

CHAPTER 8

EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate responsibility for development of the State Health Plan rests with the Statewide Health Coordinating Council. This responsibility is mandated by P.L. 93-641. It is essential that the Council members be aware of the role evaluation should play in decision-making. Furthermore, responsibilities for carrying out the evaluation process at different levels or stages must also be delineated.

An operating evaluation process is both a key component of any organization as well as a program responsibility. There is no one right process of evaluation which can be outlined and given to every health program. Each program, because of its unique background, development, needs, and expressed goals has to develop its own evaluation process. However, evaluation standards can be established for use by all programs, and results can be readable and accessible to all Council members.

Quite simply, "evaluation is the process of examining and judging."¹ Three basic purposes for evaluation are: justification of programs; control of programs; and planning for programs. One may wonder why evaluation creates skepticism about its value and utility, since its purpose is to identify weaknesses and facilitate necessary change. Uncertainty about the usefulness of evaluation can probably be traced to:

- . . . the lack of a predetermined link between evaluation and decision-making
- . . . the lack of standard evaluation methodologies
- . . . the lack of knowledge about the relationship between the cost and the value of acting upon evaluation information.

After these barriers have been reduced the evaluation process can assist the planning staff and the Statewide Health Coordinating Council through a continuous feedback process to improve the quality of their decisions and actions. Maximum benefit occurs when all persons involved participate, at least to some degree, in the entire process.

¹Evaluation and Project Monitoring, HPAAN, page 4.

Conceptually, evaluation is the same as management, the difference being that management usually focuses on short-term achievements. Therefore, a sound evaluation system will include a management system, the point at which to begin the evaluation systems design.

From this standpoint, SHCC is already involved with the management system. While the program staff must continually make decisions about:

- . . . program rescheduling
- . . . rebudgeting
- . . . reassigning staff;

SHCC is faced with decisions about

- . . . modifying program goals/objectives
- . . . redesigning strategies/services
- . . . setting standards and criteria.

Evaluation should be used carefully. It offers the potential of reducing the uncertainty about attainment of goals through specific program achievements. By reducing this uncertainty, SHCC can use the analyzed information for further planning and public accountability reporting.

