Evaluation planning: A resource for addiction and mental health researchers

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Logic models

A logic model is a visual depiction of the "if-then" (casual) relationship between a program's inputs, activities, and what the program intends to accomplish. As a program evolves and changes, so should the model.

Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes

If resources are available to the program, **then** we can do these activities.

If we do these activities, **then** certain outputs and outcomes can be expected.
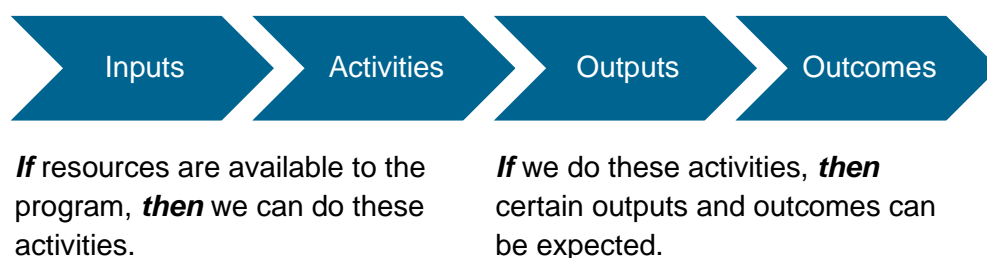
"The purpose of a logic model is to provide stakeholders with a road map describing the sequence of related events connecting the need for the planned program with the program's desired results." (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004, p. 3)

A logic model can be used for:
- Planning a new program
- Describing an existing program
- Ensuring the activities of a program link to the expected outcomes
- Identifying the outcomes that will be used to measure success

A logic model typically includes the following components (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004):
- **Goal** – what the program is trying to accomplish
- **Target population** – who the program is being delivered to
- **Inputs** – the resources that go into a program (e.g., funding, staff, infrastructure).
- **Activities** – the processes, tools, events, and actions that take place as part of the program
- **Outputs** – the tangible, direct products of program activities. They can usually be measured or counted; for example, number of workshops, number of attendees
- **Outcomes** – the expected changes that result from program activities
  - *Short-term outcomes* refer to changes in individuals' knowledge or skills
  - *Intermediate outcomes* refer to changes in individuals' behaviours or attitudes
  - *Long-term outcomes (impact)* refer to changes in an organization, community, or client system
- **Assumptions** – what is needed to support continuation of the program

A logic model may also have an accompanying narrative that describes the model in more detail.

A logic model can be simple or complex depending on the program or service being described. A model can be designed using a number of formats, such as a flow-chart (Figure 1) or table (Figure 2). Regardless of the style chosen, the model should link logically from inputs to activities to outputs to the outcomes. In its simplest form, a logic model will describe what you do, how you do it, and the results you hope to achieve.

Figure 1. Basic logic model

Inputs (what you invest)	→	Activities (what you do)	→	Outputs (what is produced)	→	Outcomes (what are the results)
• Money for groceries		• Make lunch		• # of children fed		• Decrease in hunger
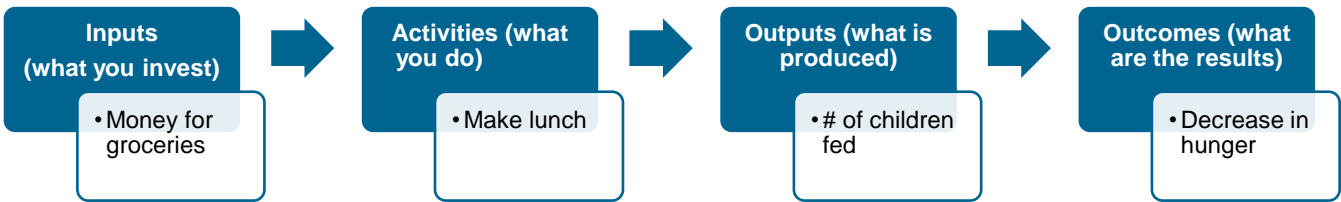
Figure 2. More detailed logic model

