FOCUS EVALUATION

Purpose:
In this stage you will work with relevant stakeholders to assess the program status, clarify the purpose and develop key evaluation questions. This will ensure that you obtain the information you need to inform the decisions you want to make.

Step 1: Assess program status

In this step you will assess program status to determine if the program can be meaningfully evaluated. For an evaluation to be meaningful, the findings need to be accurate, credible and utilized. To determine the extent to which the program can be evaluated, relevant stakeholders need to agree on the program's rationale, components and outcomes. Consider using the **Evaluation Checklist** to make sure key program elements are in place prior to investing time and resources to conduct an evaluation.

Step 1a: Review program mandate, rationale and local context

Work with relevant stakeholders to articulate why the program is needed. Start by reviewing and aligning your program activities to the relevant program standard(s) and protocol(s) in Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS). The OPHS is prescriptive for some program standards and less so for others. Where there is no clear mandate, consider revisiting the work you may have completed in *Situational Assessment* and your **Program Description** and/or **Logic Model** to review the rationale and context for the program. For example, the OPHS mandates the Board of Health to "implement a program of public health intervention to reduce the burden of illness from injuries in the health unit population" (Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care, 2018, p. 56). However, it is not prescriptive on which areas of injury prevention each health unit prioritizes. To understand the rationale and local context for why a specific injury prevention topic was selected as a priority for MLHU, revisit the evidence

TOOLS

- *Stakeholder Analysis*
- *Evaluation Checklist*

Relevant stakeholders can include internal and external stakeholders. In *Focus Evaluation*, relevant stakeholders may include those who support program delivery, decision-makers, funders, and members of the identified priority population(s). Consider reviewing the *Engage Stakeholders* concept guide.

Consulting relevant stakeholders throughout the evaluation process improves the credibility of the evaluation and increases the utility of the findings.

gathered and reviewed in the *Situational Assessment* stage and the program's **Program Description** and/or **Logic Model**. If the rationale for the program is unclear, consider going to *Situational Assessment* to reassess the program need.

Step 1b: Review program description and/or logic model

Once the program's rationale has been reviewed, determine if relevant stakeholders have a common understanding of the program. If the program has been implemented for a long time, your stakeholders' understanding of key program elements, such as the program outcomes, may have changed. With relevant stakeholders, consider using the program's **Logic Model** and/or **Program Description** to discuss the intended program outputs, outcomes, components and target group(s). Work with relevant stakeholders to determine if the program components will lead to the intended short, intermediate and long-term outcomes. This will help determine if a logical connection exists between what the program does, and the intended outcomes.

> If stakeholders disagree with the program components, outputs and intended outcomes **or** if your program outcomes are not aligned well to the program components, the program may not be ready for an evaluation.

Step 1c: Assess existing program data

Determine what existing program data you can access and the quality of the program data. Consider the suite of indicators (program process, program outcome, health equity and population health indicators) monitored in the *Monitor and Report Key Indicators* stage. It may be helpful to consult an Epidemiologist or Program Evaluator to assist with retrieving and reviewing program data.

Step 1d: Determine availability of resources for evaluation

The availability of resources can impact the evaluation scope. It is important to start thinking about the resources needed for the evaluation early on. Consider the financial, material and human resources you may need for an evaluation (Table 1). If the resources are unavailable, reduce the scope of the evaluation, or postpone for a later time. If there are external stakeholders involved in supporting the program, determine if they have resources they can provide.

Table1: Examples of resources

Resource	Example
Staffing	Data analyst support to manage and analyze existing program data
Technology	Survey software
Materials and supplies	Pen, paper and clipboard to administer data collection tool
Location	Confidential space to conduct focus groups

- Is there a public health mandate for the program?
- What is the rationale for the program? Does the rationale for the program still exist?
- Does a logical connection exist between your program components and the intended outcomes?
- Were the intended intermediaries, priority and target populations reached?
- What external factors may have influenced or impacted your program components?
- Do you have program data? Are these data complete? Accurate?
- Do you have adequate resources for an evaluation?

Step 2: Clarify purpose of the evaluation & key evaluation questions

In this step, you will consult with relevant stakeholders to define the purpose of the evaluation and develop key evaluation questions. This will help provide a clear direction for the evaluation and ensure the relevant stakeholders are in agreement with the evaluation question(s). You will also need this information for your **Evaluation Plan** in the next stage, *Prepare to Evaluate*. The purpose of your evaluation and key questions will help determine the type of evaluation that needs to be conducted. Generally, evaluations can be characterized as a Process/Formative Evaluation or Outcome/Summative Evaluation (Table 2).

