CDC Coffee Break:
Developing an Evaluation Plan: Setting the Course
for Effective Program Evaluation

S René Lavinghouze, MA: Senior Evaluation Scientist;
Office on Smoking and Health

Jan Jernigan, PhD: Senior Evaluation Scientist;
Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity

Adriane Niare, MPH, CHES: Health Scientist;
Office on Smoking and Health

LaTisha Marshall, MPH: Health Scientist; Office on Smoking and Health

Kim Snyder, MPH: CPPW Evaluation Liaison to the Office on Smoking and
Health; ICF International

Marti Engstrom, MS: Evaluation Team Lead; Office on Smoking and Health

Rosanne Farris, PhD, RD: Branch Chief; Division of Nutrition, Physical
Activity, and Obesity

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention

Welcome to today's Coffee Break presented by the Evaluation and Program Effectiveness Team in the Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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The information presented here is for training purposes and reflects the views of the presenter. It doesn't necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
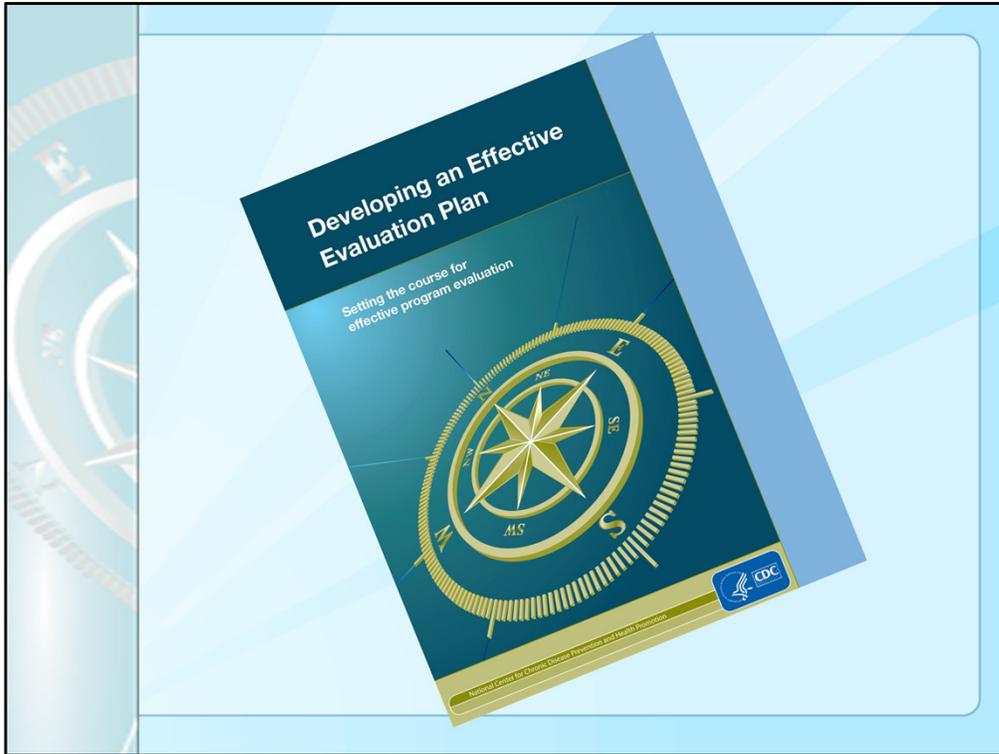
During today's coffee break we will briefly review the content of the newly released evaluation guidance document, "Developing an Effective Evaluation Plan: Setting the course for effective program evaluation." I encourage you to look this document up at the Office on Smoking and Health website for more information. We will provide the link for this at the end of the presentation.

An Evaluation Plan Is…

A written document that describes how you will monitor and evaluate so that you will be able to describe the What, the How, and the Why it Matters for your program.

What is an evaluation plan? And I'm going to stop for a moment and ask you to really take a look at the definition and let that sink in. Throughout our presentation today I'm going to encourage each of you to add or take away from this definition based on your own experiences. And maybe you want to write those down on a sheet of paper, or maybe just think about them and give you something to reflect on during our Coffee Break.