Program Goal	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes		
				Short-term	**Intermediate**	**Long-term**
	Examples: ▪ money ▪ staff ▪ capital assets ▪ operational ▪ expenses	Examples: ▪ teaching ▪ presentations ▪ counselling ▪ mentoring ▪ treatment	Examples: (usually quantifiable) ▪ materials distributed ▪ clients served ▪ hours of service ▪ sessions taught	Learning: ▪ attitudes ▪ skills ▪ motivation ▪ knowledge ▪ awareness ▪ opinions	Action: ▪ behaviour ▪ practice ▪ decisions ▪ policies	Effect on participants: ▪ social ▪ economic ▪ civic

A logic model may also include assumptions and external factors that may affect the program.

Assumptions are underlying beliefs about how and why a program will work and the people involved in the program. For example:
- Beliefs about the target population
- Beliefs about how clients will respond to treatment (e.g., confidence in research and best practice literature)
- Underlying need for the program

External factors are factors that are beyond a program's control that may affect how a program is implemented and operated, and its outcomes. For example:
- Political environment
- Social conditions
- Economic situation
- Geographic constraints
- Outside initiatives or policies

Refer to the logic model in Figure 1 as an example of how inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes are logically linked. The model outlines how money for groceries (input) is needed to make lunch (activity). If you accomplish the activity of making lunch, then a certain number of children will be fed (output), which results in a decrease in hunger (outcome).

Some of the underlying assumptions upon which the activity of making lunch is expected to lead to a decrease in hunger are:
- You can find/get groceries.
- You have the necessary equipment to make lunch.

Some external factors that may affect this relationship include:
- The price of groceries
- A food shortage/food rationing

Logic Model Template

Goal:
Target population:

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes

Assumptions:
External Factors:

Evaluation plan and framework

An evaluation plan describes the overall approach or strategy that will guide the evaluation. An evaluation can be undertaken on any group of activities intended to achieve specific outcomes, such as a program, project, initiative, intervention, policy, or strategy. This document focuses on *program* evaluation but also applies to the evaluation of any of these activities.

Typically, a logic model is developed first and then an evaluation plan. An evaluation plan answers the following questions (Lavinghouze & Snyder, 2013):
- Why is the evaluation being conducted?
- What will be done?
- Who will do it?
- When will it be done?
- How will evaluation findings likely be used?

Elements of an evaluation plan

An evaluation plan often includes the following sections.

Section	Description
Program background	Describes the program that is being evaluated and its goals and objectives.
Goals and objectives	Describes the purpose of the evaluation. It specifies the goals, objectives, and the intended audience/stakeholders.
Scope	Describes what will be undertaken as part of the evaluation, and what is considered to be out-of-scope.
Evaluation questions, outcomes, and indicators	Evaluation questions, outcomes, and indicators are often included in an evaluation framework.
Methods	Describes how evaluation data will be collected.
Budget	Describes what financial resources are available for the evaluation.
Reporting	Describes the strategy for sharing results and developing recommendations.
Roles and responsibilities	Describes who will be involved in the evaluation and how.
Timeline	Outlines a schedule for developing the evaluation plan, data collection, data analysis, and reporting of results.

Developing an evaluation plan

An overview of some important elements of an evaluation plan is provided below.

Evaluation objectives

Evaluation objectives are what the evaluation will achieve and are directly linked to the goals of the program being evaluated.

Evaluation questions

Evaluation questions are linked to evaluation objectives, specific program outcomes, and measures (indicators).

Evaluation questions identify important issues for program decisions. These questions may focus on:
- Planning and implementation issues. For example: How well was the program planned? How well was that plan put into practice?
- Reaching program objectives. For example: How well has the program met its stated objectives?
- The impact of the program on participants and/or the community. For example: What difference has the program made to its intended targets or the community as a whole? (Center for Community Health and Development, 2018)

Evaluation outputs, outcomes, and indicators

The evaluator then needs to determine how these questions will be measured. To do this, they will identify key *outputs* and *outcomes* for each question and develop *indicators* for them.

