

Tools to assist in evaluation of municipal public health and wellbeing plans

Module 7 of 7: Designing and conducting an evaluation



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Module 7 of 7: Designing and conducting an evaluation

This resource is available electronically on the internet at:
<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/regions/eastern/initiatives.htm>

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Authorised and published by Victorian Government, 820
Whitehorse Road Box Hill, Victoria
September 2013

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Acknowledgments

This toolkit was developed and written by Ged Dibley and Fae Robinson of PDF Management Services Pty Ltd, in conjunction with the Department of Health, Public and Population Health Unit, Eastern Metropolitan Region and the network of Eastern Metropolitan Region local government health planners.

The toolkit is a product of the *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Planning Review and Evaluation Support Project: Phase 2*. This regional initiative funded by Department of Health, was designed to support the evaluation of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans (MPHWPs) as set out in the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*. The work commenced with Phase 1 in 2011 involving an assessment of the barriers and enablers to MPHWP evaluation experienced by the region's councils. Phase 2 built on this work to produce the toolkit and deliver professional development opportunities for the network and individual councils.

Development of the toolkit involved a collaborative design process, induction workshops, trialling of toolkit modules and comprehensive feedback from councils and the department.

The authors would like to acknowledge the many organisations and individuals who contributed to the development of the toolkit. Thanks to:

- the staff of the Department of Health, Public and Population Health Unit, Eastern Metropolitan Region who provided direction and support for the project: Christine Farnan, Brian McDowell and previously Raymond Burnett
- the other delegates to the Steering Committee who provided valuable guidance and input into content and design:
 - Helen Molnar and Wendy Smith, Boroondara City Council
 - Sharon Barker, Knox City Council
 - Jan Loughman, Manningham City Council
 - Grant Meyer, Noelene Greene and Diana Bell, Maroondah City Council
 - Isha Scott, Shire of Yarra Ranges
 - Annette Rudd, Health Promotion Manager, Knox Community Health Service and (in her absence) Maggie Palmer, Health Promotion Manager, Eastern Access Community Health
- the many council personnel and partners who participated in workshops, reviewed and tested the toolkit and who provided valuable feedback
- the staff of Department of Health, Health and Wellbeing Strategy Team who provided insights into the toolkit's alignment with other MPHWP resources.

Introduction

The purpose of this module is to assist in designing and conducting evaluation of topics selected in your MPHWP Evaluation Strategy.

The module is one of a suite of seven resources entitled **Tools to assist in the evaluation of MPHWP**s designed to provide evaluation support and guidance to practitioners involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of MPHWP as required under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*. See **Module 1: MPHWP evaluation at a glance** for more information.

The following table describes each module and its use against MPHWP evaluation actions¹.

Table 1: Alignment of Tools to assist in evaluation of MPHWPs modules with evaluation actions

MPHWP evaluation action	Tools to assist in evaluation of MPHWPs modules
<p>Understanding MPHWP evaluation</p>	<p>Use Module 1: MPHWP evaluation at a glance to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the legislative requirements for MPHWP evaluation under the <i>Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i>. • understand the multilayered approach applied to MPHWP evaluation applied in this resource.
<p>Develop an MPHWP evaluation strategy</p>	<p>Use Module 2: Building an MPHWP evaluation strategy to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish the governance mechanisms for MPHWP evaluation • clarify how each evaluation question will be approached and what will be evaluated • establish systems to coordinate evaluation elements • design summary MPHWP evaluation reporting
<p>Determine role of internal partners, external partners and the community</p>	<p>Use Module 3: Achieving a culture of evaluation to develop internal relationships that promote MPHWP evaluation across council</p> <p>Use Module 4: Evaluating with partners to work with external partners to include assisting in the design and conduct of MPHWP evaluation in their MPHWP roles</p> <p>Use Module 5: Engaging the community in evaluation to engage the community more effectively in the design and conduct of MPHWP evaluation</p>
<p>Design systems to support the evaluation strategy</p>	<p>Use Module 6: Making evaluation sustainable to develop approaches to the design and conduct of MPHWP evaluation that are sustainable</p>
<p>Conduct MPHWP evaluation</p>	<p>Use Module 1 to guide how answers to evaluation questions will be brought together, analysed and reported</p> <p>Use Modules 3, 4, 5 to guide the way in which internal partners, external partners and the community are engaged in the conduct of evaluation</p> <p>Use Module 7: Designing and conducting an evaluation to design and conduct an evaluation of selected MPHWP topics or to support someone else to do so</p>

You are here

¹ Victorian Department of Health, 2013, *Guide to municipal public health planning*, DH, Melbourne.

PART 1: The essentials of designing and conducting an evaluation

In developing your MPHWP Evaluation Strategy you will have selected a number of specific topics for evaluation.

Each of these will need to be more fully designed and conducted. This means clarifying the evaluation purpose and other questions about the specific processes, impacts or outcomes of the program or strategy.

