



National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

Outcome Evaluation for Domestic Violence Programs

Evaluation Issue Brief #6

How Can We Make Our Evaluation Findings Work for Us?

As discussed throughout this Evaluation Issue Brief series, outcome findings can be used **internally** to improve your program and **externally** to encourage others to support your efforts.

Using Your Findings Internally

If you are not already doing so, we would recommend setting aside specific times to review the outcome information you've gathered as a staff. This sends a message that these outcomes are important, and gives you an opportunity to discuss, as a group, what is working and what needs improvement. It would also be helpful to invite volunteers and service recipients to share in these discussions and brainstorming sessions. As improvements are made in response to the data you've gathered, broadcast these changes through posters on walls, announcements, and word-of-mouth. As staff, volunteers, and service recipients see that your agency is responsive to feedback, they will be more likely to feel invested in and respected by your organization.

This Evaluation Issue Brief series has provided examples of ways that survey results could be used by a program. Depending on the particular survey tool, results can be used internally to identify unmet needs, areas of needed staff training, public or survivor perceptions of the program, and particular issues that can arise for survivors from different cultures, or different groups defined by age, sexual orientation, parenting status, or others.

Using Your Findings Externally

It is important to give careful thought to how you want to present outcome findings to the public and to funders. Some words of advice:

Keep it positive

Keep it simple

Keep it Positive

Just like a glass is half empty when it is also half full, outcome findings can be presented in both negative and positive lights. So keep it honest, but keep it positive! First, don't hesitate to let others know about the great work you are doing. Contact media sources (television, radio, newspapers) when you develop new programs, help pass legislation, and in the case of outcome evaluation, *when you have numbers to back up your successes.*

Keep It Simple

When presenting your findings for public consumption it's very important to **keep it simple**. If you are talking to the television or radio media you will be lucky to get 30 seconds of air time, so learn to talk in sound bites. Remember, people are not likely to remember specific numbers but they are likely to remember phrases like "most of," "the majority," "all" and "none." So instead of reporting:

"87% of survivors using our legal services were able to get their needs addressed"

you could say:

"the vast majority of survivors using our legal services were able to get their needs addressed"

Another way to keep it simple when presenting your findings is to pick and choose what to share with others. You will be gathering quite a bit of information about your programs and you certainly can't present it all. Decide on the top two or three findings that would be of most interest – and that would present you in a positive light – and focus on those.

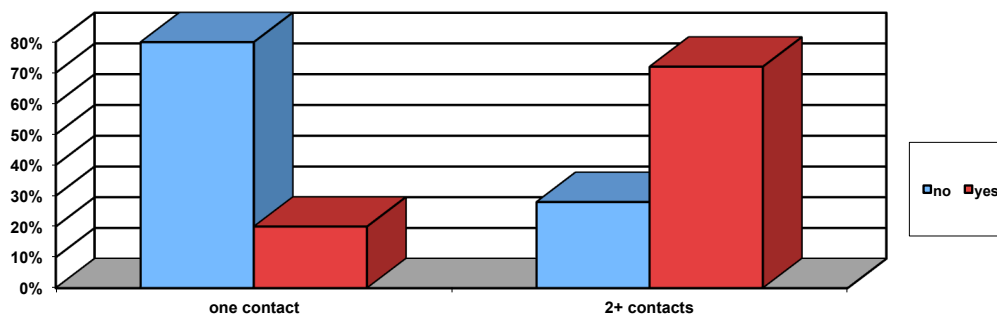
How to Share the Information with Others

There are a number of different ways to visually present your data to others. You can create **fact sheets** and **informational brochures** that include some of your evaluation findings, and you can also use **line graphs**, **tables**, **bar charts**, and **pie charts** to display your data more graphically.

Consider the data you are presenting as well as the audience when deciding how to present your findings.

Bar Graphs can be especially useful to illustrate differences between groups. For example, the following graph shows quite clearly that having more than one advocacy contact is associated with survivors feeling they have more resources (represented by "yes" in the graph).

Relationship Between Number of Contacts and Survivors Feeling They Have More Resources



Your choice of presentation will also be based on the type of computer programs you have available to you, and the amount of time you have to devote to this project. One other technical point: if you are preparing information for an "overhead" or a PowerPoint presentation make sure your font size is 18 or larger (the larger the better) to maximize people's ability to read your findings easily.

