

Chapter VII.

Evaluating the Peer Education Program

This chapter provides a step by step guide to planning the evaluation of the TAP program. Some program planners and implementers think of evaluation as the collection of a lot of useless information they will never see again. However, when designed correctly, evaluation becomes a practical tool that provides information about program components that work and do not work – giving a basis for modifying and strengthening the program. Evaluation keeps the program on track, identifies problems, and also makes the program credible to funding sources and supporters in the community. Although evaluation can be quite complex, it need not be difficult. This chapter provides some strategies for conducting simple evaluations, even for those with no previous experience. For those who want or need a more sophisticated program assessment, this chapter offers an overview of where to find more information and a trained evaluator to help. The chapter describes how to plan the evaluation, conduct process and outcome evaluations, and get additional information and technical assistance.

Planning for Evaluation

An evaluation plan should be a part of the overall TAP implementation strategy. Planning for evaluation begins at the same time as planning the program. By now, you should have read Chapters I, II, III, and IV. If you haven't, please read them now. Then, read this chapter before you begin program planning. The objectives set for the TAP program will be the same objectives used to structure the evaluation. Making the objectives specific permits evaluation. Measurable criteria for determining accomplishments, such as numbers and percentages, dates and locations, and the kind of activities involved will also guide evaluation.

Evaluation is a means of discovering the achievements of a program. Evaluation will provide feed-

back on the program's progress and measure the program's impact on the TAP members – the youth trained as peer educators. The following four steps will guide a workable evaluation plan that can be a direct benefit to the TAP program.

Step 1: Review the objectives and decide what to measure.

- Are the program objectives clearly stated?
- Are aspects of the objectives measurable or quantifiable?
- If so, for each objective, how will you know when this objective is met?
- If not, how can the objective be redesigned in order to permit evaluation to see if and when this objective is met?

The answers suggest what you should measure. If an objective does not specify what to measure, consider the objective's purpose in helping to meet program goals. Then reword it so that it specifies what should be measured. For example, if one objective is to increase youth's comfort with condoms and with vocabulary related to sexuality, how will you measure this? If you cannot figure out how to measure an objective, it may need to be reworded or reassessed.

Step 2: Collect measurements (also referred to as information or data). Use simple forms whenever possible, such as field notes and attendance lists. (These are described later in this chapter.) Collect the data when the event or activity actually happens. Many types of information cannot be collected later. For example, to know how many youth attend a TAP presentation, getting a head count at the time is essential. It cannot be done later. In another example, to measure increased knowledge or skill levels, you must have baseline data. Otherwise, there is no way to measure change.

Step 3: Analyze the data collected. Data analysis provides a summary of the information gathered, illustrates the overall activities and program, and permits comparing data from different groups within the target population(s). Use simple forms for analysis, such as counts (frequencies) and percentages. For more complicated comparisons, plan to get help from a trained evaluator.

Make sure your analysis is presented in clear terms. The terms used by evaluators sometimes convey little to others. While a highly technical analysis may impress a few experts, clearly understandable results can impress everyone who sees them.

Step 4: Apply the information. The results of evaluation will highlight areas of the program that are effective and pinpoint aspects that need modification. The practical uses of the results will vary. For example, process results may enable you to assure a funding source that you are on track, while post-test results may encourage you to revisit one activity with the TAP members to increase their skills or knowledge in a particular area. The critical point is to study the results, compare them to expectations as stated in the objectives, and reexamine the programmatic activities. Then institute changes that will improve the TAP program.

A look at two possible TAP objectives will help illustrate how the process works. Two training objectives could be stated as follows:

- **Process Objective:** Train ten TAP peer educators during ten weekly, two-hour sessions beginning (date);
- **Outcome Objective:** By the completion of the training, TAP members will learn three methods of preventing HIV/STI.

The process objective requires attendance information for each session. Therefore, the TAP coordinator should record weekly meeting attendance. The outcome objective involves assessing the change in the youth's knowledge of prevention methods. To assess this, the TAP coordinator must conduct an examination at the beginning and end of the training to determine how many TAP members learned three methods of preventing

HIV/STI during the program. Without knowing how much they knew before the program, there is no real way to assess how much they have learned during the program.

At the analysis stage, the TAP coordinator can calculate the average attendance for all sessions and the number and percentage of TAP members who improved their knowledge of prevention methods during the program. If attendance is low, the TAP coordinator might modify the program to encourage stronger participation. Similarly, if TAP members cannot identify three HIV/STI prevention methods, a review session can be added to emphasize prevention methods that TAP members did not know at the outset.

Strategies for Process and Outcome Evaluations

The two sample objectives above are, respectively, examples of process and outcome evaluation. Process evaluation involves measuring the success of a program's implementation, while outcome evaluation measures the immediate effect of the program on the knowledge, beliefs, and/or attitudes of the target population (in this case, the TAP members). Both types are important for assessing the TAP program.