Note: *As selected evaluations might include policies, principles, programs, initiatives, clusters of activities, plan objectives or even other plans, for the sake of simplicity the term 'programs or strategies' is used in this resource to convey any or all of these alternatives.*

1.1 Considering your approach

There is no one best way to approach an evaluation – each evaluation selected as part of your MPHWP Evaluation Strategy might require a quite different approach depending on its topic, purpose, timeframes or resources.

Programs or strategies that attempt to influence the health and wellbeing of the community are likely to be complex. They can have a focus on individuals, communities, organisations and society as a whole – often implemented in combination with other programs or strategies acting across any or all of the four environments for health. This can make it difficult to measure effectiveness and to attribute what can be measured to the program being evaluated.

This complexity is an ever present feature of the health and wellbeing field and presents challenges to MPHWP evaluation. However, evaluation is first and foremost intended to guide decision-making in a real world context. Organisational context, stakeholder interests and other external factors can all have a major impact on the agreed scope of the evaluation and the depth of associated information gathering and analysis. This means that while an evaluation will generally be seeking evidence of cause and effect, it will also be shaped by the needs of decision-makers and other stakeholders.

Regardless of the approach you choose, an evaluation should generate information that is credible and useful for making decisions about program effectiveness and improvement.

1.2 A range of options

Approaches to evaluation have arisen from a range of paradigms each with a claim to authority. These can be broadly described as:

- ❖ **Scientific, experimental or quasi-experimental models.** These models adopt a broadly scientific method that consists of ...*systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses.*² They pursue impartiality, accuracy, objectivity and the validity of the information generated and seek to identify causal relationships. They rely heavily on quantitative data. Examples include:
 - Randomised controlled trials, where those in the control group do not receive the program or strategy.
 - Some program logic evaluations which rely on before-and-after data of measurable difference.

- ❖ **Management or performance models.** These models are driven by management imperatives for quality control and business growth. While adopted by governments, the evaluation technologies are largely adapted from the private sector. They aspire to accuracy and objectivity and identify causal relationships. They place evaluation within a larger framework of management objectives and rely heavily on quantitative data. They regard health and wellbeing strategies as 'serving consumers/customers or communities' which creates a strong connection with such models for evaluation. For example:
 - The balanced scorecard (BSC) is defined as a mechanism that *translates an organisation's mission and strategy into a comprehensive set of performance measures that provides the framework for a strategic measurement and management system*³. The BSC, which has its roots in the business sector, attempts to apply forward looking, multi-dimensional key performance indicators linked to strategy in the four 'perspectives' of finance, customer, processes and learning.

Public sector organisations in the main have tended to adapt the model to reflect their 'service to the public' mission, so that the customer focus is replaced by a relationship with the community it serves and the learning focus is about service innovation rather product development.

- ❖ **Participant-oriented models.** These models emphasise the primary importance of evaluation stakeholders and participants, especially consumers and communities. With variations including empowerment and collaborative evaluation, they value observation and the subjective human interpretation in the evaluation process and are more likely to pursue relationships within systems and networks. They strive beyond quantitative data to include strong qualitative data. They also approach evaluation as an opportunity to build capacity among evaluation stakeholders and participants.

Recognition of the complexity of health and wellbeing has generated enthusiasm for such models as being able to describe the perceptions of change for

² Oxford English Dictionary

³ Kaplan RS & Norton DP, 'Using the Balanced Scorecard as a Strategic Management System,' *Harvard Business Review* (January-February 1996): 76.

participants and to 'capture whole' the results of what might appear as unconnected strategies. For example:

- Realist evaluation⁴ which asks not just, *What works?* or, *Does this program or strategy work?* but instead asks, *What works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects, and how?*
- Results Based Accountability (RBA)⁵ is designed to measure results and improved service performance with a focus on client quality of life. RBA starts with ends and works backwards, step by step, to ask three vital questions:
 - *How much did we do?* (Quantity/Effort)
 - *How well did we do it?* (Quality)
 - *Is anybody better off?* (Effect)
- Narrative review attempts to align the program or strategy attributes such as population group, strategies, content, implementation and stakeholder alliance into a coherent 'story' from a qualitative perspective. The *Most Significant Outcome Model*⁶ is one such method that provides a structured approach for generating and selecting stories of change that identify what stakeholders – individuals or groups – see as the most important results for them.
- Action Evaluation⁷ actively engages the participation of all stakeholders in defining their goals and determining what 'success' would look like. Also referred to as *Action research* or *Action learning*, key evaluation questions are posed throughout the life of a project. The answers to the questions are used to inform ongoing reflection about the project and support modifications that increase the likelihood of success.

In practice, there are many overlaps between these models and most evaluations will benefit from taking a broad perspective on the task – balancing the need for empirical information against the management imperatives of council and the experience and perspectives of stakeholders, consumers and communities. There is certainly no inherent incompatibility between these broad approaches which means you can pick and choose what works for you.

⁴ Pawson, R and Tilley, N (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*. London. Sage.

⁵ NSW Family Service Inc - www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au (Click on 'Results Based Accountability')

⁶ Davies R & Jess Dart J, 2005, 'The Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique: A Guide to Its Use.

