Handout 10: Evaluation

It is here that the policy cycle ends and restarts. An issue has been identified, analysed, developed into a policy proposal a decision has been made and the policy has been implemented and now it is time to evaluate the policy.

Evaluation serves the following purposes:

- It checks the degree to which the policy once implemented meets its objectives
- Discovers if there are improved ways of achieving these objectives
- It holds particular staff and management committee members accountable for the implementation of the policy
- It provides important pointers for future policy making
- It allows the policy to be adapted and more meaningful when agency objectives change
- Assesses the case for designing new programs or extending existing ones
- Decides whether the resources for the programs should continue at their current level, be increased, reduced or discontinued.

One of the biggest problems with a policy is keeping it up to date. As soon as it does then people stop using it. Therefore if evaluation is built into policy procedures it becomes a mechanism for review. And identify if the policy is still meeting its objectives.

Evaluation then becomes a tool for collecting and managing data for improvement in the policy and for making the policy more effective.

Community agencies receiving government funding may be required to evaluate their programs before further funding is forthcoming so in this way evaluation is a necessary criteria for the future viability of the program.

Policies are evaluated on their effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness.

Effectiveness: Is the program producing the results needed for the money being spent? Is the program meeting its objectives?

Efficiency: Is the program efficient in the way it uses government funding and other sources of finance for the policy purpose?

 Appropriateness: Is this new program needed does it meet client needs or should an existing one be adapted or maintained in its place?

It may not be necessary to evaluate all three of these areas. The subject matter at hand and the purpose of the evaluation should define the level of analysis.
Methods of Evaluation

The format for evaluation follows a standard format.

- Firstly there are terms of reference prepared which identifies in clear and concise terms the parameters of the evaluation and its expected outcomes
- An evaluation strategy is identified specifying the questions to be asked and approach to be taken
- Data is collected and consultation with clients, staff, stakeholders and other key people is carried out
- The information gathered is the analysed leading to a report with findings, conclusions and recommendations.

This process mirrors the original cycle that produced the policy in the first place.

Issues to Consider in Evaluation

- Who will be responsible for the evaluation?
- The frequency of the evaluation
- How other stakeholders will be involved in the evaluation and review process
- What are the key questions that need to be asked
- How the outcomes of the evaluation will be used in modifying the policy
- Available resources including financial.

While it is common practice for personnel involved in the programs to undertake the evaluation it is important to consider issues such as conflicts of interest. While internal staff of an agency may be the best people to evaluate the program because they are in the best position to identify problems and implement the findings they may also be biased and have personal interests in maintaining a program the way it is rather than being objective about its failings.

To avoid this conflict of interests agencies employ outside evaluators. The disadvantage of this can be the lack of intimate knowledge of the program, lack of experience of having been part of the difficulties and not part of the successes.

Evaluation Strategies

1. Efficiency evaluation:
   - Examination of the accounts and invoices
   - Compares the budget and actual spending
   - Compares the program in terms of finances against similar programs in other regions
   - Measures wastage of hours, staff utilisation and other resources
   - Compares the program against other of similar nature for efficiency of the process and client usage/ outcomes.

2. Effectiveness evaluation:
   - Interviews with participants and clients
• Undertakes an historical and descriptive evaluation using case studies etc
• Submissions from interested parties
• Development of performance indicators

3. Appropriateness evaluation:
• External policy review
• Longitudinal research studies
• Long term testing against performance objectives.

Performance Indicators:

These instruments of policy evaluation have become an integral part of program design. Funding bodies require that agencies identify a method of assessing the performance of a plan of action from a program in their submission for funding. Evaluation of the program is then assessed against the performance indicator set down in the submission for that particular program.

For example, a new youth program to increase labour market skills may have as one of its performance criteria “the agency will increase the number of its unemployed youth into paid employment by 50% at the completion of the 12 month training program.”

Performance indicators allow for some degree of flexibility in their outcomes rather than absolutes. This is because very few programs are total successes or failures and progress towards the goals rarely reaches complete attainment. So for example if the above example stated as a performance indicator that 100% of the youth achieved paid employment then failure is more likely. If on the other hand the program can show an increase in the number of youth in paid employment then the same program might be seen as a success.

Findings

Integrating policy review into policy design means that evaluation can be a continuous process throughout the policy cycle.

For example findings from feedback gained during the marketing and promotion of the policy/program (the implementation stage) can be utilised in the evaluation stage.

On the other hand while a policy may fail its implementation, careful analysis of what went wrong in the evaluation stage can mean that the policy can be improved over time and eventually meet its goals.

The findings from the evaluation must be concise and objective if they are to influence future policy design. The evaluation report must specify the area to be studied, present the evidence, explore alternative explanations for the findings and justify a particular recommendation.

Evaluation is essential if programs are to improve. Information from the evaluation informs the following round of policy development and implementation.
Evaluation also ensures that policies are adapting to changing agency needs and in this way are dynamic rather than a static useless piece of work that gathers dust on a shelf.