When Your Findings are "Less than Positive"

So what do you do when your findings are not as positive as you had hoped or if your findings show your program was not as successful in certain respects as you had expected? Again the same principles apply: **keep it positive** and **keep it simple**. Avoid using negative words like:

problem mistake error failure

and instead use words like:

obstacle difficulty challenge unexpected complication

Remember, one person's "failure" is another person's "obstacle to be overcome!" If you have to present negative findings to the public, don't just leave them hanging out there. Discuss how you addressed the obstacle or how you plan to address it in the future. What valuable lesson did you learn and how will you incorporate this knowledge into your program in the future? Presented correctly, even "negative" findings can be used to enhance your image with the public. They will also add credibility to your more "positive" findings.

Using Your Findings to Support the Continuation of Current Programs

One of the problems we hear agencies complain of repeatedly regarding funders is that many funding sources want to give money to "new, innovative" programs instead of to current day-to-day activities. When this is the case for your organization, you might try using your outcome data to justify the need for your current operations. Let the funder know how worthwhile and important your *current* services are instead of always adding new services that stretch staff to the breaking point.

Using Your Findings to Justify Creating New Programs

There are of course also situations when you will *want* to use outcome findings to request funds for a new program. Say for example that your current "Support and Education Program for 7-10 Year Olds" has demonstrated some positive results. The majority of the children who have attended the group have reported that they (1) enjoyed the program, (2) appreciated having a safe place to discuss their feelings, (3) learned about keeping themselves safe, and (4) learned that they were not to blame for the violence happening. You could use these findings to justify the need for creating another similarly structured group for either adolescents or for preschoolers.

You could also use your positive findings to justify expanding a popular program. Perhaps your current Housing Advocate is doing a terrific job but cannot handle the heavy caseload. Having data that illustrate for the funder (1) how many people currently use your program, (2) how many are turned away due to lack of personnel, and (3) how effective service recipients find the program to be can be an effective strategy for securing additional funds for expansion.

Important Points to Remember

- The safety and well-being of the survivors you serve must always take precedence over gathering data. Design your questions and procedures accordingly, and include feedback and input from survivors who use your services.
- Always take the time to explain *why* you are asking for information. If you explain that their input will be used to improve your services, survivors will usually be happy to answer some questions. It is disrespectful to introduce questions with only "I need you to answer some questions" or "I need you to fill this out."
- Don't request any more information than is necessary, and be committed to using this information to understand and improve upon your services.
- Consider issues of diversity in designing your outcome evaluation. Such issues include but are not limited to literacy, language, and culture. Again, including input from the survivors who use your program is vital.
- The tools and strategies developed for this manual may or may not make sense for your specific program. They were created only to provide a foundation from which to begin your evaluation efforts. You will need to tailor your strategies to fit your specific program.
- Design outcome questions that will answer whether or not survivors ***attained outcomes they identified as important to them.***

Knowledge is power. The more service providers and advocates know about designing and conducting evaluation efforts the better those efforts will be. Evaluating our work can provide us with valuable information we need to continually improve our programs.

The other Evaluation Briefs in this series address why domestic violence programs should want to evaluate our work (#1), review the distinctions between research and evaluation and between process and outcome evaluation (#2), explore ways to attend to safety, confidentiality and diversity (#3), further define outcome evaluation (#4), and provide practical guidance on gathering, maintaining and analyzing data (#5)

The content of this series of Outcome Evaluation Issues Briefs is drawn from a 2007 NRC DV publication entitled "Outcome Evaluation Strategies for Domestic Violence Services Programs Receiving FVPSA Funding: A Practical Guide", authored by Eleanor Lyon, PhD and Cris Sullivan, PhD.

Eleanor Lyon recently retired from her position at Director of the Institute for Violence Prevention & Reduction at the University of Connecticut, where she directed many research and evaluation projects focused on violence against women. She remains active as a consultant for the NRC DV, the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health, and others. **Cris Sullivan** is Professor of Ecological/Community Psychology and Coordinator of the Violence Against Women Research and Outreach Initiative at Michigan State University (MSU). She is also Associate Chair of the Psychology Department and is a Senior Fellow of MSU's Office on Outreach and Engagement. She has been an advocate and researcher in the movement to end violence against women since 1982. Her areas of expertise include developing and evaluating community interventions for abused women and their children, and evaluating victim services.