

**E**valuation plans are the “blueprints” that lay out a plan for implementation according to the building codes. They describe what the evaluation will look like and what information will be collected. Evaluation plans consist of the following information:

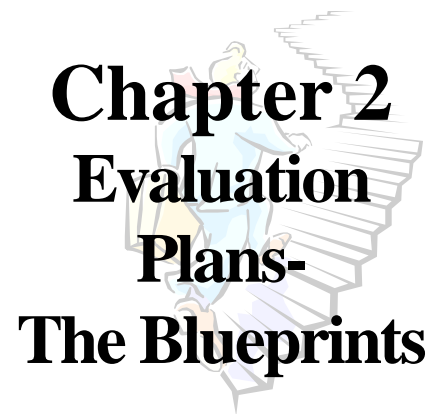
- program activities
- beneficiaries
- desired results
- indicators
- instruments to be used
- standards for success
- when you will collect data
- how often you collect data
- who will collect the data
- who will analyze the data
- who will report the results

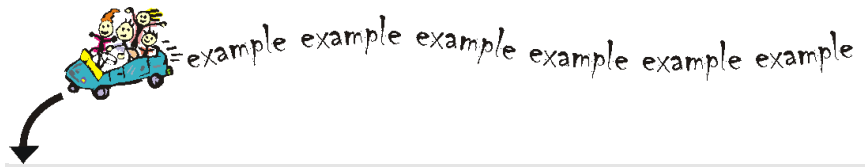
An evaluation plan acts as both a guide for your program and as a means to show stakeholders how evaluation data will be gathered. A blank evaluation plan and an example of a completed evaluation in the reference section.

AmeriCorps’ program objectives answer the initial questions of an evaluation plan –what is your program doing and what is the expected result? The questions of a “measure” and “standard” provide a framework in which to collect information on whether your program reached its desired result. However, you need a more detailed plan to successfully conduct your evaluation.

## **Establishing Indicators**

Indicators are evidence of changes that have occurred. Sometimes the indicator of a result is easy to identify. For a result such as “an increase in children immunized,” a count of the number of children receiving the injection compared with a baseline age-appropriate immunization rate is a direct measure of the change. In other cases, the result may not be directly observable. Before you select your measure, you should determine a concrete, observable factor that is a sign that you have achieved your results —an indicator.





**Desired result:** Students' attitude will improve toward school.  
**Indicators:** students' expressed attitude, student attendance.



**Consider This:**

Selecting appropriate indicators for assessing the success of your program is a critical element of the evaluation design. A good indicator is one that is:

- **Understandable:** It has credibility with the program's stakeholders, program partners, clients, and professionals in your field of service.
- **Reflective of your program's strategy:** It matches the desired result to your objectives.
- **Significant:** It is central to the change or success that your program is seeking to achieve.
- **Important for sustaining long-term results:** It suggests that the achievements of your program will be lasting.
- **Valid:** There is a logical connection between the indicator and what is being measured. For example, attendance at a workshop on neighborhood safety is a good indicator of community cohesion but not of attitude toward the police.
- **Reliable:** It can be measured in such a way that the result can be confirmed by another assessment or through the repeated use of the same instrument.
- **Sensitive to change:** It is capable of demonstrating change within the life span of an AmeriCorps program's activities (i.e., one year).
- **Direct:** There is not excessive influence by other factors or variables.

**Tip: Choose multiple indicators.**  
 If you serve a population with multiple needs who may access multiple services aimed at the same result, choose indicators that give participants and stakeholders the opportunity to attribute changes to your program.

In general, AmeriCorps programs need to show the outcomes of their services, but for some programs, showing outcomes within one year may be a challenge. For example, programs addressing environmental issues that conduct stream restoration, tree planting, or toxic abatement, or programs addressing other human needs issues that meet basic human needs such as food, shelter, or medical attention may find it difficult to measure specific

outcomes within one year. In addition, indicators for short-term outcomes may be difficult to identify and measure. However, these services do meet community needs and can have a positive long-term impact. For these activities, it may be important to know if the quality of services provided was high enough to create the positive impacts expected. For example, if trees were planted to promote beautification in urban areas, were sufficient steps taken to ensure that the trees will survive?

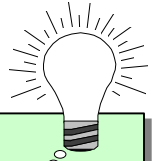
***If your program has difficulty identifying short-term outcomes, consider the following:***

- What indicators can be measured that reflect the short-term outcomes for this year?
- How will you know that the quality of the services you provide is high enough to expect the long-term outcome you intend?
- What indicators can be used to measure the quality of services provided within this program year?

***In general, AmeriCorps programs can consider the following methods to measure quality of services:***

- professional inspection or expert judgment (e.g., of housing or repairs)
- environmental assessments (e.g., quality of stream restoration)
- client/service recipient satisfaction (e.g., with human needs services)
- increased utilization of appropriate services (e.g., immunization, or prenatal visits)

Other issues that relate to measuring environmental and human needs services can be found in Chapters 9 and 10.



***Tip: Get stakeholders involved early in your evaluation plan.***

It is the best way to ensure success in data collection. It also encourages participation and ensures legitimacy of your requests for information. Interview stakeholders to elicit their expectations of reasonable outcomes, as well as their perspectives on meaningful indicators of change. It may not be feasible to involve representatives from all your audiences in your planning. Therefore, make sure that the most important groups have a chance to provide input.