A written evaluation plan facilitates the process of keeping diverse stakeholders on the same page with regards to the actual implementation of the evaluation. It's going to answer which evaluation questions are actually going to be answered by your evaluation, when they will be answered, how, and why. You might think that this is very straightforward and there is no need for a written plan. But you probably thought that about your program before you began to work on your logic model.

Just as the logic model helped to uncover hidden agendas and to facilitate a common understanding of your program and its direction, the evaluation plan, with your logic model, is going to facilitate common understanding of the exact nature and path an evaluation will take.

An Evaluation Plan…

- Covers EVERYTHING!
- Is more than adding questions to your work or action plan
- Covers breadth of all program activities
- Fosters transparency
- Is good evaluation practice

What is in an evaluation plan?

Really, your evaluation plan should include everything for a specific project or program you're working on, from your stakeholders to your dissemination methods. And ideally it will cover multiple years for continuity. You do not need to evaluate everything your program is doing. But it's good evaluation practice to include everything your program does in your evaluation plan if you're up to that point of your program or project.

It's more than just adding evaluation questions to your program work plan. This method usually results in questions that relate specifically to each individual activity, and not to your overall program or goals. Here, when you take this method, you miss the forest by looking at the individual leaves. By necessity, your evaluation will have to focus by stage of development, priorities, and feasibility. It is best that those decisions are captured in a written plan. In efforts to be transparent and increase credibility of methods and results, a written plan is open to stakeholder comments and feedback. And we're going to talk about stakeholders quite a bit today.

Why do you need or want an evaluation plan? Well, for example, if you have staff turnover, maybe an evaluator leaves, this is going to be a great document for them to review so that they can just step in and move forward with the evaluation. Additionally, if you have management turnover, it's great for management to read to introduce them to where the evaluation team has been, where they're going, and what the stakeholders' needs and interests are.

Additionally, it's an advocacy tool for resources for evaluations. Maybe you can show that in your evaluations, these are what the needs are, priorities, and establish stakeholder and decision maker information needs, and this may result in more resources. And overall, as we all know, it's just good practice to plan ahead and walk through the route you want to take.
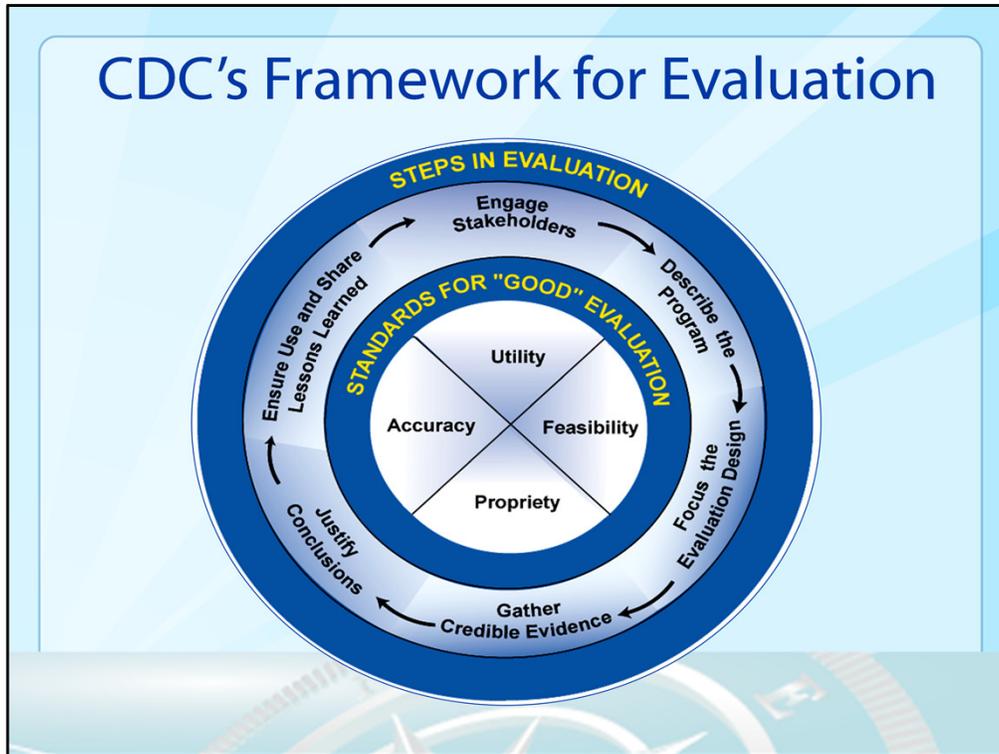
Now that we've sold you in a minute and a half on why you need an evaluation plan, we're going to walk through a suggested way of forming your evaluation plan. And this is just one way to do so, and we recommend you follow the CDC's framework for evaluation, which is really a framework to guide an effective evaluation of public health programs, and using findings to improve programs. Further, similar to the framework, the development of an evaluation plan is an ongoing cycle. In each step of the framework, there are important components that are useful in the creation of an evaluation plan.

