

# Evaluation-Flex List

## Options for Evaluation Activities Considering COVID-19 Restrictions & Disruptions

### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is forcing many CTCP-funded projects to examine program evaluation activities given shelter-in-place orders and the disruption of work and home lives. Program staff and evaluators are confronting these challenges. Their early lessons and ideas led to the development of this document which lists options for evaluation activities affected by mandated restrictions (e.g., park and business closures) and social disruptions (e.g., shelter-in-place, unemployment).

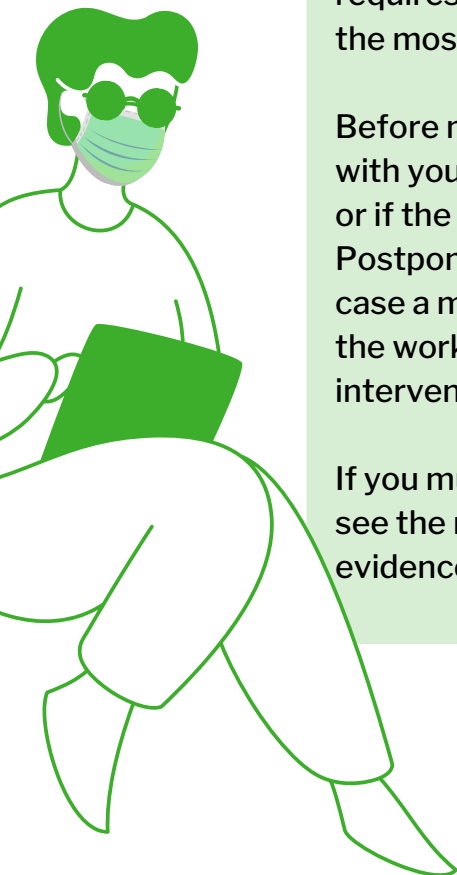
The alternatives presented here can ensure quality evaluation while preventing delays and revisions to a project's scope of work. They may also save projects and program consultants a lot of rework and the frustration of trial and error.



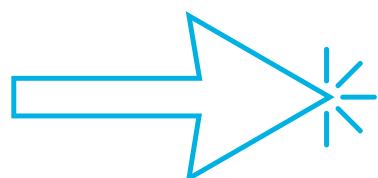
Adapting our work in response to the pandemic requires ongoing learning and patience; what works well for some may not work well for others. It also requires thinking strategically and determining what will have the most value for a project.

Before making changes to the evaluation activities, it is important to consult with your PC, PM and evaluator and determine if a modification is necessary or if the evaluation activity would better serve the project if it was postponed. Postponing an activity may not be possible if a project is ending; in such a case a modification to the evaluation activities may be necessary to finish up the workplan. However, if a project is just starting, an activity (such as a pre-intervention public opinion poll) could be postponed.

If you must change an evaluation activity, work backwards, and ask “Who will see the results from the evaluation activity? What will count as credible evidence for them?”



**Evaluation  
Activities**



## EVALUATION ACTIVITIES & PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS\*

### Outdoor venue observation (SF Parks, SF Outdoor Dining, Litter Clean-ups)

#### **Possible Alternatives:**

Key informant interviews of decision makers and/or key staff to determine if adoption/implementation activities have occurred, e.g., Have smoke-free signs been posted? (by phone or online<sup>[1]</sup>)

SF Outdoor Dining, some specific alternatives:

- Phone survey of restaurants
- Email survey of city staff to determine implementation status of policy (number of violations)
- Online surveys or research, e.g., searching for reports of smoking habits or behaviors reported by patrons, Yelp reviews of restaurants, etc.
- Obtain photos of sites (google earth, online research, etc.)

SF Parks, some specific alternatives:

- Phone survey of city/county staff to determine status of implementation (e.g., number of violations)
- Observation via remote ground and air robots/drones (very exploratory with law enforcement partnership)
- Conduct key informant interviews with park staff that conduct cleaning/emptying trash or police who patrol the parks
- Obtain photos of sites (google earth, online research, etc.)