Outputs are the direct products that result from program activities. They can usually be measured or counted. For example, number of workshops, number of attendees.

Outcomes are the expected changes in attitudes, behaviours, knowledge, skills, status, or level of functioning as a result of program activities.

Indicators are specific measures that demonstrate whether goals or objectives have been achieved. They can be proxies for goals and objectives that are not directly observable or measurable (e.g., using unemployment rate as a proxy indicator of a country's economic state). Indicators answer the question "How will I know when the outcome happens?"

Examples of indicators of program outputs:
- Number of clients seen
- Participation rate
- Levels of client satisfaction
- Amount of intervention exposure

Examples of indicators of program outcomes:
- Changes in participant behaviour
- Changes in community norms, policies or practices
- Changes in participant health status and/or quality of life
- Changes in settings or environment around the program

When developing evaluation indicators, the following criteria should be met:
- Indicators must be *relevant* to outputs and outcomes that have been identified.
- Indicators must *abide by ethical standards* for research and evaluation (for example, the Tri-Council Guidelines).
- Indicators must be *valid.* In other words, does the indicator measure what it is supposed to?

- Indicators must be *reliable.* In other words, does the indicator produce consistent results?

Tips for developing indicators:
- Multiple indicators are often needed to track the implementation and effects of a program.
- A program logic model can be a useful guide for developing evaluation indicators.
- Information about evaluation questions, outcomes, and indicators is often captured in an evaluation framework (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999).

Developing evaluation methods

An evaluation plan should describe how data will be collected. This section of the evaluation plan may include:
- A description of participants
- Sampling techniques
- Participant recruitment strategy
- Consent processes and how ethical concerns such as confidentiality will be addressed
- Data collection methods (such as interviews, focus groups, surveys)
- Whether collected data will be qualitative, quantitative, or both
- A description of any available baseline measures
- A description of how data will be stored and how long it will be retained

Depending on the type of data you plan to use, you may need to provide additional information. For example:
- If data will be extracted from an existing database, include a description of the database.
- If document reviews are used, include an overview of this process.
- If the evaluation will include third party data, include a description of how data will be obtained, as well as a description of any information sharing agreements.

Common evaluation data sources

Existing information
- Program documents (such as logs, meeting minutes, annual reports, proposals, and project and grant records)
- Existing administrative databases (such as Statistics Canada)
- Media records
- Public service and business records (such as social and health agency data or student performance records)
- Other evaluations of the same or similar programs

People
- Program participants
- Program staff, administrators, and volunteers

- Stakeholders (such as community members and community leaders)
- Key informants
- Collaborators
- Funders

Observations
- Observations of program events and activities (such as recording the characteristics, interaction patterns, and skill development of program participants)
- Observations of practices (e.g., health care practices)
- Observations of verbal and non-verbal behaviours (such as people working together as a team) (Taylor-Powell, 2002)

Common data collection methods

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Checklists
- Tests
- Summaries of records/documents
- Focus groups
- Extractions from administrative datasets (Posavac, 2016)

Defining roles and responsibilities and developing an evaluation timeline

An evaluation plan needs to provide a description of **who** will do **what**, **when**, and **how**? This includes who will:
- Carry out literature reviews and/or collect background information
- Develop tools, instruments, and consent procedures
- Collect, enter, and analyze data
- Write-up and share results

Each of these tasks needs to be considered in the overall timeline of the evaluation. When setting up the timeline, consider:
- When the evaluation needs to begin and end
- An evaluation framework (useful in providing an overview of tasks that need to be completed)
- Due dates for feedback and reports

Evaluation framework

An evaluation framework is a tool used to organize and link evaluation questions, outcomes or outputs, indicators, data sources, and data collection methods. The evaluation framework below describes an evaluation of a collaborative care model introduced to improve care for mental health patients.

