Strategic Evaluation of Programs

Report

"INVESTING SMARTER IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES"

State Library of Victoria
Shared Leadership Project

March 2010

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Contents

Executive Summary 3
Vision 4
Background Information 4
Rationale 5
Methodology 6
Results 6
1. Environmental Scan 6
Gateway Review Process 7
Best Practice Evaluation – a checklist 7
Best Practice Guidelines for Evaluation 7
Victorian Government Communication Evaluation Guidelines 8
Evaluating Community-Based Initiatives: A Participatory Approach 8
2. Benchmarks 9
3. Shared Leadership Group - Data Gathering 9
4. Risk In Program Evaluations 9
Recommendations 10
Conclusion 11
Appendix (A) Gateway Checklist PDF 12
Appendix (B) UTAS Rural Health Document PDF 14
Appendix (C) PUMA Evaluation PDF 16
Appendix (D) R74 Communications Guidelines.doc 18

Final Report

Executive Summary

Participants in the State Library of Victoria's first Shared Leadership Program each nominated a key project to work on with the scope of developing leadership and team skills in working with other personality types.

A team of five leaders nominated to investigate Strategic Evaluations of Programs and develop a strategic evaluation of programs toolkit with a formatted checklist for pre-programs and post programs.

Evaluation is a way of checking that a program is delivering the results that it sets out to achieve. It 'reflects upon the value, merit or worth of the thing in question' *1.

The emphasis on the approach is on sharing evaluation and research skills so that Public Libraries of Victoria are able to evaluate their own with the support of the developed framework.

The overall aim is to develop a strategic evaluation of programs toolkit and a report documenting our processes including recommendations which can and will be used by all public library services in Victoria to evaluate a comprehensive range of programs.

We also introduced the following statement in our report and strategic evaluation of programs toolkit as this sums up the thinking behind the project and is a marketing slogan as to why Public Libraries need to evaluate and supports the theory that if we do adopt this toolkit we can better manage our funding and continuously improve on our programs.

"INVESTING SMARTER IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES"

Quote:
*1 Wadsworth, Y. (1991) everyday Evaluation on the Run, Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin

Vision

To develop a document addressing Strategic Evaluation of Programs in Public Libraries that will be relevant to all public library services in Victoria.

Background Information

In focussing on their role as community hubs, Public Libraries are providing a rich and increasingly varied range of services and programs.

In 2008-09 Victorian Public Libraries conducted 33,096 programs that were attended by almost 1 million people*. This is an increase of 26.5% in the number of programs conducted and a 15.2% increase in people attending programs when compared with data from 2007-08. This indicates that programs are a growth area for public libraries.

Libraries run programs to:

- Respond to stated or perceived community need
- Facilitate social inclusion and interaction
- Support lifelong learning at all levels, formal and informal
- Provide the community with recreational opportunities
- Promote a culture of reading and literacy, especially in the early years
- Create library environments that are dynamic and interactive
- Promote library resources and services
- Attract new library members
- Support the strategic directions of Council and the Library service
- Develop and maintain strategic partnerships with key stakeholders, Council departments, community organisations and the education sector.

**2010 Directory of Public Libraries*

Rationale

Library services are discovering that there is a need to evaluate all programs in order to inform the following:

- ***Continuous improvement***
  To ensure programs are relevant, appropriate and are of a high standard.
- ***Accountability***
  Programs can be costly to design, plan and deliver. We need to ensure value for money and good outcomes for the community.
- ***Future planning***
  Information gathered may be used to plan new programs or to decide whether or not to repeat a program in the future.
- ***Staff development***
  Good evaluation processes may identify skill gaps and training opportunities which are crucial as libraries now operate in a rapidly changing environment, both technologically and socially.
- ***Community engagement***
  Evaluation models such as focus groups can provide a real opportunity for staff to interact with the community. Detailed feedback can be gained about a program as well as the community's needs going into the future.
- ***Strong evidence basis***
  Qualitative and quantitative evaluation can support grant applications, recurrent funding and additional funding requests.
- ***Partnerships***
  Clear evaluation enables libraries to develop and deliver programs in partnership with key community agencies and stakeholders.
- ***Marketing and Promotion***
  Evaluation can be used to demonstrate to funding bodies, partners, key stakeholders and the community what the program does and how it benefits the community.
- ***Resources***
  By providing evidence of its effectiveness, evaluation will support the allocation of relevant staffing, technology and equipment.
- ***Methods***
  Consistent evaluation checklists can establish methods by which libraries can determine if they should commence a new program or cease an existing program, redevelop or enhance a program.