### Tobacco retailer store observation surveys

#### **Possible Alternatives:**

A phone survey of retailers to ask questions about things that might have otherwise been observed, e.g., *Do you have Newport Menthols (or other targeted product)?*

[1] Online platforms include Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype for Business, etc.

**Tobacco retailer  
store observation  
surveys (Cont.)**

**Possible Alternatives (Cont.):**

Interviews or possibly observations with delivery services, e.g. Doordash, Postmates, TaskRabbit, grocery delivery services, that may deliver tobacco products.

If the stores are open, may be able to conduct an observation of products.

**Public intercept  
survey /  
public opinion poll**

**Possible Alternatives:**

An online survey using Survey Analytics, Facebook or other platform. Screens/filters would be needed to identify and reach specific audiences, jurisdictions, etc. Survey Analytics has the capacity to link online incentives to the survey (e.g., a gift card to Home Depot) to help boost response rates. Boosted (paid) Facebook ads can be effective at reaching a broad audience with a survey link and can target specific groups (e.g., people living within a specific distance or geographic criteria). Similarly, apps like Nextdoor can also be used but may be more suburban-centric. Keep in mind that the more narrow the target audience on social media platforms, the more expensive the survey may get.

Some other options to traditional opinion polls include:

- Doorknob hangars with a QR code can facilitate completion of surveys (e.g., tenants of multi-unit housing).
- Direct email can be used if email addresses are available (e.g., from schools, worksites, health facilities).
- A robocall or call center survey with and without randomization is another option. May partner with county agencies and school robocall systems to reduce costs.

*Note: TECC may have some resources that are being consumer tested now/soon that we may want to include here. Also, if a project needs more media-related funds, please consult with the PM/PC.*

**Education/  
participant surveys  
(including post  
training surveys,  
satisfaction surveys)**

**Possible Alternatives:**

An online participant survey conducted during virtual/online trainings. As needed (e.g., pre-post surveys), participants may complete a survey in chunks (intermittent polling), at the end (i.e., please take a few minutes while you are on the line to complete the survey), or provide feedback via a survey link sent after the event ends.

Some web and phone meeting systems offer surveying within their service or application.

**Key informant  
Interviews**

**Possible Alternatives:**

Key informant interviews via phone or a web-meeting platform. Some online services provide audio-video recording and transcriptions.

**Policy record  
reviews (meeting  
observation)**

**Possible Alternatives:**

Online or recorded meetings continue to be an option. However, virtual public meetings, especially with real-time public input, may not be supported in some counties or staff may not be able to participate in or access virtual public meetings.

Timing is also an issue, and access to policymakers and/or staff may be a problem. Staff of a jurisdiction may be reached by email or phone to find what is on the books and what, if any, attitudes/voting records of current policymakers, are online.

Another option is to do key informant interviews of policy makers or city/county staff to supplement the policy record review (depending on what kind of information is being sought).

## Young Adult Tobacco Purchase Survey

### Possible Alternatives:

Replace the YATPS (YPS) with another type of survey.

Some other options:

- Conduct a phone survey of retailers to ask questions about things that might have otherwise been purchased or observed, e.g., Do you have cherry flavored swisher sweets (or other targeted product)?
- If the stores are open, may be able to conduct an observation of products (but not a purchase).
- Interviews or possibly conduct observations with store delivery services.

