

Quick Tips



Quick Tips 9

Ways to Improve the Quality of Your Program Evaluations

Improve the quality of your UW-Extension program evaluations by using these four main ideas – utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy. The American Evaluation Association¹ embraces these as standards for “good” program evaluation.

Below are some questions you should ask when you plan, conduct and review UW-Extension program evaluations. Compare your plan, design and/or summary to the ideas presented here, some of which have been adapted to evaluation in the context of UW-Extension. Ask yourself, how well does my program evaluation address each item? In what ways can I make changes to the current or planned program evaluation to better address these items?

Discuss these items with an evaluation specialist, mentor, program area colleague or program leaders – anyone who can help you improve your program evaluations and who is interested in learning about the results of your educational programming.

Utility: How useful is your program evaluation to you and your audience(s)?

- 1. State purpose clearly.** Clearly state the purpose(s) of the evaluation – the reason(s) why you are doing your evaluation.
- 2. Consider audience(s).** Describe the users of the evaluation and the type of information they require, request and find credible.
- 3. Communicate findings.** Plan how to share the information with others, what format(s) will you use and how you can increase the chances that they will use the information.
- 4. Provide value.** Draw a connection between your evaluation and how it provides useful information that serves the stated purpose of the evaluation. Discuss whether the evaluation provides new information and/or if it confirms previous information.

Feasibility: How practical is your program evaluation?

- 1. Show practicality.** Show that your evaluation does not disrupt the program or its participants and that you can implement it as planned given the costs, resources and situation.
- 2. Consider political viability.** Predict any political contingencies or potential consequences that might affect implementation of your evaluation or the use or misuse of its results.
- 3. Calculate costs relative to benefits.** Determine whether the value of potential

¹ The standards are selected and adapted from *The Program Evaluation Standards* (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, (1994); [http://www.eval.org/
EvaluationDocuments/progeval.html](http://www.eval.org/EvaluationDocuments/progeval.html) that serve as professional guidelines for program evaluation.

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findings might be justified in comparison to their cost – include your time and labor, support staff time, photocopies, transcriptions of audiotapes, postage and other expenses.

Propriety: How appropriate is your program evaluation for those who are involved?

- 1. Respect people and their rights.** Review and follow UW-Extension guidelines regarding informed consent and protection of vulnerable populations at <http://www.uwex.edu/hsp>. Demonstrate honesty, ethical practice and respect for human dignity in your choice of your evaluation plan, methods and use of results.
- 2. Disclose findings properly.** Plan the appropriate communication of findings to all persons involved in or affected by your evaluation.
- 3. Assess completely and fairly.** Examine strengths and weaknesses of the program so that you can use the information for program improvement.

Accuracy: How accurate is your program evaluation and the technical information it conveys?

- 1. Describe program and its implementation.** Describe and document your program clearly and accurately and present evidence that your program is clearly identifiable as an effort of UW-Extension.
- 2. Explain evaluation procedures.** Describe your evaluation questions and procedures in enough detail so that someone else could replicate your evaluation and/or determine its adequacy.
- 3. Demonstrate defensible information sources.** Describe your sources of information in enough detail so that their appropriateness can be determined.
- 4. Ensure valid and reliable information.** If you use quantitative measures, demonstrate validity – that you measure what you claim to measure – and reliability – that you use measurement that is “consistent and stable from one use to the next.”²
- 5. Use appropriate analyses.** Analyze data appropriately and correctly. Describe qualitative and/or quantitative analyses in a way that would allow them to be replicated by another person.
- 6. Draw justified conclusions.** Link your interpretation to the data. Consider alternative explanations for documented program outcomes. Do not draw generalizations beyond what your evidence can support.
- 7. Report impartially.** Communicate the evaluation findings and not your feelings, opinions or biases.

² Vogt, W. (1999). *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Nontechnical Guide for the Social Sciences*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

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