The workbook follows the CDC's framework for developing an evaluation plan. And, additionally, OSH has a guidance document called "Introduction to Program Evaluation for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs"** which is the CDC framework using a tobacco case study example.

**Available at
http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco_control_programs/surveillance_evaluation/evaluation_manual/index.htm
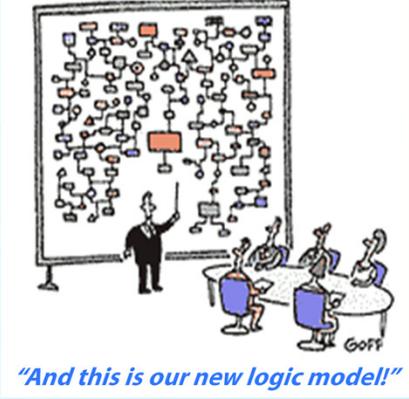
From http://dilbert.com/strips/comic/2009-04-05/

The first step is to engage your stakeholders. And this is really important because stakeholders are the people you want to share your evaluation findings with; you need to know from the beginning what they need to and want to know.

As this Dilbert cartoon highlights, working with stakeholders may add some additional challenges to creating your evaluation plan, but including stakeholders in the development of your plan is worth the challenge because, as I said, you're building a market for the evaluation and the final evaluation report. It might even equal more resources for the evaluation if your stakeholders want something and realize you don't have the resources to gain that information.

Please remember that your evaluation is for your stakeholders, and not just CDC or whoever is funding you. Your stakeholder work group should include 8 to 10 people, and when writing this up in your evaluation plan, there are pros and cons to including the names of these people in the document. And you should weigh those with each program, making their own decision.

"And this is our new logic model!"

The next step is to briefly describe your program. And you may be saying, "Why do we need to do this in our evaluation plan? We've already done it in our program plan and in our logic model." I would say that's good because then you have something you can copy from and this shouldn't be too difficult of a step. And really what we're recommending is that you don't repeat everything, just a couple of paragraphs to ensure everyone is on the same page so that you set the stage and the context for your evaluation, and you're sure the evaluation questions aren't coming out of left field. You're facilitating the actual identification of the questions because they're coming from your program. You're promoting a shared understanding of the program, and also you're preparing for your final evaluation report.

Focus the Design

Evaluation Question	Methods That Might Be Used to Answer the Question	Assumptions or Conditions for This Method to Be Viable	Resources Needed to Implement This Method	Limitations of This Method

Step number three is to focus the design of your evaluation. And evaluations are not just about what CDC wants or about researchers' pet projects, but what is useful and will be used by the program. Stakeholders, including funders and decision makers, will be involved in this decision-making process. It's necessary to solicit evaluation questions from all sources. What information do these groups want? What do they need to stay engaged and at the table to participate in your program and your evaluation? By doing this, you're going to cover some hidden agendas, so keep those in mind.