### Other evaluation-related activities that will require some adjustment in methodology, but not significantly:

- **Coalition satisfaction surveys:** instead of conducting pen to paper, use an online tool such as Survey Analytics or Survey Monkey. In rural areas, coalition members have to wear a lot of hats, so you may have to meet with them individually to keep them connected. If possible, devote time during online meetings to complete the survey.
- **Focus groups/consumer testing:** use an online tool such as focusgroupit.com or Zoom to conduct the meeting online. Be sure to over invite participants in order to meet the desired focus group size and composition. Using online platforms, including social media, also allows a project to select people by zip code, area, or other characteristics.
- **Meeting recording tool or for recording online interviews (Otter Meetings)**
- **Member Participation/Activity Log:** add to the log a place to describe how the meeting was conducted (in-person or online). May want to engage coalition members in individual interviews to assess opinions on progress or program planning.
- **CX Assessment:** online research, then virtual meetings. This would require a shift in the training for the CX assessment which will be provided by CTCP online in October/November 2020 (1-2 sessions per week from October through November). The training will demonstrate how to conduct a virtual CX assessment.
- **New SOW development for LLAs:** how do we make this easier, particularly if the work becomes more virtual? Encourage projects to utilize the trainings for the features provided by online platforms (e.g., how to use the whiteboard or break-out group features).
- Recommend that **unused travel funds**, as appropriate, move to support incentives (to complete surveys, for example) or services/software. Incentives could include sending members a mini-care package (with snacks like granola bars or trail mix) along with the materials needed to participate (e.g., meeting agenda). Other expenses could include a secure online access, e.g., OneDrive, Google Drive or Slack application. Could possibly use unspent travel funds to pay for boosted Facebook ads to increase response rate from target population.

## Beyond Measurement: Design, Analysis and Reports Within Evaluation Activities

Changes made to measurement activities (e.g., what, when, where, and how measures occur) may affect your ability to understand “change” or detect if you are making a difference. If you measured something one way “before” COVID but then change that measure “after” COVID then it may be difficult to compare results over time, across jurisdictions, or other comparative analyses. This can be a problem, but stay calm. Analyses of change is messy and may be messier with COVID-related changes to evaluation activities. For example, you might have quantitative baseline measures (observations) but qualitative follow-up measures (key informant interviews).

If you decide you must change an evaluation activity, consider these questions to make your decision:

1. For whom is the final report of the analyses? What do they need? What evidence will be credible for them?
2. How will the potential change in an evaluation activity influence our ability to compare change over time, across locations, across demographic groups, or other points of comparison?
3. How will the credibility of our analyses be affected (weakened or strengthened)? Credibility can be affected both by validity (accuracy) of the results and reliability (replicability) of the results.
4. How can the change(s) we make in an evaluation activity make the results of comparative analyses more credible?
5. Whose input can help me strengthen the credibility and usefulness of my final results? (e.g., evaluator, PC, community stakeholders like coalition members and key partners).



## **\*Limitations/considerations:**

- Online options have a bias that comes due to health equity (eliminates those that do not have online capabilities).
- A phone call instead of an observation survey is not equivalent, nor as comprehensive. It also relies on self-reporting and the honesty/integrity/knowledge of the person answering the phone.
- Recruiting volunteers may be a challenge under COVID-19 safety precautions. However, this varies between projects.
- Consider integrating CX activities and KIs to eliminate the frequency of contact/asks with policymakers.
- In consideration of coalition members that may be transitioning to COVID-related work, furloughed, temporarily unemployed, etc., allow ample time for completion of the coalition satisfaction survey with frequent reminders to complete.
- Changing strategies/evaluation activities requires a considerable amount of training, infrastructure building (e.g., lists of restaurants, policy makers, parks, etc.). In addition to implications for project staff, the modifications to/redesign of instruments, databases and technical assistance by the evaluator are also time intensive.
- Limitations/barriers should be noted in the progress report under the specific activity.
- Staff are being redirected and/or rotated in and out of COVID-19 activities depending upon the number of active cases, contact tracing needed, etc. For that reason, it can be difficult to maintain consistent effort for tobacco-related activities (intervention or evaluation).

**Join us for further discussion!**

**Quarterly TEA meetings take place every fourth  
Wednesday of February, May, August,  
and November from 10:00–11:30 AM.**

**Learn more at  
[tobaccoeval.ucdavis.edu/tea-users-page](https://tobaccoeval.ucdavis.edu/tea-users-page)**