



FACTSHEET

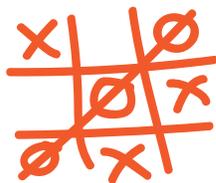
Evaluation as Strategy: Helping to Achieve your Legacy

Content developed from a YouthREX Webinar featuring Tanya Darisi, Executive-in-Residence, Capacity Canada, Alyssa Gremmen, POSSE Project, Christa Romaldi, Youth Action Network, and YouthREX



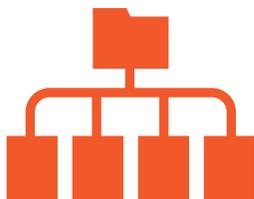
Here at YouthREX, evaluation is part of our every day lives; we engage with it, and learn from it on a regular basis. Despite our positive perspective on evaluation, we are very aware that many view it as a chore, something they know they should do, but not something they *want* to do. Evaluation can be especially hard for frontline workers who have so much to do and think about when directly supporting youth; many also feel it is a top down process that doesn't necessarily improve their daily work or employment context.

We want to remove the negative connotations surrounding evaluation and highlight that it is a way to improve, rather than simply prove the impact of our work. The best way to do this is to be strategic.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE STRATEGIC?

Being strategic is about working in a manner that's directed towards the achievement of specific goals. It's also about being thoughtful when it comes to decisions and designs, making sure they are focused towards goal development. It is important to remember that evaluation can work for you and at its core, is about learning. One of the hardest parts of evaluation can be finding the right balance between what funders require, and what you need to work towards your mission.



SO WHERE SHOULD YOU START?

We recommend starting with a logic model or theory of change. These clearly lay out your ideas for what it takes to achieve 'success,' whatever that means for your program or organization. Begin with a hypothesis - your best guess about what you think it's going to take to achieve your outcomes or goals. Try to make connections between what you need to do your work (inputs), and what you're going to do (activities). Then consider what you expect to come out of your activities (outputs). Finally, look at what you want the changes or benefits that come from your activity to be (outcomes).

Thinking about what you know and don't know in your logic model is a great place to start framing your evaluation questions. If you're stuck, imagine what you want to be able to say about your program/organization a year from now and frame your evaluation around what you need to make that vision a reality.



BUILDING STRATEGIES THAT WORK FOR YOU (NOT AGAINST YOU)

Just because something has always been done a certain way doesn't mean you need to stick to that way. Evaluation is fluid and always changing so you can tailor it to suit your needs. Pick what's urgent and gather the data you need. Remember

that it's okay to go back and refine your evaluation questions to either go deeper, or perhaps you've learned something and can try something new.

COLLECTING DATA

When it comes to collecting data, most tend to immediately think survey, however just as evaluation is always changing, so are the ways we gather information.

Good data collection is:

- systematic, consistent and creates opportunities to find evidence that's positive, but also things that are unexpected;
- engaging your participants in the evaluation design. This is a great way to ensure they remain active when evaluation time comes because they've had a say in developing it;
- being creative in your methods. You could try one of the following methods:
 - postcards (rather than formalized surveys, postcard surveys are shorter and more targeted)
 - wrap up conversations
 - post it notes
 - voting with dots
 - graffiti walls (using big pieces of paper where people can creatively share what their experiences have been)
 - Social Media (ie. Twitter & Instagram)

WHAT TO DO WITH DATA ONCE YOU HAVE IT

In traditional evaluation models, someone takes the data away and analyzes it, feeding results back. This definitely has its advantages, but we also think that analyzing data collaboratively is a cool way to learn about your findings. Bring people from your evaluation together – this can be participants, volunteers, staff, and stakeholders – and engage them in the conversation allowing for a diversity of perspectives. This process helps to facilitate buy in into the evaluation process because participants are now truly invested.

Consider this: if you have to make recommendations to stakeholders in order to move forward, it will be much easier to explain your rationale if they were part of the evaluation process.

REMEMBER, EVALUATION IS MORE THAN METHODS

Evaluative thinking involves:

- being curious
- paying attention
- asking questions
- challenging beliefs
- reflecting