialogue programs made this point as well: a program that provides something people want—for example, to learn a practical skill or trade—becomes more attractive and, in the process, more effective.

## GRAND GESTURE

Grand gestures are, by their nature, singular. Their impact lies in the drama they create. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's dramatic trip to Israel was a paradigmatic example of a grand gesture, as his fame and power commanded media attention worldwide and illuminated Egyptian and Israeli efforts at reconciliation.

In Macedonia in 2002, religion academicians Paul Mojzes and Leonard Swidler organized a program, co-sponsored by the Institute, which included many of the same elements of a grand gesture. They organized a multi-day event around interfaith scholarship, which included 40 respected foreign scholars who helped draw local attendees. But the power and visibility of the meeting was due to the grand gestures of well-known, powerful people. The President himself attended the opening and closing sessions.

The attending media were rewarded when the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church arrived wearing all his ceremonial robes, with his Muslim counterpart dressed dramatically as well, in ceremonial headdress and robe.

The interfaith gathering itself did not resolve the conflict, but it was an important step toward changing attitudes about the issues and may have helped lay the groundwork for cooperatively building peace in the future.

## The Specific Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue Programs

The foundation of interfaith dialogue is the recognition that in order to achieve sustainable change in the ideas and actions of a religiously identified community, religious actors and institutions must genuinely support that change.

Mutual tolerance is essential for conflict prevention and resolution, and interfaith programs are designed to increase tolerance between participants through encounters with one another in an atmosphere of relative security and mutual respect. These programs foster empathy, and help participants form real relationships and develop a more complex and sophisticated understanding of each other.

Although some peacebuilding projects emerging from faith-based organizations closely resemble secular peacebuilding efforts, in most cases the religious orientations of the organizations and individuals involved shape the peacebuilding they undertake. For example, religious mediators often make very explicit use of religious language and texts, such as prayer, when addressing conflict. This spiritual element encourages looking beyond one's personal interests toward a greater good.

Most religions are committed to working for justice and peace, and have long-standing and well-established structures or processes for doing so. They may also have religion-specific approaches to conflict resolution, such as guidelines for resolving conflict or rituals for reconciling relationships that have potential application across religious boundaries. Interfaith programs between conflicted groups can mobilize these and other religious elements in the service of increasing mutual tolerance—a process that begins

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***Evaluation is, in the most practical sense, a tool for learning to work better.***

with the ability to interact without fear or aggression, and progresses, through empathy and understanding, to mutual respect.

## **What Is Evaluation?**

Since evaluation requires a clear statement of goals, methods, and outcomes, it is, in the most practical sense, a tool for learning to work better.

Program evaluation is the mechanism by which all stakeholders in the program come to understand what does and does not work—and why.

In this case, stakeholders represent a wide range of people, including:

- Program staff and managers;
- Religious communities interested in peace;
- Granting agencies;
- Government officials;
- Academicians who develop theory and technique;
- The general public.

Even though there are many stakeholders, evaluation is primarily concerned with providing useful, meaningful feedback to the program managers themselves. Evaluation drives program development and institutional learning by providing the means to make mid-course corrections and build upon success. Useful evaluation facilitates the ongoing refinement of a program's goals and methods, and helps adjust its methods to suit those refinements. Therefore, evaluation must be an integral part of a program from inception, with program management actively involved in identifying what information it needs to make good decisions and, later on, on what it needs to interpret and apply the evaluative data. Over time, the understanding accumulated through evaluations like these will expand knowledge of the actual and potential roles of religious organizations in international peacemaking.

Broadly speaking, at the program or project level, evaluation of interfaith peacebuilding is concerned with three components: context, implementation, and outcome.

*Context.* Interfaith dialogue programs take place in conflict areas, where politics and community dynamics play crucial roles in every aspect of the program, from pivotal issues (such as determining the social consequences for individuals who participate in the program) to small yet important details (for example, how do we ensure food delivery?). Context evaluation looks at what factors in the community help or hinder project goals.

*Implementation.* Evaluation examines what happens in a program, and why. In other words, it addresses the heart of the program by focusing on the program's core activities—those undertaken to achieve its intended goals and outcomes. The challenge of implementation evaluation is to identify the critical components or activities of a program, both explicit and implicit, and explore their relationships as they are tied to the project's outcomes. This level of evaluation seeks to understand which aspects of the program facilitate the desired outcomes and which ones impede them.

