

## Creating a Colorful Evaluation Plan



"High Tide" by Tom Francis

You have completed your CX process, chosen your objectives, come up with ideas for intervention activities, but you haven't started thinking through your evaluation plan. Now is the time to do it -- before you finalize your intervention activities, since evaluation should work in tandem with your campaign efforts to help move the intervention forward.

How to get started thinking about evaluation? Let's look for a moment at the big picture rather than the little details that you will be asked in OTIS. Evaluation is not so much a puzzle as one may think, but more like a number of layers of strategically placed brush strokes that complement and finish the "masterpiece" of your tobacco control work. The range of evaluation activities you can use is wide, but with a little guidance and experience, it will be easy to pick from the palette of data collection methods.

### ***Evaluation adds "color" to your objective***

Before you begin to apply any of the "color" to your evaluation, you will need to outline its structure -- the plan type. This will influence what type of information you will need to collect. To determine the plan type, you'll need to answer a few questions about the focus of the objective. First, is your objective related to a policy? If so, will the work concentrate on policy adoption alone, or adoption and implementation (or, in rare cases, implementation only). Additional plan types focus on individual behavior change or work on assets. These choices determine if the evaluation design is primarily process, outcome or a combination of both. Do you see the structure of the picture emerging yet? Maybe not. After all, there is a lot more to consider.

With the plan type identified, your composition can begin to take shape as you "block in" the larger elements of your evaluation painting. You do this by laying out your process and outcome data collection strategies. Perhaps, though, you're not completely clear on what is considered to be process and what is outcome evaluation. One common misconception is that process and outcome evaluation use different data collection methods, but this is not the case. Both gather evidence, they just answer different

questions. Process evaluation answers questions like: What is the situation? What is a good course of action? Why is something occurring or not occurring? Did we achieve the goal we said we would achieve? Outcome evaluation answers: What is the effect of our intervention? How much changed after the intervention (and possibly because of the intervention)?

If the information you collect is the color which gives your intervention activities life and vibrancy by fleshing out the sketch of how to best proceed, then think of process data as the lighting, and outcome data as the contrast. Both add a great deal to your "painting" but each captures slightly different types of data. Both approaches may use observation, key informant interviews, surveys, record reviews and other methods, but outcome evaluation has to have some form of measure that can show the difference between before and after -- for instance by having pre- and post surveys, observations or interviews that show a difference has been made. Deciding when and where to apply these data collection methods is what makes the difference between a rather pale and flat picture and a rich, three dimensional one.



And just like painting has different schools of style which painters follow, there are different designs in evaluation you can employ. There is the experimental design where participants or places like tobacco retail outlets or parks are randomly assigned to either a control group or an intervention group. If that sounds very scientific and hard to do, it's because it is. Only a few tobacco control programs have attempted this approach. More commonly used are quasi-experimental designs where comparison is done over time, by using multiple measures (a baseline plus two or more follow up waves) of data collection to get the job done. Although the most commonly used design among tobacco control programs is non-experimental, this is the weakest of the three design types. It's much harder to make the case that any change in your results is due to program intervention rather than other influences when the only comparison comes from one round of pre- and post data.



So, which design should you choose for your evaluation plan? That depends on the vision you have for your masterpiece, tempered by the reality of the cost of using rather expensive "paints." Or in program terms, it depends on your objective and your resources. Primary objectives call for a more rigorous design (than non-primary objectives), but even so, you may not have enough people or financial resources to carry out your great vision, so weigh this carefully.

The data collection methods should fit the intervention like complementary colors to make a harmonious piece. Thus finding out what policy makers think requires key informant interviews and sometimes policy record reviews; to support your efforts with public opinion data, a public opinion survey works well. (And by the way, the public can be as general as all people living in the area or as specific as tenants in an apartment complex.) A quicker and sometimes more adequate way to gather the opinion of a specific group is through focus groups. Observation methods are called for when there is something visible to measure as proof, such as signs or litter.

The scope of your plan and your sample size depend a lot on what your resources can support (but keep in mind, the richer the "color," -- i.e., larger, more representative sample -- the more your audience will be convinced). But be realistic. Everything still needs to get done by "exhibition" time (a.k.a. progress reports and final evaluation report).

Finally, remember that all great painters looked to others to learn. Tap into the experience of your colleagues who have worked on similar objectives. Also, TCEC is available for advice about planning and

carrying out your evaluation. Give us a call, drop us an e-mail, or go to our website to get resources and individual assistance. May your plan be invigorating and colorful!

*Photos by David Schexnaydre and ishutterthethought*