Methodology

This project was one of many suggested by Public Library Managers for participants of the 2009/2010 Shared Leadership Program sponsored by the Public Libraries Victoria Network (PLVN) and the State Library of Victoria (SLV).

The project team has focussed on developing a toolkit that can be applied to the evaluation of existing, new, and emerging programs.

It is intended to be used as a starting point to encourage evaluation in the planning phase and the life cycle of a program linking it closely to the strategic plans of the Library Service. The toolkit does not intend to provide a definitive or prescriptive "how to" for program evaluation.

In looking for examples of strategic evaluation methods, the Project Team has:

1. Conducted environmental scan for examples to obtain an overview of current evaluation methods in other library services, other organisations and industry

2. Looked for benchmarks in the public library sector

3. Gathered data from fellow members of the Shared Leadership Program

4. Explored the risks inherent in program evaluation.

Results

1. Environmental Scan

Research was undertaken to find examples of pre-program evaluations, within Australia and internationally to obtain an overview of current evaluation methods in other library services, other organisations and industry. The Project Team focussed on examples based library industry knowledge and Best Practice.

Key Best Practice evaluation methods readily adaptable for the Public Library industry are given below in summary and in appendices attached to the report.

1. Environmental Scan cont…

The research showed that there were few instances of evaluations pre-program.
For the purpose of this project, the most suitable examples found were:

Gateway Review Process

State Government of Victoria – Department of Treasury and Finance

- Gateway Review examines a program and projects at key decision points. It aims to provide timely advice to the senior responsible owner (SRO) as the senior person responsible for the successful outcome of a program or project. A Review provides the SRO with an independent view on the current progress of the program or project and helps determine if it is ready to move onto the next phase. *(Gateway Checklist.pdf appendix A)*
- Extremely thorough document, addressing all elements pre-program.
- Process is local to Victoria and an example of Best Practice.

Best Practice Evaluation – a checklist

University of Tasmania – Department of Rural Health

- The University Department of Rural Health (UDRH) has a vigorous program of research and dissemination of the results of that research as part of its commitment to excellence in improving the health of rural communities. Tools and resources on the website have been provided for staff and students to help ensure that Tasmanian rural communities benefit from UDRHs attention to excellence in research. Resources here target grant writing and publication in ways that aim to foster a climate of collaboration and service to Tasmania (*UTAS Rural Health Document PDF Appendix B)*
- Well presented tool, in a basic flowchart, illustrating steps of evaluation
- Process is an example of Best Practice.

Best Practice Guidelines for Evaluation

OECD - PUMA (Public Management Committee) Policy Brief No 5

- These guidelines identify key issues and practices that OECD Member countries should consider when seeking to improve the use of evaluations. They focus on management of evaluation activities in government and management of individual evaluations. It is not their role to determine when evaluation is the most appropriate input to the policy making and performance management process. (*PUMA Evaluation.pdf appendix C*)
- Identifies main points for focusing an evaluation, and encourages the creation of a culture of evaluation
- Process is an example of Best Practice

