



Office of Juvenile Justice
and Delinquency Prevention



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Northwest Regional
Educational Laboratory

NATIONAL MENTORING CENTER BULLETIN

DOING A SELF-EVALUATION

A new publication provides a road map for evaluating mentor programs

By Maya Muir

For a mentoring program, undertaking a self-evaluation for the first time can be pretty intimidating. How do you go about it? Won't it take time and energy away from the program? Is it worth the effort?

It does take time. And yes, it can be difficult. But mentoring program administrators who've done it are in solid agreement that self-evaluation is something you can't afford not to do. It's the only sure way, they say, to really find out what's working and what's not. The information you turn up will give you the direction and data you need to improve your program.

And there's a less obvious but equally important reason to evaluate: attracting volunteers and securing

funding. Volunteers want to be part of programs that are successful; an evaluation is objective evidence of your success. Funding agencies, too, want to know that you are using your resources in the best way possible before they are willing to invest in you.

Getting Started

A new publication, *Evaluating Your Program: A Beginner's Self-Evaluation Workbook for Mentoring Programs*, says the first step is to identify all the people who might participate, and then winnow that group down to a representative cross-section of staff and interested parties. The workbook, put out by Information Technology International and aimed

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National Mentor Conference Ready to Roll in Early May

The spring event will bring programs, experts, and valuable information together

The National Mentoring Center is pleased to announce that the details have been finalized for its National Mentoring Conference. The event is a joint effort of the NMC, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the National Mentoring Partnership. On May 2-4, mentoring leaders and practitioners will gather in Alexandria, Virginia, to discuss the future of mentoring, learn about new research in the field, and attend workshops and trainings designed to strengthen youth mentoring. Programs of all shapes and sizes will gain valuable information and learn new strategies to help them evolve and improve.

There will be intensive, half-day seminars in six different tracks:

1. Mentor recruitment and retention
2. Mentor and mentee training
3. Sustainability and resource development
4. Program evaluation
5. Mentoring in small and rural communities
6. Mentoring youth in the juvenile justice system

Also featured will be a "Best Practices" showcase where programs can learn about successful mentoring efforts from around the country. These shorter

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Assessing Needs Before Starting a Program

Thinking about starting a mentoring program, but not sure where to begin?

Step One is to gather a small group of interested people to begin discussing your idea. As you meld that group into a team, you'll need to consider key factors affecting your school and community, as well as the climate within which you will be operating. Which district officials, school councils, parent groups, administrators, counselors, and teachers need to be brought on board? What community organizations will be critical for success?

Next, you'll need to narrow down the program's focus to meet local needs. To do that, you must better understand those needs. Interestingly, here

you will use the same tool employed in the self-evaluation of an up-and-running program: a community needs assessment. This assessment is a systematic analysis, critical in clarifying whether a new program is really necessary, and if so, how to tailor it. For example, should you focus primarily on students' academic work, social support, or delinquent behavior?

Not only will the needs assessment help clarify where the greatest needs lie, but it will also provide you with valuable documentation to aid in recruiting mentors and building partnerships. It should also provide you with new contacts that are interested in your idea, possibly representatives of foundations, corporations, senior groups, neighborhood leaders,

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at Juvenile Mentoring Programs (JUMPs), stresses the importance of building a sense of ownership among participants. Participants should understand how they can contribute and how they will benefit from their involvement.

In its training materials, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta emphasizes that setting expectations clearly and early is critical to program effectiveness. Mentors and parents, they say, should be informed ahead of time that evaluations are a part of the mentoring process and crucial for improving the experience for all involved.

The first steps of an evaluation should cover territory familiar to program founders—a review of start-up issues such as program mission, goals, and alignment with community needs. In revisiting these issues, you need to ask, Do our stated mission and goals best describe what we do now? Have needs in the community changed? Are we meeting those needs? Can we describe our target population more accurately now?

To get at these questions, experts recommend doing a community needs assessment—a systematic gathering of information about needs and resources. There are several ways of going about this:

A social indicators approach. Statistics from public records on dropouts and students in trouble will help clarify which youth are in greatest need in your community. These data can be obtained from county or city records, social service agencies, and health planning groups.

A survey approach. Questionnaires and interviews can provide excellent information from key sectors of the community, such as teachers, school counselors, ministers, and others.