Evaluation Question	Outcome	Indicator	Data Source
What are patients/ families/other care providers' experience with the program?	Patients spend less time in hospital	# of days in hospital for patients compared to baseline	Discharge Abstract Database
	Patients and families receive required support while under care	# and % of patients/families reporting they received adequate support	Patient/family feedback survey
		Patient/family narratives on the value of the supports they received	
What is the experience of service providers with providing collaborative care?	Service providers receive required information on the collaborative care service model	# and % of service providers reporting they received adequate information	Service provider survey
	A range of service providers and stakeholders collaborate to supporting patients	# and type of service providers supporting patients	Provincial database
		# and % of service providers reporting care was collaborative	Service provider survey

Evaluability assessment

What is evaluability assessment?

Evaluability assessment (EA) examines the extent to which a program[1] can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion. The results of an EA helps identify whether the evaluation of a program is justified, feasible, and likely to provide useful information (Kaufman-Levy & Poulin, 2003).

How do you conduct an evaluability assessment?

An EA is conducted through document reviews, interviews with stakeholders, and observations (such as site visits).

Documents should be reviewed for:
- The program's history, goals/objectives, scope, design, and operation
- Whether the program has a theory of change that highlights how specific activities will lead to expected outcomes
- Whether there are sufficient resources to do an evaluation
- Timelines for the evaluation (Peersman et al., 2015; Trevisan & Huang, 2003; USAID, 2017; Davies, 2003; Leviton et al., 2010; Kaufman-Levy & Poulin, 2003)

Interviews with stakeholders allow the EA team to:
- Get clarification about the program and any assumptions that were made in its design (Trevisan & Huang, 2003; Public Health Ontario et al., 2018).
- Confirm the purpose of the evaluation and how the results of the evaluation will be used (Public Health Ontario et al., 2018).

Observations, such as site visits, allow the EA team to witness the program in action. This allows the EA team to compare what was said about the program with how the program operates (Kaufman-Levy & Poulin, 2003; Public Health Ontario et al., 2018).

The EA should be led by independent, third-party evaluators. To minimize bias and conflict of interest, the EA team should not involve project managers or the team that will conduct the subsequent evaluation (Davies, 2003). It is best if more than one evaluator conducts the EA to provide different perspectives and findings (Peersman et al., 2015).

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[1]The term "program" is used broadly to refer to any group of activities intended to achieve specific outcomes; this includes projects, initiatives, interventions, policies, or strategies.

Steps to conducting an evaluability assessment

Step 1	Determine the scope and purpose of the evaluability assessment
Step 2	Identify stakeholders and intended users of the program
Step 3	Identify and review relevant documents
Step 4	Conduct stakeholder interviews and observations
Step 5	Assess evaluability
Step 6	Draw conclusions and recommendations

Step 1: Determine the scope and purpose of the EA

- Will the entire program be assessed, or only specific components? (Pearlman et al., 2015; Leviton et al., 2010; USAID, 2017).
- What timelines and resources are necessary to carry out the evaluation? (Public Health Ontario et al., 2018).

Step 2: Identify stakeholders and intended users of the program

The second step is to identify key stakeholders and understand their needs (Public Health Ontario et al., 2018; USAID, 2017; Trevisan & Huang, 2003). Different stakeholders should be included in the EA process, including program managers who may implement the EA findings, and decision makers who usually approve funding and resources.

Once key stakeholders have been identified, you will need to determine their needs and expectations related to the EA, as well as their roles and level of involvement in the EA process. It is important to have a good understanding of stakeholder communication preferences (for example, how would they like to be contacted and when). Involving stakeholders early in the EA process will lead to better engagement and buy-in (Trevisan & Huang, 2003).

Step 3: Identify and review relevant documents

Relevant documents should be reviewed to understand:
- The program's history, goals, and objectives
- How the program fits within the larger organization's goals
- The program's theory of change or logic model
- The program's capacity to collect and manage data, indicators and outcomes (both short-term and long-term)
- The target population

- Program resources (USAID, 2017; Kaufamn-Levy & Poulin, 2003; Leviton et al., 2010).