1. Environmental Scan cont…

Victorian Government Communication Evaluation Guidelines

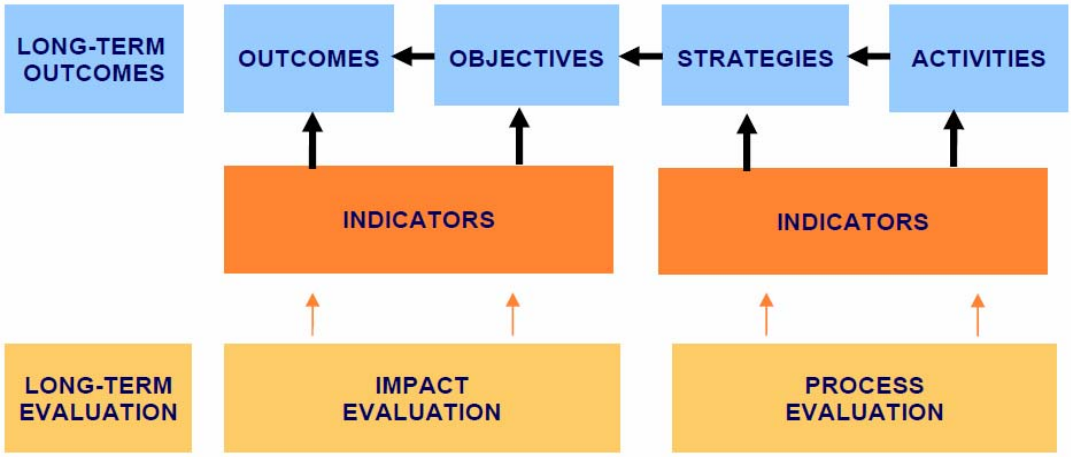
State Government of Victoria – Department of Premier and Cabinet – Communications Toolkit

- This document provides rationale and guidelines for communication program evaluation (post event, but pre-communication) and follows the DPCs Communication Process, that is; Plan, Implement & Evaluate. They stress the need for evaluation for accountability and continuous improvement *(R74 Communications Guidelines.doc appendix D)*
- A good, adaptable, checklist, addressing elements pre-program
- Process is local to Victorian Government.

Evaluating Community-Based Initiatives: A Participatory Approach

Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne

- This evaluation model has worked well for both large-scale nation-wide evaluations, as well as small-scale local projects. The model continues to be refined over time and has elements that can be easily implemented by community-based organisations including libraries
- Process is local to Victoria
- Focuses on outcomes of a project as a crucial aspect of evaluation methodology. Outcomes are also the central focus when developing the evaluation frameworks, as outlined in the diagram below.



The key strengths of this evaluation model are that it:

- Acknowledges each community's existing strengths and aims to build the capacity within the community to conduct its own evaluations
- Increases the understanding of evaluation amongst the community
- Is cost effective for the agency delivering the community-based initiative
- Concentrates its efforts on what is best for communities, families and children by striving to be community centred.

2. Benchmarks

Benchmarks from other public library sector were sourced via an email to PLVN elist requesting assistance in gathering meaningful data we quested the following information be sent to the project team any statements or KPI's that refer to implementing evaluation of programs; any indicators/measures with regard to evaluation of programs; any other reference made to evaluation of programs in business plans, annual reports.

From the responses it appears rare in the Victorian Public Library sector for evaluation of programs to be identified into strategic planning or business planning documents. Anecdotal evidence suggests that evaluation practices for programs do exist. A variety of post evaluation forms were sourced from the LibMark Working Group.

Many library services were able to provide the project with examples of survey and evaluation sheets filled in at the end of a program by staff and participants.

3. Shared Leadership Group - Data Gathering

Anecdotal evidence from the Shared Leadership program supports the practice of post program evaluation, rather than strategic evaluation as part of the planning process.

There is evidence to suggest grant funding promotes the evaluation of programs.

4. Risk In Program Evaluations

The results of this research show areas to be considered are:

- Support from key stakeholders, community, management and staff
- Appropriate and sufficient resources, including people, to deliver program
- Venue considerations – indoors or outdoors, within the library space or in an allocated room, or external venue
- Volume of the audience - including too few or too many participants
- Cumulative impact of multiple events (program overload?)
- Sustainability - ability to continue a program past the initial phase
- The method of promotion and/or marketing
- Budget contribution

The pre-program checklist developed is based on model of Victoria's Department of Premier and Cabinet Communications Toolkit taken from www.dpc.vic.gov.au/communications.

Recommendations

The recommendations of this project are:

- To use the Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit
- Evaluation is built into the life cycle of the project (pre evaluation in the planning; milestones, post evaluation).
- It would be useful for the sector to develop standard templates for common programs
- Suggest these templates be added to the PLVN website

Conclusion

The Project Team developed the Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit based on research which can be applied to almost any program – existing or conceptual. In its most basic form you can assess activities such as storytime or children's holiday activities, through to a launch of a major new collection, service or even Library Branch.

The unique flexibility of the toolkit means that it can be used to assess existing programs or new programs yet to be implemented.

