Evaluation/Reflection

1994

Learn and Serve America: Higher Education Evaluation Requirements

Learn and Serve America

LEARN AND SERVE AMERICA: HIGHER EDUCATION
EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS

Every program that receives Learn and Serve America: Higher Education funding should establish:

- a set of annual objectives
- a system for using "customer" feedback to improve program quality
- a system for collecting additional descriptive and demographic data

I. Annual Objectives. Annual objectives describe what the program believes will be the result of a year of effort, a statement about what will change because of the program. Objectives should reflect essential program goals. Programs may hope to accomplish many things, but need only submit to the Corporation objectives that are at the core of their program's mission. Up to three objectives should be submitted in each of the following areas:

- community impact
- participant development
- institutional impact.

Every objective statements should contain the following five components:

- the work to be done or the activities to be engaged in
- the intended result of that work (only one result per objective)
- a method of measuring quality or impact
- a standard of success
- the number of individuals who benefit

Objectives should focus on results as much as practicable given the constraints of time and measurability. Generally, objectives should be prepared for each college or university included under the grant.

II. Using "Stakeholder" Feedback to Improve Program Quality. In addition to conducting an objectives-based evaluation, programs are required to institute procedures that provide regular feedback on program operations. To fulfill this requirement programs must:

- determine who the program's primary stakeholders are (i.e., key customers, people who must be "satisfied" in order for an organization to fulfill its mission),
- develop and implement strategies for obtaining regular feedback from them, and
- use that feedback systematically to improve quality.

III. Descriptive Data and Evaluation Reporting Requirements. Finally, programs are required to provide the following evaluation information over the course of the grant period:

- information on participants (through the Participant Summary Form)
- information on programs (through the Local Program Information Form)
- information on accomplishments - primarily activities and numbers of individuals served (through an annual accomplishment survey administered by RAND).

Question 1: What are some typical objectives? The Corporation has not identified typical community impact objectives. Because these objectives are tailored to local programs and the services they provide, the variety of objectives submitted is quite substantial. The Corporation hopes to "catalogue" common community impact objectives in the next six months.

Participant development objectives generally fall into four categories - objectives that relate to increased civic responsibility and an ethic of service (e.g., continued commitment to community), objectives that relate to acquired service area expertise (e.g., counseling skills, tutoring skills), objectives that relate to increased life skills (e.g., planning skills, leadership skills), and objectives that relate to increased learning (e.g., increased knowledge about social problems, etc.).

Institutional impact objectives have generally centered around changes in institutional policies and practices (e.g., introduction of service-learning graduation requirements), partnerships (e.g., service partnerships developed across institutions), and increases in the number of participants (e.g., increased number of service-learning classes).

While the Corporation encourages programs to learn from each other, we caution against looking for "one-size-fits-all" objectives. Annual objectives should ultimately be developed and refined at the local program level.

Question 2: How does continuous improvement fit with the process of measuring progress towards objectives? From the Corporation's perspective continuous improvement efforts are distinct from evaluation work related to annual objectives. Continuous improvement efforts should be centered around "stakeholder" feedback. Programs are required to determine who their primary stakeholders are and to use regular feedback from them to improve program quality. Annual objectives are outcome oriented goals. They describe what you hope will change as a result of your activities. Annual objectives detail where you want to be at the end of the year. Continuous improvement relates to the quality of your services while you are getting there.

Question 3: How do I measure progress towards objectives on a continuous basis? You do not need to. Most programs will periodically track only the first and last components of their objective statements (i.e., program activities and the number of individuals who benefit). The result of program activities will generally be measured less frequently. For instance a tutoring program may track the hours of tutoring it performs and the number of students tutored weekly. However, they may assess the result of that tutoring, improved reading, through a test given only at the beginning and end of a semester.

Question 4: What do I do if I know we are not going to achieve one of our objectives? Grantees that wish to revise annual objectives should contact their program officer at the Corporation.