*Outcome.* Evaluation begins by asking what the program is trying to accomplish: What impact is the project having on its participants, staff, other organizations, and the community? Since projects often produce unanticipated outcomes, and since the goals of interfaith dialogue are particularly hard to measure (e.g., conflict prevention) in a complex environment, outcomes need to be evaluated at multiple levels of the project and at multiple points in time. The challenge is to focus not only on expected outcomes, but also on unanticipated ones.

Multiple levels of project outcomes might include:

- Participant-focused outcomes;
- Program and system-level outcomes;

- Broader community outcomes.

The participant-focused outcome asks what difference this program made in its participants' lives. Most often, program and system-level outcomes are what evaluators have in mind when thinking of the "success" of any program. Broader community outcomes are both interim and long-term, and might include such "spin-off" effects as increased cooperation between faith groups on non-political tasks.

***Evaluating social change implies the existence of a theory of change***

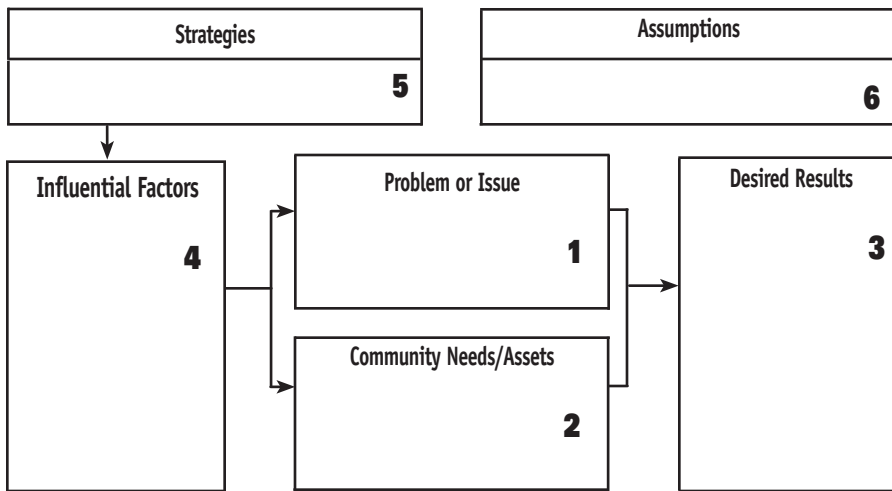
When we posit a relationship between a particular intervention and a desired outcome, we have assumed a theory of change. A logic model and graphic display of the theory is one way to clarify the thinking behind a particular program design, so that it can be shared with all stakeholders, as well as the evaluator.

A logic model includes:

- A succinct statement of the problem and what community needs or assets require intervention;
- A statement of desired results, both short- and long-term;
- A list of factors believed to influence change in this community;
- Strategies used elsewhere to achieve similar results;
- Assumptions behind how and why the strategies work.

Following the logic model, results are conceptualized on three levels: as outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

**Logic Model Development Program Program Planning Template—Exercise 1**



Outputs are the services delivered, such as a weekend interfaith retreat. Outcomes are the benefits to the participants (better relationships with individuals of another faith, less fear and suspicion of the other, and so on.). Impacts are effects on the larger community, like more peaceful sermons preached at worship services.

***Evaluating Programs of Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding.***

In 2001, Dr. Tamra Pearson-d’Estree of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution and others outlined a conceptual framework for defining success in conflict resolution efforts. According to this framework, conflict resolution efforts have a variety of goals:

**Table One: A Framework for Comparative Case Analysis of Interactive Conflict Resolution**

<p><b>I. Changes in Representation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Learning</li> <li>• Attitude Change</li> <li>• Integrative Framing</li> <li>• Problem-Solving</li> <li>• Better Communication and New Language</li> </ul>	<p><b>II. Changes in Relations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Improvements in Relational Climate</li> <li>• Validation and Reconceptualization of Identity</li> <li>• Security in Coexistence</li> </ul>
<p><b>III. Foundations for Transfer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artifacts</li> <li>• Structures for Implementation</li> <li>• Perceptions of Possibility</li> <li>• Empowerment</li> <li>• New Leadership</li> <li>• Influential Participants</li> </ul>	<p><b>IV. Foundations for Outcome/Implementation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networks</li> <li>• Reforms in Political Structures</li> <li>• New Political Input and Processes</li> <li>• Increased Capacity for Jointly Facing Future Challenges</li> </ul>

Source: d'Estrée et al. 2000: 52-53

- Reaching agreement;
- Creating or restoring harmony in a relationship or locale;
- Fostering structural change to reduce those elements believed to induce or maintain conflict.