The toolkit can be used when seeking funding or partnerships, as it will clearly demonstrate the planning process, the potential outcomes, and the impact on social, financial and environmental considerations.

Left to Right:
Vivien Newton, Matthew Kinleyside, Christine McAllister, Sue Flett and Jane Grace

Appendix (A) Gateway Checklist PDF

Department of Treasury & Finance

The Gateway Review Process

Program review

THE PREREQUISITES FOR A REVIEW ARE:

- clear and confirmed strategic objectives and outcomes; and
- an assessment of progress to achieve key deliverables and value-for-money.

THE PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW IS TO:

- confirm the program's outcomes and objectives make the necessary contribution to the overall strategy of the organisation and its senior management;
- confirm the program outcomes and objectives interface effectively with broader high-level government policy objectives and initiatives;
- ensure users and key stakeholders support the program;
- confirm the program's potential to succeed has been considered in the wider context of the organisation's delivery plans and change programs;
- review the arrangements for leading, managing and monitoring the entire program;
- review the arrangements for identifying and managing the key program risks;
- check financial and other resources are provided for the program;
- ensure plans for the current and next stage are realistic and properly resourced with sufficient people of appropriate experience and authority;
- check progress against plans and expected outcomes, e.g. investment logic map, investment concept brief, benefits management plan and the business case;
- check the market is appropriately engaged with the feasibility of achieving the required outcome; and
- check the program integrates with other internal and external programs.

Gate 1 Strategic assessment

THE PREREQUISITES FOR A REVIEW ARE:

- the business need is established;
- key business objectives and outcomes are identified; and
- a strategic assessment document is created.

THE PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW IS TO:

- confirm the project's outcomes and objectives contribute to the overall strategy of the organisation and its senior management, and effectively interface with broader high level government policy objectives and initiatives;
- ensure the project documentation has been created in accordance with the investment lifecycle guidelines;
- ensure users and key stakeholders support the project;
- confirm the project's potential to succeed has been considered in the wider context of the organisation's delivery plans and change programs;
- review the arrangements for leading and managing the project;
- review arrangements for identifying and managing the key project risks;
- confirm plans for financial and other project resources;
- ensure plans for the current and next stage are realistic and properly resourced and include sufficient people of appropriate experience and authority; and
- check the market is appropriately engaged with the feasibility of achieving the required outcome.

Gate 2 Business case

THE PREREQUISITES FOR A REVIEW ARE:

- a robust business case;
- identified and appraised options; and
- affordability and value- for- money is tested.

THE PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW IS TO:

- confirm the business case is robust, i.e. it meets the business need, is affordable, achievable and likely to achieve value-for-money;
- confirm potential options have been identified and analysed and expert advice has been obtained;
- confirm the underlying investment logic is reflected and proven by evidence in the business case;
- confirm the project remains aligned with the objectives and deliverables of the program and organisation;
- establish the feasibility study has been completed satisfactorily and a preferred pathway has been determined;
- confirm market interest has been investigated and appropriate high-level procurement strategies have been considered and documented;
- ensure there is support for the project and internal and external authority;
- ensure the major risks have been identified and risk management plans have been developed;
- establish the project is likely to deliver its business goals and it supports wider business change;
- confirm the scope and requirements specifications are realistic and clear;
- ensure there are plans for the next stage and the project team can deliver;
- confirm overarching and internal business and technical strategies have been taken into account; and
- ensure quality and benefit management plans are in place, including key performance indicators.

Gate 3 Readiness for market

THE PREREQUISITES FOR A REVIEW ARE:

- a finalised procurement strategy;
- robust procurement documentation; and
- an updated business case.

THE PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW IS TO:

- confirm the business case once the project is fully defined;
- confirm the objectives and desired outputs of the project remain aligned with the program;
- ensure the procurement approach is robust, appropriate and approved;
- ensure the project's plan is detailed and realistic and includes a contract management strategy;
- ensure the project controls and organisation are defined, financial controls are in place and resources are available;
- confirm funds are available for the entire project;
- confirm the development and delivery approach mechanisms remain appropriate and manageable;
- confirm the supplier market capability and track record is fully understood;
- confirm the procurement approach will facilitate good client-supplier relationships;
- confirm the procurement plan is appropriate and complies with legal and purchasing requirements;
- confirm appropriate project performance measures and tools are being used;
- confirm there are risk, issue and change management plans and these are shared with suppliers and/or procurement partners;
- confirm quality procedures have been applied consistently since the previous review;
- confirm internal organisational resources and capabilities will be available for future phases of the project; and
- confirm the stakeholders support the project and are committed to its success.