Question 5: How do I ensure my objectives, continuous improvement efforts, and the national evaluation all fit together? Imagine putting together an *Annual Report to "Stakeholders"* at the end of the year . What would you want to say in that report? At a minimum you would probably want to:

> (1) concisely describe your program
> (2) list your service activities and the impacts of those activities
> (3) detail opportunities for improvement and how the program plans to take advantage of them

These items correspond to the three primary goals of evaluation - describing programs, assessing impacts, and improving quality. By fulfilling the Corporation's evaluation requirements, you will also be able to achieve each of these goals. Specifically, by developing results-oriented objectives you will be able to achieve (2). By collecting and using stakeholder feedback you will be able to achieve (3). By completing the Corporation's Participant Summary and Program Information forms you will be well on your way to achieving (1). In concert, the results of your evaluation efforts should provide a comprehensive picture of your program, which you can provide to all key stakeholders, not just the Corporation.

Because the Corporation has the resources to perform more in-depth evaluations and because we must assess the impact of the overall Learn and Serve America: Higher Education Program, we are supplementing local evaluation efforts with national evaluations that will:

> (1) describe programs using nationally aggregated figures (using our database and the forms you submit)
> (2) assess impacts through a quasi-experimental study conducted by RAND/UCLA in cooperation with a sample of programs
> (3) identify effective practices and lessons learned in cooperation with a sample of programs (for purposes of quality improvement).

The results of this study will be shared with programs, so that you may use what we learn both to demonstrate the impacts of Higher Education programs in general and to improve your local operations.

Introduction to the RAND/UCLA Evaluation Plan

Learn and Serve America:
Higher Education

Presentation to a Corporation for National Service Teleconference

December 8, 1994

NATIONAL EVALUATION QUESTIONS:

COMMUNITY IMPACTS
- What work was performed by LSAHE programs?
- What is the impact on direct beneficiaries of service?
- Do programs build stronger communities?

PARTICIPANT IMPACTS
- Does participation increase civic responsibility?
- Does participation increase educational attainment?
- Does participation enhance life skills?

INSTITUTIONAL IMPACTS
- What is the impact on sponsors, partners and involved institutions?

WHAT IS THE RETURN ON THE LSAHE INVESTMENT?

GOALS OF THE NATIONAL EVALUATION

- **How effective is LSAHE in:**
  - **serving communities?**
  - **strengthening the higher education infrastructure?**
  - **promoting college student development?**

- **What factors facilitate implementation and effectiveness?**

- **What are best practices in the field?**

AUDIENCE FOR THE NATIONAL EVALUATION

- **Congress/Legislative Mandates**

- **Corporation for National and Community Service**

- **Higher Education Community**

- **LSAHE Grantees**

OUR APPROACH TO THE
LSAHE NATIONAL EVALUATION

- Develop a rigorous evaluation design

- Use multiple methods, both qualitative and quantitative

- Perform comparative analyses

- Invite grantee involvement while respecting time constraints

LSAHE NATIONAL EVALUATION:
DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES

RESPONDENTS	HOW MANY?	ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE
Program directors	All	Accomplishment Survey	Yearly
Community agency liaisons	Approx. 1-3/program	Service Recipient Agency Survey	Yearly
Freshmen	Representative sample	Freshman Survey	Yearly
Sophomores, juniors, seniors, alumni	Representative sample	Follow-up Survey	End of 1st Year & End of 3rd Year
Faculty	Representative sample	Faculty Survey	End of 2nd Year
All of the above	Some	Case studies	1-2 site visits per program if selected

RESOURCES for LOCAL EVALUATIONS

General:

Evaluation and Program Planning (Journal)
Educational Evaluation and Policy (Journal)
Evaluation Review (Journal)
New Directions for Program Evaluation (Jossey Bass series of edited volumes)
Applied Social Research Methods Series (Sage series of books)

Specific books of interest:

Herman, J. L., Morris, L. L. & Fitz-Gibbon, C. T. (1987). *Evaluator's Handbook*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Fitz-Gibbon, C. T.& Morris, L. L. (1987). *How to Design a Program Evaluation*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Morris, L. L., Fitz-Gibbon, C. T., & Lindheim, E. (1987). *How to Measure Performance and Use Tests*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Patton, M. Q. (1987). *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Stecher, B. M. & Davis, W. A. (1987). *How to Focus an Evaluation*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Suskie, L. A. (1992). *Questionnaire Survey Research: What Works*. Tallahassee, Florida: Florida State University/Association for Institutional Research.

Developing Evaluation Resources

Δ Universities
Δ School Districts
Δ Corporate Partners
Δ Foundations
Δ State Departments of Education
Δ Local Government Research
   Departments
Δ National Associations
Δ AmeriCorps Program Network
Δ Host-Site Experts
Δ Issue-Area Experts