

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit for Public Libraries



Shared Leadership Program 2010

March 2010

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Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

Introduction

The Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit is considered a living document. It is a document that any manager or member of staff would refer to when planning or evaluating a program.

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 2007-8. This indicates that programs are a growth area for public libraries.

This Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit is a result of research undertaken by a team of leaders in the Public Library industry that investigates and researches methods for evaluating programs.

*2010 Directory of Public Libraries

Definition of evaluation

“the systematic assessment of the operations and/or outcomes of a program or policy, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards as a means of contributing to the improvement of the program or policy”*

*Carol Weiss, quoted in
Introduction to Program Evaluation
<http://www.cdc.gov/tb/programs/Evaluations/Default.htm>

Purpose of the Toolkit

The purpose of this Toolkit is to provide practical advice and methods in evaluating library programs.

The Toolkit is divided into two parts:

- rationale for conducting an evaluation on a library program
- practical checklists and real life examples that an organisation can use

Objectives of the Toolkit

The main objectives of the toolkit are:

- To provide a framework for library professionals to assess their organisation’s practices in evaluating library programs
- To provide improvements in programs evaluation for Public library industry
- To be an instrument that library professionals can use to conduct an assessment of a program

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

Before you evaluate

Before commencing with a program it is important to ask the following:

1. Is the proposed program consistent with the organisation's strategic objectives?
2. Do the likely benefits and outcomes of the program exceed the cost of implementation? Is it value for money?
3. What drives the need for the program?
4. Is the program in response to research?
5. Does the organisation have the resources, staff, skills, finance to support the planning, implementation and delivery of program?

6. Do all parties (key stakeholders) have a shared understanding of the program and its intended outcome?
7. What are the critical success factors of the program?
8. Is the program sustainable and can the organisation provide continual support?

Why evaluate

At a basic level the evaluation of programs aims to determine whether or not a program achieved its objectives and if it didn't, why not.

There are, many other reasons why we should evaluate programs, such as:

- *continuous improvement*
- *accountability and return on investment*
- *future planning*
- *staff development*
- *community engagement*
- *funding bodies, key stakeholders*
- *seeking additional resources to support growth, sustainability*

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

When to evaluate

It is important to conduct evaluation on an ongoing basis during the life cycle of the program.

This helps:

- to clarify the program's purpose and intent
- address any issues that may affect the success of the program
- re-prioritise and assess commitments
- address timeframe issues

Types of evaluations

There are many methods that can be used to evaluate programs such as, focus groups, questionnaires, interviews, observations, forms, surveys.

More than one method can be used to obtain the necessary information and data that determines the success or failure of a program, its ongoing sustainability and the value to the participants attending the program.

The following evaluation methods matrix illustrates what methods can be used when evaluating the many different types of programs that public libraries offer.

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

Post Program Evaluation Matrix

Suggested evaluation methods; a combination of methods may be used

Evaluation Methods								
Programs (sample)	Evaluation Forms – Online & Print	Attendance Statistics	Strength Weaknesses Opportunity Threats Analysis	Focus group, Community Consultation	Surveys	Interviews	Informal Anecdotal	Formal feedback eg Program correspondence
Storytime	*	*		*		*	*	*
School Holiday	*	*					*	
Author Talks	*	*					*	
After School Activities		*					*	
Information Based Programs	*	*			*		*	
Computer Classes	*	*			*		*	
Book Groups	*					*		*
Conversation Clubs	*	*	*	*				
Homework Help	*				*		*	
New Book Days		*					*	
Cultural programs	*		*	*		*		
Skill development	*	*	*			*		
Learning English		*	*	*		*	*	

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

Pre-Program Evaluation Checklist

A pre-program evaluation could address the following elements. However, you do not need to ‘answer’ every element – it can be as brief as you require. Adapt this list to your needs.

