Process Evaluation

PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTER
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
Promoting Health & Wellness Throughout the Lifespan

WHAT IS A PROCESS EVALUATION?

A process evaluation assesses how a program, project, or intervention is implemented. It examines whether activities are carried out as planned, identifies strengths and challenges, and provides insights for improvement.

Unlike outcome evaluations, which measure the impact of a program, process evaluations focus on the “how” of implementation—helping organizations refine strategies, improve effectiveness, and ensure accountability.

WHY IS A PROCESS EVALUATION IMPORTANT?

A process evaluation is important because it tells you how the program is having its intended effects. Even if you are confident about your program's impact on outcomes, evaluating the process matters because what does or does not happen during implementation may impact how effective the program is. This is essential to ensure implementation is going smoothly.

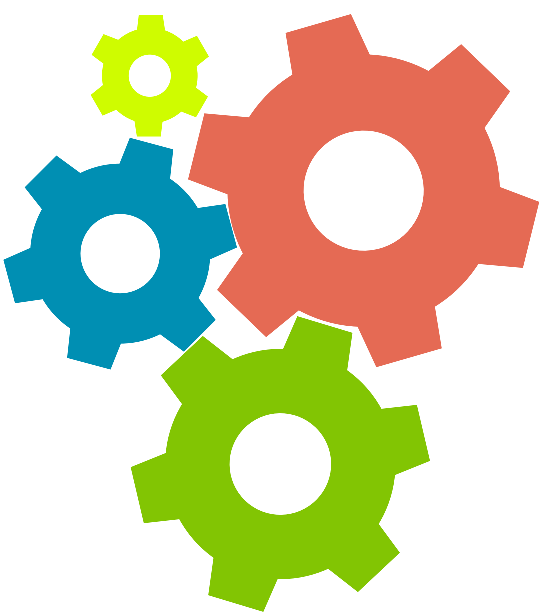
What are the benefits of a process evaluation?

A process evaluation can tell you if your program is experiencing barriers to implementation, including:

- Participants dropping out or not engaging in program activities
- Variation in facilitator skills and engagement that are affecting program effectiveness
- Facilitators running out of time when delivering the program

A process evaluation helps identify:

- Problems with implementation
- How facilitators (i.e., those delivering the program) are handling barriers and struggles
- Areas where staff and facilitator support are needed
- Program activities that are, or are not, being implemented
- Whether participants like, or are engaged in, the activities



GETTING STARTED

When do I conduct a process evaluation?

It is ideal to conduct a process evaluation as soon as implementation begins and to continue throughout the duration of program delivery. Addressing issues early on in program implementation provides an opportunity to ensure that future implementations will run smoothly and lead to positive program impacts. It is also important to evaluate after a program has been adapted.

Process evaluations will look different depending on your plan. Typcially, they will have a strong focus on participants and will montor implementation fidelity.

Participant-Focused: Are we reaching the people we aim to reach with our program?	Implementation Fidelity: Are we delivering the program as it was intended?
Who are we advertising our program to?	What program activities are happening and when/how did program activities take place?
Who attends and completes our program?	What are the barriers to implementation of program activities?
Are people liking the program?	What is going well with my program?

USING A PROGRAM'S LOGIC MODEL

As you are planning a process evaluation, be sure to familiarize yourself with your program's logic model. A logic model is a visual representation of what your program activities are, the short-term outcomes you hope to see change in, and the long-term goals of what you hope to achieve. **It may look something like this:**

INPUTS	OUTPUTS		OUTCOMES/IMPACT	
	ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPATION	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES
What resources do we need?	What do we need to do In order for those Individuals or groups to accomplish the short-term outcomes?	Who must be reached for the short-term outcomes to be acheived?	What preconditions must be met for the long-term outcomes to be achieved?	What Is the ultimate goal?

If you are implementing an evidence-based program, it will likely already have an established logic model from which to work. Check out the PRC Website for more [logic model examples.]

In a process evaluation, you will focus on the first two sections of your logic model. The inputs, or your program's resources, and the outputs, or your program activities and participants. **Using your program's logic model will help you stay on track and measure your program goals.**

Program Inputs:

Process evaluations provide an opportunity to assess the fit and feasibility of a program. Within your logic model, these are your inputs. This is a helpful step that can keep your team ahead of the game by understanding if you selected an appropriate program for your local strengths and needs.

