Chapter 12. Evaluation

Overview

This chapter discusses the design, development, and use of an evaluation component for the 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 appraises whether those activities were successful or need adjustment. The chapter also examines the elements necessary to achieve 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. The National Process Evaluation of Weed and Seed (1995) and the National Evaluation of Weed and Seed (1999) can serve as references.

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 refine and improve activities, and to document successes rather than 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. Which school department to approach for assistance varies from one institution to another, but options include the political science, sociology, business, and urban affairs departments.

The planning section of local government may be willing to help develop an evaluation component. The city's economic development agency may also be able to assist.

Some nonprofit organizations, such as the local Chamber of Commerce, Urban League, and United Way, often help nonprofit groups such as Weed and Seed develop an evaluation process.

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

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

Although evaluation terms may seem unfamiliar, they simply refer to program components and are used universally. By using and agreeing on these definitions, you can ensure a strong 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 conducted).

◉ **Outcome.** The benefits to 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 key to both a successful site operation and an informative and useful evaluation. Each strategy component should have measurable goals on which the evaluation framework is constructed.

◉ When developing operational plans, identify desired outcomes tied to the goals; also develop the following supporting pieces:

◉ Tasks to be performed in moving toward the goal.

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:

Goal:	Decrease the dropout rate.
Objective:	Decrease dropout rate by a certain percentage.
Tasks:	◉ Enroll targeted number of students.
	◉ Track attendance in classes.
	◉ Compile class completion rate.
	◉ Measure the reduction rate of school dropouts.

◉ Organization or individual responsible for the tasks.

◉ Timeframe for accomplishing these tasks.

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

◉ 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 adequate for program needs?

Assess qualitative measures using evaluation process results. Talk with participants about their perceptions 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 only to 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.

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 evaluation process should 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 the program is to be continued, it may be necessary to reduce the number of people served, limit the scope, or raise additional funds.

- There is not enough information about the causes of the targeted problem. With additional information from the evaluation, adjustments to the focus can be implemented. For example, a goal is to reduce drug sales around a school. The program provides classes about substance abuse. Drug sales, however, have not been affected by the program because drugs are sold by people from outside the community, not students who attend the classes. The classes may be effective in teaching students about substance abuse; however, they have 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 be able to improve how the program is run. It may, however, be necessary to make more extensive changes.

- The goal is reached and the program will operate for another year or until it is no longer addressing a priority issue and the focus gets redirected.

Implementation Issues

Deciding What To Evaluate Will Be the First Issue

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

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

Other Implementation Issues

To ensure credibility, find an organization or individual not involved in Weed and Seed to conduct the evaluation.

Costs are often an important issue when the evaluation is discussed, so seek assistance from educational and other nonprofit organizations as well as local government agencies.

Remember that signoff from the Steering Committee may not be easy to obtain if members feel that the evaluation report depicts the site unfavorably. Therefore, this issue should be addressed before the evaluation starts to assure everyone that it will not be an indictment. It will be important to demonstrate to 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
Resources	*Services*	*Products*	*Benefits*
Money	Training	Classes taught	New knowledge gained
Staff	Education	Counseling sessions held	Skills increased
Volunteers	Counseling	Educational material designed	Attitudes or values changed
Equipment	Mentoring	Hours served	Behavior modified
Supplies		Participants served	Conditions for participants improved
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													
3													
4													
5													
6													
7													
8													
9													
10													
11													
12													
13													
14													
15													
16													
17													
18													
19													
20													
21													
22													
23													
24													
25													
26													
27													
28													
29													
30													
31													
Total													
Days Open													
Average													