<p>1. Background of project Provide rationale for the program purpose and objectives. Include history of the program, including the source of the original reason for the project.</p>	<p>8. Output/outcome measurement tools Measurement tools used as part of the evaluation should be specified and a rationale provided, if necessary. If outcomes were not directly measured, some explanation should be given.</p>
<p>2. Rationale for approach Research/evidence should be cited in support of the approach taken, its form and extent.</p>	<p>9. Evaluation findings Findings should be clearly stated and signed off by the responsible officer as reflecting the Library’s view. Findings should address the objectives.</p>
<p>3. Aims and objectives The over-arching aim from the Strategic Plan should be provided. It may not necessarily be achievable solely through the program in question, but the program objectives should be clearly linked to it. The objectives should be ‘SMART’ (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound). Where it is not obvious, a rationale should be provided for the aim and objectives.</p>	<p>10. Risk Assessment “Risk” is the chance of something happening that will have an impact on objectives. This involves both upside and downside potentials. (AS/NZS 4360 Standard on Risk Management)</p>
<p>4. Target audience/s Should be identified, and a rationale provided for them (if not obvious). Ideally, target audience objectives should be identified, if these differ from those cited in the Aims and objectives.</p>	<p>11. Key Success Factors Factors critical for the success (or failure) of the activity to achieve its objectives should be identified. How sustainable is the program? Do we have resources available, staff, facilities, finance and equipment?</p>
<p>5. Communication (internal stakeholders) All project communications activities should be listed and a rationale provided for the choice.</p>	<p>12. Budget Budget and expenditure figures should be provided, and a statement should be made in respect of the cost-effectiveness of the activity</p>
<p>6. Marketing/PR/Media (external) Media used should be listed and a rationale provided for the selection.</p>	<p>13. Recommendation to Proceed with Program The evaluation should make recommendations for the future, reflecting learning’s gained from the evaluation.</p>
<p>7. Key messages/marketing/photos Key messages/marketing should be cited/described, and a rationale/evidence provided for their selection. Will it build and nurture relationships and partnership with stakeholders?</p>	<p>14. Accountability The evaluation should identify a person(s) responsible for the program who will be accountable for the overall program/activity.</p>

Model based on Victoria’s *Department of Premier and Cabinet Communications Toolkit* taken from: www.dpc.vic.gov.au/communications

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

Post-Program Evaluation Checklist

A post-program evaluation could address the following elements. The evaluation can be as brief as you require. Adapt this list to your needs.

<p>1. Purpose/Objectives/Audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the purpose of the event met? • Did we deliver what we wanted/intended? • Timing of evaluation/s – at milestones or at the completion of the event? 	<p>6. Marketing and Promotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing – how did they find out about it? • Media – what leverage is available?
<p>2. Links with Strategic Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it linked to the Strategic Plan? 	<p>7. Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance numbers? <p>Demographic – are they local? – Profile – where do they live – ages – mode of transport – how did they get to the event?</p>
<p>3. Partners/Stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners in the delivery of the event – eg U3A, local societies or groups • Opportunity to showcase to key stakeholders – eg Councillors, board members, CEOs 	<p>8. Participant Satisfaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer satisfaction – Benefits <p>Would we run the event again?</p>
<p>4. Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return on investment (ROI) – cost/benefit analysis 	<p>9. Other Benefits to the Library Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits and outcomes to the library service – word of mouth promotion
<p>5. Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are staff sufficiently skilled to run the event? • Venue – Space Available • Quality of the Program – Content & Time scheduled • Frequency or repetition of the event • Guest ‘Performers’ – did they deliver what we wanted? 	<p>10. Continuous Improvement and Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for improvement • Feedback from staff and attendees (360° feedback)

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

Checklist PRE PROGRAM EVALUATION SAMPLE:

A pre-program evaluation could address the following elements. However, you do not need to ‘answer’ every element – it can be as brief as you require. Adapt this list to your needs.

Program: Manga+ Club at St Albans Library

1. Background of Project

Provide rationale for the program purpose and objectives. Include history of the program, including the source of the original reason for the project.

- To provide a weekly club for youth to meet in the library after school from 4-5pm.
- To encourage social connectedness for youth
- To provide a space for youth to meet and discuss anime, graphic novels, share their artwork and practice Manga drawing
- To promote resources, services and facilities that the library has to offer young people
- To provide a space for young people to exhibit their Manga artwork and take pride in their achievement

2. Rationale for Approach

Research/evidence should be cited in support of the approach taken, its form and extent.

- Limited opportunities for young people to attend free recreational activities in the St Albans area
- Youth are naturally drawn to the library because of the free internet service. The Manga + program provides a constructive focus for youth when in the library
- Anime, graphic novels and comics are heavily borrowed resources

Previous Manga workshops have been well popular and attended; the anecdotal feedback from young people was very positive

3. Aims and Objectives

The over-arching aim from the Strategic Plan should be provided. It may not necessarily be achievable solely through the program in question, but the program objectives should be clearly linked to it. The objectives should be ‘SMART’ (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound).

Where it is not obvious, a rationale should be provided for the aim and objectives.

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

- The program supports Brimbank City Council's Community Plan's strategic objective of *Creating a Community of Life Long Learners*
- The program supports the St Albans Library's Branch Plan of developing strategies to engage with local youth to promote learning and social connectedness

The program to be self managed by the young people that attend the Club after 4 months

4. Target Audience/s

Should be identified, and a rationale provided for them (if not obvious).