Process Evaluation

Process evaluation uses simple measures to gather information on the implementation and operation of the program. Process measures can be developed to track each component of the program, from enlisting community support, through training peer leaders, to administering the actual intervention activities. With information from a process evaluation, the TAP coordinator can identify and replicate successful components of the program. She/he can keep funding and oversight agencies informed and also use information from a process evaluation to identify and correct problems. Use the four steps listed below to plan a useful and manageable process evaluation.

Step 1: Review objectives and decide what to measure. The best way to do this is to select process objectives during the initial program planning stages.

Start with simple ones, like the following:

- Recruit 20 students by September 8 and train them by January 1 to provide TAP peer education activities.
- Hold TAP training for three hours every Monday from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. in October and November at the Main Street YMCA.
- At the halfway point in the TAP training, survey TAP participants to solicit feedback on the content and the pace of training.

Step 2: Collect measurements. Collecting information need not be burdensome if appropriate systems are planned ahead of time. Prepare tools or systems and designate individuals to be responsible for collecting and storing information.

Develop simple forms to record most of the needed information. Simple, easy-to-use forms, such as the following, will yield useful process evaluation data:

- **Timelines.** Use planning calendars or charts to plot program activities by the week or month and compare the actual timing of activities to the original plan. (See samples in the Appendix.)
- **Attendance sheets.** To learn what works in retaining peer educators in the program, take attendance at each session. Is attendance down after an uninspiring session? Is it down each time at the same sessions? Attendance sheets simplify record keeping and avoid the problems that using stray scraps of paper may cause.
- **Protocols:** Develop simple protocols to standardize information collecting at TAP sessions. The form for field notes, given here, provides a convenient tool for gathering information from individual TAP sessions. Keep forms in one file or notebook. Prepare and keep periodic reports on the progress of the program, also submitting them to a supervisor, if appropriate.
- **Surveys:** To ascertain reactions to specific exercises, develop a short survey to measure participants' satisfaction.

Ask **closed questions** with the answers or response choices. For example, Did you enjoy participating in this exercise? Yes _____ or No _____

Or, ask **open questions** that allow the respondent to give answers in their own way. Open questions

should be used to request general feedback, comments, and suggestions. For example, What suggestions *do you have for improving the exercise just completed?*

Pass the satisfaction survey(s) out after each exercise and after the entire training. Assign responsibility for data collection appropriately. For example, the TAP coordinator can take attendance and fill out field notes after each session while peer educators count participants at each presentation they give and take responsibility for turning in activity forms to the coordinator.

Step 3: Analyze the data collected. Analyzing the data increases the usefulness of the information collected. Process measurements permit comparing expectations to actual program activities. For example, compare field notes with the program plan and record any changes in the plan and the reasons for them. Summarize attendance figures, noting growth or attrition among the TAP members. Compare timelines, work plans, and budget projections to the actual dates, sequence of events, or amounts spent. Pay particular attention to feedback about training exercises as well as to conclusions drawn from group discussions. These can pinpoint areas needing improvement as well as strengths that will help the program grow.

Step 4: Apply the information. Process evaluation can help to strengthen, improve, and redirect the program at any time. Don't wait until the end of the training to learn that the program deviated from the training schedule. Review the original plan frequently to discover how close it is to the actual work being done. Decide what to do about any discrepancies.

For example, suppose that the agency decides that condom use is a key area of training for the peer educators; however, the plan schedules the session on condom use for the final week of training. The training is running about two weeks behind. This is the time to revise the schedule to insure that the TAP members receive the condom use segment. Alternatively, the TAP coordinator can revise some of the exercises to get all the condom information into the remaining training sessions.

Outcome Evaluation

Evaluating the effectiveness of the TAP program requires measuring the effect of the program on the participants, particularly their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Outcome evaluation can be more rigorous and can seem more complex than process evaluation, but by using appropriate tools and by incorporating an evaluation strategy when the program is planned, the evaluation can run smoothly. Use a simple plan when the TAP coordinator, TAP members, or other existing staff must conduct the outcome evaluation. The following information provides a four-step approach to planning this type of assessment.

Step 1: Review objectives and decide what to measure. As with the process evaluation, objectives for the outcome evaluation should be measurable and derived from the program's goals. Outcome objectives state what the program will do for or with the target population. Outcome objectives involve the immediate or short-term effect on knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of the participants. The objectives for training TAP members normally focus on improving the knowledge and skills of the participants. Examples of outcome objectives for TAP training follow:

- TAP trainees will, during the course of the training sessions, increase their awareness of why adolescence is a high-risk period for exposure to HIV.
- TAP trainees will learn at least three methods of HIV transmission during the TAP program.
- TAP trainees will improve their leadership skills through participation in the program.

Step 2: Collect measurements. Chose methods for collecting information that are appropriate to the experience of the TAP coordinator, the specific program objectives, and resources available to the program. After reviewing the objectives, you may find that the data needed for outcome evaluation will be simple. However, some outcome measures can become complex and require the help of an evaluator.

Testing is a common method of collecting outcome

data. Tests range from short quizzes to broad surveys. Answers to the specific questions should disclose the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, awareness, and/or skills of respondents. Make sure that the questions mirror the information presented in the same way that a final examination in school tests knowledge of the topics presented during a specific class. Pretests and post-tests are useful for measuring changes in specific knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Some additional methods of gathering process and outcome data include observer notes, interviews, and focus group research.