Gate 4 Tender decision

THE PREREQUISITES FOR A REVIEW ARE:

- an evaluation of the bids;
- selection or confirmation of the preferred supplier or partner;
- an assessment of bids against the project benefits; and
- an updated business case.

THE PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW IS TO:

- confirm the business case including the benefits management plan once the bid information is confirmed;
- confirm the objectives and desired outputs of the project remain aligned with the wider organisation's business strategy;
- check necessary statutory and procedural requirements were followed during the procurement and/or evaluation process;
- confirm the recommended contract decision is likely to deliver the specified outcomes on time, within budget and provide value-for-money;
- ensure management controls are in place to manage the project through to completion, including contract management processes;
- ensure there is continuing stakeholder support for the project;
- confirm the approved procurement strategy has been followed;
- confirm the development and implementation plans of the client and the supplier or partner are sound and achievable;
- confirm there are risk, issue and change management plans and these are shared with the necessary parties; and
- confirm the proposed procurement has financial approval and an adequate budget.

Gate 5 Readiness for service

THE PREREQUISITES FOR A REVIEW ARE:

- an award of contract;
- contract administration;
- commissioning; and
- the asset or service is ready for delivery.

THE PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW IS TO:

- check the current phase of the contract is complete and documented;
- confirm contract management arrangements are in place and current, to manage the operational phase of the contract;
- check the business case remains valid and unaffected by events or changes;
- check the original projected business benefit is likely to be achieved;
- confirm there are processes and procedures to ensure long-term success;
- confirm all necessary testing is done, e.g. commissioning, business integration and user acceptance;
- check there are feasible and tested business contingency, continuity and/or reversion arrangements;
- confirm all parties have agreed plans for managing ongoing risk and issues effectively;
- evaluate the risk of proceeding with implementation where there are unresolved issues;
- confirm the business has the necessary resources and is ready to implement the services and the business change;
- confirm the client and supplier implementation plans remain achievable;
- confirm all parties have agreed plans for training, communication, rollout, and support;
- confirm there are client plans for managing the working relationship with reporting arrangements at appropriate levels in the organisation reciprocated by the supplier;
- confirm defects or incomplete works are identified and recorded; and
- check lessons for future projects are identified and recorded.

