



How Do You Know if it's Working? Evaluation!

This Info Sheet gives a brief overview of the wealth of helpful information you can find in *Best Practices Workbook for Boating, Fishing, and Aquatic Resources Stewardship Education (Workbook)*. See the back for details.

Programs that implement formal evaluation are successful (or on their way to success), because the evaluation process shows you what works and what doesn't.

Probably the most neglected component of all educational programs is evaluation. Far too often programs are based, not on research evidence supporting their effectiveness or on accepted education theory, but only on what another program or agency is doing. And most evaluation efforts only report simple program outputs such as the number of participants at an event and cost of delivery. What do these simple outputs tell you about how well you are educating your audiences?

Programs that implement formal evaluation are successful (or on their way to success) because the evaluation process shows you what works and what doesn't. By building on what works and changing what doesn't, you continually work toward your program goals and objectives. Evaluation also helps you base your education efforts on sound educational theory and focus on accomplishing agency/organizational goals and objectives.

Following is a brief summary of Best Practices for program evaluation. *Chapter 4* of the *Workbook* explains each of these in detail.

More information regarding program evaluation is available from the American Evaluation Association: www.eval.org.

Effective program evaluation is based on program goals and objectives.

In order to evaluate your program, you must have some standard(s) to evaluate it against. Your program goals and objectives are those standards.

Effective program evaluation is a systematic and ongoing process that begins when a program is being planned and carries through implementation.

To be most effective, evaluation must begin before a program is implemented. A systematic evaluation process can help you build your program correctly, adjust it over time, and ultimately achieve the results you are looking for. The first step is to evaluate whether the program is even needed.

Effective program evaluation receives administrative and financial support.

It is a common misconception that program evaluation is only a periodic event. However, evaluation is most effective when it is built into the program. Making evaluation an integral part of your education program requires support at every level.

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Effective program evaluation helps identify program outputs, such as number of participants and participant feedback.

While collection of program outputs (such as number of participants, cost per participant, etc.) alone is not sufficient for program evaluation, this kind of information is easy and inexpensive to collect, and it is an important piece of the evaluation puzzle.

Effective program evaluation explores and investigates the program's short-term learning outcomes.

If your program is oriented toward fostering knowledge gains and/or skill acquisition (as opposed to behavioral change), it is important that this be done at the end of any training or program experience. Many audiences will want to know "What did we learn (or come away with)?" Effective programs determine short-term learning outcomes based on objectives and program experiences.

Effective program evaluation explores and investigates the program's long-term benefits and impacts.

Although collection of program outputs such as number of participants is important, effective program evaluation goes beyond it. Educators in effective programs identify the outcomes they expect and continually assess their program's impact on achieving them.

Effective program evaluation encourages the use of multiple and varied assessment methods.

Reliably assessing program outcomes such as the knowledge, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors of participants is difficult.

Many methods and techniques are available, and each has strengths and weaknesses. Whatever methods you choose, be sure they are based on the systematic collection of data, and that the data are credible and dependable. The *Workbook* discusses some common evaluation methods. Use multiple methods whenever possible.

Effective program evaluation uses national criteria to select curriculum materials.

There is a tremendous amount of curriculum material available on boating, fishing, and stewardship education (see www.gift.org/EdAssessment/index.html). How do you know if the materials you want to use are suitable? Review the materials against national standards that have been developed for each area.

Effective program evaluation allows program staff to take advantage of professional development opportunities relating to evaluation.

One limitation of many educational programs is the lack of trained staff who can plan and carry out evaluations. Encouraging program staff to pursue professional development opportunities in the areas of assessment and evaluation builds greater capacity for staff to apply the results to your program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

This information sheet is just the tip of the iceberg. MUCH more information on planning, developing, and evaluating education programs can be found in the *Best Practices Workbook for Boating, Fishing, and Stewardship Education*. The more Best Practices you can incorporate into your program, the greater the chance that your program will achieve the goals you set for it.

To review and/or order copies of this and other Information Sheets, the *Workbook*, or other Best Practice tools and materials, go to: www.RBFF.org/educational/bestpractices.cfm or contact RBFF at: 601 N. Fairfax St. • Ste. 140 Alexandria, VA 22314-2054 • 703 519 0013