

## Common Mistakes to Avoid in Your Evaluation Plan

### Common problems with “plan type”

1. Policy adoption + implementation plan type with no process data collection activities
2. Policy adoption + implementation plan type with only process data collection activities to measure adoption, and no outcome data collection
3. Voluntary policies identified as individual behavior change
  - *Example: An objective promoting voluntary smoke-free multi-unit housing policies is a policy objective, although individual apartment owners/managers make the decision.*

### Evaluation Requirements by Plan Type

Objective Plan Type	Evaluation Type	
	Outcome	Process
Policy (single or multiple) adoption		X
Policy adoption & implementation	X	X
Policy implementation only	X	--
Individual behavior change	X	--
Other with measurable outcome	X	--
Other without measurable outcome		X

Most plan types should include some process evaluation even if only outcome evaluation is required, (especially for primary objectives) because process data collection will help you figure out how best to develop and implement your intervention activities.

### Intervention activities or evaluation activities?

1. Evaluation activities are sometimes mistakenly listed in the intervention section, and not in the evaluation section. Focus groups and public opinion polls are the activities most frequently misclassified, but YTPS and data collection training also get mislabeled.

NOTE: If an activity is in both the intervention and the evaluation section, “double-dipping” (i.e., including deliverable %s for each) is a possible concern.

2. Sometimes tracking measures are listed as process data.

*Examples:*

- Under “other” – lists of participants at educational activities
- Under “media activity record” -- list of the media activities used in the intervention. The media activities should be listed as intervention activities. In addition, on the evaluation plan there should be a description of how media will be reviewed for number of

articles/letters to the editor/editorials generated, how the issue was framed, what page (i.e. placement the coverage got), etc.

### **Issues in sampling descriptions**

1. Misuse of the term “random” when what is really meant is “convenience”. *Example of common mistake: “A convenience sample will be used and people will be interviewed randomly.”*

Example of the correct use of “random”: *A random sample of 30% of all parks in Bear City will be chosen for observation. The name of each of the parks will be written on 12 slips of paper, one for each park, and placed in a bowl. We will select the first 4 parks (30%) for observation.*

Example of the correct use of “convenience”: *We will use a convenience sample to survey 200 apartment dwellers by placing trained surveyors in front of supermarkets. Each survey will begin with a screening question on whether the respondent lives in an apartment in Bear City. If the answer is yes, we will continue with the survey; if the answer is no, we will thank the person for their time and discontinue the survey.*

2. Criteria for selecting a sample is not provided or is unclear. Here are some good examples of sample selection criteria.
  - *Park observations will be conducted only in Bear City parks with tot lots and playgrounds. Alternatively: Park observations will be conducted in all Bear City parks.*
  - *We will survey people who live in apartment buildings with more than 10 units in Bear City.*
  - *Key informant interviews will be conducted with Bear County Board of Supervisors and members of their senior staff.*
  - *The two beaches in Bear County with the highest number of visitors will be the locations for cigarette litter clean-ups.*
3. Mismatch of sample size to data collection type:
  - a) Focus groups are usually between 6-12 people.
  - b) Key informant interviews are rarely done with more than 30 people, and it is common for them to be as low as 3 or 4.
  - c) Public intercept surveys vary greatly, but should be enough to have credibility for the purpose.
  - d) Education/participant survey samples should be as big as the number # of participants expected.

4. Need for explanation of timing and location of observations.

### **Process data collection activity questions**

1. When should there be more than one description for the same kind of data collection activity?
  - *Answer: When they serve different purposes, not necessarily just because they involve more than one kind of respondent*

2. How should the projects be using the different data collection activities? (for more information, see [Tips & Tools #1](#)).
3. What are other issues to watch out for?
  - a) Mismatch of timing of data collection and purpose of the activity.
  - b) Use of media activity record when it isn't serving an evaluation purpose.
  - c) Use of "other" data collection activity when one of the more specific options would be more appropriate.
  - d) Outcome evaluation described as a process data collection activity because the wrong plan type was chosen -- and vice versa.

