

Evaluating a fund's wellness initiative

Including evaluation components in the design of a wellness initiative is necessary to determine what aspects of the initiative have been successful and to identify areas for improvement.^{1,2,3} Evaluating the initiative will help guide a fund's future efforts, facilitate decision-making, and provide guidance for other funds who may be interested in undertaking a similar initiative.

An evaluation includes the systematic collection, analysis, and reporting of information about an initiative.^{1,3} The evaluation findings help trustees and administrators understand the relative strengths and weaknesses of the initiative and how it can be improved to maximize intended outcomes. Although it can be difficult to allocate financial resources for this purpose, the knowledge gained makes investing in evaluation money well spent.⁴

Types of Evaluation

Three types of evaluation are important for accurately assessing a wellness initiative—process, intermediate, and outcome evaluations.

Process evaluation. A process evaluation provides insights about the relative merits of the initiative—what did and didn't work, who was reached, and what areas might have benefitted from improvement.^{1,3} A process evaluation can occur during or after implementing an initiative. Conducting a process evaluation during implementation may identify opportunities for mid-course adjustments. Examples of questions that probe process evaluation are:

- Was the initiative implemented as planned?
- How did the initiative achieve its objectives?
 - What strategies were used to reduce the number of tobacco users?
 - What activities were conducted?
 - ▶ How many fund members were screened for tobacco use?
 - ▶ What materials did fund members receive about tobacco cessation services? For example, a fund can keep a record of messages related to prevention or environmental change, such as preventive messages that discourage tobacco use or encourage participation in the fund's initiative
- Which stakeholders were involved?
- What were the experiences of individuals who participated in the initiative?

Intermediate evaluation. An intermediate evaluation examines the short-term outcomes of an initiative.^{1,3} The short-term outcomes are connected to long-term outcomes.⁴ Examples of questions that probe intermediate outcomes include:

- What immediate effects did the initiative have?
 - Were there changes in the number of claims that indicate whether fund participants used the tobacco cessation services?
 - How many fund participants made a quit attempt?
- Can the fund clearly attribute changes in the rate of participation in the initiative to the campaign?
- Did the fund's initiative directly affect participants' behavior or knowledge?
 - For example, a fund can keep a record of participants' knowledge about tobacco cessation medications before and after an initiative.

Outcome evaluation. Also known as long-term evaluation, this kind of evaluation examines the long-term effects of a fund's initiative on its participants' health status and whether planned objectives were met.^{1,3} Examples of questions that examine outcomes include:

- What changes in prevalence of tobacco use occurred as a result of the initiative?
- What health effects were associated with the initiative? For example, insurance claims can be used to measure health effects relative to the following questions:
 - Was there a change in the number of tobacco-related deaths? Tobacco-related diseases? Tobacco-related disabilities? Number of sick days used?

A Sample Initiative to Reduce the Prevalence of Tobacco Use Within a Fund

In conjunction with setting a goal to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use among fund participants, a fund can design an initiative to implement and promote a comprehensive tobacco cessation benefit, including the following evaluation components:

Program objective: Reduce the prevalence of tobacco use among fund participants.

Intervention strategies:

- (1) Implement and promote coverage of comprehensive tobacco cessation services;
- (2) Create educational messages about the value and availability of tobacco cessation benefit; and
- (3) Launch a campaign, setting a firm goal to reduce the prevalence of tobacco users by a specified percentage or number by a certain date, e.g., by December 2012, the fund will reduce the prevalence of tobacco users by 20%.

Evaluation question: Will the provision of a comprehensive tobacco cessation benefit, coupled with a campaign to reduce the percentage of tobacco users by a target date, increase the number of fund members who attempt to quit and succeed in quitting tobacco use?

Process measures: List events that occurred as part of the initiative, stakeholders involved, and strategies used.

Short-term outcomes: An increased use of tobacco cessation services by fund participants.

Long-term outcomes: Reduction in prevalence of tobacco use among fund participants, decrease in tobacco-related deaths, disease, and disability.

References

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- ² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health. MMWR 1999;48(No. RR-11). Retrieved June 7, 2010, from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's website: <http://www.cdc.gov/eval/framework.htm#cbph>.
- ³ MacDonald G, Starr G, Schooley M, Yee SL, Klimowski K, Turner K. Introduction to Program Evaluation for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2001. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco_control_programs/surveillance_evaluation/evaluation_manual/pdfs/evaluation.pdf. Accessed on July 8, 2010.
- ⁴ Starr G, Rogers T, Schooley M, Porter S, Wiesen E, Jamison N. Key Outcome Indicators for Evaluating Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2005. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco_control_programs/surveillance_evaluation/key_outcome/pdfs/key_Indicators.pdf. Accessed on April 20, 2010.

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