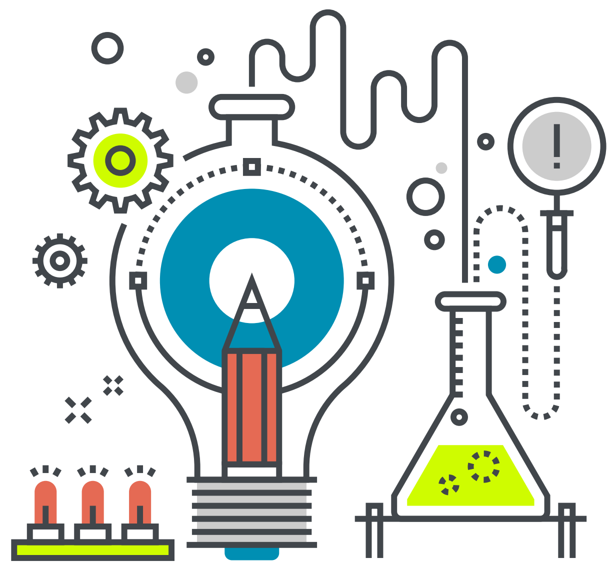
Program Fit

Program fit refers to whether your program or activities are an appropriate match for your local culture and desired outcomes. Program mismatch is the opposite and will decrease the likelihood of high-quality implementation and positive program impact. Strong program fit can mitigate several downstream barriers, including reactive adaptations, poor participant responsiveness, or weak program outcomes.

Program Feasibility

Program feasibility is how realistic, or feasible, it is that your team can implement the program as intended. When a program is feasible, there is adequate access to the resources needed to implement, evaluate, and sustain that program. Internal capacity often impacts program feasiblity - This may include funding, physical materials, adequate time, other resources, or local support.

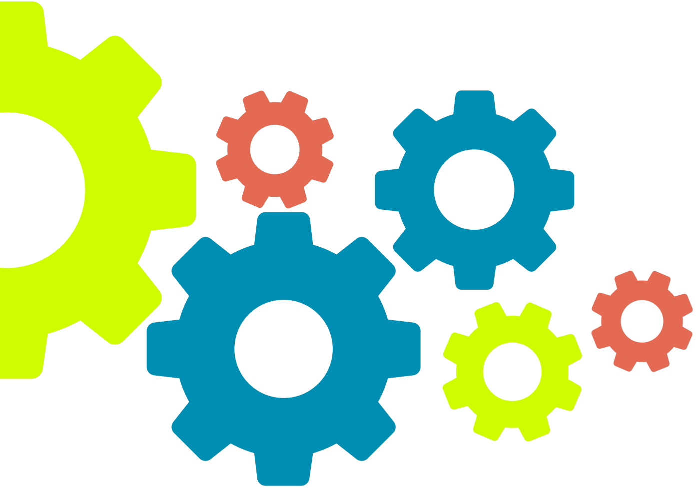
PROCESS EVALUATION COMPONENTS: PROGRAM INPUTS



Consider these resources when measuring program fit and feasibility:

Hexagon Program Exploration Tool | NIRN

Program Fit and Feasibility | NIRN



PROCESS EVALUATION COMPONENTS: PROGRAM OUTPUTS

Program Outputs:

A process evaluation will also involve the measurement of outputs, including:

1. **Recruitment & Reach**
2. **Implementation Fidelity**
3. **Program Adaptations**

Recruitment & Reach:

Process evaluations allow time for examining participant recruitment and reach, which is essential for ensuring that your program engages the intended audience. Recruitment refers to the methods used to invite participants, such as outreach, marketing, and incentives. Program reach focuses on how well the program engages those it was designed to serve. In your logic model, consider how your recruitment strategies align with the demographics, needs, and preferences of your intended population. If the program has the desired reach, it is accessible and appealing to those it aims to help, increasing the likelihood of meaningful engagement and program impact.

Some Helpful Tools for Recruitment & Reach:

Assessing Reach | RE-AIM Planning Tool

Rural Recruitment and Retention | RHIhub

Process Evaluation Outputs:

RECRUITMENT & REACH

Evaluating participant recruitment is essential for understanding your program's reach. During this process, your program should consider:

- What recruitment approaches did we use? (flyers, emails, phone calls, advertisements)
- Did we reach the group we intended?
- Were we able to attract diverse groups to our program?
- Which recruitment strategies worked well, and which did not?

You can assess these elements by comparing your participants with pre-recruitment expectations and by asking participants during intake how they heard about your program and recording this information for future use.