⁷ Action Learning, Action Research Association - www.alara.net.au/public/home

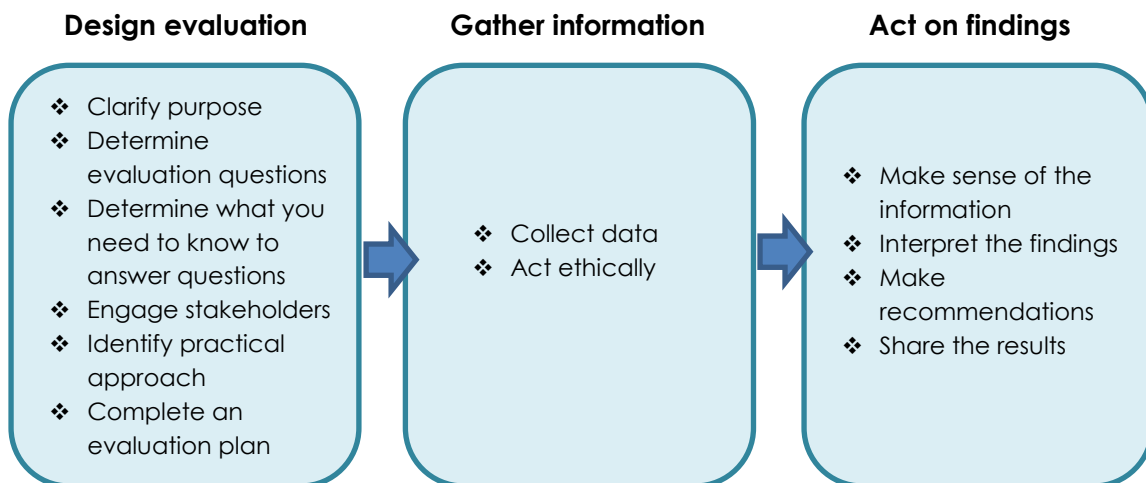
1.3 Preparing for evaluation

The MPHWP Evaluation Strategy will have identified the topics selected for evaluation over different years of the MPHWP cycle. It will now be useful to prepare an evaluation plan for each. This will be led by the person identified in MPHWP Evaluation Strategy as responsible for the selected evaluation.

It is important for the evaluator to plan in advance to ensure that the purpose is clear and that the proposed methods will answer the evaluation questions effectively and in a way that stakeholders agree will be useful, feasible, ethical and accurate. The sooner an evaluation plan is established the sooner it is possible to put information collection systems in place.

This module uses three broad stages that can guide the design and conduct of an evaluation see Figure 1.

Figure 1: Evaluation stages



Each of these stages is detailed further in this module. If you are leading the evaluation the information will assist you in designing and conducting your evaluation project. If the evaluator is an internal or external partner, you might consider offering them a copy of this module or you can contribute ideas drawn from it as you think useful.

If a different approach is chosen for the evaluation based on the topic or some other consideration, for example, an evaluation method required by a funding agency, the ideas in this module can be used to check that the alternative has the minimum features you need to ensure your evaluation questions will be answered.

A listing of useful resources on alternative evaluation approaches is in the *Further resources* section of this module.

PART 2: Design evaluation

- ❖ Clarify purpose
- ❖ Determine evaluation questions
- ❖ Determine what you need to know to answer questions
- ❖ Engage stakeholders
- ❖ Identify practical approach
- ❖ Complete an evaluation plan

The challenge as you develop an evaluation plan is to be clear about what you need to understand, that is, the questions you need to answer and to find the information that will answer your questions.

What is important is that the evaluation asks and answers questions that are critical to making decisions about the program or strategy being evaluated. This will be driven by the evaluation's purpose and might include a focus on the reach and quality of the program or strategy, the capacity of the system to effectively deliver it, the immediate and intermediate impacts and the long term outcomes.

The evaluation will need clear **governance and advisory processes** to specify how decisions will be made about the evaluation, for example:

- ❖ Who will conduct the evaluation? Will it be an internal group, an external evaluator, or somebody else?
- ❖ What resources will be available for the evaluation, including time, money and expertise?
- ❖ Who will provide advice, who will make recommendations, and who will make decisions about content and dissemination?

You might start designing your evaluation knowing this information or you might need to ask some of these questions first.

The following sections work through the six steps that make up the design stage of evaluation.

Use the **Evaluation Planning tool** in the appendix to develop an evaluation plan – see **page 25**.

As you consider each step in Part 2 you will be prompted to complete a component of the evaluation plan tool - look for the heading '**Fill in Evaluation Tool now**'

Make a hard copy or electronic copy of the evaluation plan tool and look them over before you commence so that you get an idea of the information you will need.

2.1 Clarify purpose

A statement of purpose makes what you want to accomplish through your evaluation clear to your internal and external stakeholders.

An effective purpose statement will sharpen the focus of your evaluation, for example, is it broadly focused on all aspects of the program or strategy or does it have a more narrow focus?

In deciding your purpose, consider the following questions:

❖ **What is the program or strategy intending to achieve?**

You should be able to draw this straight from your originating program or strategy documents. If these do not include goals, aims or objectives stated in a clear and measurable way, you will need to spend time revisiting the original intentions of the program or strategy before you undertake the evaluation.

