

Why an Evaluation Will Matter to Your Program

Let's begin with what evaluation actually does. According to the literature, evaluation provides a systematic method to study a program, practice, intervention, or initiative in order to understand how well it achieves its goals. An evaluation of a volunteer driver program studies the program and its practices in order to:

- know what has worked
- why it worked
- what could be improved
- whether it has achieved its goals

Below are reasons why an evaluation will matter to your volunteer driver program.

INTEGRATION WITH PROGRAM PLANNING

The evaluation process begins with the planning of the program. During the planning phase, a program can begin its evaluation process by setting goals and designing the program to meet those goals. The next phase of the evaluation process is the initiation of actions during the implementation phase by focusing on how to set goals and design the program to meet those goals. The third phase of the evaluation process can be undertaken as an annual phase in order to measure success based on the previous year's plans and objectives.

IMPROVEMENT OF SERVICE DELIVERY

A volunteer driver program can identify ways to improve its operations and service delivery. The evaluation effort offers an opportunity to identify challenges and difficulties faced by a volunteer driver program and how it can adapt and correct its methods and activities in order to improve its operations as well as its service.

INVOLVEMENT OF KEY ACTORS

A variety of people may be involved in the operation of a volunteer driver program. Their voices need to be heard when the time comes for understanding its successes and failures. For example, the involvement of board members, staff members, volunteers, passengers, community supporters, and funders can be critical for acquiring an understanding of what has gone right and what has gone wrong, and how deficiencies can be overcome.

INITIATION OF CRITICAL ACTIVITIES

Evaluation of a volunteer driver program can (and perhaps should) include both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data will be needed when considering financial objectives. Such data may include primary data from software reports and written reports. Qualitative data will be needed when considering people objectives. Such data may include the results of written surveys, individual interviews, and focus group discussions with a broad range of focus group participants.

INTEGRATION WITH OTHER ACTIVITIES

When a full-blown evaluation is difficult because of budgetary issues (e.g., inability to afford external evaluators), a volunteer driver program may decide to develop a special project team that can weave evaluation methods into ongoing activities. For example, the project team may review driver or passenger data from software reports or add evaluation oriented questions into a survey that is being undertaken for another purpose.

In summary, although a volunteer driver program may appear to be serving an important need, it will be hard to know if it is actually achieving its goals without collecting data and without conducting an evaluation. By undertaking an evaluation, the volunteer driver program will be able to determine why and how it has achieved its goals and whether its resources have been used efficiently and effectively.

Much of the information in this section was developed from materials of The National Institute for Children's Health Quality.