Engaging programs spark word-of-mouth recruitment, boosting reach and attracting interested participants. Gather feedback regularly!

Participant behaviors may be influenced by where and how they were recruited. For example, participants recruited through community spaces may feel a stronger initial connection compared to those who responded to a general flyer or mass email.

By identifying effective recruitment strategies, you can tailor future recruitment to better reach and engage your target audience.

Process Evaluation Outputs:

IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY

Implementation Fidelity is the extent to which a program is implemented in the way that was originally intended by the program developers. Maintaining high fidelity is important to maximize program impacts. Elements of fidelity are outlined below. All of these elements will affect the fidelity of your program, which can also affect your program's outcomes. A note on balancing fidelity with program adaptations will follow.

Adherence: Utilizing core program components with no modifications.

Dosage: Quantity and duration of program delivery measured through checklists and attendance logs.

Quality of Delivery: How well the program is delivered to the intended audience.

Participant Responsiveness: The level at which people are engaged with and enjoying the program.

There are many ways to track implementation fidelity. **Many evidence-based programs come equipped with program-specific fidelity tools, and those are recommended.** If your program does NOT have such tools, consider these options:

Fidelity Checklist | Military Families PSU
Self-Report Fidelity Checklist | CSU PRC
Observer-Report Fidelity Checklist | CSU PRC

ADHERENCE

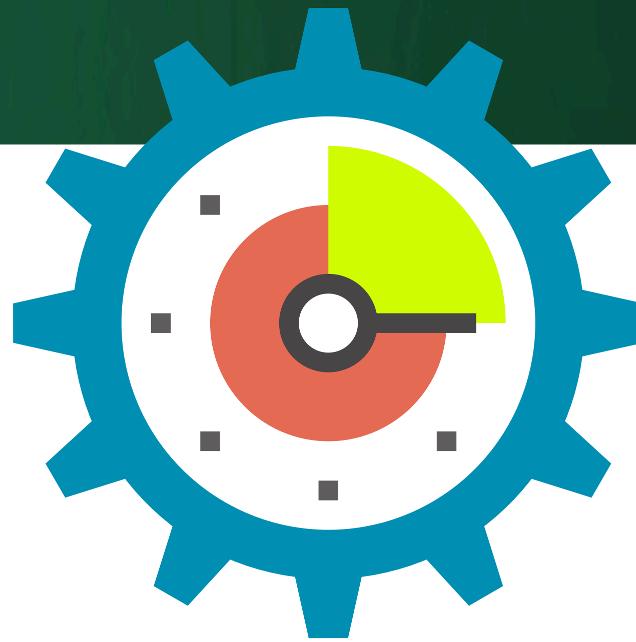
Adherence to a program is when a program does not deviate from the original program materials, meaning that no, or very minor, adaptations or adjustments were made.

Process evaluations help determine how adherence to program protocols affects outcomes.

Some programs come with adherence tools that measure specific program protocols. These have various names including session trackers or fidelity checklists. Here is an example:

[Botvin's LifeSkills Training Fidelity Checklist for Middle School]

DOSAGE



Tracking dosage allows you to see how much of the program the participants were actually exposed to, which is crucial for achieving desired outcomes. Even the best-designed programs can fall short if participants don't receive enough exposure to key program components. By assessing dosage, you can identify if low attendance or other barriers is limiting participants' full engagement with the program.

Total Time of Program Delivery

This refers to the amount of time (i.e., hours) spent delivering the program.

Frequency and Sequence of Program Delviery

This refers to the spaced timing and order of sessions.

Dosage is often measured through attendance logs and session trackers to monitor how much the overall dosage aligns with the original program and which participants are engaging more or less than others

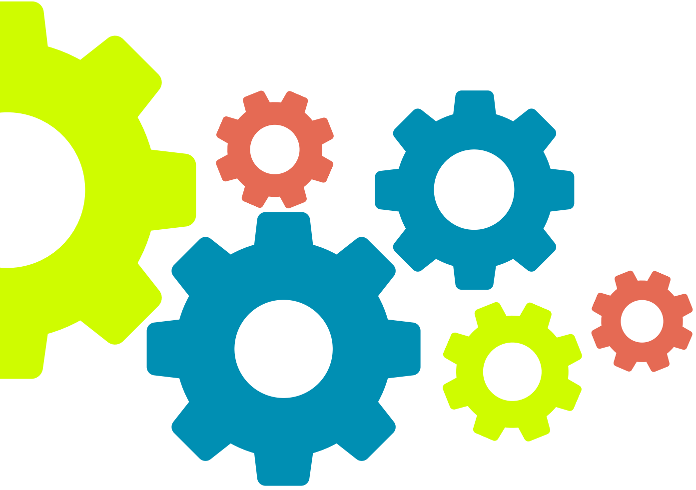
QUALITY

Process evaluations can assess the quality of program delivery, including how well the program materials were communicated to participants and whether facilitators are using effective methods for engagement. There are several program facilitator qualities and skills that affect outcomes. Effective facilitators:

