Recording, Tracking and Evaluating

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Evaluating Your Information and Referral Activities and Services

Additional Benefits of Evaluation

Creates standards for success or a baseline to measure against over a period of time

Helps your program grow and become more successful as lessons learned can be utilized to help strengthen it in the future

Identifies duplication of efforts and strategies that work and don't work with your target audience

Lends credibility to your organization, especially as you work to build partnerships

Gives you a competitive edge as your organization competes for Federal grants or other funding

US Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Over the course of this module, we have included some evaluation tips for the various Information and Referral activities. Here we will discuss evaluation of this service in more general terms.

Evaluation measures progress or success. Knowing if your Information and Referral efforts are on track and getting positive results ensures that you are not wasting valuable resources on ineffective methods. Even though human and financial resources are tight, even though there are many other important things to do, don't skip this part. Because Literacy and Basic Skills programs have limited resources, it is even more important that they are only used for *effective* information and referral activities.

After doing information and referral activities, you need to look back and see how successful or productive they were. How else will you know that your outreach attempts:

reached your target audience and made them respond?

built strong collaborative partnerships?

initiated referrals both to and from your program that were beneficial to clients/learners?

Evaluating your Information and Referral allows you to rate the success of your outreach, service coordination, needs determination and referral activities. Evaluation helps you:

- find out what is and isn't working
- identify gaps in your Information and Referral services
- use resources where they will provide the most benefit
- show MTCU and other stakeholders that your program is effective and coordinating well within the community

Ways to Evaluate Information and Referral

People often refer to two different types of evaluation:

> **Formative**, which helps you to **improve** an ongoing plan or activity (person, product, program, etc.) Formative evaluation can be considered in two sub-categories (implementation and progress) depending on the stage in which it takes place. Some examples are:
> - Reviewing past program and community statistics to determine demographic groups which you are not serving sufficiently, to set target audiences (implementation).
> - Having someone review your flyer for mistakes before you circulate it. Their evaluation would allow you to correct mistakes and improve your flyer (progress).
> - Getting current learners to look over your marketing brochure to tell you what they like and dislike about it (progress).
> - Holding a focus group of past learners to find out what problems they had in transitioning to the next step in their goal path, so you can work with transition partners to alleviate those problems (implementation).

> **Summative**, which helps you to assess and prove if the results of the plan or activity (person, product, program, etc.) had an impact and/or met the set goals. These types of evaluation take place at the end of the plan or activity. They are often quantitative, such as:
> - The number of people responding to an ad, flyer or poster that was posted or circulated.
> - The number of people or organizations that attend an information session.
> - The increase in referrals received from a community partner after holding a meeting with them and establishing referral protocols.

We mention these two types of evaluations as, together, they provide you with evaluation strategies from the first steps in developing your Information and Referral strategies, throughout your campaign and beyond to determining the extent of each strategy's success.

Below are some types of tools that can help you evaluate your Information and Referral activities:

- Counts (statistics, responses, contacts, clients, learners, referrals, etc.)
- Observation (events, audience behaviour, service delivery)
- Social media likes or followers
- Website use analysis
- Case studies and learner success stories
- Media clipping/tracking
- Surveys and questionnaires (in-person, phone, online with clients, learners, partners, public, etc.)
- Key informant interviews (phone, in-person)
- Focus Groups
- Surveys (see the John Howard Society of Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton, Outreach Literacy's Community Partner Surveyin the Sample Forms section of this module.

Questions and Activities for Reflection

1. This module has broken Information and Referral into four parts: Outreach and Communications; Service Coordination, Integration and Information Gathering; Client and Learner Needs Determination; and Recording, Tracking and Evaluating Information and Referral. To which part(s) do you think your agency needs to give some attention? Why?

2. Think about examples of both formative and summative evaluations your program has carried out, related to Information and Referral. Which type of evaluation do you find more effective?

3. Why might it be important for your agency to carry out both formative and summative types of evaluation?