A key informant approach. Reaching out to a broader range of businesspeople, parents, and community leaders can build crucial support from influential forces.

A community forum approach. Holding meetings to sound out larger numbers simultaneously brings in diverse perspectives.

Observation. Visiting classrooms to get firsthand information about student behavior provides important clues to kids' needs.

You will need to identify all the forms of support you receive from the community. This includes organizations that refer clients to you, schools and organizations that provide information or space, sources of in-kind contributions or advertising, and financial help. This also is a good time to consider kinds of support you want but do not have.

Assessing Needs Before Starting a Program (cont.)

or community organizations with an indirect interest. Start building solid relationships with them from Day One by letting them know the results of your community needs assessment; later, you may want to invite them onto your steering committee or your board of directors if you incorporate as a nonprofit organization.

Another question you'll need to address is, What organizations or businesses can we form partnerships with? Finding the right partnerships can bridge the gap between dream and reality for your program. Partners can be resources for virtually all your needs: funding, space, information and, most important, mentors.

Next step?

Determining clear goals and objectives. A goal is a broad statement of purpose, such as encouraging students to remain in school until graduation, or strengthening children's self-esteem. An objective, on the other hand, is specific and measurable; it is a plan to accomplish a specific task with specific resources by a certain time. For each goal, there should be several objectives.

By now, you have built a foundation and assembled the elements necessary for building a mentoring program. You're on your way!

—Maya Muir

Developing and Using a Logic Model

Once you've taken those initial steps, you're ready to analyze the day-to-day operations of your program. The JUMP manual suggests using a "logic model" that breaks down your program's elements into five levels: inputs, activities, goals, outputs, and outcomes. These are defined as follows:

- 1. Inputs:** The resources you draw on, which include funding, space, volunteer hours, and harder-to-quantify items like reputation and name recognition.
- 2. Activities:** The tasks your program engages in with the population you serve. Operating a youth drop-in center is an activity.
- 3. Goals:** The long-term changes (preferably quantifiable) your program seeks to accomplish, such as lowering the dropout rate by 20 percent.
- 4. Outputs:** The effects of your intervention, which contribute to outcomes. An example of an output is that mentors come to the drop-in center to meet youth before they are matched. Any single activity may have more than one output.
- 5. Outcomes:** Specific things you hope to accomplish, such as sustained changes in behavior, attitudes, knowledge, or environmental conditions. Outcomes may be immediate (having youth finish homework assignments), intermediate (increasing attendance by 50 percent), or long-term (a rise in grade point average of 2 percent).

As you analyze your program using these concepts, you will be able to draw connections between items listed. For example, one activity (a drop-in center) could cause several outputs (giving youth a place to study and access to computers for completing schoolwork).

Developing Questions from Your Model

Now you are ready to begin developing focused questions for different levels of your model about effort, effectiveness, efficiency, and process. "Effort questions" relate to input and activities. What services did you provide, and for whom? An input-level effort question is, How many mentors were recruited by each of several methods?

An "effectiveness" question is, Did you achieve the results you desired? Did the class attendance of mentored youth increase by 50 percent? Effectiveness questions are better focused around outputs and outcomes than goals. (You will find it hard to prove effectiveness in reaching goals, as they are broader and may be influenced by factors not included in your model.)

You may want to ask questions about efficiency—that is, the relationship of program costs to benefits achieved. Efficiency questions tie together all the components of your model, except goals.

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Measuring Qualitative Data

Four useful measurements of qualitative data are:

Nominal scale (using numbers to identify but not rank items such as ethnicity)

Ordinal scale (ranking to indicate relative magnitude, such as rating activities from most to least helpful)

Interval scale (where the numbers have a qualitative meaning, such as ranking an activity like tutoring from 1 to 10, one being the least useful)

Ratio scale (like an interval scale except that distances can be determined between levels and there is a meaningful zero, such as grading a test from zero to 100 percent).

EVALUATION: (continued from page 3)

Other questions will focus on process or outcomes. To look at process, you will ask effort questions: Is your program conducting the activities, using the inputs, and seeing the outputs that you intended?

