
UNIT 9: PROGRAM EVALUATION

In this unit you will learn about:

- **Importance of Evaluating a CERT Program.** What program evaluation is and what it can accomplish.
- **What to Evaluate in a CERT Program and How.** Four steps for conducting a program evaluation.
- **Creating a Program Report.** How to create a brief and focused Program Report and the importance of the Program Report in the evaluation process.

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UNIT OVERVIEW

A CERT program must have a process for how it is evaluated and measured for effectiveness. Evaluation is the process by which the Program Manager is able to identify appropriate changes and continuous improvements that will keep the CERT program fully functional. This unit looks at:

- The importance of evaluating a CERT program
- What to evaluate in a CERT program and how
- The steps for conducting a program evaluation
- Creating a Program Report

At the conclusion of this unit, you will be able to develop a process for evaluating your local CERT program:

- Explain what program evaluation is.
- Describe the purpose of evaluating a program.
- List the steps for evaluating various program components.
- Identify the characteristics of a Program Report.

This unit will look at the following topics:

- What Program Evaluation Is
- Why Do Program Evaluation
- How to Do Program Evaluation
- Program Report

WHAT PROGRAM EVALUATION IS

The first step is to agree on what program evaluation is.

Program evaluation is an ongoing process that asks (and gets answers to) three questions:

1. What are we doing now?
2. How well are we doing it?
3. Do we need to do something differently? If so, what?

The results are documented in a Program Report.

The implementation of a CERT program is the beginning step for you. Evaluation of the program is a continuous process.

Remember the discussion of setting goals and objectives in Unit 2.

Those objectives specified what activities the CERT program would undertake in order to accomplish the goal it had set.

During a program evaluation, you need to find out how well the program is meeting the objectives – how well it is performing – and what corrections, if any, are needed.

WHY DO PROGRAM EVALUATION

One of the reasons that program evaluation is done is to ensure consistency in day-to-day operational activities. By asking “How well are we doing?” you continue to scrutinize the program’s accomplishments and verify that they are meeting the standards you set.

Another equally important reason for program evaluation is to allay any concerns on the part of State or local officials that volunteers who have been trained in the CERT program are acting without direction or outside the guidelines of the program.

It only takes a few problem incidents to damage the credibility of your CERT program and raise concerns about training volunteers.

Periodic program evaluation maintains program control and allows you to reduce and manage the instances of independent or undirected volunteer actions. It also allows you to make adjustments as needed.

HOW TO DO PROGRAM EVALUATION

After understanding what program evaluation is and why it is done, the next step is to review how to do it.

The process for conducting program evaluation is not complicated.

1. First, decide what you want to learn.
2. Next, figure out a strategy for collecting the information.
3. Then collect the information.
4. Finally, analyze the information you collect and decide on the next steps.

STEP 1: WHAT DO YOU WANT TO LEARN

Since the CERT program is strongly dependent upon the ability of the Program Manager to set clear and defined program goals and objectives, your program will most logically be evaluated by determining the achievement of those objectives.

Remember, a good objective is SMART:

- Simple
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Timely

During a program evaluation, you are working to determine if your program met the “achievable” part. Did we do what we set out to do?

HOW TO DO PROGRAM EVALUATION (CONTINUED)

Here are some of the elements of a CERT program you should evaluate:

- *CERT Basic Training*
- Other training
- Program: volunteers, resources, funding
- Exercises and drills conducted
- Community activities
- CERT partners developed for program support

STEP 2: DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR COLLECTING THE INFORMATION

The next step is to develop a strategy for collecting the information you want to learn. The strategy should include answers to these questions:

- Who needs the information being collected?
- What types of data are needed?
- Where will the data be found?

Who needs the information being collected?

Every program has partners and stakeholders who will want to know how the program is doing. See the discussions in Units 2 (Setting a Program Vision) and 3 (Promoting Your Program) about partners and stakeholders.

HOW TO DO PROGRAM EVALUATION (CONTINUED)

What types of data are needed?

Program evaluation data will fall into one of two categories of data: quantitative or qualitative. The kind of data that a program will need for its evaluation strategy is determined by what the program is trying to learn.

Qualitative data include commentary, anecdotes, testimonials, observations, etc.

Quantitative data are everything else, for example:

- Numbers
- Ratings
- Rankings
- Yes or no responses to specific questions

Where will the data be found?

In Unit 6 there was a discussion about the importance of keeping good records. Here is one of the places where good recordkeeping makes a difference.

The numbers (the quantitative data) will be found in your records. For qualitative data, you should debrief with volunteers after public safety events and should jot down observations and any good anecdotes.