In addition, evaluation of conflict resolution programs always face the challenge of how to link smaller “micro-changes” (in attitude or behavior of participants) to larger “macro-changes” in the community that create peace.

Pearson-d’Estree’s group proposed an inclusive framework that permits the evaluation of all outcome criteria that may apply in conflict resolution programs. They argue that this framework can be adapted to cover all the various types of conflict resolution programs, including dialogue, training (as intervention), trauma healing, and peacebuilding.

The categories in this table are based upon the type of change the program seeks. The first, “Changes in Representation (Thinking),” encompasses the implementation of new ideas and ways of conceptualizing issues, new languages, better communication, and the like. The second, “Changes in Relations,” includes indications of change in those variables that engender improved relationships, such as trust, empathy, and new understandings of identity and security.

The next two categories transcend the particular moment of intervention: “Foundations for Transfer” focuses on those achievements that establish the groundwork for transferring new progress—an output such as formulating a new joint, interfaith agenda—to the larger community. The fourth category, “Foundations for Outcome/Implementation,” covers the structures that participants create or support that help them bring changed ideas and relationships into the larger culture. These include networks participants may create, new political structures, new media, educational forums, and the like.

These categories are not mutually exclusive, nor do they imply causality. The world of conflict and intervention is far too complex for simplistic models. In real life, relationships between criteria exist and interact across the four categories.

***Because change happens over time, it is important to plan to have multiple evaluations that extend well beyond the initial intervention.***

### ***Evaluation Over Time***

Because change happens over time, it is important to plan to have multiple evaluations that extend well beyond the initial intervention. Pearson-d’estrée’s group suggested a grid in which evaluation takes place at three “phases of change” in order to assess three levels of impact.



**Table Two: Time Frame and Level of Impact**

<b>Time Frame by Level of Impact</b>	<i>PROMOTION</i>	<i>APPLICATION</i>	<i>SUSTAINABILITY</i>
MICRO			
MESO			
MACRO			

The “promotion stage” is immediate and follows the intervention itself (e.g., weekend workshop). The “application stage” is short-term and occurs when the participant has had time to bring his new ideas or behaviors back to his primary community. The “sustainability” phase then examines the farther-reaching impacts, over the medium- to long-term. In other words, did these new ideas or developments remain effective and viable on their own over time?

The grid in Table 2 recognizes that change takes place on different levels as well as at different times. “Micro” level refers to the program participants, “meso” level represents the participants’ reference groups (such as professional organizations, extended families, and religious communities), and the “macro” level refers to large-scale social or national changes.

With this terminology in mind, it is easier to enter into the evaluation process, even if the process itself remains challenging.

### ***Recommendations***

Effective evaluation of interfaith dialogue programs depends upon identifying variables that can be measured. There are some obvious and simple measures of success, such as the number of participants attending, or the number willing to return or who refer others to the program. There are also quantitative measures of attitude change, which rely on self-report to questionnaires. Both of these are important. But what really makes a difference is what people do following the program that they did not do before. Behaviors of various sorts can be observed and quantified once they have been identified as target behaviors.

We therefore begin the evaluation by seeking out those at the source of the dialogue programs—people currently working in the field. How do they make ongoing program decisions? What methodologies do they use to assess their own progress? How do they know what works? More than 20 directors of interfaith programs and others involved in interfaith work were interviewed either in person, by phone, or via e-mail for this report. Despite their differences, the data yielded common themes regarding the program dimensions to be evaluated and how that might be done. Their insights form the basis for the following recommendations:

1. Evaluation should direct the way change takes place. It is through effective evaluation that a program articulates clear goals and objectives, describes specific steps taken in interventions, and observes and assesses its own outputs, outcomes, and impacts.
2. Specificity is a crucial key to effective evaluation. Thus, a program goal should not be described merely as “teaching conflict resolution skills.” Rather, the program activity should describe the specific skills to be taught and the specific teaching method to be used. For example, one basic skill might be “active listening,” in which the listener summarizes and repeats what has been said to make sure he has understood fully what is being communicated.
3. Evaluation must be an integral part of program planning from the beginning, and should be an ongoing process throughout the life of the project, providing feedback to program managers and staff that enable them to adjust and improve their work in

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***Media activity can serve as a crude, but broad-based measure of change in the general society.***

real time. Repeated evaluations are also necessary after the program is completed to assess medium- and long-term outcomes.

