Evaluating Program Outcomes: Program Evaluation

About the Core Topic

Program evaluation is a planned, systematic process of assessing the different elements of a program or service in terms of its effectiveness, efficiency, and overall impact. This includes collecting and analyzing data related to the program's goals, objectives, and short- and long-term outcomes. It assesses how well the program was implemented and how effective it was at accomplishing its intended purpose. Program evaluation helps us understand not just if a program or service is successful but why and what is contributing to its success (or lack thereof). Program evaluation also should tie back to the community mental health needs assessment results and examine whether gaps are being met.

Key Components

- **Partner Engagement:** Involving collaborators in the evaluation process and identifying strategies to select and assess outcomes.
- **Needs Assessment:** Identifying the mental health needs and strengths within the community or organization that the program or service is intended to address.
- **Developing a Logic Model:** Creating a program-specific logic model that identifies the inputs, activities (implementation strategies), action mechanisms, service and clinical outcomes, and long-term impacts.
- **Evaluability Assessment:** Review of the program's readiness for evaluation.
- Identifying **Evaluation Type**: Selecting the type of evaluation that addresses the program and organization's needs (e.g., formative, process, summative, and/or implementation, service, and client outcomes).
- **Evaluation Design:** Developing evaluation questions, specifying data to collect, methods and tools for data collection and analysis, evaluation roles, and responsibilities. The design may need to be modified based on real-world constraints.
- **Execution of Evaluation Plan:** Carrying out the evaluation and ensuring the focus of evaluation remains on identified project goals and objectives.
- **Report Generation and Dissemination:** Telling the story of program implementation and impact based on evaluation data, highlighting key takeaways, next steps, and recommendations. Program evaluation data can also inform improvement initiatives and discussions on sustainability and scalability.

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Why This Topic Matters for Implementation

Have you wondered if your organization has successfully implemented a practice or program? Is it achieving the desired outcomes? Has it reached its intended audience? Is the practice or program being implemented as intended? Are changes in implementation strategies necessary to achieve and sustain your desired outcomes? Program evaluation enables organizations to answer these questions.

Program evaluation helps to improve the efficacy of programs and practices by measuring how closely they followed their plan or model. It can also capture the impact of implementation strategies on desired outcomes as well as any barriers that may have gotten in the way. It tracks initial outcomes and provides evidence for overall program effectiveness and impact. This information informs decision-making related to sustainability and scalability and can impact future program funding.

Key Resources

These practical resources are designed to help you move from planning to action.

- *The Community Tool Box: A Framework for Program Evaluation: A Gateway to Tools*. Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas.

- *RE-AIM*. National Working Group on RE-AIM Planning and Evaluation Framework.