Given all the kinds of questions you might ask, how do you choose between them? The workbook suggests that it is better not to try to answer every possible question. Instead, particularly the first time, pick one or two evaluation questions at each level (inputs, activities, etc). Most important, pick questions with high relevance to your work—perhaps questions that will help you analyze areas where you know you need improvement. But don't worry about covering everything. Questions you don't answer on one evaluation, you can answer on the next.

Once you've formed your questions, you need to determine how to collect the information to answer them. First, you need to select the variables (behaviors, attitudes, etc.) you want to focus on. You might, for example, want to know if students are more likely to complete homework after being in a mentoring program. To do that, you need to find a way to measure the homework completion rates of students who have been in a program and of an equal number of similar students who haven't.

You will probably want to gather both quantitative data (which can be reduced to numbers or numerical relationships) and qualitative data (which are described in words, such as anecdotes, notes, etc.). Mentoring professionals rarely feel that numbers alone are capable of telling the story of their accomplishments. They're more likely to rely on stories.

While anecdotal evidence plays an important role in evaluation, quantitative findings (what social scientists call "hard data") allow for comparisons over time and for aggregating numbers, which are informative and important.

You may use measurements to describe something in the present or to depict change over time. Calculating the average age of youths in your program is an example of describing the present. If you want to document changed behavior after intervention, you need to measure twice, before and after. This kind of pretest and posttest design is a powerful evaluation tool. If you can't pretest, however, a posttest-only design may suffice if you have a good estimate of the baseline—that is, of where you started. Another useful tool is an "experimental" design, which compares two groups of subjects, one receiving intervention, the other not. For social service organizations, this is often accomplished by comparing those on a waiting list to those in a program. Because participants have been randomly assigned to their groups, the test will have high validity. (They are not random, however, if the wait list consists of harder-to-match children.) The chief disadvantage of this method is that it depends on withholding services from some who desire them. A related tool is the "quasi-experimental design," which compares two existing groups, one that receives the intervention and one that doesn't. Unfortunately, because the groups haven't been randomly assigned, you can't be sure that changes are the result of your project.

Circumstances often dictate what methods you can use, but the more rigorous the design, the more helpful the results will be.

Collecting Data

The kind of information you need, your target population, and your resources will determine the methods you pick to collect data. Archival records are one important source; however, retrieval of records can be time-consuming, and you are dependent on sometimes-reluctant organizations to release them. Nor will you necessarily find records in the most useful form.

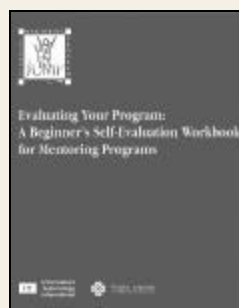
You can also use interviews, questionnaires, surveys, or focus groups. A questionnaire is a good tool with a large group. Focus groups are best done with a trained leader and may be expensive, but they can be an efficient way of hearing from several groups at once. While considering any of these, keep in mind that not all tools are culturally appropriate for all groups; if in doubt, consider pilot testing a method first.

Direct observation is a method in which an evaluator sits in on an activity or tapes it for later analysis. Indirect observation, where the group studied is unaware of your presence, includes using pre-existing data, and taking notes while touring the community. Direct and indirect observation can supply useful supplementary evidence, but because both methods tend to be exploratory and descriptive, you'll probably want to supplement these findings with data obtained by other means.

Once you've gathered the data, what do you do with it?

Statistical analysis will help you come up with conclusions from quantitative data. For some of your data sets, you will probably need to calculate frequencies, the arithmetic mean, median, mode, variability, range, and standard deviations. These calculations are not hard; if you need more sophisticated statistical information, software programs can help.

All these tools are useful for gathering data about your constituency. But if you want to compare it to other groups, consider using a standardized instrument, a tool that measures a specific variable in the same way with all subjects. Many standardized instruments have been already developed by professionals and tested; it is easier to use one of these (provided you find an appropriate one) than developing your own. (See the resource listings in this newsletter for further information on available instruments.)



USEFUL RESOURCE

Much of the information in this article was gleaned from the above publication from Information Technology International (ITI).

To order a copy of *Evaluating Your Program: A Beginner's Self-Evaluation Workbook for Mentoring* contact ITI at (301) 765-0060 or novotney@erols.com.

