

INTRODUCTION TO EVALUATION

TIP SHEET

Step Five of the Strategic Planning Framework addresses program evaluation. By definition, evaluation is the systematic collection, analysis, and use of program information for various purposes, such as monitoring, program improvement, outcome assessment, planning and policy-making. More simply, evaluation is a process that helps prevention practitioners learn about the strengths and weaknesses of their activities so that they can identify areas for program improvement. Although it is the final piece of the Framework, evaluation should not be left until a program is nearly finished. Evaluation is most effective when it is included as an integral part of the entire planning process.

There are many different ways to conduct evaluations, and there is no one best way to do any evaluation. A good evaluation requires thinking through the questions that need to be answered (what information is needed), identifies the type of program being evaluated, and considers how the information will be used. Evaluation does not have to be expensive or complicated to be useful. Some evaluations can be done at little cost, and can even be completed by persons who are not professional evaluators. The information included in the following Tip Sheets will provide some insight into the various types of evaluations and the types of information each provides, as well as the various methods for collecting the data for an evaluation. We have also included a discussion on utilizing an outside evaluator, and a glossary of key evaluation terms. This is by no means intended as an evaluation primer but provides background information to assist you in making some of the decisions for planning an evaluation. To that end, this guide also includes a sample Evaluation Plan Template. The references sheet at the end of this section provides sources for more thorough information concerning how to do evaluations for various types of programs.

Sources: Prevention Partners: <http://preventionpartners.samhsa.gov/resources>
Western CAPT: <http://casat.unr.edu/bestpractices/eval1.htm>