The clearer the description of your program or strategy, the easier it will be to align your evaluation purpose. One way of creating clarity is using a program logic approach.

For more on Program Logic, see the presentation at:

[http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/EF8861765B99DB1ECA257B19007DBA75/\\$FILE/understanding_program_logic.pdf](http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/EF8861765B99DB1ECA257B19007DBA75/$FILE/understanding_program_logic.pdf)

❖ **How do you intend using the findings of the evaluation?**

Uses might include to:

- meet internal or external reporting requirements and demonstrate accountability for the use of resources
- improve program or strategy design and delivery
- contribute to evidence about what works and what doesn't
- illustrate the changes achieved and the value of the program or strategy
- promote awareness among stakeholders and others
- inform future planning or resource allocation.

❖ **Do you want to check the long term benefits of the program or strategy?**

Have you undertaken baseline measures or is there information available to illustrate the changes achieved over time?

Has it been running long enough to consider long term benefits?

❖ **Do you want to check that the program or strategy is being implemented as intended?**

Are you interested in reach or participation rates; standards and quality; awareness or satisfaction?

❖ **Do you want to check that the program or strategy is having the influence you expected and not having unforeseen consequences?**

Are you interested in changes in behaviours, policy or supportive environments?

❖ **Who are the evaluation's potential audiences?**

This might be councillors, senior managers, the public or external partners. Keep in mind that evaluations do not occur in a vacuum and all evaluations are influenced by – and seek to influence – socio-political factors.

The purpose of your evaluation will also be influenced by what is realistic. Creating overly ambitious aims can lead to evaluations that are unable to draw compelling conclusions that will support decision-making. It is generally better to undertake a limited, focused evaluation of good quality, than a larger evaluation of lower quality.

Fill in Evaluation Tool now

Once you are clear why you are undertaking the evaluation insert this in the evaluation plan tool under '**Purpose**'.

You will have also considered what the program or strategy is intending to achieve. Write the statements that express the program or strategy intentions in the evaluation plan tool under '**Stated Intentions**'.

2.2 Determine evaluation questions

The evaluation questions will reflect your purpose and will guide decisions about what you measure and how you gather the necessary information. The following table suggests some questions related to the evaluation purpose.

Purpose	Sample questions
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Has the program or strategy been implemented as intended? ❖ What factors (both positive and negative) impacted on the implementation ❖ What proportion of the target group has received the program or strategy? ❖ Has uptake of the program or strategy varied by socioeconomic position, indigenous status, cultural or linguistic background and/or rural/metro location? ❖ Have program or strategy participants (staff, community organisations, community members) been satisfied with the program or strategy? ❖ How effective were contracting and subcontracting arrangements that were established to support program or strategy implementation and evaluation?
Impact and Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Have the program or strategy impacts and outcomes been achieved? ❖ What impact has the program or strategy had on populations facing greatest inequality? ❖ What unanticipated positive and negative impacts/outcomes have arisen from the program or strategy? ❖ Have all strategies been appropriate and effective in achieving the impacts and outcomes? ❖ What have been the critical success factors and barriers to achieving the impacts and outcomes? ❖ Is the cost reasonable in relation to the magnitude of the benefits? ❖ Have levels of partnership and collaboration increased?

Table 2: Evaluation questions reflecting broad evaluation purpose

The specific questions you ask will be specific to the evaluation topic and describe what you want to know to determine whether your expectations have been or are being met. The questions therefore will be based on the stated intentions of the program or strategy being evaluated.

At this stage you might also consider what level of detail is required to understand whether your goals and objectives have been met. It can be impractical (too costly or timely) to collect in-depth data for a wide range of research questions or indicators. You might need to make trade-offs between the quality and extent of your evaluation. Having a small number of key questions helps to focus the evaluation design and provides a useful framework for analysis and reporting.

Fill in Evaluation Tool now

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Alongside each **'Stated intentions'**, insert the evaluation question(s) you have devised in the evaluation plan tool under **'Evaluation Questions'**.

2.3 Determine what you need to know to answer questions

Once you have posed your questions, you will need to focus your evaluation design on considering what information is required to answer them. This information is often presented as indicators or measures that will allow you to discern any significant change between your starting point or baseline and the time of your evaluation. This helps you to assess whether the program or strategy is progressing as intended.

See indicator examples Tables 2 and 3 in **Evaluation Framework for health promotion and disease prevention programs**, Victorian Department of Health, 2010

[http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AE7E5D59ADE57556CA2578650020BBDE/\\$FILE/Evaluation%20framework%20for%20health%20promotion.pdf](http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AE7E5D59ADE57556CA2578650020BBDE/$FILE/Evaluation%20framework%20for%20health%20promotion.pdf)

When your evaluation questions are concerned with information that can be counted or calculated, for example, participant numbers, service usage or satisfaction results, the indicators you need will be 'hard numbers', that is, quantitative data.