Finally, you have analyzed your data and are ready to draw some conclusions. Your data may suggest that participation in your program brought measurable improvement in the target population. But just because improvement occurred, you can't necessarily link it to your mentoring program. With multiple variables (factors impinging on behaviors and attitudes) it is difficult to make a clear link between a particular intervention and a particular outcome. Also, you will need to double-check to ensure that distortions, such as selection bias or maturation of the youth being studied, have not occurred during your investigation. You may not be able to show a clear connection between the intervention and the outcomes. But by understanding the kinds of distortions likely to occur in data collection and interpretation, you can keep them to a minimum.

Sharing and Learning

After a methodical self-evaluation, you should have a clearer idea of what you're doing right and why. You should also know what you can do better and have some ideas for improvement. In addition, you will have created a new tool that can help you use your resources more efficiently and perhaps attract new ones. If you conducted a community needs assessment, you may have identified unmet needs in the community. This conclusion could be the beginning of exploring whether your program should expand, regroup, or change directions.

Also, think about sharing the results of your evaluation. Who would be interested in your findings? How can they help your work and your target population?

"Outcome data is not just for managers and funders," the Metro Atlanta training program stresses. "Share it with mentors and parents. It's evidence that their efforts are paying off. Parents can clearly see how your program works for their children." For more information, contact the Roberto C. Goizueto Mentoring Institute, www.bbbsatl.org.

By the time you've completed your first self-evaluation, the benefits of the process should be evident. Congratulate yourselves—and plan when to start the next one. That's right; self-evaluation is, if not continuous, close to it. "Make outcome assessment a part of the culture and language of the agency," advises Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta. ■

Center's Library Offers Resources

Check out our extensive collection of evaluation guides and tools

Conducting an assessment of program needs, objectives, resources, and outcomes is a time-consuming and often difficult process. One of the keys to making the job easier is to use the right model and method to suit your program. The Lending Library of the National Mentoring Center has a number of guides available to help programs in designing their evaluation tools and goals.

Guide to Evaluation Strategies for Mentoring Programs and the Mentoring Center, 1992

This guide looks at many of the methodologies used to evaluate several different mentoring programs in the Oakland area. One of the few resources geared specifically toward mentoring efforts, it examines the various methods of data collection and analysis that are applicable to the different types of mentoring programs.

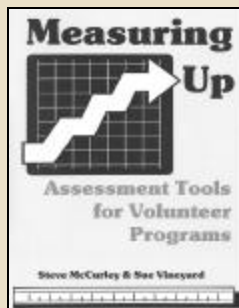
Understanding Evaluation: The Way to Better Prevention Programs, 1993

Originally developed for evaluating programs working under the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, this guide operates under the premise that "many evaluations that use simple designs can be conducted without formal training in program evaluation." It then offers the novice evaluator a step-by-step guide to the process of evaluating and reporting outcomes in programs serving youth.

Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach, 1996

Developed for use by United Way agencies, this guide is one of the best resources available for evaluating any program working with youth. It guides programs through preparation, choosing measurable indicators, data collection, and result reporting. It contains many examples of the various steps for programs to reference in doing their own evaluation.

RESOURCE CORNER



Measuring Up: Assessment Tools for Volunteer Programs

A fabulous resource for volunteer programs containing many sample questionnaires and surveys for data collection. These tools focus on volunteer involvement and can help any program in determining if they are using their valuable human resources effectively.

Baltimore City Public Schools Partnership Mentoring Evaluation Instruments, 1994

An excellent set of evaluation instruments for a school-based mentoring program. It even includes the often-elusive survey for mentees in addition to the standard instruments for staff and mentors.

Outcome Measures for Child Welfare Services: Theory and Applications, 1986

This one is for the serious evaluator. Written for the evaluation of child welfare programs, this textbook gets deep into the theoretical background of evaluation design. A useful resource for those conducting a very thorough assessment of program services and outcomes.

Planning a Program Evaluation, 1996

Produced by the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension, this simple generic guide would be an excellent model for a mentoring program to use. It explains all aspects of assessment in clear, step-by-step terms.