Ideally, target audience objectives should be identified, if these differ from those cited in the Aims and objectives.

Young people aged 12-18

5. Communication activities

All project communications activities should be listed and a rationale provided for the choice.

- Promote the program through our partner Brimbank Youth Services
- Prepare a flyer to publicise the program to local schools, sporting clubs, parents, youth clubs etc
- Promote the program on the library and Council websites

6. Selected media

Media used should be listed and a rationale provided for the selection.

Local newspapers – delivered to homes in the St Albans area

Local school newsletters

7. Key messages/Marketing/Photos

Key messages/marketing should be cited/described, and a rationale/evidence provided for their selection. Will it build and nurture relationships and partnership with stakeholders?

Key message: the library is a dynamic and relevant place for young people to learn and connect

8. Output/Outcome Measurement Tools

Measurement tools used as part of the evaluation should be specified and a rationale provided, if necessary. If outcomes were not directly measured, some explanation should be given.

- A minimum of 10 young people attending each week
- 3 Manga art exhibitions each year
- 1 Focus group evaluation session to be held with attendees 3 months into the

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

<p>program to assess the program Program to be self managed by Club attendees after 4 months</p>
<p>9. Evaluation findings Findings should be clearly stated and signed off by the responsible officer as reflecting the Library’s view. Findings should address the objectives.</p>
<p>10. Risk Assessment “Risk” is the chance of something happening that will have an impact on objectives. This involves both upside and downside potentials. (AS/NZS 4360 Standard on Risk Management)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • weekly sessions to be capped at 20 young people <p>staff, volunteers or local youth workers will be on hand to welcome the young people to the club and maintain positive engagement with the group during the session</p>
<p>11. Key Success Factors Factors critical for the success (or failure) of the activity to achieve its objectives should be identified. How sustainable is the program? Do we have resources available, staff, facilities, finance and equipment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program is sustainable; the library provides a space for the Club to meet, A3 paper, pencils and Manga books all which are budgeted for. • Library staff time is minimal as there is limited set up/pack up time. Staff are not present during the entire session. Local Youth Workers have a regular presence. • Library staff more engaged with young people and their needs • Minimum of 10 young people attending each session • 3 Manga art exhibitions
<p>12. Recommendations The evaluation should make recommendations for the future, reflecting learning’s gained from the evaluation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program to be trialled for 6 months <p>Focus group evaluation of the program after 3 months. Findings from the focus group session to be used to “tweak” the program</p>
<p>13. Budget Budget and expenditure figures should be provided, and a statement should be made in respect of the cost-effectiveness of the activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This program is cost effective as it is run in partnership with Brimbank Youth Services • Staff time is minimal • Resources required to run the club are minimal (A3 paper and pencils, library

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

resources)

- The Club is ultimately self sustaining
- Weekly running costs would be less than \$20 including staff time

14. Accountability

The evaluation should identify a person(s) responsible for the program who will be accountable for the overall program/activity.

The St Albans Senior Library Services and Programs Officer

Model based on Victoria's *Department of Premier and Cabinet Communications Toolkit* taken from: www.dpc.vic.gov.au/communications

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

Checklist POST PROGRAM EVALUATION SAMPLE:

The Casual Chef (2010) program at Casey Cardinia Library Corporation (CCLC)

1. Purpose/Objectives/Audience

To provide an informative program on cooking tips and techniques that will help save money for families, creating good healthy habits in the pantry and fridge and enjoying healthy food.

The program is a one off event held in March to promote the resources and services at the Cranbourne Library and to tie in with the Melbourne Food and Wine festival.

Target group: 17 +

The evaluation was completed at the end of the program. The program met the objectives outlined.

2. Links with Strategic Vision

The Casual Chef supports the CCLC strategic direction of *Community Engagement, lifelong learning*.

3. Partners/Stakeholders

The library partnered with the Friends of the Cranbourne Library to deliver this program

Stakeholders: Friends of Cranbourne Library,

4. Budget

The program cost \$365.00 to run and was funded by the Friends of Cranbourne Library. Staff time involved setting up the meeting room, production and distribution of flyers, photocopying, preparing a display and active promotion at customer service points.

Return on Investment = \$16.00 per participant

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

5. Resources

Venue: Library meeting room = free

No staff training was required to run this program and the administration of the program was shared by a number of staff. The library has ample books on the subject of food and wine of which many were on display for borrowing.

