

African American Prevention Intervention Network SANKOFA FACT SHEET

May, 2001

No. 20

Program Evaluation

Since there is no vaccine to prevent HIV infection, our only hope for controlling the spread of the epidemic lies in educational programs designed to change behavior. Yet, no matter how much we believe in our programs, there is always the possibility — indeed, the likelihood — that they are not as effective as we would like them to be. They may be fundamentally misconceived and fall far short of the mark, or they may need only minor modifications to be more effective in preventing HIV infection. So, if we are fully committed to saving lives — and everyone working on HIV/AIDS has this commitment—we must admit that our programs are in need of constant scrutiny and adjustment. Evaluation is the best way to learn how to expand the effectiveness of our programs.

Program evaluation can be defined as the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs for use by specific people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness and make decisions with regard to what those programs are doing and affecting. Simply put, program evaluation is a process of determining the effectiveness of a program. This process can be seen as a circle, complete and continuous and is on-going.

Because of the question of accountability, evaluation of community programs, in general, and HIV/STD education, specifically, has become increasingly important. Evaluation can greatly enhance an organization's standing in the community. Those organizations that use evaluation initiatives to guide program development and implementation not only provide better programs; they also are most likely to have better justifications for their programs, stronger community support, and as a result, more stable funding and greater longevity. Conversely, organizations that ignore the need for evaluation tend to become marginalized more quickly and ineffective as champions of community change and development.

Aside from the need to make programs more effective, there are other important reasons to evaluate. Some of the primary reasons for evaluation are:

- To show accountability to funding sources and the general public.
- To ensure that planning and development of HIV/AIDS prevention programs will be achieved with maximum effectiveness.
- To institute safeguards that require program personnel to systematically examine what they are doing and why.
- To produce data that will aid in decision-making relative to program improvements or continuation and that will aid future fund-raising efforts.
- To disseminate knowledge and program models that will lead to replication of successful prevention efforts.
- To enhance the organization's visibility and credibility within the community.
- To influence policy makers to make positive changes in HIV prevention based upon successes supported by data.

There are six steps in program evaluation which include the evaluation framework and standards for an effective evaluation. The framework promotes a common understanding of program evaluation. The steps in the framework include:

- Engage stakeholders
- Describe the program
- Focus the evaluation design
- Gather and analyze evidence
- Justify conclusions
- Ensure use and share lessons learned



The framework also addresses the **quality** of evaluation by asking the question: Will the evaluation be a good evaluation? In evaluation terms, *standards* convey quality and include four key areas to consider:

1. **Utility** (*Is the evaluation useful?*)
2. **Feasibility** (*Is the evaluation viable and practical?*)
3. **Propriety** (*Is the evaluation ethical?*)
4. **Accuracy** (*Is the evaluation correct?*)

Program evaluators view these four standards as the initial yardstick by which to judge the quality of program evaluation efforts.

In conclusion, pertinent data (documentation, record-keeping, manuals, etc.), having a structured and consistent way of doing things, assessing the needs of all parties involved, and continuously monitoring the program to identify its strengths, weaknesses, and cost-effectiveness, are necessary to assure a full evaluation of the program. It is essential that we learn to document the effectiveness of our programs utilizing sound evaluation methodology. Always remember that program evaluation can be seen as a circle, complete and continuous and is always on-going.

Source: Program Evaluation Training Manual, African American Prevention Intervention Network Project, Mississippi Urban Research Center, Jackson State University

For more information, call the technical assistance analyst at the Mississippi Urban Research Center, 1-866-JSU-MURC (578-6872).