4. Although the primary goal of evaluation is specific to the program it serves and is geared toward local and changing needs, it is nevertheless helpful to begin with a list of dimensions to be evaluated (see Table 1). This kind of list permits the accumulation and sharing of knowledge in the field.
5. The power of face-to-face contact in the evaluation process cannot be overstated. The importance of dealing directly and personally with participants was repeatedly emphasized at both program and evaluation levels. At the program level, many program directors were convinced that powerful change occurred predominantly through the process of interpersonal encounter. Getting to know individuals from the other side as fellow human beings was perceived by nearly all program directors to be a transformative experience.
6. Similarly, when evaluation is conducted privately and personally, the participant often yields observations and comments about his experience with the program that would not have been shared in a less intimate setting. Therefore, the evaluation of most types of interfaith programs should include a personal interview with both participants and staff. Ideally, the interview would combine both structured and open-ended elements. It would also include both attitudinal and behavioral indices.
7. Since programs of interfaith dialogue are programs of social change, media activity can serve as a crude, but broad-based measure of change in the general society. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of “mediawatch” tracking efforts that have grown increasingly sophisticated. Today, the media can be monitored for increases in articles that focus on peace or cooperation, for decreases in the number of articles that incite violence, for the language it uses in describing a particular religious group, or for virtually any other relevant criteria. The mass media play a role in setting the agenda and influencing the issues people talk about; programs of interfaith dialogue exist in that environment. It is an important contextual factor.

Media monitoring can be supplemented by “man in the street” interviews. This additional source of data provides a check on whether the media are impacting or reflecting popular opinion; it is particularly helpful in places where freedom of the press is not guaranteed and where the population questions the media’s credibility.

8. Additional means are available for evaluating programs aimed at academic elites. As change agents within their own societies, their ideas exert influence mainly through their writing and lecturing. Therefore, one outcome measure appropriate to an interfaith dialogue program for academics would include an assessment of participants’ work products—articles, papers, and books—before and after the intervention. Does their work indicate changes in attitudes, ideas, information, or action plans?
9. Simplest measures of success include:
  - a. Number of program participants;
  - b. Number of post-program meetings;
  - c. Number of program spin-offs;
  - d. If the program is targeted to a particular audience, who the participants are, what their standing in the community is, how “senior” they are, and so on.
10. Technology—both hardware and software—can be borrowed from other fields. Examples of hardware would include the use of videotape for purposes of evaluation, training, and general information dissemination. Software applications would include adapting evaluation approaches that have been used effectively for other programs of social change, such as programs for reducing gang violence in urban areas, or strategies for changing health beliefs and behaviors among certain demographic groups.

11. In addition to evaluating a program's context and the nature of its intervention procedures, personality variables should also be evaluated. Certain character traits, behaviors, or social roles are important to program effectiveness, such as a person's status within his or her religious community. The measurement of status or reputation is community-specific, of course. In some faith communities it might be based on scholarship; in others, leadership of a large congregation; and in still others, a reputation for effective community activism.

In discussing the traits that make for effective staffing for interfaith dialogue programs, our interviewees focused on attitudes they observed but could not measure, such as possessing a sense of security in one's religious identity coupled with a curiosity about others'; the ability to listen to and consider contradictory views with an open mind; integrity; a capacity for empathy, the ability to appreciate other participants' anger and pain—and, perhaps more importantly, channel it into something constructive; and a willingness to be changed personally by the encounter.

12. When evaluation becomes a more standard part of programs, its staff and managers will begin to think more like social scientists. That is to say, they will think about goals and measurable criteria that evolve over time, and include a control group whenever possible (e.g., a waiting list control, evaluated over time before they are exposed to the program).

