

Program Evaluation Tip Sheet: Evaluating Training Events

May 24,
2011

This tip sheet is intended for programs funded through the Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It is not a comprehensive guide, but a reference of key points to keep in mind when evaluating training events.

Sponsoring organizations, trainers, and trainees all invest time and resources in attending training. Evaluation can provide data to understand the impact of the training and inform refinements to future training events. Also, an evaluative viewpoint in the planning stages of training can help clarify what the training is intended to accomplish and how best to organize and deliver the training. The tips below demonstrate how evaluation can play a part before, during, and after a training event.

Confirm the need for training. Use needs assessment methods to ensure that a real need exists and that it can be addressed by training. People already may have adequate knowledge and skills but may encounter barriers to implementing those skills on the job. For example, health care providers may encounter barriers in implementing the skills and knowledge they already have because they lack proper equipment, face constraints in reimbursement policies, or do not have adequate time with a patient — barriers that are not solved by more training.

Match the evaluation to the purpose of the training. Be clear about what is expected of participants as a result of the training. Is this event about helping participants gain new skills or knowledge? Then write clear training objectives and use them to guide the design of the training activities. Is the event more about promoting a new policy, providing opportunities to network, or motivating people to do what they already know how to do? If so, design the event to achieve its true goals, and focus the evaluation of it accordingly.

Understand your audience. Before designing your training curriculum, assess trainees' existing knowledge, attitudes, and skills so you can build on them. What other skills do they need? Are they motivated around the training topic? Successful training events fill the gap between participants' behavior when they enter the classroom and their back-on-the-job-in-the-real-world behavior.

Pay attention to on-the-job factors that might inhibit use of new skills. Assess the workplace where the trainee is expected to perform. What factors will support or hinder the desired performance? What is needed to reinforce the training once people are back at work? Consider developing tip sheets, visual prompts, email reminders, or other aids to refresh learning.

Use evaluation throughout the training session. Adults learn best through hands-on learning. Have trainees practice and apply new skills in individual or small-group exercises. Assessing trainee performance on exercises provides feedback on trainee progress—both to the trainees and the trainer. Rather than summarizing key points, the trainer can ask participants, "What have you learned so far?"

Adult learners...

- Bring life and work experience to the learning environment and can build upon it.
- Usually have specific results in mind when seeking education.
- Are often skeptical about new information and prefer to try it out before accepting it.
- Learn better when training is timely for a problem or situation they are facing.
- Prefer hands-on learning but do not like making mistakes in front of others.
- Want to be respected as a peer with existing knowledge and expertise.



Consider what level of evaluation results you seek. Written questionnaires are common and low-cost and can capture the participants' opinions and reactions. Other assessment methods can be used to capture different kinds or levels of information. Group discussions, personal interviews with participants, journaling, and videotaping a session can provide the trainer with a way to assess trainees' progress, especially for conceptual learning.

Use the appropriate instrument. Rather than an end-of-session knowledge test, use self-checks throughout the training, or, better still, provide opportunities to practice skills and receive feedback. If you need to measure skill or knowledge acquisition, consider using a three-test design (a pre-test; a post-test; and a retrospective pre-test after the training in which trainees use their newly acquired understanding and skills to more accurately estimate the level of knowledge and skills they had when they began the training).

Design the evaluation so that results make a difference. Collect evaluation information that is relevant for decision-making by the evaluation sponsor, the course designer, or other key stakeholders. Ask, what kind of data will provide evaluation results that decision-makers find useful, credible, accurate, and timely? What level of evaluation rigor is needed so that it can inform decisions and changes? Questions about how well a course met its objectives, what the trainees liked best, or their level of satisfaction may not be relevant for one-time training events.

Assess what else might be needed. Even when trainees gain knowledge through a training course, more may be needed. An end-of-session evaluation may have the most relevance as a needs assessment for your next training. Consider asking "How well prepared are you to do 'X' when you return to work?" or "What else do you need to be able to perform this task?"

Document the important effects of your training. Training evaluation often focuses on gains in knowledge. Yet people can benefit from training even if they do not learn anything new. Did trainees have a chance to confirm what they already knew? Are they more confident because they had more chances to practice skills, get coaching, or receive feedback? A checklist of "value added" components is an easy way for trainees to document these effects.

In addition to acquiring new knowledge or skills, training may help participants...

- ⚡ Expand or deepen understanding.
- ⚡ Increase insight into what was already known.
- ⚡ Refocus attention to a topic.
- ⚡ Integrate information they already knew.
- ⚡ Challenge their existing perceptions.
- ⚡ Become motivated to learn more.
- ⚡ Develop new ways of thinking.
- ⚡ Feel motivated to apply knowledge and skills.

References and Resources

- ⚡ Kirkpatrick DL, Kirkpatrick JD. Evaluating training programs: The four levels (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers; 2006.
- ⚡ Rochester Institute of Technology. Adult learners. Available from <https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/tls/course-design/instructional-design/adult-learners>. Accessed October 26, 2016.
- ⚡ Taylor-Powell E, Renner M. Collecting evaluation data: End-of-session questionnaires. 2009. Available from <https://learningstore.uwex.edu/Assets/pdfs/G3658-11.pdf>. Accessed October 26, 2016.

