



Ryan's Guide to Evaluation

"Hi, I'm Ryan,
and I'm a Peace First Fellow!"

Evaluating the success of your project is critical to improving your projects in the future. Proper evaluation allows you to:

- Focus on key success criteria during the implementation of your project;
- Quantify in concrete terms the impact of your project so you can promote your activity to others;
- Be able to determine the pay-back on funds used, especially grant funds; and
- Learn from your experience so you do not repeat mistakes and build upon your successes.



Once you focus on the goals of your project, the evaluation methods follow easily. Always remember that evaluation goes beyond numbers – it's about ensuring that the change you want to create in the world is really, truly happening.

1 Story of Success

My group, Youth for Literacy, completed an assessment of our impact on literacy and realized we were missing a key area in our community – financial literacy for teens. We applied for and won a large grant to design and conduct financial literacy classes for teens. Evaluating our success was a key requirement to receive the grant. Our team discussed the best ways to measure the impact of our classes. We began by considering the number of attendees as a critical measure of success. However, when we hashed it out further, we understood that just because someone came to our classes, that did not mean they learned anything. Therefore, although it took a lot of planning and work, we decided to implement a “before class” test and “after class” test to see what the students had learned. We also gave an assessment at the end of the 9 months of courses to see how much they had retained, how satisfied they were with what they had learned, how useful they thought the classes had been, and how likely they were to recommend the classes to fellow classmates. We saw a consistent 60% gain in knowledge with each class and a retention at the end of the series of over 90%. We consistently scored over 95% in all success categories, which allowed us to present before the city council and receive approval for ongoing training classes.

2 Resources to Help You

Resource #1

Project Evaluation Guide for Nonprofit Organizations by Fataneh Zarinpoush

http://sectorsource.ca/sites/default/files/resources/files/projectguide_final.pdf

This guide walks readers through the steps involved in evaluation including setting a project purpose, setting evaluation questions, measuring results, understanding the data, and

presenting the results in a report. Although this guide is meant for longer, more complex projects, a quick read will show a project leader the importance of evaluation and the key steps to implement it, even for small projects.

Resource #2

Community Toolbox: Measuring Success <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/evaluate/evaluate-community-initiatives/measure-success/main>

A resource by Community Tool Box that has a good overview of the evaluation process. I find this resource most helpful because it clearly outlines the benefits of doing an evaluation.

3 Tips to Keep In Mind

Tip #1

Make sure all evaluation criteria follow the SMART criteria – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.

Tip #2

Inform all volunteers of your evaluation criteria. This will keep them focused on what is important and make them feel like a bigger part of the project.

Tip #3

Follow up on evaluations. Don't let the numbers be the end. Work as a team to find out what went wrong and what went right. Document your project so the next project manager can benefit from your work. Evaluations are not only to make sure you made an impact but are also to help you improve in the future.

4 Strategies

Strategy #1

Evaluations should include quantitative data, or numbers, to determine outcomes, the long-term effects of your work. When assessing progress you not only need to know the end result, but the starting point and the resources added. Think about the number of hours volunteered by age group, the number of people served, the number of training hours given, dollars spent or saved, and services increased. For example, when I conducted a book drive I collected the race/income/age literacy rates by area, the number of books received and the number of boxes of books received, the number of sites at which we collected books, the number of sites that our publicity was posted, the number of volunteer hours (adults versus youth) spent gathering, sorting, and donating the books, the money spent on supplies, the final number of acceptable books received to be donated, and the number of charity sites we donated books to. We then took the charity sites and determined the split of children there by income, age, and race so we could determine the potential impact on literacy on those groups.

Strategy #2

Evaluations should also include qualitative data, gathered through interviews and observations, that may reveal intangible benefits of your project. Qualitative data can tap into the insights and opinions of others. For example, we asked attendees of a class if they felt the class was useful on a scale of 1-5. This appears to be quantitative data, but it was our way of measuring an opinion. Through interviews, surveys, small focus groups, and observations you may be able to determine your project's impact on student leadership, community engagement and cooperation, opinions



on a service (such as a library or school), individual's well-being, and interest in a subject. One goal of a STEM Festival I put on was to increase the interest in students of STEM-related classes at school. Our information guides periodically interviewed students to see what they found exciting and how it related to school. Some of these interviews were recorded and put in our project video we posted about our project to show the impact hands-on projects made on interest in subjects at school.

Strategy #3

Make your evaluation process results driven. In other words, don't measure things that don't matter at the end. Always keep your goal in mind. If your goal is to beautify a community park, then measure the amount of items (or pounds) of garbage you pick up. If you want to change people's opinions about gun control, then you should survey their opinions before and after a discussion.

Strategy #4

Use your evaluation results to share your success. Grant post-reports always want specific outcomes. This will help you gain future grants as well as you can give numbers to back up your efforts. Also, post your results in local newspapers and on volunteer agency websites. Your experience will motivate others to get involved and make your impact greater. Share what you learned so others can gain from your experience.