- Are trained to deliver the program
- Understand the program's logic model
- Are motivated by the program goals
- Can build rapport and trust with the participants
- Are a strong cultural fit for the population
- Encourage positive engagement or participation
- Use reflective listening and redirection
- Create a warm/inclusive environment

What is inclusivity?

Inclusivity ensures everyone feels welcomed, respected, and part of the group. Creating a safe space for everyone to grow fosters a sense of belonging and benefits all participants.



MEASURING QUALITY

Examples & Resources

- Learn about staff perspectives using a questionnaire, such as this **Example of Facilitator Satisfaction Survey**.
- Measure implementer quality - Here is an example of how to collect feedback about the facilitator by including questions at the end of a participant posttest: **SFP 10-14 Youth Posttest.**
- Utilize performance reviews - Facilitators can assess their own strengths and areas for growth, or program managers and trainers can provide assessments.
- Session observations from an additional facilitator or supervisor is also great for measuring quality of delivery.

When building measures for quality, consider these **Guidelines on Measuring Participant Satisfaction**

Elements like focus groups, surveys, and employee evaluations can be conducted at regular intervals throughout the program or as needed.

ENGAGEMENT

Participant engagement is the level of involvement, interest, and commitment that individuals show towards program activities. Engaged participants actively participate, show enthusiasm, and are willing to apply learned skills or knowledge in their daily lives.

It is unrealistic to expect that participants will always be engaged in a program. High engagement can be difficult to attain, and low engagement could be an indicator that program adaptations may be needed.
If your program is geared to a particular subgroup (e.g., rural community, single parents, teenagers, etc.), you will want to ensure that your program is engaging for that group.

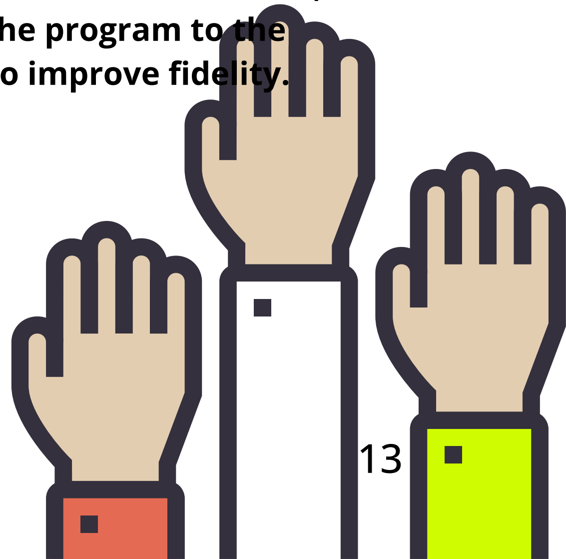
What is a warm environment?

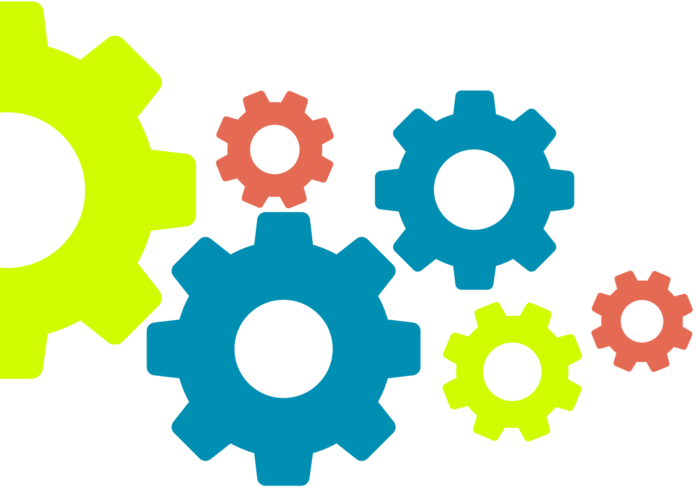
Warm and inclusive environments make it more likely that participants will engage in a program. A warm environment is judgment-free, where people feel comfortable sharing. Such responsive spaces are especially effective in encouraging participation among underrepresented groups.