You're not going to be able to evaluate everything all the time, unfortunately. Choices are going to have to be made on which questions are most important based on the stage of development of your program, priorities, and feasibility. Additionally, you should be determining the use and users of your evaluation up front. It's very important with your evaluation planning process in your evaluation plan to be very transparent. For example, if the evaluation might be used to defund a program, this should be clearly understood by everyone participating in the evaluation. Additionally, who will have access to the results, when, and how needs to be transparent. And I just want to focus on the word "transparency" for a minute. This is important throughout the evaluation plan process in writing the plan, but especially in step number three.

Overall in this step you're going to identify your evaluation questions and link them to the program logic model; facilitate transparency for the prioritization process, including what is the evaluation purpose to the use and users; and promote an understanding of what the evaluation will and will not deliver. This is an important one. You want to make sure all the stakeholders understand what the evaluation will produce and what it will not so there are no expectations that aren't met. Also, it's going to facilitate budget and resource discussions, also important.

On the slide is an example table from the workbook to help you focus your evaluation design. You need to include information about this in your plan because people may question it later on and you want that written documentation to show you, and so that stakeholders are clear on what the plan can and cannot deliver.

And now I'm going to have Rene walk us through the second half.
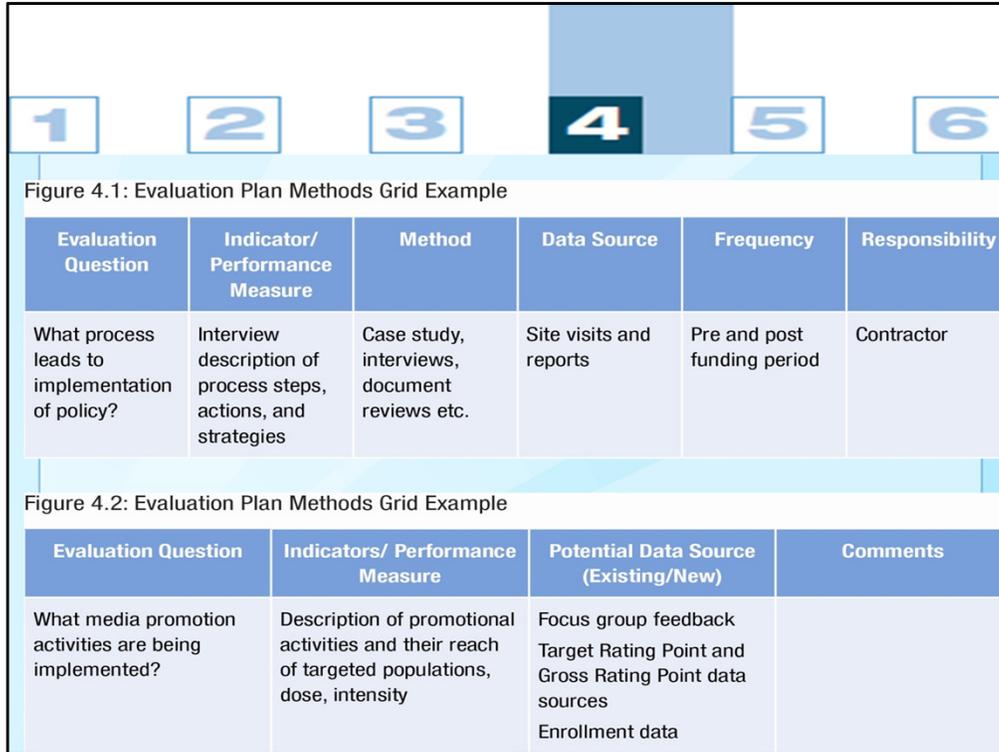
Planning for Gathering Credible Evidence

- Identify stakeholder involvement.
- Identify appropriate methods to match evaluation questions and transparency about rationale.
- Identify methods timeline, resources, roles, and responsibilities.
- Summary charts are helpful but don't neglect the narrative.

When we get to step four, at this point a lot of folks think that, okay, that's all I need in my evaluation plan, steps one through three, because I described my program and I've identified my questions, so that's really all you need. And a plan is to tell me where I'm going to go, and then I'm finished.