When your evaluation questions are more concerned with understanding the subjective experience of stakeholders and participants, the indicators you need will be descriptive, that is, qualitative data. Both forms of information have their strengths and weaknesses in helping you answer your evaluation questions. The table below illustrates the respective strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative data.

Table 3: Strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative data

	Strengths	Limitations
Quantitative data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Best used to answer what, when and who questions ❖ Findings can be generalised, <i>if</i> selection process well-designed and sample is representative of study population and the sample size is large enough ❖ Relatively easy to analyse ❖ Data can be very consistent, precise, reliable ❖ Usually cost efficient collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Not well suited to how and why questions ❖ Related secondary data sometimes not available, or accessing available data is difficult ❖ Difficult to understand context of activities
Qualitative data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Best used to answer how and why questions ❖ Complement and refine quantitative data ❖ Provide more detailed information to explain complex issues ❖ Multiple methods for gathering data on sensitive subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Not well suited to what, when and who questions ❖ Findings usually cannot be generalised to the study of population or community ❖ More difficult to analyse; do not fit neatly in standard categories ❖ Data collection is usually time consuming and costly

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Quantitative data on its own might not be robust enough to explain complex issues. Qualitative information allows the study of motivations and perceptions, providing richer information on how individuals react in their environment and cope with change. It takes you behind the numbers to provide insight into why change might have occurred.

However, qualitative data on its own might not provide the information needed for service planning or for cost-benefit analysis.

It is therefore likely that using both quantitative and qualitative data in your indicators will provide a practical solution and improve understanding by bringing together and testing different perspectives.

Fill in Evaluation Tool now

Insert the information required to answer each evaluation question in the evaluation plan tool under '**Information required**'.

Sometimes one piece of information or measure might answer more than one question.

2.4 Engage stakeholders

Engaging stakeholders in an evaluation is more likely to result in an evaluation plan and an evaluation that will meet stakeholder needs and expectations, improve access to data and information and create greater ownership of evaluation recommendations. Key stakeholders including funding bodies, council managers, staff, colleagues, partner organisations, program participants and the community.

Engagement with these stakeholders can occur through membership of an evaluation steering committee or through advisory or reference groups. It might involve shorter-term consultations or meetings or communication mechanisms such as newsletters or communiques. The decision about who is engaged and how you engage them in the evaluation will depend on each stakeholder group's connection with the evaluation.

Consider the following questions:

- ❖ Who are the stakeholders or stakeholder groups in the evaluation?
- ❖ What is each stakeholder or stakeholder group interest in the evaluation? What would each want from the evaluation, for example, improved services, better collaboration or evidence of effectiveness?
- ❖ What roles can each stakeholder or stakeholder group take in the evaluation, for example, participation in data collection, assistance with interpretation? Consider whether there are any issues that constrain their participation in the evaluation. How can issues such as conflicts of interest, access, and confidentiality be managed or avoided?
- ❖ How will each stakeholder or stakeholder group be involved in the evaluation, for example, membership of reference group, informant?
- ❖ When will you engage with each stakeholder or stakeholder group for example, from commencement, at consultation phases?

Note: Remember to consult with stakeholders on all relevant features of your evaluation plan. For general principles see **Module 4 Evaluating with partners** and **Module 5 Engaging the community in evaluation**.

Fill in Evaluation Tool now

Refine your evaluation plan to reflect stakeholder input.

2.5 Identify a practical approach

Once you are clear about your evaluation questions and your measures, it will be important to consider how you will gather the information you need and other factors that might impact on the evaluation design. You might need to make trade-offs to ensure the success and relevance of the evaluation. These considerations might include:

- ❖ Selecting methods for data collection, including the availability of data and access to evaluation participants.
- ❖ Ensuring evaluation expertise.

Methods for data collection

The methods you use to gather information will reflect the kind of data you require to answer your evaluation questions. A mix of quantitative and qualitative data will mean a mix of methods. Methods that support the collection of quantitative and qualitative data include:

Table 4: Quantitative and qualitative methods

Quantitative methods	Qualitative methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant activity records • Pre/post activity tests – biological and psychological • Service usage records • Surveys with closed questions or using ratings • Process tracking • Statistical analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups • Individual in-depth interviews with open or semi-structured formats • Journals • Open-ended survey questions • Observation – including the use of images and multimedia • Case Studies • Document review – previous studies, reports, minutes • Non-statistical analysis

Whatever data collection methods you decide to use, it will be important to synthesise the information in order to make sense of it, for example:

- ❖ a questionnaire might be used to quickly collect a great deal of information from a lot of people
- ❖ interviews might then be used to get more in-depth information from certain respondents to the questionnaires
- ❖ finally, case studies might then be used for more in-depth analysis of unique and notable cases such as, those who experienced significant benefits or those who quit.

You can either collect evaluation data yourself in-house (primary sources) or use information others have collected (secondary sources).

Using secondary sources, such as data provided by other agencies, is likely to be less resource intensive, but you will need to be confident that it is credible, available, repeatable and affordable.

