GETTING STARTED WITH EVALUATION

In this resource you will learn about the different types of evaluation and the first two steps you can take to evaluate your project. **The resource includes the following sections:**

Defining Evaluation: 'Evaluation' can mean gathering feedback or measuring change in the community.

Step 1: Identify your goals and outcomes: Think about why you're doing your project and what change you hope to cause.

Step 2: Pick indicators for your outcomes: Figure out how you can measure whether the change is happening.

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About the series:

An important part of community projects is **sharing their impact**, or the change they create in the community. Sharing impact celebrates your hard work, gets people excited about your project, and shows funders the outcomes you achieved. **Evaluation** is the process of measuring the impacts of your project. Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta Division and Centre for Suicide Prevention and PolicyWise for Children & Families collaborated to create a resource series to support rural community members in evaluating their mental health projects. To see the entire series, check out its web page.

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Evaluation involves collecting information about a project to see if and how it's achieving its goals. Through evaluation, we can:

- See what is or is not working and where we can make changes.
- Explain the impact of the work we're doing to other people who care.
- Use what we've learned from our project to make future decisions that help our community.

Evaluation can be used in different ways

Formative Evaluation

Sometimes people use the word 'evaluation' to refer to gathering feedback to improve the project in the short-term. You could call this '**form**ative evaluation,' evaluation that happens as a project is **forming** or in its discovery phase. Formative evaluation helps you learn from your project in a continuous way. You try something, notice what went well and what didn't, and then make changes based on what you learned.

The main audience for formative evaluation is the people working on the project, such as the leaders, planners, and volunteers. People leading similar kinds of projects might also be interested in the results of a formative evaluation.
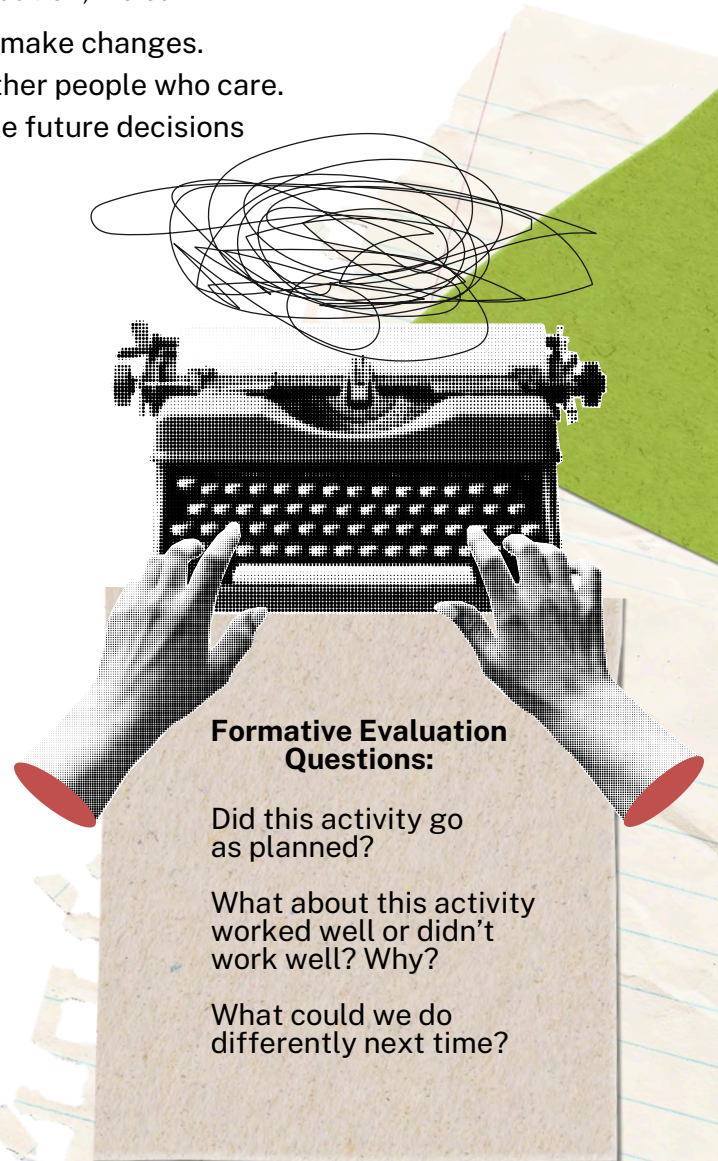
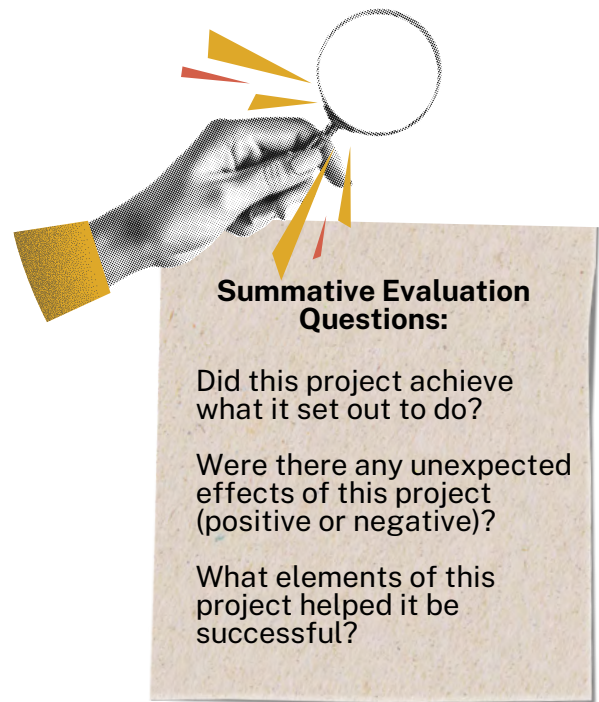**Formative Evaluation Questions:**