But that's really not where you should stop. You should continue on through all six steps, because missing steps here could mean significant delays, which can reduce your credibility. Or it can mean that you don't have the budget to cover completion of your project, which can impact future projects as stakeholders have less say that evaluation will produce useful products. Because they may be thinking, "Hey, we did that 40-page survey for you, and we didn't get much return on investment there." This is not really where you should stop. You should continue on.

Including information about step four in your evaluation plan helps increase transparency and stakeholder buy-in. Will the stakeholders accept your data sources and your methods? This is where you discuss that with your evaluation questions from step three, what are your data sources and your methods? Work that up to them and what decisions are made—that goes into your evaluation plan.

Resource development, and advocacy for those resources based on your methods and your data sources. Planning what you will do in ensuring that you have these resources, including a timeline, including enough time to do what you have planned, documentation of those decisions, and again, repeating what Kim said, facilitating transition if there is staff turnover.

Figure 4.1: Evaluation Plan Methods Grid Example

Evaluation Question	Indicator/ Performance Measure	Method	Data Source	Frequency	Responsibility
What process leads to implementation of policy?	Interview description of process steps, actions, and strategies	Case study, interviews, document reviews etc.	Site visits and reports	Pre and post funding period	Contractor

Figure 4.2: Evaluation Plan Methods Grid Example

Evaluation Question	Indicators/ Performance Measure	Potential Data Source (Existing/New)	Comments
What media promotion activities are being implemented?	Description of promotional activities and their reach of targeted populations, dose, intensity	Focus group feedback Target Rating Point and Gross Rating Point data sources Enrollment data	

Here we have just a couple of examples of some helpful methods, grids, that can be used in your evaluation plan to get a quick snapshot overview of linking your evaluation questions with indicators, methods, data sources, frequency, and my favorite column, the responsibility: Who is going to be responsible for this piece of the evaluation? A little reminder for each of those players in the evaluation implementation.

Planning for Conclusions

- How will you analyze the data?
- Will there be an interpretation meeting?
- Will there be opportunities for stakeholders to review preliminary results prior to final publication?
- Will there be timeline constraints?
- Will there be specific opportunities lost if deadlines are missed?

Step five: planning for conclusions, again, another step. People think, "Well, that's conclusions, I don't have to worry about that until I start analyzing my data, so why would I have that in the plan?" But here your focus is on what you will do so you can plan for the time it takes to analyze your data: How do you set up those databases? How much time do you need for review and interpretation? My stakeholders—if you're going to allow for stakeholder interpretation meetings or workgroup interpretations, this leads to transparency, as well as helps a great plan.

If you're going to allow for the review and the interpretation by your workgroup or other stakeholders, you have to allow for time for that in your timeline. And if there are going to be specific opportunities lost if deadlines are missed, say a legislative session or an important decision, there are deadlines for that and they need the information, you have to build that into your timeline, because adding these interpretation meetings into your review sometimes can add a number of weeks or more. This may take extra time but, again, it can be well worth the effort, and it needs to be planned for.