The goal should be to provide high-quality implementation. Sometimes, making minor adaptations to improve the fit of the program to the participants' needs and strengths is a great way to improve fidelity.

Participant Engagement Indicators

- Asking or answering questions
- Volunteering for activities
- Limited distractions
- High attendance rates
- Low number of people dropping out





MEASURING ENGAGEMENT

Consider This...

Cynthia is attending a cooking class in her community. She wants to expand her skills and is enjoying the curriculum. Every week, she shares what she has practiced at home from last week's session, asks questions, and volunteers for activities. Alex also goes to this cooking class, but he's embarrassed to practice in front of others. He doesn't participate in activities or discussions and is often looking at his phone.

Alex and Cynthia attended the same number of classes and both got their certificate for completion, but only Cynthia developed new skills. Who do you think is going to prepare better meals for friends and family?

Comparing outcomes at the end of the program and examining the differences between participants who are more engaged could be a good way to learn about what is working and for whom it is working best. **Low engagement could suggest several different implementation issues, including:**

- The teaching style benefits some participants more than others
- Program adaptations may be needed for all or some participants
- The program or facilitators could be a poor fit for your local setting

Engagement can be measured by having:

- An evaluator or another facilitator observe the sessions to examine levels of engagement
- Facilitators report on participant engagement after each session

Process Evaluation Outputs:

ADAPTATIONS

Program Adaptations are any changes or modifications made to the program. When changes are made, they are often not tested, meaning that the impact of those adaptations is unknown. This does not mean that adaptations are bad practice. Actually, program adaptations can improve program quality, engagement, and outcomes when done with care and caution.

To learn more about best practices balancing fidelity with adaptations, see these resources:

The Traffic Light Model for Program Adaptations | CSU PRC

Adaptations for Underrepresented Populations | SAMHSA

Making Adaptations for Rural Settings | RHIhub

Tracking program adaptations will help your team understand how the changes are affecting your program outcomes. This step can be as simple as keeping a document or spreadsheet of any changes made. For more advanced options, consider:
Interactive Map2Adapt Tool | TCI
FRAMEwork for Tracking Adaptations

PLANNING A PROCESS EVALUATION STEP BY STEP

- Meet with your team and determine what you hope to gain from a process evaluation.
- Conduct a fit & feasibility assessment of your program.
- Look at your program's logic model and determine what process variables your program wants to measure.
- Select measures that effectively assess each identified aspect of the program's components (e.g. reach, fidelity, etc.).
- Identify members in your team or reach out to a program evaluator in your community to help support an evaluation.
- Between staff and evaluators, determine what everyone's role and responsibilities will be in the process evaluation.
- Start collecting your data and utilize a Process Evaluation Planning Checklist like the one below to guide your work
- Analyze your data.
- Share your findings!

Want to learn more about process evaluations? Check out these resources:
CDC Guidelines to a Process Evaluation
&
IES Program Evaluation Toolkit

For a deeper dive into program evaluation, including how to plan a process evaluation, see our intermediate tool:
Developing a Program Evaluation Plan | CSU PRC

PROCESS EVALUATION PLANNING CHECKLIST

	Example Evaluation Method	Suggested Schedule for Completion	Potential Person responsible
Who are our program participants?	Demographic data collection and observations	Session 1	Session facilitator
What dosage did each participant receive?	Create an attendance sheet and fill it out at each session.	Each session	Session facilitator
What adaptions happened during implementation?	Adaptation tracker or fidelity monitoring tool filled out by facilitators and/or observers.	Facilitators: Each session Observers: 2-3 times throughout program	Evaluated by Program Director
How satisfied were participants with the program?	Satisfaction surveys or small group debriefs	Every other week alternating surveys/discussion	Peer facilitator
How do staff feel about the program and implementation?	Debriefing in staff meetings and individual supervision.	Every staff meeting, halfway through program, and at program completion.	All session facilitators and documented by staff trainer
How clearly did facilitators communicate program goals and lessons to participants?	Addressed in participant debriefs and staff meeting sessions.	Every other week along with satisfaction check-ins.	Session facilitators
How engaged were participants in their sessions?	Track how often participants ask questions, volunteer for activities, and share stories with the class.*	Each session	Peer facilitator

(Center for Disease Control, n.d.)

*Utilize the “Participant Responsiveness” Tracker in the PRC Fidelity Tool (Page 5)

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