The objectives listed above can be measured by surveying participants before and after the training. Surveying at both times permits measuring improvements made as a result of participation in the program. In addition, program leaders can observe and record improvement in participants' skills and attitudes.

Step 3: Analyze the data collected. One can conduct data analysis in a variety of ways, depending on the situation. The type of data collected, the ways in which the data will be used, and the depth of information desired will influence the analytic methods used. Evaluators study data in many sophisticated ways. For in-depth analyses, contact a professional evaluator. Fortunately, some simple analytic methods provide a lot of information.

Descriptive Statistics: Count the numbers of presentations, materials distributed, participants, and correct responses received. Counts can be compared to the numbers expected, as listed in the objectives. Summary statistics, such as means, medians, and percentages detail the characteristics of the target population. The summary statistics are easier to understand than actual counts when dealing with large numbers. Moreover, most people are familiar with them.

Targeted Analysis: Sometimes a program will need data on subgroups of the target population. Use the same methods as are used with the entire population. For example, in learning whether males and females have the same information about condoms or whether younger adolescents have the same level of

Written Materials

A variety of books are available on the subject of evaluation. Start with something simple. Many organizations and individuals have developed step-by-step guides to designing evaluation, several specifically in the field of teen pregnancy prevention and or adolescent sexual health. A few such guides are listed below:

1. Berk RA. *Thinking About Program Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990.
2. Bertrand JT. *Evaluating Information-Education-Communication (IEC) Programs for Family Planning and Reproductive Health: Final Report of the IEC Working Group*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996.
3. Brindis C, Davis L. *Building Strong Foundations, Ensuring the Future [Communities Responding to the Challenge of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, v. II]* Washington, DC: Advocates for Youth, 1998.
4. Brindis CD, Korenbrot CC, Brown PL. *Evaluation Guidebook for Family Planning and Information and Education Projects*. San Francisco: Center for Population & Reproductive Health Policy, University of California, 1986.
5. Card JJ. *Handbook of Adolescent Sexuality and Pregnancy: Research and Evaluation Instruments*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993.
6. Damond M, et al. *Making Evaluation Part of Your HIV/AIDS Education Plan: Methods and Measures*. Washington, DC: American Red Cross, 1993.
7. Fink A. *Evaluation Fundamentals: Guiding Health Programs, Research, and Policy*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993.
8. Fitz-Gibbon CT, Morris LL. *How to Analyze Data*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987.
9. Fitz-Gibbon CT. *How to Design a Program Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987.
10. King JA, Morris LL, Fitz-Gibbon CT. *How to Assess Program Implementation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987.

11. McKay EM, Lopez DA. *Evaluating HIV/STD Education and Prevention Programs: an Introduction*. Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza, 1991.
12. Morris LL, Fitz-Gibbon CT, Freeman ME. *How to Communicate Evaluation Findings*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987.
13. Patton MQ. *How to Use Quantitative Methods in Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987.
14. Philliber S. *Evaluating Your Adolescent Pregnancy Program: How to Get Started*. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1989.
15. Stecher BM, Davis WA. *How to Focus an Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987.

Many textbooks are also available. Check with a local college or university library and with the university's social sciences, psychology, or public health departments. Organizations that conduct applied research in the social sciences as well as funding institutions often have simple written materials to guide evaluation planning.

Technical Assistance

If the sponsoring agency does not have staff trained in evaluation, one may find the help needed at a local college or university. Contact the social sciences and/or public health departments to find out if an evaluator, either a professor or a graduate student, can help with the project. The kind and amount of help available will vary but asking early increases the chance of finding help. Often, graduate students are eager for real work experience and will work for fees that are much lower than those normally charged by professional evaluators. Sometimes the TAP coordinator can arrange to let the student use the data for a thesis or dissertation in exchange for the evaluation work.

In addition, a number of organizations may be able to help with different aspects of the evaluation. Check with local youth serving agencies and public health organizations for leads within the community.

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Whether working with a graduate student or a seasoned professional, a little preparation will help planners communicate their needs clearly and gain the best results. Start the process in the early stages of program planning to ensure time for consultants to accommodate the request for help. At the minimum, the contact should be made three months in advance of when help will actually be needed.

Be clear about the kind of help needed. When a plan is being developed, someone may be needed to critique it as well as to be available for informal consultation three or four times during the evaluation process. Be clear if you need help in designing the questionnaire, calculating the sample size needed, and/or analyzing data. The evaluator will want to know how much time the project will need. If a planner is

unclear about the steps – and therefore the time required – he/she should have a full discussion of what is wanted from the evaluation at the initial meeting. When planners are vague, and tasks keep getting added on, volunteers may feel compelled to withdraw from the commitment, or paid consultants will need additional funding beyond their initial cost estimates. Finally, publicly and frequently acknowledge the help you receive in all reports to funding sources, the community, the media, and involved agencies.

Advocates for Youth also offers training and technical assistance to groups implementing the TAP program. The staff at Advocates can answer questions about evaluation and can help develop alternative evaluation plans.