As always, resources in the Lending Library may be borrowed directly by OJJDP-funded JUMP programs by calling Resource Specialist Michael Garringer at 1-800-547-6339, or via e-mail at: mentorcenter@nwrel.org. Other mentoring programs can borrow materials through interlibrary loan at their local public library. To search the collection and read our lending policy, please visit the Library search engine at: www.nwrel.org/mentoring/resources.html

—Michael Garringer

Get Evaluation Help Online

The Web offers practical sources for guiding programs

There are several evaluation resources and tools online that can help programs set their objectives and collect data. Some of the following may be useful to a mentoring program starting the evaluation process:

The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation

www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/rde/manual1.htm

The Administration on Children, Youth, and Families has developed this guide offering detailed, step-by-step procedures for assessing the effectiveness of your program's services.

Basic Guide to Program Evaluation

www.mapnp.org/library/evaluatn/fnl_eval.htm

This comprehensive guide by Dr. Carter McNamara looks at all aspects of program evaluation for nonprofits, including models and strategies, and analyzing and reporting findings.

Outcome Evaluation: A How-To Guide

www.casnet.org/program-management/data-collection/guide.htm

From the CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) Web site, this rough guide aims to help mentoring programs that are in the first stages of identifying measurable outcomes to enhance and refine services.

Project STAR

www.projectstar.org/

Project STAR, sponsored by the Corporation for National Service, provides training and technical assistance to CNS programs on evaluation issues. While most of the information on the site is intended for CNS programs, the site offers sample plans and a detailed toolkit covering every aspect of program assessment.

Outcome Measurement Resource Network

<http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes/>

This section of the United Way Web site offers resources and articles on outcome evaluation for nonprofits. Many of the resources are available for downloading and can be adapted for mentoring programs.

User-Friendly Handbook for Mixed Method Evaluations

www.ehr.nsf.gov/EHR/REC/pubs/NSF97-153/start.htm

A massive and detailed guide on the National Science Foundation Web site and written for NSF programs, this guide offers something for even the most experienced evaluators. Chapters include the evaluation of a hypothetical project (for greater understanding of the process) and an overview of common qualitative methods and data analysis techniques. ■

CONFERENCE: (continued from page 1)

sessions will allow for programs to learn the methods used by exemplary programs in a wide range of topics, such as:

- Recruiting and screening mentors
- Working with youth in the juvenile justice system
- School-based mentoring
- Mentor recognition and retention
- Risk management
- Older adults and mentors

Also on the agenda are several distinguished keynote speakers, including:

Dr. Susan Weinberger, President of the Mentor Consulting Group

John Wilson, Administrator, OJJDP, U.S. Department of Justice

Dr. Ethel Simon-McWilliams, Executive

Director/CEO, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Gail Manza, Executive Director, The National Mentoring Partnership

The Center anticipates that this conference will be one of the premier events in the mentoring field this year. The NMC welcomes the opportunity to bring programs from around the country together to learn and share ideas that will make a difference in the lives of youth.

The National Mentoring Partnership is coordinating registration for the event. To learn more about the conference and get hotel and registration information, please visit the NMP Web site at: www.mentoring.org/nmc. ■

The National Mentoring Center Bulletin

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NEWS
BRIEFS

■ MENTORING EXPERTS MEET

The National Mentoring Center held a meeting of its Cadre of Experts and other mentoring leaders in New Orleans on January 18-19. Joining the expert trainers were representatives from the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, the National Mentoring Partnership, Public/Private Ventures, and Information Technology International. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss ways in which the NMC can improve services to JUMP grantees and work collaboratively with other national agencies to strengthen mentoring efforts at the local level. Among the topics discussed were early assessment of JUMP program needs, strengthening state mentoring initiatives, increased training at local levels, continued research into effective practices, and greater dissemination of mentoring resources. The NMC plans on incorporating all these ideas into its work scope as it plans for the future delivery of training and information services.

■ E-MENTORING CLEARINGHOUSE TO BE ESTABLISHED

The National Mentoring Partnership has received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to establish a National E-Mentoring Clearinghouse. The clearinghouse will provide mentoring programs with information and training on providing electronic mentoring for young people. The e-mentoring movement has taken off in recent years as programs find new ways of connecting volunteers and youth. To meet the needs of this growing movement, the clearinghouse plans to create guidelines for safe e-mentoring; develop how-to guides for programs looking to start or expand a program; and offer online and onsite training opportunities.

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