Collecting your own information requires processes that are well designed and carried out. They are potentially resource intensive. Consider the following questions:

- ❖ How much of the information you need can be collected and analysed in a low-cost and practical manner?
- ❖ How accurate will the information be?
- ❖ Will the methods get all of the needed information?
- ❖ What additional methods should and could be used if additional information is needed?
- ❖ Will the information appear as credible to decision makers, for example, to funders or senior management?
- ❖ How will you select participants for the evaluation? What sample sizes will you need? How will you ensure a good response rate?
- ❖ Will the audience comply with the methods, for example, will they fill out questionnaires carefully, engage in interviews or focus groups, let you examine their documentations?
- ❖ How can the information be analysed?

Fill in Evaluation Tool now

Insert the method you will use to gather the information required and its source, in the evaluation plan tool under '**Information Collection**'.

Ensuring evaluation expertise

A further question in identifying a practical approach to the evaluation will be: *Who will conduct the evaluation?*

You might consider doing it internally or engaging an external evaluator. This will be influenced by your purpose, for example, highly politicised evaluations might demand an independent evaluator. It will also be influenced by the availability of internal expertise or whether the council wants to invest in evaluation training.

There are a range of advantages and disadvantages of each that you can consider as set out in Table 5.

Table 5: Advantages and disadvantages of internal and external evaluators

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Internal evaluators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ An in-depth, working knowledge of the program or strategy means detail should be well understood ❖ Existing relationships with program or strategy staff and stakeholders can promote confidence and cooperation ❖ Direct responsibility for evaluation means implementation can be closely monitored and varied if necessary ❖ Might be less costly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ There is a risk of being too close to the program or strategy leading to reduced objectivity ❖ Responsibility for ongoing program or strategy activities might mean the evaluation is not given adequate attention ❖ Position might need to be backfilled ❖ Experience and expertise in evaluation might be inadequate
External evaluators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Lack of familiarity can offer objectivity and alternative perspectives ❖ Would be expected to have significant evaluation experience and expertise ❖ Evaluation task would be expected to be a priority receiving adequate time and attention ❖ Can help to build capacity of program or strategy staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Might take time to become familiar with the program or strategy and organisational context ❖ Might take time to win the trust and support of program or strategy staff and stakeholders ❖ Costs might be higher ❖ Engagement might require a complex contracting and monitoring process in accordance with procurement policies

Cost is obviously a major consideration however, it is important not to assume that using an internal evaluator is the less costly option. See **Module 6: Making evaluation sustainable**.

If a decision is made to use an internal evaluator or team, consideration should be given to ensuring they have adequate time and resources to get the work done. Attention should also be paid to ensuring they build on or develop their evaluation skills through the process.

Some information gathering methods require expertise to ensure the results are reliable and credible. For example, surveys need to be designed with unambiguous questions that might include 'closed' and 'open' questions. You will need a sufficient response rate and a pilot may be necessary to test for flaws before it is deployed more widely. Confidentiality issues arise with your distribution list as well as the protection of confidential responses. If in doubt, seek advice from someone with relevant training and experience. You might need to commission this work from an external source. This does not mean you need to outsource the entire evaluation.

If a decision is made to use an external evaluator you will still need to be clear about your purpose and preferably the evaluation questions and measures. This will allow you to make sure that the evaluation stays on track and meets your expectations. An external evaluator would be expected to assist in refining some of the detail and methods adopted. Alternatively an external evaluator could be engaged simply to support the evaluation plan design and aspects of the evaluation outside the capacity of internal staff.

Note:

If engaging an independent evaluator, consider using the evaluation plan as part of the brief for seeking quotes. It can be further refined with the selected evaluator.

2.6 Complete an evaluation plan

Having considered the evaluation purpose, evaluation questions, measures and data collection methods and sources, it will be important to:

- ❖ develop timeframes for evaluation tasks, including progress and final reporting
- ❖ establish routine data collection mechanisms to gather information over time
- ❖ clarify communication and dissemination mechanisms
- ❖ clarify resources
- ❖ assign responsibilities.

Each evaluation plan should provide all the detail needed to fully implement the evaluation. Each plan should be accessible by all involved in the program or strategy being evaluated and meet all requirements including being useful, practical, feasible and ethical.

The reporting requirements of your evaluation will be an important consideration. Meeting your target audience requirements will differ depending on their role. For example, your organisation's management team might be interested in knowing if the program or strategy achieved its intended results, whereas a funding body might place just as much emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness or return on investment. Other stakeholders and the target group or participants might also have unique questions that they want answered through the evaluation.

The evaluation plan should be able to be picked up by anyone involved in the program or strategy at any time and provide them with a clear picture of the evaluation logic and tasks.

You will have already considered the specific audience of the evaluation in developing your purpose. You also need to consider how you will present the evaluation findings to them, for example:

- ❖ *Will it be provided as a written report with an executive summary?*
- ❖ *Will it be supported with written case studies or using media (photographs, DVDs or similar)?*
- ❖ *Will it be reported as a face to face presentation of key points?*

In addition, you need to consider how your evaluation findings and your evaluation experience will be shared with a broader audience of council colleagues, health professionals, the community, researchers and others. Options might include: newsletters, journal contributions, workshops and conferences.

