Q & A about Evaluation Reporting

Ask an Evaluator *is a forum for project directors, health educators, data collectors and evaluators of any CTCP-funded project to ask questions about evaluation topics. If you have a question for our next issue, don't hesitate to send it to rakipke @ucdavis.edu!*

When are evaluation reports due?

All evaluation reports must be submitted to CTCP in OTIS by June 30, 2010.

Can we submit hard copies by mail rather than upload them electronically?

No. The 2004-2007 funding cycle was the last time when projects could opt to submit hard copies of their evaluation reports. By now, everyone should be able to upload evaluation reports and all attachments into OTIS. This will greatly speed up the response time to receive feedback on your reports, as now both PCs and reviewers from TCEC will be able to access reports instantly and simultaneously. It will also make archiving high scoring reports into ROVER much easier and will save tons of paper!

Do both Brief and Final Evaluation Reports get scored?

No, only Final Evaluation Reports will be reviewed and scored by a member of the TCEC evaluation team. With each project submitting between two and six reports (one for each objective), that could mean that close to 500 reports would need to be reviewed and scored! In the interest of time, CTCP decided that the bulk of both writing and reviewing effort should be focused on Final Evaluation Reports written about primary objectives, with the thought that more of a project's resources and energies are devoted to primary objectives as opposed to non-primary ones. Along those lines, brief reports are usually shorter and less detailed than final evaluation reports (for [examples](#), see our website).

What criteria are Final Evaluation Reports scored on?

Final evaluation reports are scored according to the criteria set out in the guidelines for writing evaluation reports, *[Tell Your Story](#)*. In fact, it's a good idea to have the scoring sheet (pages 26-28) next to you as you go about writing your report so you can be sure to cover each section thoroughly and see exactly the type of information that needs to be included.

Reports are scored only on the merits of the reporting -- how clearly the writing lays out: the scope of the tobacco control problem/issue, how the program activities went about tackling the objective, how the evaluation activities informed the project and what learning resulted (i.e., conclusions and recommendations). Whether the project achieved its objective has no bearing on the score!

Reports can earn a total of 32 points -- 8 for the title page and abstract, 6 for the project description, 12 for evaluation methods and results and 6 for the conclusions and recommendations. For any item that receives less than a perfect score, the reviewer will specify what was missing or less than adequate.

For examples of what a thorough report might look like, check out the example in *Tell Your Story*, several sample reports written by TCEC, and a few high-scoring reports submitted by tobacco control projects in 2007 on our [website](#).

My external evaluator is an experienced researcher who has written many evaluation reports. Can't she use her own report format?

Actually, we have found this to be a problem. Quite often there seems to be a disconnect between the way that evaluation is done in tobacco control and how other researchers tend to think of program evaluation. This has resulted at times in very low scores on reports written by otherwise experienced external evaluators.

One reason this might be so is that in most fields, program evaluation is utilized to assess the*effectiveness* of a particular program. The evaluation measures how closely the program was delivered as designed. It also seeks to measure how it affected program participants. (This is why program evaluation often compares an intervention group with a control group which does not receive program services.)

In tobacco control, evaluation is more like process evaluation where evaluation activities are used to collect data to inform the direction of the intervention (e.g., key informant interviews with policymakers provide information about how open they are to a smoke-free policy, identify likely supporters and opponents, and find out potential benefits and concerns so that the project can anticipate the opposition's arguments and frame its policy work in the most effective way). This allows the project to build a critical mass of support in order to get a policy passed and/or implemented.

So in tobacco control work, evaluation activities are not so much used to assess program effectiveness or impact, but rather to inform each step of the project. Because of this, final evaluation reports need to document a project's efforts -- how far it got toward reaching its objective, the steps that were taken to get there, and a rationale for why such strategies were chosen. The report should present how each activity -- intervention and evaluation -- fits into the sequence of events of the project. What was its purpose, how it built upon the knowledge and/or momentum of what went before, and how it informed the activities that came after.

It is the job of project directors, then, to be sure that evaluators are given the appropriate tobacco control evaluation guidelines to follow, and work with them to ensure that all plans and reports reflect the approach to evaluation that CTCP has designated. The Tobacco Control Evaluation Center can help evaluators bridge this gap. So call us!

How soon will we receive feedback on our reports?

Unlike in the past when it took ages to receive any feedback about your reports, we aim to get scores to you within a few months (after all, it does take a while to review more than 300 reports!). Once a report has been scored, OTIS will generate an email to the project director with notification that the scoring sheet is available for viewing (and download). With this feedback, project directors are encouraged to meet with their evaluator to discuss how the report could have been improved and perhaps identify strategies to do so in future reporting. A low or medium score means that your report is not thorough enough to be as useful as it could be to a wide variety of audiences, including your own program!

How are evaluation reports used?

Evaluation reports serve so many more purposes than mere accountability of your project to the California Tobacco Control Program! Besides chronicling the tactics and strategies that your project tried, a final evaluation report also captures the learning and knowledge generated over the contract period about the political, economic and cultural climates of the jurisdictions you were working in, the relationships that blossomed or waned as a result of various factors, and the influences of personalities

that may have facilitated or gotten in the way of your efforts. All of this can help guide your own staff (and other projects) as they attempt to follow in your footsteps!

But there are many other uses for these reports too! TCEC culls effective strategies from reports on specific indicators to compile summary reports that show how projects are tackling various issues (see Summary Reports article). In addition, all the time spent on writing a great final evaluation report can pay off when you can excerpt or adapt portions of it to use in press releases, policy briefs, presentations, fact sheets, etc. for a variety of audiences. For a whole host of ideas and resources about how to adapt evaluation reports for other uses, check out the link to the regional training materials binder on our website. Lastly, final evaluation reports that receive a high or medium score are archived by CTCP and are available to other tobacco control projects through ROVER. So these reports can be a veritable treasure trove to a lot of readers if done right!