Did this activity go as planned?

What about this activity worked well or didn't work well? Why?

What could we do differently next time?

Summative Evaluation

Sometimes people use the word 'evaluation' to refer to measuring the impact of a project. You could call this '**sum**mative evaluation' because it **sums up** the project. Summative evaluation helps you learn about the project as a whole. It celebrates what the project achieved and how it created change in the community.

The audiences for summative evaluation can vary. People involved in the project's delivery, people who funded the project, and the community the project serves might all be interested in the impact measured through a summative evaluation.

Summative Evaluation Questions:

Did this project achieve what it set out to do?

Were there any unexpected effects of this project (positive or negative)?

What elements of this project helped it be successful?

Step 1: Identify your goals and outcomes

Project goals are the objectives of your project as a whole. They describe the change you hope to make in your community through your project. Goals can be short-term or long-term.

Example: Ritcher Soil Project

Ritcher is a small town that prioritizes the community's mental well-being. Ritcher wants to rebuild residents' connection to nature and deepen social connections. To achieve this, Ritcher's project leaders hope to involve community members in a garden project.

Outcomes are the changes that result from your efforts, like a healthier community or new skills for participants. They show the success of your work and build toward your project goals.

Ritcher held a kickoff event where people could sign up for gardening shifts and workshops. They handed out brochures about organizations that offer mental health supports. The project leaders expected the following outcomes of their event:
- *Build community connections*
- *Spread awareness of mental health events and resources*

Personal Reflection

Think about one activity you're doing in your project and what changes you hope to see in the short-term and long-term.
- What do you hope participants will get out of your project activity?
- What outcomes, or changes, do you expect to come out of your activity?

Step 2: Pick indicators for your outcomes

Indicators are the way you measure outcomes. They are the signals that show whether your project activity is causing the change you expect.

Ritcher Project Kickoff Event Example

Outcomes	*Indicators & Measurement Tools*
Build community connections	*Project leaders counted the number of event attendees and volunteer recruits. They handed out a short survey at the end of the event and calculated the percentage of attendees who said they made meaningful connections with others.*
Spread awareness of mental health events and resources	*Project leaders counted the number of mental health program brochures attendees took. They invited attendees to put sticky notes on a poster to answer questions about community mental health. They asked what mental health programs attendees knew about, how they had used these supports, and about their experiences with mental health.*

Personal Reflection
Pick one or two of the outcomes from your project. Think of some indicators that measure if you are reaching these outcomes and how you could collect this information.

Read these resources to learn more about how to collect evaluation data:

Picking Methods for Measuring Project Impact

Link

Creating Surveys & Collecting Numeric Information

Link

Gathering Formal & Informal Stories

Link

Analyzing & Sharing Stories of Impact

Link