Once you have determined those evaluation questions, selected indicators, determined your source of data, collected your data, you can proceed to plan for analyzing the data and planning for conclusions.
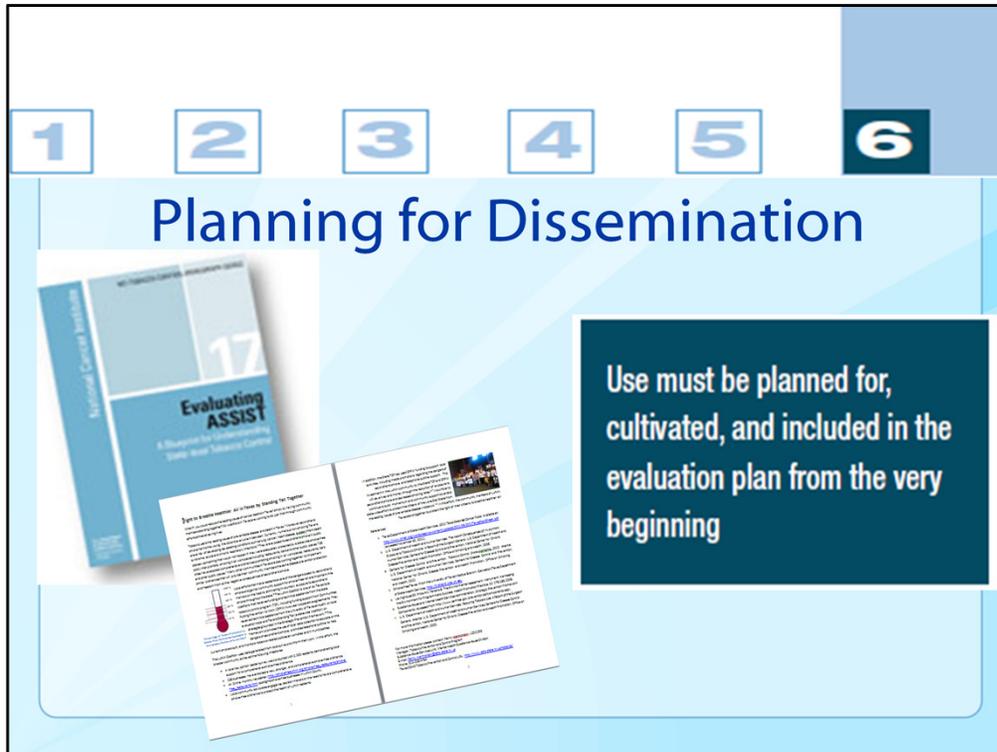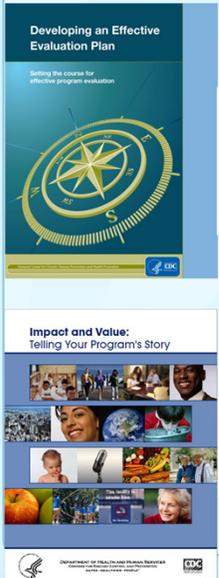
And then planning for dissemination: It is vital that you plan for dissemination of your evaluation findings from the very beginning. A dissemination plan—just that we will post it on our website and they will come is not really sufficient enough, or even a final evaluation plan is not sufficient enough. You want people to be engaged in your data and use your information; there may be multiple modes of dissemination to multiple audiences. Do you have the skills to address those different audiences? It takes different skill sets to address different audiences.

And you may want to have dissemination methods throughout the evaluation process, early on, upstream, maybe some early lessons learned, some success stories, maybe some executive summaries that go throughout the process, little paragraph spotlights, things like that. You want to have this plan in your evaluation plan, your dissemination plan in your evaluation plan. And we do have some charts and examples in our workbook that could help you walk through developing a dissemination plan. And we used our help communications group to help develop that, so that we know there is some expert advice in there from those that have that real expertise in communicating with different audiences.

And at this point, I want to point out that your division, the Division of Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Evaluation Team, is currently developing an evaluation guide on the evaluation reporting to ensure use. They will be having that resource tool for you soon.
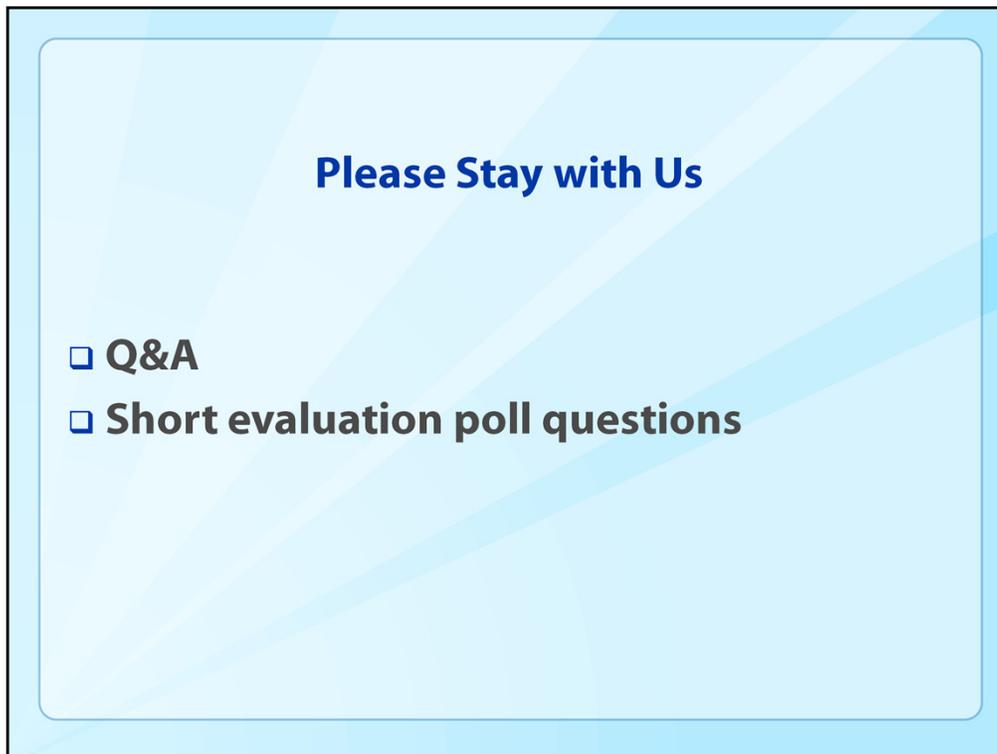
Resources

