



Omaha Community  
Foundation

Good grows here.

## Program Planning and Evaluation A Backward Design Approach

“To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you’re going so that you better understand where you are now so that the steps you take are always in the right direction.”

- Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*

### What is Backward Design?

Backward design is a process that focuses on RESULTS first and then designing activities that produce those desired results. It shifts perspectives. Traditional program planning often begins with interesting ideas or activities that we traditionally are required to do. We then design a program, often on the go, and then decide on some type of evaluation at the end.

Backward design looks at the big picture with the end goals in mind. With backward planning we identify needs, set a vision or goals, decide how to meet those goals, and then design a program that will meet our goals and link planning to evaluation.

Many times, arts programs and activities are launched without a project plan. Backward planning suggests the reverse. By starting with a vision of the result, we can better make choices that take us to our desired end. Likewise, when planned, evaluation becomes not an afterthought but a tool to keep us on track and allows us to gather info for improvement.

### Program planning

- GOALS: What do you want this program to achieve?
  - Identify a realistic need or mission.
  - Be specific and realistic.
  - Does it serve an identified need?
- RESOURCES: What and who do you need to make it happen?
  - Funds, people, access to resources (physical or intangible): facilities, partners
- OBJECTIVES: What are the steps to make it happen?
  - Timeline from inception to completion
  - Who is responsible for each step, i.e. marketing, PR, purchasing, contacts, etc.
  - Milestones, deliverables
- RESULTS: What will your results look like?
  - Who is your audience?
  - Set realistic expectations
- IMPACT: How will you know when you succeed?
  - Is there a connection back to your goals and objectives?

## Linking Evaluation to the Program Plan

- Connect evaluation to the program **GOALS**.
  - What questions do you want answered?
  - Make sure you evaluate what you set out to do.
- What **RESOURCES** do you need to do your evaluation?
  - Who will be involved in the evaluation?
  - When will the evaluation occur?
  - Pre- and post- comparisons, need assessments
- How will you assess or measure your **OBJECTIVES**?
  - Indicators
  - Formative (about the process) or
  - Summative (about the product)
- What will you do with the **RESULTS**?
  - Program improvement
  - Show accountability
- What was the **IMPACT** of your program?
  - Connection to **GOALS** and **OBJECTIVES**

## Types of Evaluation Questions

- **NEEDS ASSESSEMENT:**
  - Whom will the program serve (target audience)?
  - What gaps exist in the current service/program? In the environment/community?
  - What do the clients (audience) value about your service/program?
  - Do we reach underserved populations?
  - What are the obstacles to service delivery?
- **FORMATIVE:**
  - Is the program being implemented as planned?
  - Who is participating in the program?
  - Are we meeting targets of inclusion and diversity?
  - How many clients is the program reaching?
- **SUMMATIVE:**
  - Were participants satisfied with their experiences?
  - What did people learn in the workshop?
  - What changed because of this project?

## Evaluation Instruments

- Surveys
  - Specific range of targeted questions, standardized responses, can be administered pre- and post.
- Observation
  - Direct viewing of activities and outcomes, but is reported second-hand. Holistic understanding of context.
- Demographics
  - Collection of participant statistics, locations, statistics for analysis over time. Key to context and credibility.
- Document Studies and Work Samples
  - Preserve samples of work created, recordings, videos, meeting agendas and minutes. First hand examples of impact.
- Reflection
  - Thinking about the lessons learned from this project and experience. Useful for training and education of personnel.

## Tips to creating a good survey questionnaire

- Clearly state your intentions – explain WHY you are conducting the survey.
- Include clear instructions at the start of your questionnaire.
- Don't ask for personal information unless you need it.
- Keep the questions short and concise.
- Ask only one question at a time and avoid double barreled questions.
- Make sure the questions are not biased - i.e. "How did you like the program?"
- Ask questions that can be answered by your subjects or include an NA option.
- Order/group questions according to topic or category.
- Present the questions in a clean and organized layout.
- Proof and test the survey questionnaire.

## For additional resources on evaluation:

- W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2001) Logic model development guide. Battle Creek, MI: W.K. Kellogg Foundation.  
<https://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide>
- Frechtling, J. (2002). The 2002 user friendly handbook for project evaluation. National Science Foundation.  
<https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02057/nsf02057.pdf>