Table 2: Types of Evaluations

	Purpose of evaluation	**Appropriate time**
Process/ Formative Evaluation	To assess if the program activities have been implemented as planned, and produce the intended outputs.	Typically occurs early in program implementation
Outcome/ Summative Evaluation	To determine if the intended outcomes of the program activities have been achieved and to assess the program's effectiveness.	Typically occurs a the conclusion of a program or after a predetermined time period

Step 2a: Determine the evaluation purpose

Defining the purpose of the evaluation is a critical step. This involves working with relevant stakeholders to understand what you want to know from the evaluation, what information you need, and how the findings will be used. In earlier stages you may have anticipated evaluation needs, or identified areas for evaluation while monitoring your key program indicators. Consider using this information to inform your discussions with relevant stakeholders.

Check-in with the relevant stakeholders (e.g. director, program manager) to ensure the key evaluation questions align with their information needs and the decisions the evaluation will

It is important that relevant stakeholders (e.g. director, program manager, community partners, members of the identified priority population etc.) are engaged when defining the purpose of the evaluation. This will help ensure you are meeting their information needs. The program's level of maturity also needs to be considered as you define the evaluation purpose. It may not be feasible to determine if the program is meeting its outcomes if the program has not been implemented as intended or if sufficient time has not passed.

Step 2b: Develop clear evaluation questions

In this step, you will need to work with relevant stakeholders, including your priority populations, to develop your key evaluation questions. These are broad questions that reflect the purpose of the evaluation. Key evaluation questions are not the specific questions that you would typically include in a data collection tool. Your key evaluation questions may be around the issues of:

Depending on the nature of the evaluation, it may not be feasible and/or the appropriate time to involve your priority population when clarifying the purpose and key evaluation questions. However, their level of involvement may increase as you move to the next stage, *Prepare to Evaluation*.

- Program Relevance - Is the program addressing the identified public health need?
- Program Efficiency - Are the program components being implemented efficiently?
- Program Effectiveness - Is the program effectively addressing the identified public health need?

Ensure the questions you are developing are answerable, appropriate and incorporate the needs of relevant stakeholders, including members of the priority population. Consider reviewing the *Health Equity Concept Guide* to learn more about priority populations. If existing program data is insufficient and collecting new data is not feasible, your key evaluation question may be unanswerable. Determine if your key evaluation questions are appropriate by reviewing your program's **Logic Model** and/or **Program Description**. The Logic Model and/or Program Description will give you a sense of the program's logic by illustrating how the program's intended outputs and outcomes are linked to the program components.

Your stakeholders may identify evaluation questions, where some relate to process evaluations and others relate to outcome evaluations. In this case, consider revisiting your evaluation purpose to determine the question(s) that will help you achieve the purpose.

You may encounter situations where stakeholders have identified a number of different key evaluation questions. You will need to work with them to prioritize the evaluation questions by considering the type of decisions the evaluation will inform, priorities and concerns raised by the stakeholders, the program's level of maturity, and the resources available to conduct the evaluation. Consider an Epidemiologist or Program Evaluator for support with developing your key evaluation questions.

Guiding Questions

- Is there opportunity for members of the priority population to provide input in clarifying the evaluation purpose and key evaluation questions?
- If yes, what is the appropriate strategy to engage members of the priority population?

	Focus Evaluation **Checklist** Checklist items relevant to complete this stage are dotted; Checklist items relevant to Program Manager are solid	
☐	Identify stakeholders relevant to focusing the evaluation	
☐	Assess the program status with relevant stakeholders	
	☐	Review the rationale for the program
	☐	Review **Program Description** and/or **Logic Model**
	☐	Assess program data
	☐	Determine if adequate resources are available for an evaluation
☐	Determine if proceeding with the evaluation or if more information is required before starting the evaluation	
☐	If proceeding with the evaluation, clarify the evaluation purpose and key evaluation questions	
☐	If additional information is required, proceed to the relevant stage in the Planning and Evaluation Framework	

References

Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care. (2018). Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services, and Accountability. Retrieved from
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/protocols_guidelines/Ontario_Public_Health_Standards_2018_en.pdf