13. It is important to bear in mind the power of a "grand gesture." The visual and public action of a celebrity or political figure (such as President Sadat's trip to Israel) carries considerable weight, and with it the ability to transform the context of a conflict. In a similar but subtler fashion, including or consulting major religious figures in public peacemaking efforts lends credibility to those efforts.

***It is important to bear in mind  
the power of a "grand gesture."***

## Conclusion

For purposes of evaluation, interfaith dialogue is a particular type of social change program. Therefore, these are the steps toward meaningful evaluation:

1. Build evaluation in from the beginning, to be an integral component of program planning.
2. Begin with a "*theory of social change*" which makes explicit the assumptions behind your project. For example, the following assumptions might underlie a program of teacher training in interfaith dialogue: 1) teachers influence the attitudes and behavior of their students. 2) Teachers influence by serving both as role models and as sources of information. 3) Schools are microcosms of the larger society.
3. The next step in evaluation is to specify both *short and longer-term goals (outcomes and impacts)*. In our example, short-term goals would include the following changes in the teachers who participate in the intervention:
  - a. The expression of more positive ideas about the other religions;
  - b. The expression of more positive attitudes toward interacting peacefully with members of the other religions;
  - c. Increased knowledge and understanding of the other religions.

Mid-term goals for the trained teachers might be:

- a. To develop a curriculum (and materials) for teaching what they have learned;
- b. To become sources of interfaith dialogue programming;
- c. To increase in amount and quality of interfaith activity by the teachers themselves.

A long-term program goal might be:

For more information on this topic, see our website ([www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)), which has an online edition of this report containing links to related websites, as well as additional information on the subject.

- a. Over time, to see that the teachers' experiences with interfaith dialogue will be reflected in an increase in positive, tolerant ideas expressed in the school community.
4. Specific evaluation approaches are part of developing strategies aimed at reaching the goals. Whenever possible, pre-testing should be done to develop a baseline for quantitative measures. Thus, before the intervention one would collect the following data:
  - a. Questionnaires about the attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs participants have about the other religions;
  - b. Information on the amount and quality of interfaith interaction teachers have in their own lives;
  - c. Attitudes participants have toward peaceful interaction with members of the other group.

Baseline measures would be taken on the long-term goals as well, for example, the number of incidents of hate-based activity on school grounds, the quality of school-sponsored interfaith activities (e.g., clubs, extracurricular activities), or the number of positive and negative interfaith references in student publications.

5. Short-term evaluation would assess output, i.e., was the service delivered? In this case, did the teacher-training take place as planned? Measurement would include number and type of meetings, number and type of attendees, meeting content and process.
6. Then outcome would be assessed—what was the effect of the program on the participants? Post-testing repeats the pretesting questionnaires to note changes in relevant attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors. This is the time for qualitative evaluation as well. Face-to-face interviews add a great deal to an understanding of how the participants experienced the program. What was helpful? What made an impression on them? How could the training be improved for the next time? What would they want to have had more of? Less of? In what way do they think they have changed? What are they doing or planning to do differently? Open-ended face-to-face interviews can yield important feedback that would not emerge either in a group or on paper.
7. Mid-term assessment in this example is behavioral: Was a curriculum developed for teaching some aspects of what the teachers had learned? Did the trained teachers develop any type of interfaith dialogue programming? What did they do? What helped or hindered the achievement of mid-term goals?
8. The long-term goal of disseminating positive attitudes would repeat the pre-intervention assessment, looking for lowered incidence of hostility between groups (such as less graffiti, vandalism, or hate-based violence in the school), as well as increases in positive (or decreases in negative) interfaith references in school newspapers and other public communication.

When it does its job well, religion offers an alternate vision of reality. It insists that the current reality—violent conflict—is not the only one possible. Religion gives people food for their imagination, and the ability to consider another possibility. As one of our participants said, “you’re a slave in Egypt, then along comes Moses and says, ‘There’s another way—we’re going to be free!’”

Many people involved in interfaith dialogue in conflict areas around the world noted that one act of terrible violence can wipe out in a moment what takes the parties a long period of painstaking work to build. It is not unlike what happens to a village that experiences a natural disaster. The violent spasm destroys and spreads ruin quickly, but leaves some things intact. And, just as the storm passes, allowing the villagers return to rebuild, reinforce, and renew, so too do interfaith peacebuilders recommit themselves to nonviolent alternatives to resolving their differences.



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