Needs evaluation

Needs evaluation is typically used in program planning. This evaluation helps determine which program aspects or activities are most needed and for which population. Generally, this method is used to help develop new programs or justify existing program components.

Suggested uses

Needs evaluation is a systematic program planning tool that can help you to:

- Identify client needs
- Clarify objectives
- Set priorities
- Identify strengths and weaknesses
- Plan changes
- Allocate resources

Questions addressed by a needs evaluation might include:

- What services should the program provide?
- How should the program be organized?
- What are appropriate program objectives?
- What need(s) is the program addressing?
- What is the most effective way to provide services?

Planning and implementation

One way to create a needs evaluation plan is to complete a simple matrix adapted from Witkin and Altshuld (1995). After listing all program goals/objectives in the first column, complete each column from left to right beginning with the What should be column. The column descriptions will help clarify the process. Once your plan is in place, choose data gathering methods best suited to implement your plan. The matrix also is a good way to summarize findings and recommendations for decision makers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Data Gathering</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Goal/Objective</td>
<td>What should be</td>
<td>What is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Goal 2</td>
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<td>Goal 3</td>
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<td>Goal 4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Applying results

An important part of any needs evaluation focuses on identifying solutions and how to implement
them to solve the needs of students, clients, or program participants

- **Prioritize needs using evaluation results.** Ideally, data gathered from students, clients, or program participants (e.g., surveys, interviews, and focus groups) provides them with an opportunity to identify their needs. A group of 10-20 stakeholders (students, program participants, program staff, administrators, etc.) can then prioritize needs based on evaluation results and their knowledge of the population being served, the program, and the program’s sponsoring organization.

- **Identify possible solutions.** It is best to develop a list of multiple solutions for each prioritized need. Altschuld and Witkin (1999) identify several approaches to selecting solutions.

- **Select the best solution.** Once stakeholders have identified all viable solutions, they may then choose the solution that best meets the prioritized need given available time and resources.

- **Map your solution.** It is imperative to plan how the chosen solution is applied. While stakeholder input is vital, much of the detailed planning will fall on program managers or administrators. Altschuld and Witkin (1999) recommend using a success map to plan how your solution is carried out.

**Examples**

- **UT Austin Fine Arts Library facility needs evaluation**
- **User needs assessment and evaluation for the UC Berkeley Electronic Environmental Library Project:** a preliminary report

**Additional information**