Staff Hours = approximately 3 hrs to administer program

6. Marketing and Promotion

- The program was promoted using a flyer which was designed in-house by the **Communications Officer**. The flyer was available at all branch libraries, Council Customer Service centres, Community Centres, and retirement homes.
 - Distributed to the Cranbourne Friends of the Library and the Cranbourne Community Plan groups for distribution
 - Information was available on the library's website
 - A media release was sent to local papers
 - An eye-catching display was setup in the library promoting the program
-

7. Data

28 people attended the program.

8. Participant Satisfaction

Feedback from the participants indicated that they found the session to be informative and would be willing to attend another session. Consideration to running the program again in about 18months.

9. Continuous Improvement and Recommendations

Engage healthy cooking group.

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

Checklist

POST PROGRAM EVALUATION SAMPLE 2:

Summer Reading Club (SRC) 2009/2010 program at Brimbank Libraries

1. Purpose/Objectives/Audience

To encourage as many children as possible to join the SRC and to read as many books as possible over the summer break. This will help maintain their reading and literacy skills. The program started on 1 December 2009 and concluded on 14 February 2010.

Target group: 5 to 13 year olds

2. Links with Strategic Vision

The SRC supports Brimbank City Council's strategic direction of *Creating a Community of Life Long Learners*.

3. Partners/Stakeholders

The library partners with ALIA to deliver this program

Stakeholders: children, parents, schools

4. Budget

The program cost \$1,065 to run: \$580 was spent on SRC activity packs and \$485 for 2 finale parties (Wild Action). Staff time administering the program is minimal. The program ran over 2.5 months and attracted 1,372 children. This was a cost effective program and equates to .77 cents spent on each child. We estimate that the children would have read over 10,000 books during the life of the program.

5. Resources

Very little staff training is required to run this program and the administration of the program is shared by a number of staff. The library has ample books for children to borrow. Wild Action who provided the entertainment at the 2 finale parties were very professional and had the children enthralled. The venues for the finale parties were appropriate.

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

6. Marketing and Promotion

- The event was promoted using a flyer which was based on a template provided by ALIA. The flyer was available at all branch libraries, Council Customer Service centres, Neighbourhood Houses, Community Centres and Leisure Centres
- Information was available on the library's website
- A media release was sent to local papers
- All schools in Brimbank were sent information about the program
- Library staff spoke to parents about the program and its benefits to their children
- Library staff spoke to children who were in the library and encouraged them to join
- Each year the library service rewards the staff member/and or branch that registers the most children. This motivates staff to get involved.

7. Data

1,372 children registered for the program. This is an increase of 14.5% over last year's program. 80 children attended the finale parties. The children were overwhelmingly local and aged between 5 to 13. The average age would have been 8.

8. Participant Satisfaction

We plan to run this event again in 2010/11 because it is cost effective, it is an easy program for staff to administer and it encourages children to read over the summer break in a fun and interactive way. Parents and children have come to expect the program and look forward to it each year.

9. Continuous Improvement and Recommendations

Wild Action who performed at the finale parties placed limitations on the number of children that could participate. This meant that many children missed out on attending the parties. Next year we will offer finale parties without limiting attendance.

Strategic Evaluation of Programs Toolkit – A practical approach

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can you evaluate an activity if you do not have a budget for evaluation?

In many instances adequate evaluation can be done with no budget or on a shoe string

2. The project is too small to warrant an evaluation?

All projects need to be evaluated to determine the success of the program and whether the project has achieved the outcomes and worthy of continuing or reviewing and running again in another form.

3. Who should do the evaluation?

Any staff member or key stakeholder with an investment in the program can evaluate the program. However the following needs to be considered:

- Resources, in-house evaluation may be appropriate if skill and experience are available
- If the program is extensive and involves a number of key stakeholders and financial accountability is required independent evaluation may be considered
- Objectivity and professionalism with which evaluations are carried out. The progress chosen for the evaluation must be clear and transparent.

4. When should you evaluate?

Ideally, program evaluation should happen at the planning stage and then be applied during the life cycle of the program and at the conclusion of the program.

5. What if I do not have time to evaluate?

The checklists provided in the toolkit will assist the library staff to evaluate programs. The checklists are adaptable and allow for shorter evaluations as well as more comprehensive evaluations

6. What should I do if our library service does not have evaluation templates?

There are a lot of examples out in the industry; you can google or email LibMark Working Group or colleagues across the sector. PLVN in future will post templates on their website.

7. Who do I get feedback from when evaluating programs?

The common source of feedback is from participants, key stakeholders, colleagues and partners in the program.

8. How do I know if my evaluation is effective?

Please refer to The Strategic Evaluation Toolkit and the questions within this.