Gate 6 Benefits evaluation

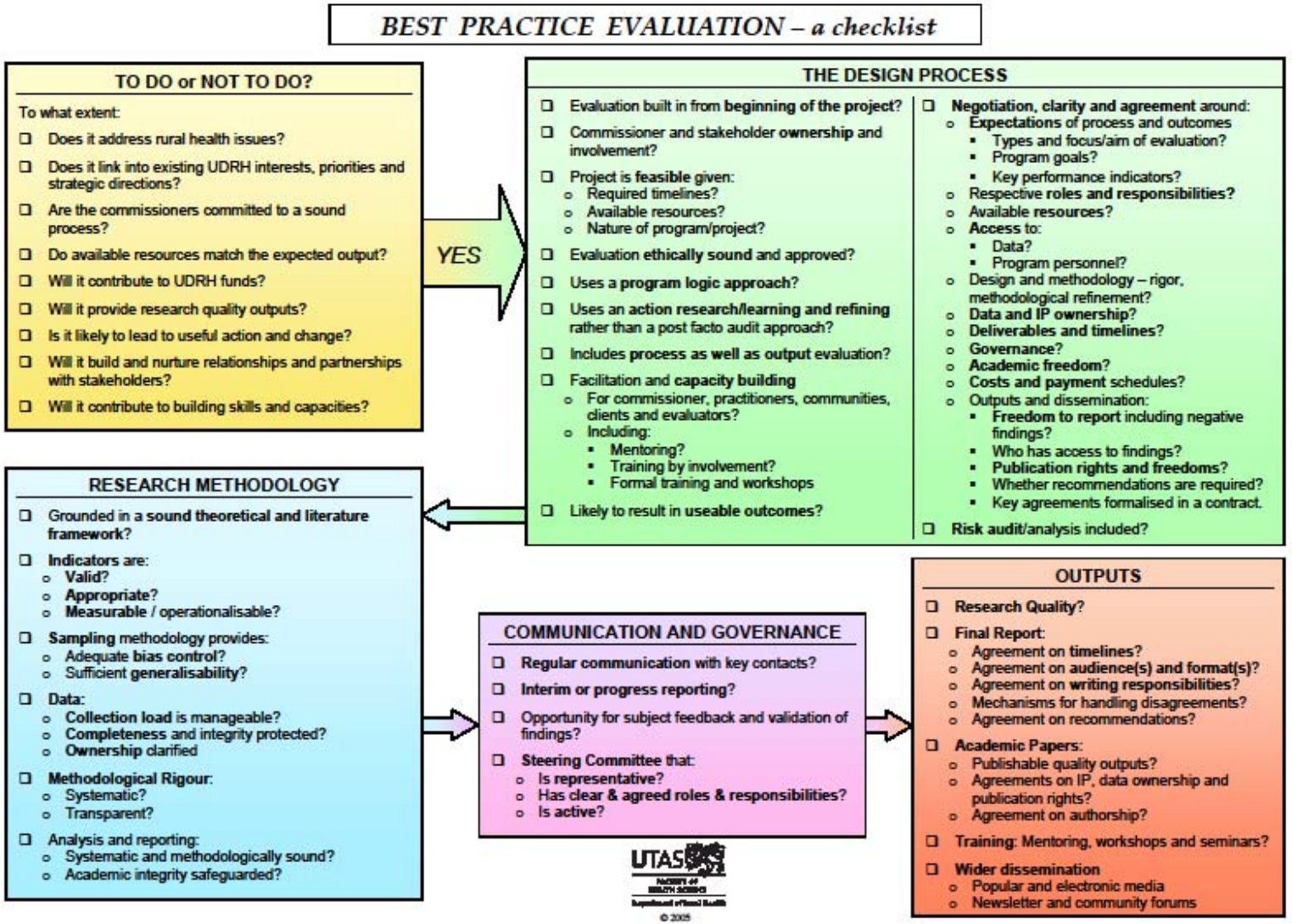
THE PREREQUISITES FOR A REVIEW ARE:

- handover;
- benefit reporting;
- a value-for-money and performance assessment; and
- capture of lessons learnt.

THE PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW IS TO:

- assess whether the benefits in the business case are being delivered;
- confirm a business need exists for the investment and assess ongoing requirements;
- assess the effectiveness of the ongoing contract and/or service delivery management processes;
- confirm the client continues to have the necessary resources to manage the contract successfully;
- where changes have been agreed, check they do not compromise the original delivery strategy;
- check there are ongoing continuous improvement mechanisms to improve value-for-money;
- confirm there are plans to manage the operational contracts to conclusion; and
- assess the lessons and methodology for sharing the information within and across government.

