

What Makes an Evaluation Plan Good?

What it is that makes an evaluation plan a good one? You've got the OTIS Evaluation Guide in front of you, and you've laid out all of the components for how you intend to evaluate your interventions, but how do you describe your plan in OTIS so that it all makes sense? What do good sections of the evaluation plan look like?

One place to get some excellent examples of the level of detail necessary to tie all of the pieces together are the [sample evaluation plans](#) on the TCEC website. These plans, developed by TCP, illustrate the logic of how each evaluation piece supports the whole evaluation plan and the objective in particular. Every part of these sample plans show you how each component should be completed in OTIS. They also demonstrate the logic of specific evaluation choices.

Previous plans from some of your colleagues can also illustrate how to write up your evaluation plan. We wouldn't recommend, however, that you just copy any evaluation plan of a project that worked on an objective you are interested in, as some plans are better than others. To help you sift through what's out there, we've selected some pieces of evaluation plans that we thought were particularly good examples of various components:

An example of a good outcome evaluation design comes from Santa Barbara County's objective on indicator 1.4.1 which states that "the amount of cigarette-related litter found in 6 key survey areas in Santa Barbara County will be reduced by 50% from a 2004 baseline."

What specific outcome is being measured?

Number of cigarette butts will be counted in 9 collection sites (6 intervention and 3 control). Reduction in cigarette butts is anticipated in all locations where the interventions take place.

What type of study design will be used?

Quasi-Experimental

Number of Intervention Groups:

1

Number of Control Groups:

1

Intact Group:

Yes

Measurements:

Multiple Measurements

Describe your study design:

Cigarette butts will be collected from 6 sites in the intervention group and 3 sites in the non-intervention group one time per year for the three-year study period. In addition, a focus group composed of smokers will be conducted in order to assess campaign and barriers to appropriate disposal. Sites will be selected in the intervention communities as follows: 2 high school campuses and their perimeters, 2 business and/or retail complexes affected by the local 20-foot law, and 2 beach sites (1 with and 1 without a smoking ban in place). Intervention locations will be located in North and South County, except both beaches will be in the south. The intervention group will all be exposed to a media campaign; some will receive direct educational presentations and all these entities have a state or local policy that governs tobacco use in the areas where cigarette butt litter is being measured. The control group will consist of 1-high school campus and their surrounding perimeters, 1-business and/or retail complex, and 1-beach site. These locations will be in Ventura County, and will be selected to most closely match those in the intervention group and by convenience. To establish a baseline at each site, sites will be (a) mapped, (b) cleaned of all butts in the target area, and (c) returned to by surveyors three days later to record the number of butts accumulated over the 3-day period. The same procedure will be followed annually for the following two years.

What makes this design good? For one thing, the use of multiple measures over time as well as control

and intervention groups means that the claims that can be made about the effect of the intervention will be much stronger than had a non-experimental design been used. Also, the design description outlines the how the control sites will be chosen to match the characteristics of intervention sites to minimize any confounding factors that could be other causes for the results. Especially good detail is the explanation of how the sites will be mapped and cleaned of litter first and then assessed three days later. This will allow for a controlled measure of the problem of tobacco litter within a specific time frame.

The full picture of all of the key pieces of the evaluation plan is laid out in the Evaluation Summary Narrative, which also describes the rationale for your approach. Here, in the details, the logical strategy of Santa Barbara's evaluation is apparent:

The goal of the evaluation is to determine if the intervention will result in a decreased number of cigarette butts in the intervention community, and increased policy implementation. An attempt will be made to select butt surveillance locations in areas where cigarette butt litter is perceived to be a problem, i.e., having 100 or more butts at pre-survey measurement. However, convenience sampling is also anticipated, given the need to select locations where data collection is possible based on LLA resources and the realities. Each survey area will be mapped to detail the location of butts. Each year the same area at each location will be surveyed. Surveillance will be conducted using observational time sampling. Survey forms will include the collection of data relevant to smoking such as availability of ashtrays, reconfiguration of benches or other seating, changes in surrounding buildings, and signage, in addition to day of the week, date and time, and number of smokers and butts.

Before areas are selected, information will be collected regarding cleaning and maintenance of streets, off-ramps, colleges, or other potential study sites. Responsible personnel will be interviewed to determine cleaning schedule and usual practice. Each year staff will re-contact responsible personnel to determine if frequency of cleaning and maintenance has changed. Surveys will be conducted at the identical day and time each year, unless maintenance schedules have changed.

Surveyors will receive a training on collection practices, will use location-labeled zip-lock bags, and will write the number of butts collected on the outside of the bag.

A focus group of smokers from the intervention and control sites will be conducted in order to determine recognition of the campaign, understanding of the campaign, degree of perception of cigarette butts as litter, knowledge of alternate disposal methods, motivation to use alternate disposal methods, perceived barriers to appropriate disposal, knowledge of harm to the environment, factors identified with potential to influence their behavior, perceived motivation to change, and reported change in behavior during the study period.

After the study period data from the baseline and the two subsequent surveys will be analyzed to determine if there is a significant difference in the number of butts intervention and non-intervention areas. Information from the smoker surveys will be tabulated and examined using descriptive techniques.

A final report will summarize the data and assess the elements of the intervention that appeared to have the greatest influence in changing smokers behavior in disposing of cigarette butts. Results will be distributed to local media, Partners, and submitted as a potential topic to the Project Directors' Meeting.

As you can see, the purpose of the evaluation is laid out clearly so that the reader can understand how each of the various data collection activities will support the objective. A description of how data will be collected in each activity demonstrates the quality and validity of the research approach. The narrative ends with a description of how the data will be analyzed and used. NOTE that it does not merely say that results will be used in the Final Evaluation Report (which is a requirement), but indicates a real use for the data by distributing the information through the media as well as to tobacco control colleagues. One obvious use for the data that should be mentioned is that results will be shared in meetings with city and county officials, parks and recreation personnel and other decisionmakers to illustrate the scope of the problem of tobacco litter.

Hopefully, these examples give you a sense of what makes an evaluation plan good. If you are applying for non-competitive funding and have specific questions about your own planning approach, feel free to contact the friendly TCEC staff for advice.