www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco control_programs/surveillance evaluation

http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/ publications/library

Some additional resources that we have in the Office of Smoking and Health, in the evaluation planning workbook that's available now for a free download at this website: In the back, in the appendix, there is a short evaluation sketch pad tool, which focuses on useful and working with your stakeholder work group. And a half-day or full-day-like retreat-type session or something, where you can basically outline the skeleton of your evaluation plan with your stakeholders' input. We do have in clearance now the soon-to-be-released, we hope by the fall of this year, how to write a final evaluation report. And we also have the telling your interim stories, like through success stories and stuff, and the impact and value in telling your present success stories workbook are available at this website. And, again, that's a free download.

www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco_control_programs/surveillance_evaluation

http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/library

Please Stay with Us

❑ **Q&A**
❑ **Short evaluation poll questions**

Question #1: What are the biggest issues, concerns, or roadblocks when writing an evaluation plan?

Probably the biggest issue and concern is that folks don't have enough time to write it, to actually fully work through it with their stakeholders because they find that they needed an evaluation and they want an evaluation plan this afternoon. Working through that process, that's why the sketch pad tool is probably really helpful to at least get a skeleton model, a skeleton plan worked out. Maybe you can do that in half a day, or even in a couple of hours with your stakeholders, even if it's through a webinar like this that you might could at least get a skeleton plan worked out with your stakeholders as you go flesh out the details with it. But at least get something from step one through step six worked out so that the documentation and the decisions are made. I just can't encourage you enough to just start that planning process before you just jump in because otherwise resources aren't there, skill sets aren't there.

There is argument and disagreement over the questions, and especially over what can, what will the evaluation deliver and what it won't deliver. There is usually at the end thinking, oh, I thought it was going to do this, the evaluation must not be very useful when that wasn't what the evaluation was going to deliver at all, so it's miscommunication.

Question #2: Do you recommend actually naming stakeholders in the evaluation plan?

I think that decision needs to be made on a case by case basis. Some reasons you may want to include the names of stakeholders in your evaluation plan is really to ensure that you're prioritizing evaluation questions to those outside people who are looking at the evaluation. This way if they see the stakeholders, they'll think it's less biased. Maybe, too, you've got people who are volunteers who are going to be part of that implementation, and as Rene said, just like the responsibility column on your methods grid, this is another reminder to them that, hey, I'm supposed to complete this part.

Also, a lot of your stakeholders are volunteers; that's going to give them some credit for their work if that's needed, and it's also just going to increase transparency and show that this evaluation had an outside group looking over it and making sure that it was credible. But I think there are cons as well for each program, so they would need to weigh those.

Thank You

If you have questions, please contact:
ddunet@cdc.gov

For more information please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333
Telephone, 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)/TTY: 1-888-232-6348
E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov   Web: www.cdc.gov

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division for Heart Disease and Prevention

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