Appendix (B) UTAS Rural Health Document PDF


BEST PRACTICE EVALUATION – a checklist
TO DO or NOT TO DO?
To what extent:
Does it address rural health issues?
Does it link into existing UDRH interests, priorities and strategic directions?
Are the commissioners committed to a sound process?
Do available resources match the expected output?
Will it contribute to UDRH funds?
Will it provide research quality outputs?
Is it likely to lead to useful action and change?
Will it build and nurture relationships and partnerships with stakeholders?
Will it contribute to building skills and capacities?
YES
THE DESIGN PROCESS
Evaluation built in from beginning of the project?
Commissioner and stakeholder ownership and involvement?
Project is feasible given:
Required timelines?
Available resources?
Nature of program/project?
Evaluation ethically sound and approved?
Uses a program logic approach?
Uses an action research/learning and refining rather than a post facto audit approach?
Includes process as well as output evaluation?
Facilitation and capacity building
For commissioner, practitioners, communities, clients and evaluators?
Including:
Mentoring?
Training by involvement?
Formal training and workshops
Likely to result in useable outcomes?
Negotiation, clarity and agreement around:
Expectations of process and outcomes
Types and focus/aim of evaluation?
Program goals?
Key performance indicators?
Respective roles and responsibilities?
Available resources?
Access to:
Data?
Program personnel?
Design and methodology – rigor, methodological refinement?
Data and IP ownership?
Deliverables and timelines?
Governance?
Academic freedom?
Costs and payment schedules?
Outputs and dissemination:
Freedom to report including negative findings?
Who has access to findings?
Publication rights and freedoms?
Whether recommendations are required?
Key agreements formalised in a contract.
Risk audit/analysis included?
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Grounded in a sound theoretical and literature framework?
Indicators are:
Valid?
Appropriate?
Measurable / operationalisable?
Sampling methodology provides:
Adequate bias control?
Sufficient generalisability?
Data:
Collection load is manageable?
Completeness and integrity protected?
Ownership clarified
Methodological Rigour:
Systematic?
Transparent?
Analysis and reporting:
Systematic and methodologically sound?
Academic integrity safeguarded?
COMMUNICATION AND GOVERNANCE
Regular communication with key contacts?
Interim or progress reporting?
Opportunity for subject feedback and validation of findings?
Steering Committee that:
Is representative?
Has clear & agreed roles & responsibilities?
Is active?
OUTPUTS
Research Quality?
Final Report:
Agreement on timelines?
Agreement on audience(s) and format(s)?
Agreement on writing responsibilities?
Mechanisms for handling disagreements?
Agreement on recommendations?
Academic Papers:
Publishable quality outputs?
Agreements on IP, data ownership and publication rights?
Agreement on authorship?
Training: Mentoring, workshops and seminars?
Wider dissemination
Popular and electronic media
Newsletter and community forums
UTAS

Appendix (C) PUMA Evaluation PDF

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION

A focus on results is a central element in recent public sector reforms in OECD countries. Evaluation is important in a results-oriented environment because it provides feedback on the efficiency, effectiveness and performance of public policies and can be critical to policy improvement and innovation. In essence, it contributes to accountable governance.

The objective of evaluation is to improve decision-making at all levels. Yet its actual use has often proved to be limited, especially in relation to key policy decisions and budget reallocations.

These guidelines identify key issues and practices that OECD Member countries should consider when seeking to improve the use of evaluations. They focus on management of evaluation activities in government and management of individual evaluations rather than on methodological questions. It is not their role to determine when evaluation is the most appropriate input to the policy making and performance management process. That decision will best be taken by the Member countries themselves.

PUMA Policy Brief No. 5

Public Management Service
May 1998

Appendix (D) R74 Communications Guidelines.doc

Victorian Government Communication Evaluation Guidelines

Background

Communications practitioners have long been aware of the importance of evaluating communications activities. Unfortunately, this has not always resulted in a greater focus on evaluation. The 1994 International Public Relations Association *Gold Paper on Evaluation* found that, while 90% of Australian PR practitioners believed evaluation of communications activities was 'worthwhile', only 15% actually undertook it 'frequently'.

A 1996 report by the Victorian Auditor General's Office found an uneven standard of evaluation across the Victorian Government. A Review of Victorian Government communications evaluations carried out in 2000 identified that:

- There is a lack of consistency in the approach, focus, content, level of detail and rigour displayed by evaluations.
- Victorian Government does not routinely evaluate all communications activities.
- Frequently, insufficient levels of research are undertaken to enable evaluation of communication activity outcomes to take place.

The Value of Evaluation

In essence, evaluation seeks to determine whether activities worked—whether, and to what extent they achieved their outcomes, and if not, why not. This is important for two main reasons:

1. Accountability
It is a key principle of the Parliamentary system that Executive Government is accountable for its expenditure of public monies. Accountability is not possible, unless the results of expenditures are measured and reported.

Communication activities are no different in this regard to any other kind of government activity, except that communications outcomes can be more difficult to measure than those of some other types of programs.

2. Continuous Improvement
Evaluation is good management practice. Since the 'eighties, Australian government agencies at all levels have moved from a focus on inputs and processes to a much greater emphasis on program outcomes.

At the same time, the quality movement in management has articulated the principles of continuous improvement. Without continuous efforts to measure, consider and improve their approaches, communications practitioners will not be able to refine their techniques, nor to track the rapidly changing environments in which they operate.

Reference:	R74
Description:	Rationale and guidelines for communication program evaluation.
Audience:	All government communications practitioners.