### **Outcome evaluation design questions**

1. What is the "outcome to be measured" (as opposed to "policy outcome to be achieved")?
  - *Not just a repeat of the objective, but a statement of what is being used to assess the achievement of the objective. Examples: % of tobacco retailers who have obtained licenses; amount of tobacco litter collected; % of observations in which smoking behavior was seen*
2. When is a non-experimental design with "post-test only" enough?
  - *When it is clear that the "outcome to be measured" did not exist prior to the intervention. Example: % of tobacco retailers who have obtained licenses.*
3. How can policy implementation be documented?
  - a) Retail licensing: # of licenses sold compared to # of known tobacco retailers; number of citations issued; number of licenses revoked.
  - b) Outdoor areas (including MUH common areas) – Observations of signage, smoking behavior, tobacco litter.
  - c) MUH individual units –Review of rental agreements (the choice in OTIS is "other" because a policy record review is not one of the five choices on the pull-down menu).
  - d) Sponsorship – Observations, usually using an event observation form.

### **Evaluation reporting pitfalls**

1. Analysis description that doesn't match type of data. For instance, descriptive statistics for focus groups or qualitative data is not appropriate; a better approach is to review notes or transcripts in order to identify common themes and topics. Analyses of pre- and post- data should compare changes in percentages, and can specify a statistical test (e.g. a t-test or chi-square).
2. Dissemination plan that doesn't show how the data will be used by the project or other stakeholders (e.g., stating only that the final evaluation report will be submitted to TCP).
3. A description of limitations or challenges that describes challenges to the intervention, but not necessarily to the evaluation.
4. Use of the term "case study" for analysis and/or reporting sections.

NOTE: Final Evaluation Reports are submitted for primary objectives; Brief Evaluation Reports submitted for non-primary objectives.

***A good evaluation narrative:***

1. Discusses how the different data collection methods will be used.
2. Is consistent with the evaluation design and the data collection activities in the plan (e.g., does not introduce “outcome” evaluation for a process only design).
3. Provides detail that helps you understand how the different evaluation activities come together to inform the efforts of the objective.
4. Does not repeat description of intervention activities except as it relates to the evaluation.

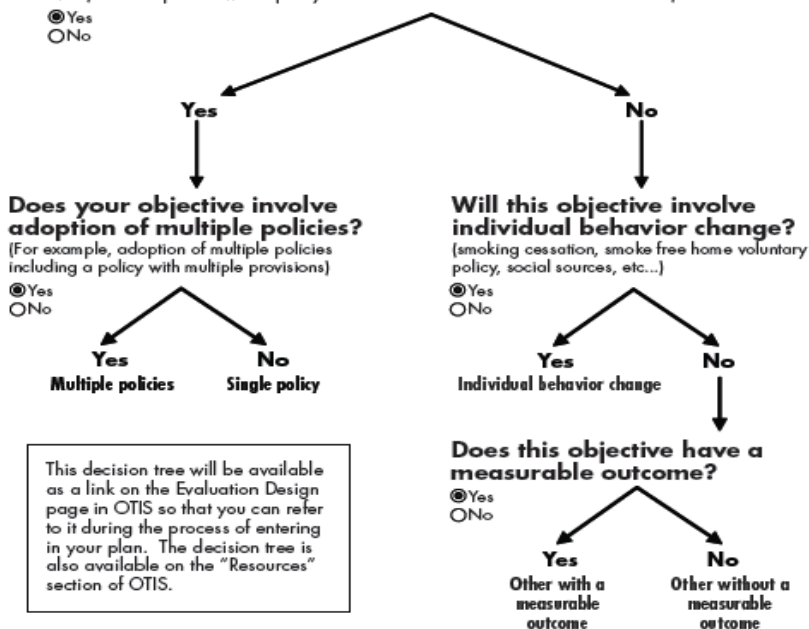
# OTIS Decision Tree for Evaluation Design

Determining the appropriate Plan Type for your Objective

**Is your objective related to a policy?**

(this includes adoption of a legislated or voluntary policy (e.g., organizational, institutional, event) and compliance with a policy. It does not include smoke-free homes or cars.)

Yes  
 No



This decision tree will be available as a link on the Evaluation Design page in OTIS so that you can refer to it during the process of entering in your plan. The decision tree is also available on the "Resources" section of OTIS.

## Data Collection by Plan Type

