

Promoting Effective Program Evaluation

Project Impacts

The goal of the Promoting Effective Program Evaluation project was promote the development and continuation of effective MORE programs by assisting program staff to develop and implement effective formative and summative evaluation plans. As a result of their participation in the program, program staffs for MORE-sponsored projects were expected to:

- Significantly improve their understanding of the benefits of program evaluation;
- Significantly improve their skills in developing both formative and summative evaluation plans;
- Significantly improve their understanding of the pro's and con's of internal and external evaluations;
- Develop an initial evaluation plan; and
- Begin implementation of their evaluation plan.

Participants at each Evaluation Exploration Short Course completed entry and exit surveys to gather data on their knowledge about program evaluation and skills in planning a program evaluation. The surveys did not “test” participants but, instead, asked participants for a self-assessment of their knowledge and skills.

As shown in Table 1, most participants felt they had an “excellent” or “good” understanding of the benefits of evaluation at the time they entered the course. However, their perceived skills in developing formative and summative evaluation plans as well as their perceived understanding of the pro's and con's of internal versus external evaluation were far less positive. Less than a quarter felt their current evaluation plan was “good” or “excellent” and only 15% categorized their program evaluation skills in these categories.

Following the workshop, participants expressed much higher self-ratings of their skills and knowledge in these areas. Well over half of the participants rated their skills in developing formative and summative evaluation plans and their overall skills in program evaluation as “good” or “excellent.” They also indicated that they gained additional knowledge about conducting an internal program evaluation.

Table 1
Percentage of Respondents Selecting “Excellent” or “Good”
Before and After Participation in a Four-Day Short Course

Question	Percentage of Participants*	
	Pre	Post
My understanding of the benefits of evaluation to my program is...	70%	89%
My skills in developing a formative evaluation plan for my program are...	16%	59%
My skills in developing a summative evaluation plan for my program are...	20%	65%
My understanding of the pro's and con's of doing my program evaluation internally is...	33%	82%
I feel that my current evaluation plan for my program is...	24%	38%
Overall, I feel that my skills in program evaluation are...	15%	58%

* For May 1998, September 1998, May 1999, and February 2001 short courses (N=168).

The data in Table 2 shows participant responses to a series of questions asking them to rate specific evaluation skills. Participants' self-ratings of their skills were low on the pre-survey and improved substantially on the post-survey. As a result of the short course, more than 60% of the participants felt their skills were "excellent" or "good" for most of the areas listed.

Table 2
Percentage of Respondents Rating Their Skills As "Excellent" or "Good"
Before and After Participation in a Four-Day Short Course

Question	Percentage of Participants*	
	Pre	Post
Designing an evaluation plan for your grant proposal.	18%	61%
Writing goals and measurable objectives for your program.	36%	84%
Selecting the types of data you need to gather for your program evaluation.	31%	71%
Deciding if and how to use an external evaluator for your program.	19%	76%
Identifying and working with an external evaluator	24%	61%
Developing a budget for your program evaluation plan.	20%	44%
Developing surveys and materials for your program evaluation.	17%	44%
Collecting data for your program evaluation.	30%	63%
Working with your institution's research office to collect data for your program evaluation.	27%	53%
Analyzing data for your program evaluation.	28%	52%
Writing a final report for your evaluation.	26%	61%
Using the results of your program evaluation to revise your program.	35%	73%
Sharing the results of your program evaluation with other program directors.	33%	66%
Sharing the results of your program evaluation with program officers and reviewers.	36%	68%

* For May 1998, September 1998, May 1999, and February 2001 short courses (N=168).

Finally, the MORE program requires an evaluation plan to be included in proposals submitted for funding. The quality of the evaluation plan affects the reviewers' ratings and, ultimately, the success of the proposal in receiving funding. As shown in Table 3, MORE proposal developers in 1998-2000 who had taken the Evaluation Exploration Short Course in 1998 or 1999 were more likely to be funded than those who did not complete the short course. Although this is a correlational rather than causal finding, it suggests that the course may contribute to creation of competitive proposals.

Table 3
Funding Success of Participant Proposals, by Participation in Short Course

Participation in 1998 or 1999 Evaluation Exploration Short Course	Proposals Submitted in 1998-2000	
	Received funding	Did not receive funding
Did participate	63%	37%
Did not participate	43%	57%

Finally, ongoing feedback from participant and MORE program staff suggest that the resources and information provided through the project has been highly useful in both evaluation planning and implementation.

Therefore, the evaluation data strongly suggest that the project has accomplished the goals and objectives established for it.