Considering these issues at the commencement will also help to fine-tune what you need as products of the evaluation process.

Fill in Evaluation Tool now

Insert your ideas for communicating the progress of the evaluation and disseminating its findings in the evaluation plan tool under '**Communication and Dissemination**'.

To complete your evaluation plan ensure that you have identified the person responsible for gathering information and the timeframe for collection and analysis.

Fill in Evaluation Tool now

Insert the person responsible and timeframe information in the evaluation plan tool under '**Person Responsible**' and '**Timeframe**' respectively.

Finally, revisit the issue of resources. Be realistic about what it will take to undertake the evaluation you have designed. You might need to increase the resources or reduce the scope of the evaluation. The evaluation plan should make it easier to make a business case for increased resources or to see where reductions in evaluation activity might be found.

Fill in Evaluation Tool now

Insert a description of the resources dedicated to the evaluation in the evaluation plan tool under '**Resources**'.

PART 3: Gather information

- ❖ Collect data
- ❖ Act ethically

You will have identified the information you need for your evaluation, including your data collection methods and sources in your evaluation plan. This next stage involves gathering the information as planned and analysing it. It will be important to:

- ❖ Collect data
- ❖ Act ethically.

3.1 Collect data

If you have designed your evaluation well, gathering information is simply a matter of drawing down the information from existing databases or records for analysis or conducting the surveys, focus groups or other methods you determined to capture stakeholder perspectives.

In some instances you will have established routine data collection mechanisms to gather information over time, for example, participation rates and participant characteristics. In others you might need to design or commission specific tools, such as survey instruments, focus group questionnaires or interview protocols.

It is useful at this stage to review whether the methods you have chosen are actually working in practice. For example:

- ❖ Are databases complete and accurate?
- ❖ Are stakeholders engaging in the evaluation as expected?

If either of the answers to these questions is 'no', you will need to adjust the method to compensate. Otherwise it will be necessary to acknowledge in your analysis that there are limitations to the information that influence your capacity to draw some conclusions.

3.2 Act ethically

Evaluation necessarily involves collecting information from others and it is vital to do that in a professional manner that demonstrates respect, honesty and integrity.

In approaching any evaluation, it is important to:

- ❖ avoid or declare any conflict of interest
- ❖ observe legal requirements, including individual rights to privacy and the need to gain informed consent
- ❖ protect data, confidentiality and anonymity
- ❖ respect the beliefs, customs and cultural practices of relevant parties.

It is also preferable to provide participants with the opportunity to receive the results of your evaluation. This might be in a format that is suited to the audience.

For more on ethics in evaluation see the **National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research** at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e35>

PART 4: Act on findings

- ❖ Make sense of the information
- ❖ Interpret the findings
- ❖ Make recommendations
- ❖ Share the results

As you gather the evaluation information it will be possible to answer your evaluation questions. It is important at this stage to revisit the evaluation purpose to ensure that as you analyse the information your focus remains on why you are evaluating. It can be easy to be distracted by 'interesting' data that might not be relevant. Key considerations at this time are:

- ❖ Make sense of the information
- ❖ Interpret the findings
- ❖ Make recommendations
- ❖ Share the results.

4.1 Make sense of the information

Information of itself will not answer your evaluation questions. It must be analysed and interpreted to identify and summarise the key findings. Making sense of qualitative data requires a different type of analysis from that needed to analyse quantitative data.

Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative information involves numbers and will be analysed and presented as rates, frequencies, measurements or percentages. It involves relatively simple calculations of means (averages) or medians (the middle value) and modes (the most common value) or differences over time or between groups. In most cases, these can be presented in tables or graphs.

However, where impacts are being measured, it will be necessary to use statistical tests to gauge whether your observations are 'significant'. Enlist the help of someone with training in statistics.

Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative information will predominantly take the form of text or images. Qualitative information analysis therefore involves identifying recurring or strong themes among the array of information and then classifying and grouping the information according to these themes so that you are able to build a picture that responds to your evaluation question.

This classification and grouping into themes can be conducted as an iterative process whereby a 'cut and paste' process is used to identify similar commentary into themes. This is then reflected upon and further 'cutting and pasting' continues until a satisfactory coherent picture is arrived at.

Analysis is presented as commentary often supported with a selection of quotes or images that support the key ideas of the themes.

4.2 Interpret the findings

Interpretation is critical.

It is really important in evaluation to not only understand *what* has been achieved, but also to understand *why* things are succeeding or not succeeding. This helps to build the evidence base for future planning, program or strategy development and implementation. It provides a level of understanding that makes it possible to replicate the things that work and to address the things that don't.

Sometimes it is useful to think about interpretation in terms of 'causal attribution' – *did the program or strategy cause the outcomes and impacts that have been observed?* In many cases, however, the outcomes and impacts have been caused by a combination of programs and strategies, or by a program or strategy in combination with other factors. In such cases it can be more useful to think about 'causal contribution' as *did the intervention contribute to the outcomes and impacts that have been observed?*

To answer these questions it can be useful to consider what would be different if the program or strategy did not occur or to investigate possible alternative explanations for the changes you observe.