You may find this information in a variety of documents, including:
- Performance reports
- Policy briefs
- Work plans
- Terms of references
- Proposals
- Monitoring and evaluation plans
- Previous evaluation reports (USAID, 2017).

Step 4: Conduct stakeholder interviews and observations

Interviews with stakeholders provide additional insight into how the program works (Trevisan & Huang, 2003). Stakeholders can have different intentions, expectations, and assumptions about the program depending on their role and level of involvement (Public Health Ontario et al., 2018).

The EA team should also conduct site visits to see how the program operates, and compare this to what they learned from the interviews (Kaufamn-Levy & Poulin, 2003).

Step 5: Assess evaluability

Assessing evaluability involves answering important questions about:
- A program's *design*
- The overall *feasibility* of conducting an evaluation
- Whether and how an evaluation would be *useful* to program managers and other stakeholders (Peersman et al., 2015; Trevisan & Huang, 2003; USAID, 2017; Davies, 2003; Leviton et al., 2010; Kaufman-Levy & Poulin, 2003).

The rigor and number of questions to consider when conducting an EA can vary. The Department for International Development (DFID) developed an EA checklist based on a synthesis of the literature. This checklist is outlined in Table 1 and can be adapted according to your specific needs and contexts. Rationale for each question can be found in the DFID report (Davies, 2003).

Table 1. Questions to Consider When Conducting an Evaluability Assessment*

Design		
Objectives	-	Are the objectives of the program clearly stated, realistic, and achievable?
Theory of change	-	Does the program have a clear theory of change? (Is there a clear causal linkage from inputs to outcomes?)
	-	Can the objectives be achieved within the expected timeframe given the planned activities?
	-	Are assumptions about enablers and constrainers explicit? Is it feasible to assess these?
Monitoring and evaluation	-	Are the indicators specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART)?
	-	Does the program's in-house monitoring and evaluation system have the capacity to produce relevant and good quality data?
Feasibility		
Documents	-	Are all relevant documents available and accessible?
	-	Are there any previous evaluation reports?
Data	-	Does baseline data exist? If not, how feasible is it to collect the data?
	-	Are there existing data sources to measure outcomes?
	-	Are critical data available?
	-	Has data been collected for all indicators with sufficient frequency?
	-	Are there significant missing data?
	-	Are the measures reliable?
	-	Does the program have the capacity to collect data for an evaluation?
Resources	-	Are there sufficient resources (time, human, funding) for an evaluation?
Utility		
Purpose	-	What is the main purpose of the evaluation?
	-	Has it been discussed and agreed upon by stakeholders?
Demand and stakeholder buy-in	-	Who is requesting the evaluation?
	-	Are they willing to be part of the evaluation process?
	-	Are they supportive of the evaluation?
Timing	-	Will the evaluation inform decisions to improve the program in a timely manner?
	-	Has the program been implemented long enough to show results or outcomes?
Ethical issues	-	What ethical issues exist for participants and stakeholders?
	-	What constraints do they impose for the evaluation?
	-	Are ethical guidelines in place?

*adapted from Davies, 2013.

Step 6: Draw conclusions and recommendations

After an EA is conducted, you will need to communicate the findings and recommendations to relevant stakeholders. These will usually fall under three categories:

1) **No major gaps were identified:** The EA finds that the program meets the majority or all of the items in Table 1. In these cases, it is usually recommended to proceed with the evaluation (Peersman et al., 2015).

2) **Some gaps were identified:** It is usually recommended that the necessary changes are made before proceeding with the evaluation. For example, if there not enough time and resources to answer all of the evaluation questions, stakeholders should reprioritize the scope of the evaluation (Peersman et al., 2015).

3) **Major gaps were identified:** For example, the program does not have the capacity to provide data for an evaluation, there is a lack of required resources and buy-in from stakeholders, or there are major ethical issues and risk to participants. If these issues cannot be addressed easily or in a timely manner, it is usually recommended that the program postpone the evaluation (Peersman et al., 2015; Leviton et al., 2010; Kaufman-Levy & Poulin, 2003).

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