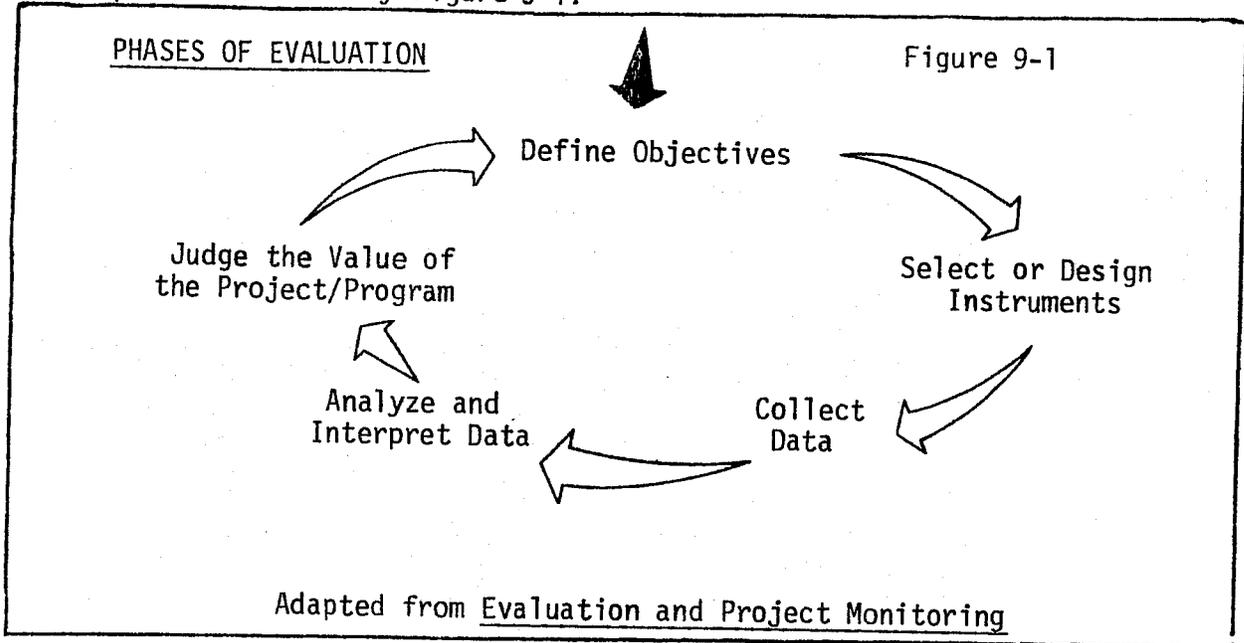
CONDITIONS

Even before the design of an evaluation system begins, certain conditions must be satisfied if evaluation is to provide a useful tool to the Council and staff. The conditions are:

- Those who use the evaluation results must agree on
 - definitions of program activities
 - the conditions the program is supposed to change
 - the kinds of outcomes expected.
- The key assumptions on which the program is based must be stated in forms which can be objectively tested or measured.
- The SHPDA must work with program staffs during initial planning and implementation.

THE PHASES OF EVALUATION

Simply stated, evaluation takes place in a cyclical sequence of phases as shown by Figure 9-1.



These five phases are applicable to all levels of evaluation whether the need is for a simple project evaluation or a complex experimental evaluation. This process includes:

Defining Objectives: Objectives are developed from goals and become the guides for data collection. Therefore, the more explicitly objectives are stated, the more likely it is that the program will achieve its intended effect and the easier it will be to demonstrate that achievement.

Selection or Design of Instruments: Data is assembled from raw information. Evidence is a summary, or analysis of the data. The instruments, or methods of data collection, must, however, be selected with an eye to their use in demonstrating change or difference. The most difficult barrier to designing an evaluation instrument is the fact that specific objectives and actions are not the only factors affecting the stated goal. Therefore, the data and the derived evidence must be clear and interpretable to the Council. Various methods or instruments can be selected by levels of sophistication. See the following section, entitled, "EVALUATION MEASURES."

Data Collection: The third phase is collection of the data. The analysis of this data must evaluate change or difference. Change is demonstrated by comparison of present data with previous or baseline data. Baseline data is from the same sources stated in the objectives, thus, baseline data not only serves as the baseline for evaluation but also as a way of defining the problems.

Difference is demonstrated by comparison of two or more sets of data from two or more groups, e.g., the different effect of two types of care in treating sufferers from a certain problem. This demonstration requires an advanced source of data and more sophistication in evaluation design.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data: If the objectives were completely stated, the analysis of data should be straightforward. Experts, statisticians, consultants may be trusted with performing the analysis, but the Council should share the responsibility of interpreting the analysis and deciding its meaning.

Judging the Value of the Project/Program: The analysis and interpretation of data do not complete the evaluation. This evidence must be used to evaluate the project/program in terms of its benefit, cost, accomplishment, or impact. The Council may decide that the change and/or impact was exactly as expected, or the Council may decide that the expectations were not met. At this point, a number of decisions must be made. Perhaps the objectives derived from the goal(s) were not appropriate; perhaps the objectives need modification (objectives can be modified in any or all parts: action, content, data or effect); also, new objectives may be needed because of new knowledge or changing circumstances; finally, perhaps the program responsible for carrying out the objectives needs to be designed differently or another more appropriate program assume the responsibility.

EVALUATION MEASURES

A major issue in evaluation design is what measures within the universe of measurable factors should be used in the evaluation process. Presently, there is not agreement on what factors constitute effective evaluation. Nor is there agreement as to how these factors ought to be measured. For these reasons, it becomes most difficult to standardize the evaluation process.

However, in view of these difficulties, evaluation may still be accomplished in the following two areas:

Narrative Description of Health Status and System,