Planning for an Evaluation

1. What is the purpose(s) of performing the evaluation, i.e., what do you want to be able to decide as a result of the evaluation? For example:
 - a. What is the status of your CERT program's progress toward achieving its stated goals?
 - b. Do CERT members have adequate resources (equipment, facilities, training, etc.) to achieve the program goals?
 - c. Should priorities be changed to put more focus on achieving the goals?
(Note: This question could be considered as a program management decision rather than an evaluation question.)
 - d. How should goals be changed, or should any goals be added or removed? Why?
2. Who are the stakeholders that should receive information from the evaluation, e.g., emergency services personnel, community support partners, CERT volunteers, etc.?
3. What information is necessary to really understand the strengths and weaknesses of the program, benefits to the community (outcomes), how the program succeeded or failed and why, etc.?
4. Where (sources) should the information be collected, e.g., program documentation, CERT volunteers, community partners, etc.?
5. What are the best methods available for collecting the information e.g., questionnaires, examining documentation, observing CERTs, etc.?

HOW TO DO PROGRAM EVALUATION (CONTINUED)

EXERCISE: DETERMINING WHETHER OR NOT YOUR PROGRAM'S PERFORMANCE IS MEETING YOUR GOALS

Purpose: This exercise allows you to develop specific methods for evaluating different CERT program components based on your actual program goals/objectives.

Instructions:

Part 1:

1. Go to the Draft Program Plan in Unit 1.
2. Individually review your overall program goal and 1- 2 specific objectives that were developed previously (in Section 1. Program Goals).
3. If you have not done so already, develop a program objective. Objectives must be SMART: simple, measureable, achievable, realistic, and timely.
4. You have 5 minutes.

Part 2:

5. Break into small groups (e.g., table groups, groups of 3 – 4 participants).
6. For each person:
 - a. Select one program objective.
 - b. Get ideas from the group on how this objective could be evaluated by the Program Manager (data to collect, questions to ask).
 - c. Write the ideas from the group in your Draft Program Plan.
7. You have 15 minutes.
8. You will report to the whole group.

HOW TO DO PROGRAM EVALUATION (CONTINUED)

STEP 3: COLLECT THE INFORMATION

This step is self-explanatory.

STEP 4: ANALYZE THE INFORMATION AND DECIDE ON NEXT STEPS

Analyze data

When you analyze data, always begin with a review of your evaluation goals: the reason for the program evaluation. This will help you organize your data and focus your results, analysis, and conclusions.

For example, if you wanted to improve your program by identifying its strengths and weaknesses, you can organize data into program strengths, program weaknesses, and suggestions to improve the program.

Compare the results you got to what you expected to get.

Consider options

The second step in taking action is to consider:

- Conclusions that can be drawn about program operations or meeting goals
- Specific recommendations that may help improve the program
- What choices there are in implementing those recommendations

Take corrective action if needed

If the findings indicate that changes are needed, develop a plan for implementing the changes. The plan should include new objectives (see Unit 2) and may involve new policies and procedures (see Unit 8).

PROGRAM REPORT

REPORTING EVALUATION RESULTS

You are responsible for ensuring that your program evaluation results are properly documented and distributed. This is accomplished via the use of a Program Report.

Here are some things to keep in mind when generating the Program Report:

- Justify your conclusions or recommendations using your program evaluation data findings.
- Translate recommendations into specific action plans, including who, what, when, how, and any other “need-to-know” specifics.
- The level and scope of content depend on the recipient of the report, e.g., funding agency, community supporters, State office.
- Be mindful of the intended audiences for any Program Report. Every Program Report needs to address the specific interests of the audience while still maintaining its objectivity.
- Keep the Program Report as concise as possible.

EXERCISE: CREATING A PROGRAM REPORT

Purpose: This exercise allows you to practice appropriate ways to distribute program evaluation results to your various audiences.

Instructions:

1. Break into four small groups.
2. For the target audience assigned to your small group, complete the worksheet, *Creating a Program Report*, on the next page.
3. You have 10 minutes.
4. You will report your plan to the whole group.

Creating a Program Report

Scenario: Your program has had a successful year. You want to tell _____ (your assigned target audience) about the *CERT Basic Training* you provided.

1. What do you want or need to accomplish with this report?
2. How much detail do you need to include? Give examples.
3. How could or should the report be formatted? Why?

UNIT SUMMARY

This unit has looked at program evaluation:

- The importance of evaluating a CERT program
- What to evaluate in a CERT program and how to do it
- Creating a Program Report