

Section 6: Learning from Our Experiences

Learning Objectives: Participants should grasp the importance of documentation and evaluation as a means for performance improvement. Suggested time: 2 hours

It's important to keep track of what we do and to learn from our experiences. Doing this can help us improve our program and its results.



Instructor's Note: Facilitate a brainstorming session on ways to document and assess programs and activities. Topics for discussion include the following items:



- Documenting our activities and achievements – in words and pictures

Documentation will not only help your group in the evaluation process, but it will facilitate smoother relationship with the media and make your projects easily accessible to other groups.

- Measuring success – how will we know we've succeeded?

There are a number of ways to measure success, but your group will determine the most important measures of success. Check your project/program's progress against these measures at designated intervals.



Instructor's Note: Ask the group to brainstorm what they feel will be important measures of success.



- Getting feedback – evaluation tools and techniques

Ask participants how they're feeling about your group's project, or use a more structured form of feedback gathering. (See the Resource Guide).



- Debriefing – learning in the moments after a major activity

Sometimes the best feedback is available immediately after a project has taken place. For workshops, structure a short period of time at the end of your session to solicit feedback and allow participants to evaluate the session. For projects, try and schedule time for your group to meet immediately following the project for just 20 minutes or so. Discuss successes and challenges, lessons learned and any other feedback. Make sure there is a recorder for your group.

- Incorporating what we've learned into future efforts

Often times, challenges met are easily avoided in the future. Make sure that everyone in the group knows that successes and challenges are vital to the continued success of future projects. Consider a running "best practices" list for particular projects, workshops, or even demographic groups (i.e., When working at the senior home, volunteerism is more visible in the morning hours).

- Sharing what we've learned with others in our group and beyond (tell FEMA, local media, other communities—anyone who will listen!)

The importance of spreading the word can not be emphasized enough. If you're proud of your group's achievements, others will be intrigued. Utilize the methods outlined in Section 4 to attract media, and use any other methods available to you to share your successes. FEMA's regional offices and mitigation staff are interested in your successes as well. The FEMA website will have the latest information on how to share your mitigation successes with others.

- Utilizing the Internet to spread the word.

The Internet has become a powerful information-sharing tool. Chances are that a member of your group has experience using the Internet either personally or for business. Solicit help in getting project and volunteer information online. If no member of your group is comfortable taking on this task, solicit help from a local web-development firm.

The link between evaluation and sustainability is well documented. Programs and projects that are consistently evaluated are more likely to satisfy engaged volunteers and more likely to effectively serve your community. As programs and projects change over time, consistent evaluation allows your group to refine processes and procedures. Well-evaluated programs are often the longest lasting and most successful.

It can also be valuable to ask participants to evaluate themselves or a particular project before and after the fact. A simple structure for self-assessment is available in the Resource Guide.



If your group is planning on using this curriculum or a similar workshop structure, the following form can help you evaluate your effectiveness.

Please take a moment to answer the following questions. Circle the response that best reflects your opinion. Return the form to the workshop facilitator.

1. The facilitator spoke with clarity and was easy to understand.
 - a) Very clear and understandable
 - b) Clear and understandable
 - c) Somewhat clear and understandable
 - d) Not clear
2. The facilitator was knowledgeable about the subject.
 - a) Very knowledgeable
 - b) Knowledgeable
 - c) Somewhat knowledgeable
 - d) Had no clue....
3. I understood the objectives of the workshop.
 - a) Very clear
 - b) Clear
 - c) Somewhat clear
 - d) Not sure what the workshop was about
4. Workshop objectives were accomplished.
 - a) All accomplished
 - b) Most accomplished
 - c) A few were accomplished
 - d) None were accomplished
5. The activities and discussions contributed to the completion of the workshop objectives.
 - a) Major contributors
 - b) Added interest to the workshop
 - c) Somewhat useful
 - d) A waste of time
6. I felt the scheduled pace of the workshop was...
 - a) Enough time
 - b) A bit too quick
 - c) Too much time
 - d) I found my mind wandering....
7. I was given plenty of opportunity to express my opinion in the group about the subject.
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Disagree
 - d) Strongly disagree
8. The group sessions had the right amount of participants and elicited participation from all workshop members.
 - a) Size was perfect
 - b) Size was too small
 - c) Size was too big
 - d) Didn't need group sessions
9. The facility met the visual and auditory needs of the audience.
 - a) I could see and hear very well
 - b) I could see and hear
 - c) I couldn't see and hear all the time
 - d) I couldn't see and hear at all
10. The training media (overheads, PowerPoint, posters, etc.) were clear and legible.
 - a) Very clear and legible
 - b) Clear and legible
 - c) Blurry and somewhat small
 - d) I couldn't make them out at all
11. Our community will benefit from the subject matter of this workshop.
 - a) Great things will come from this
 - b) It will benefit
 - c) Somewhat benefit
 - d) Not benefit at all
12. I will be able use the knowledge and skills I received in this workshop immediately.
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

Please answer the following questions. If more space is needed, please use the back of this page.

- The best part of the workshop was:

- The part of the workshop that could use improvement is:

- Comments: