

What makes a good evaluation?

A well-planned and carefully executed evaluation will reap more benefits for all stakeholders than an evaluation that is thrown together hastily and retrospectively. Though you may feel that you lack the time, resources, and expertise to carry out an evaluation, learning about evaluation early-on and planning carefully will help you navigate the process.

MEERA provides suggestions for all phases of an evaluation. But before you start, it will help to review the following characteristics of a good evaluation (list adapted from resource formerly available through the University of Sussex, Teaching and Learning Development Unit Evaluation Guidelines and John W. Evans' Short Course on Evaluation Basics):

Good evaluation is tailored to your program and builds on existing evaluation knowledge and resources.

Your evaluation should be crafted to address the specific goals and objectives of your EE program. However, it is likely that other environmental educators have created and field-tested similar evaluation designs and instruments. Rather than starting from scratch, looking at what others have done can help you conduct a better evaluation. See MEERA's searchable database of EE evaluations to get started.

Good evaluation is inclusive.

It ensures that diverse viewpoints are taken into account and that results are as complete and unbiased as possible. Input should be sought from all of those involved and affected by the evaluation such as students, parents, teachers, program staff, or community members. One way to ensure your evaluation is inclusive is by following the practice of participatory evaluation.

Good evaluation is honest.

Evaluation results are likely to suggest that your program has strengths as well as limitations. Your evaluation should not be a simple declaration of program success or

failure. Evidence that your EE program is not achieving all of its ambitious objectives can be hard to swallow, but it can also help you learn where to best put your limited resources.

Good evaluation is replicable and its methods are as rigorous as circumstances allow.

A good evaluation is one that is likely to be replicable, meaning that someone else should be able to conduct the same evaluation and get the same results. The higher the quality of your evaluation design, its data collection methods and its data analysis, the more accurate its conclusions and the more confident others will be in its findings.

How do I make evaluation an integral part of my program?

Making evaluation an integral part of your program means evaluation is a part of everything you do. You design your program with evaluation in mind, collect data on an on-going basis, and use these data to continuously improve your program.

Developing and implementing such an evaluation system has many benefits including helping you to:

- better understand your target audiences' needs and how to meet these needs
- design objectives that are more achievable and measurable
- monitor progress toward objectives more effectively and efficiently
- learn more from evaluation
- increase your program's productivity and effectiveness

To build and support an evaluation system:

Couple evaluation with strategic planning

As you set goals, objectives, and a desired vision of the future for your program, identify ways to measure these goals and objectives and how you might collect, analyze, and use this information. This process will help ensure that your objectives are measurable and

that you are collecting information that you will use. Strategic planning is also a good time to create a list of questions you would like your evaluation to answer.

Revisit and update your evaluation plan and logic model

(See Step 2) to make sure you are on track. Update these documents on a regular basis, adding new strategies, changing unsuccessful strategies, revising relationships in the model, and adding unforeseen impacts of an activity (EMI, 2004).

Build an evaluation culture

by rewarding participation in evaluation, offering evaluation capacity building opportunities, providing funding for evaluation, communicating a convincing and unified purpose for evaluation, and celebrating evaluation successes.

For more detail:

<http://meera.snre.umich.edu/evaluation-what-it-and-why-do-it>