A key way of understanding *why* is to interpret the findings of your evaluation within the operating context. What works in one set of circumstances might not work in another. Understanding the dynamic properties of the context is an important consideration in the success or otherwise of your intervention. Issues you might consider are the setting, the social networks and the timing.

As Hawe, Shiell and Riley describe this approach:

An intervention may then be seen as a critical event in the history of a system, leading to the evolution of new structures of interaction and new shared meanings. Interventions impact on evolving networks of person-time-place interaction, changing relationships, displacing existing activities and redistributing and transforming resources. This alternative view has significant implications for how interventions should be evaluated and how they could be made more effective.⁸

Considering questions about the specific circumstances of your municipality, the people and partners you have worked with, and the time and place of your program or strategy will help in your interpretation of its value.

⁸ Hawe P, Shiell A, Riley T 2009 *Theorising Interventions as Events in Systems*, American Journal of Community Psychology, No. 43, pp 267–276

4.3 Make recommendations

Document your evaluation findings in a report. Prepare it as a draft and allow stakeholders to consider, validate or challenge its conclusions before you finalise it.

Recommendations help stakeholders and program or strategy staff understand how they might improve a program or strategy. Make sure the recommendations are supported by the evaluation findings.

4.4 Share the results

In your evaluation plan you will have identified the specific people who will use the evaluation findings and who have the capacity to act on its recommendations.

However, others will be interested in your evaluation. There may be other stakeholders you have identified earlier, as well as people operating in similar circumstances looking for solutions to local issues. A robust evaluation will contribute to the evidence base and therefore future planning locally and more widely.

Don't restrict yourself to sharing evaluation findings through a report. Other options might include:

- ❖ presenting findings at staff forums or more widely to professional conferences and seminars
- ❖ writing and publishing a peer-reviewed paper summarising the evaluation or aspects of it
- ❖ sharing stand-alone evaluation fragments such as stories, videos, graphs and images from the evaluation – depending on the methods you used.

PART 5: Further resources

The following is a list of useful resources in addition to those cited in the body of the resource. All web based material was last accessed 20 September 2013.

For more on Department of Health evaluation resources

Visit: <http://health.vic.gov.au/prevention/evidence/index.htm>

These pages include important tools and guidelines to evaluation and the use of evidence.

For more on Realist Evaluation

Kazi MAF. 2003, *Realist Evaluation in Practice: Health and Social Work*, Sage.
Pawson, R and Tilley, N (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*. London. Sage.
Pawson R. Nothing as practical as good theory. *Evaluation* 2003;9:471–90

Realist Synthesis

A site containing realist evaluation materials and links
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sociology/realistsynthesis/>

For more on Action Research and Action Learning

Action Learning, Action Research Association
www.alara.net.au/public/home

For more on the Balanced Scorecard

Balanced Scorecard Institute

Information on the Balanced Scorecard and varied applications
<http://www.balancedscorecard.org/>

For more on Result Based Accountability (RBA)

New South Wales Family Services Inc. - Applied Results Based Accountability
www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47:rba-results-based-accountability-&catid=35:current-projects&Itemid=54

Also try Community Indicators Victoria who provide RBA workshops

<http://www.communityindicators.net.au/> Search for 'RBA'

Evaluation plan tool

Purpose of the evaluation:

Stated intentions of the program or strategy	Evaluation questions	Information required	Information collection	Responsible	Timeframe

Communication and Dissemination
Resources

Note: Review this evaluation plan regularly to ensure you are on track, that your evaluation questions remain relevant and the information collection is working.

Example Evaluation Plan

Active Transport Program Evaluation

Purpose of the evaluation:

To assess the effectiveness of active transport initiatives to determine what will be continued, expanded or ceased and to improve cross-council collaboration.

Stated intentions of the program or strategy	Evaluation questions	Information required	Information collection	Responsible	Timeframe
To increase the level of active transport in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent has active transport increased and for whom? What initiatives were effective in raising community awareness and confidence in using active transport and what initiatives weren't? What initiatives created a supportive built environment for active 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of active transport before program commencement (baseline) and following implementation – including walking, cycling and public transport use by population groups Description of initiatives Changes in perceptions of route access, public transport reliability and safety attributable to initiatives Route connectivity and amenity attributable to initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ABS travel to work data Program description Community survey of perceptions Audit of street, pathway and public transport networks and access to key activity 	Active transport officer	<p>Baseline collections - immediate</p> <p>Progress report December 2014</p> <p>Evaluation deadline December 2015</p>

	<i>transport and what didn't?</i>		<i>centres</i>		
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Communication and Dissemination
<i>All stakeholders will be advised of intention to evaluate initiatives. Key stakeholders will be provided with a copy of final report. A presentation on key findings will be delivered to senior executive group. An abstract will be prepared for [Health Promotion Conference] 6 months after completion of Program. Maybe don't use years this dates the document</i>
Resources
<i>Evaluation will be conducted internally, led by Active Transport Officer within existing function. \$10,000 will be budgeted for professionally designed and administered community perceptions survey.</i>

