GETTING TO IMPACT:
USING THE EVALUATION STANDARD
TO MEASURE RESULTS

I serve on a local nonprofit foundation board that
awards grants to community organizations that sponsor
programs to discourage teen pregnancy. Over the years,
the foundation has developed research-based rubrics for
scoring grant applications. But recently, board members
noted that agencies seeking funding don’t describe the
impact of their program on the youth they serve.

During a visit to one of the foundation’s grant recipi-
ents, I was reminded of NSDC’s standard on evaluation:
Staff development that improves the learning of all stu-
dents uses multiple sources of information to guide
improvement and demonstrate its impact.

The agency I visited has had a program for nine years
that focuses on helping high-risk students with personal
development, health plans, healthy dating habits, and preg-
nancy prevention. Staff are genuinely engaged and con-
cerned about young people, but the organization has no
real assessment of how much difference it is making. The
agency has developed a curriculum and has implemented a pre- and post-test, but
the results provided only anecdotal evidence of what was
occurring as a result of the staff’s efforts.

The organization’s funding depends on
whether it can demonstrate the need and
value of its program because the founda-
tion is carefully scrutinizing and rating
applicants to determine where to award
grant money. The organization now asks
applicants, “What outcomes do you hope
to achieve with this program? How are
these outcomes measured?” The foundation
wants specific and measurable out-
comes, data measuring stated outcomes, and evidence that
the agency has analyzed and improved its efforts
based on data. The foundation now looks for strong evi-
dence (e.g. specific numbers) that the program is successful
and has achieved its proposed outcomes. In the current
environment, schools are undergoing similar scrutiny with
calls for increased accountability. As professional de-
velopers, we can lead the march toward effective program evalu-
ation, beginning with our own staff development pro-
grams.

Although professional developers are aware of NSDC’s
Standards for Staff Development (NSDC, 2001), many of
us running professional development programs do not
evaluate whether we are getting results — the impact of
what teachers are learning on student learning.

Professional development leaders are capable of doing
far more evaluation than we do. All programs can be evalu-
ated, although perhaps not all at the same level of sophisti-
cation. Evaluation is a matter of intentionality. Just a few
short years ago, many educators were frightened by the
idea of examining student data. Central office
evaluation staff usually explained student data to
school staffs. Now, more educators are proficient in examining student data after learning
through professional development.

Leaders of most staff development programs to
determine to what extent the
leading to improved achieve-
ment — the effect of the program on the
ultimate goal of student learning.

In 2000, after a series of projects led
by Joellen Killion, NSDC’s director of
special projects, NSDC concluded that
leaders of most staff development programs fail to plan for
and to evaluate the impact of programs on student learn-
ing. Killion immersed herself in evaluation theory and
research, going beyond educational evaluation to examine
cutting-edge evaluation work in the medical and
community organization fields.

Killion (2002, p. 132) said almost anyone could begin
to evaluate program effectiveness by developing evaluation
think, which she defined as a frame of reference, a mind-
set, a set of analytical skills. Evaluation think is based on
the assertion that rigorous, ongoing evaluation of new and
well-established staff development programs is an opportu-
nity for improvement. Adopting evaluation think as a

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frame of reference causes staff development leaders to become their own best critics. It requires them to be objective and use data gleaned from evaluations — rather than intuition, opinions, impressions, or assumptions — as the basis for decisions about future staff development.

We can make program evaluation a reality and turn the standards into action with three steps.

**Develop evaluation think.** To develop the habit of evaluating, always begin with the end in mind. Ask, “What outcomes do we want from this program? How will we know when we have achieved our outcomes? What evidence do we need in order to demonstrate that we have met our goals?” Next, determine while designing the program what kinds of data to collect to monitor progress.

**Decide critical benchmarks.** Then make evaluation everyone’s work by creating and embedding evaluation frameworks in all projects. (See box at right for additional information.)

**Adopt a theory of change.** Killion refers to Joseph Wholey’s theory of change (1987, p. 78) that identifies “program resources, program activities, and intended program outcomes, and specifies a chain of causal assumptions linking program resources, activities, intermediate outcomes, and ultimate goals.”

Based on your own understanding of change theory,

- Identify the program’s components (what the program does);
- Specify the relationship among the components to explain how the change occurs (sequence of actions); and
- Delineate the underlying assumptions upon which the program is based (Killion, p. 58).

**Use measurement processes and tools.** Make a conscious choice at the program’s outset to evaluate it, and use both formative (ongoing) and summative (ending) evaluation processes. Specify within the plan what processes and tools you will use in your evaluation. For example, use Thomas Guskey’s (2000) levels of evaluation and detail how you will gather information. Outline the data you will collect and at what points in the program. When data collection is complete, follow through with an analysis of the information you’ve gathered, and share the results. The most important step is the one that keeps in motion the cycle of change: Use the information to revise your processes and improve your efforts.

As district leaders continue to make difficult choices on the best ways to use limited resources to improve student achievement, staff developers are responsible for demonstrating results. Staff developers know the most important factor in student learning is the classroom teacher, and the most important factor in assisting teachers to maximize their own achievement is their ongoing professional learning. Evaluating professional development in a way that demonstrates that link is vital to teachers’ continued success. While many have improved their efforts to assess programs, there is still much work to do.

**REFERENCES**


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**Evaluate your staff development program**

**PLANNING PHASE**

1. **Assess evaluability.** Determine whether the staff development program is ready to be evaluated.

2. **Formulate evaluation questions.** Design formative and summative evaluation questions.

3. **Construct evaluation framework.** Determine the evidence needed to answer the evaluation questions, the data sources, the data collection methodology, logistics of data collection, and the data analysis methods.

**CONDUCTING PHASE**

4. **Collect data.** Manage data collection process and collected data.

5. **Organize and analyze data.** Organize, analyze, and display data.

6. **Interpret data.** Interpret data to determine merit, worth, and/or impact and to make recommendations for improvement.

**REPORTING PHASE**

7. **Disseminate findings.** Identify audiences to receive findings, the most appropriate format for communicating findings to each, and disseminate findings.

8. **Evaluate the evaluation.** Reflect on the evaluation process, the knowledge and skills of the evaluation team, the resources and methodologies used, and the findings to improve future evaluations.