

How to Expand the Evaluation Agenda

Many evaluations focus on program purpose, design, and result. However, several broader agendas for evaluating a volunteer driver program might include:

- need for the program
- design of the program approach
- program implementation and delivery
- program impact or outcome
- program efficiency (cost efficiency)

In the event the program administration or staff of a volunteer driver program want to undertake these broader evaluation agendas, it would be helpful to try to answer the following questions.

- 1. Problem:** What is the special older adult mobility problem that the volunteer driver program addresses? Who does the problem affect, and how does it affect them?
- 2. Justification:** What is it about the problem or its affect that justifies organizing this volunteer driver program?
- 3. Goals:** What are the goals of the volunteer driver program for addressing the problem of mobility for older adults?
- 4. Interventions:** What interventions or actions can be taken to address the problem, and how does the design and implementation of the program address the problem? Are the interventions or actions of the program appropriate, or should other interventions or actions be considered?
- 5. Competition:** What other transportation systems and services are addressing the same problem, and does the volunteer driver program duplicate or compliment their activities? What can the volunteer driver program do if it is duplicating the activities of others?
- 6. Users:** What populations are targeted for mobility or transportation intervention? Is the volunteer driver program addressing these populations, and if so how? Should it consider limiting or expanding its target populations?
- 7. Methods:** What are considered appropriate methods for implementation of a transportation program, and are the implementation efforts appropriate? If not, how can implementation efforts be improved?

- 8. Operations:** Are the actions being undertaken to implement the volunteer driver program attaining the desired benefits? If not, should the sponsor consider altering the operations of the program?
- 9. Costs:** How much does it cost the sponsor to undertake the volunteer driver program? Are the costs reasonable in relation to the benefits the target audience receives?
- 10. Impact:** What actions can the sponsor take to strengthen the volunteer driver program so that it meets goals for impacting its target audience?

PROGRAM OPERATIONS AND OUTCOMES

When the volunteer driver program is ready to undertake an evaluation process, program operations and outcomes will undoubtedly receive considerable attention. Program operations identify whether the program is being operated as planned and focuses on the programs ability to produce the desired effects at a reasonable cost. The following are topics and related questions that might be addressed in an operations evaluation.

- Are administrative and service objectives being met?
- Are the intended services being delivered to the intended persons?
- Are there needy but underserved persons the program is not reaching?
- Once in service, do sufficient numbers of persons participate in the service?
- Are the clients satisfied with the services?
- Are volunteer drivers satisfied with the service?

Program outcomes identify whether the program goals, objectives, and outcomes are being achieved. Suggested topics and related questions that might be addressed in an outcome evaluation are listed below.

- Do the services have beneficial effects on the recipients?
- Are some recipients affected more by the services than others?
- Is the problem or situation the services are intended to address being improved?
- Are resources used efficiently?
- Is the cost reasonable in relation to the amount of the benefits?
- Would alternative approaches yield equivalent benefits at less cost?

Regardless of the evaluation approach(s) selected by a volunteer driver program, what is important is that evaluation is about discovery. It is about what works and what doesn't work. It is also about the impact of services on staff and volunteers and especially on customers. It offers the potential for positioning community leaders, boards, and staff to take the next steps in planning for undertaking actions that will improve the program and its impact on its customers.