

Don't Let Evaluation Planning Give You Nightmares!

by Catherine Dizon

Photo by Wallyir/MorgueFile

It was a pitch black hour. Our assiduous editor, Robin Kipke, was lurking in the shadows with a blood red editing pen, waiting for (even a draft of) an article on the topic “Developing Your Evaluation Plan.”



Shivering, I sought refuge from the swirling storm in my head by talking to colleague (and external evaluator) Katie Moose. She provided some helpful tips which reassured me. [She also turned on the lights so I could see what I was writing!]

I'll admit it. I found it hard enough just writing *about* evaluation planning without even having to *do* it! At first, the thought of creating an entire work plan seems to loom over you like the giant marshmallow man that invaded New York City in the movie *Ghostbusters*! It can be scary and overwhelming to think about what you aim to accomplish over the next three years. Sometimes you may feel like you don't have enough information to make decisions about what to include in the plan. Well rest easier. The Tobacco Control Evaluation Center (TCEC) is here as your nightlight gently pulling you out of those nightmares. Except for the eerie clowns, there's nothing to be afraid of....

Trick or Treat!

In this past month, you've collected a lot of information “candy”. You compiled data to inform your Communities of Excellence (CX) process, examined the need to address a number of indicators, and prioritized those with either the greatest promise for progress or those that could make the biggest difference. Now you've got to convert these priorities into sensible work plans for the next three years.

As you dive in, it's a relief to know that there are tons of resources on Partners. All of the presentations and materials from this week's LLA Guidelines training are accessible on the [“CX and LLA Guidelines”](#) [subsite](#).

In particular, I'd like to draw your attention to the pre-recorded presentations, especially the one on evaluation which our Project Director



Jeanette Treiber did. This short presentation, as well as the other resources, lays out for you what decisions are necessary when developing an evaluation plan. We really encourage you to take the time to listen to the recordings and check out the slides on Partners. If you have any remaining questions, the presenters are always happy to help provide clarifications and tips.

The screenshot shows the 'Partners' website interface. On the left is a navigation menu with sections: 'My Account', 'CTCP Update', 'Information', 'Projects', and 'Community'. The 'Projects' section includes 'CX and LLA Guidelines', which is circled in red. The main content area features a header 'Communities of Excellence in Tobacco Control' and a sub-header 'CX and LLA Guideline - Materials for the 2014-2017 Planning Process'. Below this are six icons representing different resources: Requirements, CX Manual, CX Presentations, LLA Guidelines Presentations (circled in red), Data Sources, and Indicators and Assets. On the right side, there is a 'Prerecorded' section listing various topics like 'Writing a SMART Plan', 'Evaluation', 'Budgeting', etc., each with links for 'Recording' and 'Powerpoint Slides'.

Fitting All the Pieces Together

When you begin formulating your evaluation plan, think about how all the parts fit together to bring your work plan masterpiece to life! That is, figure out how to make your evaluation work for you.

Start with your intervention activities and think about what you would need to know to be strategic about how and when to conduct those activities, with whom to conduct them, and what would enable those activities to have the greatest impact. Next, think about how evaluation activities could collect this information and from whom. Brainstorm ALL the kinds of information you would want to know and from there you can whittle it down to just those evaluation activities that will be essential to informing your efforts.



Here's what I mean: Say you are planning to deliver a number of presentations to educate community groups. It could be a smart idea to test the material with focus groups first to see if the wording and messaging is just right. If you're going to hold media activities and submit letters to the editor, it would be helpful to conduct a media activity record in order to monitor how the media is framing this issue over time so that you can see if your activities had the desired effect. Or perhaps you hope to build momentum for a policy among members of your city council. Because it's important to understand their priorities and motivations, you'd want to investigate that through key informant interviews with them or their staff. Also, knowing that their views can be swayed by public opinion, means that having survey results from a large sample of the community would be very strategic. And so on.

That's how you can strategically use evaluation to support intervention activities. Doing so can prevent you from aiming your efforts in the dark.



Everyone Needs a Set of Good Bones

The logic of these relationships between evaluation and intervention activities should be made apparent in the description of each evaluation activity's purpose as well as in your Evaluation Narrative which lays out the rationale of your entire evaluation plan. Be sure to specify how evaluation activities will forward your progress toward achieving the objective.



You don't need a DNA lab to get back to the source. Be sure to identify the where your data collection instruments come from. Will they be developed by your staff or evaluator or will you consult the Evaluation Center (TCEC)? And don't forget to build in data collector training activities! Any time you have more than one person collecting data, you'll need a data collector training evaluation activity to ensure that all data collectors are implementing the protocol in the same way.

From the Grave

For some projects, it makes sense to continue an objective that gained momentum during the bridge year or 2010-2013 funding cycle. It's ok to resurrect parts of your plans from last time. In fact, we suggest you dust off your old Final Evaluation Reports (FERs) so you can learn what was successful and what was not. That way you can incorporate the elements of your plan that worked and change or adjust those that did not into your new plan. Remember, if done right, FERs can document institutional memory and map out the way forward. Don't be afraid to dig up your older FERs and objectives from previous cycles and capitalize on past learning.



Consult the Spirits

If you need help figuring out how to write up the elements of your Evaluation Design, Evaluation Activity Plan, or Evaluation Narrative, other articles in this issue have tips as do the many resources on the TCEC website. The [Evaluation Tools](#) page has a section on evaluation planning. There are also [past webinars](#) that go over the steps in greater detail. And when it comes to developing your data collection activities and instruments, we have a whole set of training materials on survey design and lots of webinars that cover each of the primary data collection methods.

So no need to shake in your boots! You've got plenty of help at hand. If you get stuck and have a specific question or two you'd like to talk over with an evaluation specialist, you can contact TCEC for some technical assistance at tobaccoeval@ucdavis.edu or 530.752.9951.

It's our goal to keep you safe from those evaluation plan nightmares.

Nighty Night!

