



The Challenge

A Publication of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

Keeping Prevention Activities on Track

The Benefits of Evaluating School-based Prevention Initiatives

Every substance abuse or violence prevention program sets out to affect some kind of change. Some programs seek to change young people's knowledge and attitudes about alcohol and other drugs. Others aim to prevent violent behaviors, or to improve healthy decision-making skills. How can you know if a program does what it sets out to do? And, how can you tell what results are achieved as a result of a particular strategy or program?

Evaluation is the systematic collection and analysis of data needed to make decisions. It is the process for gathering the information that lets you

know whether you achieved your goal. It tells you what works and what doesn't. Further, it may give you some insight into why your program worked, or didn't work, as well as you expected.

Evaluation is an integral part of the *No Child Left Behind* Act's focus on proven methods. *No Child Left Behind* puts emphasis on determining which educational programs and practices have proven to be effective, and uses federal funds to support those that have proven track records of success.

As such, all prevention programs supported by the U.S. Department of Education's

Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) are required to evaluate their activities and services. This includes both programs funded through state and local formula grants, as well as those funded through discretionary grant programs.

But many program directors view evaluation as a hurdle. During a grant application process, it is not unheard of for a program director to call an evaluator the night before an application is due to request a last-minute evaluation plan—one that's often little more than boilerplate. According to evaluation expert David S. Anderson of George Mason University's Center for the

Advancement of Public Health, they're doing their program a disservice.

"Most people in school settings really care about what they're doing. They're not in it for the money; they're working for the satisfaction of helping people," Anderson noted. "Therefore, when they're running a prevention

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program, they want to do it the best way that they can to add value to people's lives."

"The word 'value' is at the very center of the word 'evaluation,'" he continued. "That's really what we're talking about. A good evaluation tool lets you know if your program works—if it has real value to the community."

"Evaluation is not something to be tacked on at the end of a program simply because it is required, but should be an integral part of the program from the very beginning," Anderson explained. "It is actually a strategic planning tool that helps organize your thinking, and thus your program."

According to Anderson, a solid evaluation can be useful in many ways. It can help in:

► **Planning.** An evaluation can help you clarify what you want to accomplish;

► **Assessing accomplishments.** An evaluation can help you know whether you have achieved your desired outcomes;

► **Keeping on track.** An evaluation can help you know when you have hit certain milestones along the way;

► **Enhancing and refining.** An evaluation can help point to what needs to be done to improve your project;

► **Making budget decisions.** An evaluation can help you see where resources should be allocated or reallocated;

► **Advancing knowledge.** An evaluation can help you test theories and share your insights with others;

► **Increasing the public trust.** An evaluation can help you maintain accountability.

With all of these good reasons for conducting an evaluation, why do so many people avoid it? Anderson explained that there are many myths associated with evaluation.

"Some people think that evaluation is too complicated or too expensive—that funds can be better spent elsewhere. It's true that evaluation can be costly, but it doesn't have to be. And it's money well spent, as early evaluations can keep one from investing in a non-successful program or process."

"Another common reason that people avoid conducting

a program evaluation is because they fear that an evaluation will open up new information or point to problems that they will then need to address. That may be true, but it's better to have that information than to go forward without it. An evaluation will give you insights into what aspects of your project may be more or less helpful. New information can be used to develop revised delivery approaches for future projects."

Anderson emphasized that it is important for program directors to share the results of their evaluation with their colleagues in the prevention field. "You've got to share what you learn when you learn it. It's as important for your colleagues to hear what didn't go well as what did go well. Even when you don't get the results you anticipate, you've learned something important for the field."

Finally, Anderson noted that a solid evaluation can actually bring in more dollars to support a program. "In this day of limited time and limited dollars, funders need to focus their spending on what works. When you can show evidence of your program's effectiveness, they're more likely to support your efforts." ❧

Learn More!

► Anderson, D. and Abdalla, A. (2000). *A step-by-step guide to planning and implementing evaluation strategies*. Fairfax, VA: George Mason University, Center for the Advancement of Public Health. This and other evaluation resources are available online at: www.caph.gmu.edu.

► Mertinko, E., Novotney, L., Baker, T., and Lange, J. (2000). *Evaluating your program: A beginner's self-evaluation workbook for mentoring programs*. Potomac, MD: Information Technology International. This workbook, produced for the Office of Juvenile

Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), was developed for grantees of OJJDP's Juvenile Mentoring Program, but is applicable to other prevention programs. The workbook is available online at: www.itiincorporated.com/sew_dl.htm

► Muraskin, L. (1993). *Understanding evaluation: The way to better prevention programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. This free publication can be ordered through ED Pubs at: www.edpubs.org or by calling (877) 4ED-PUBS. ❧

Hiring and Working with an Outside Evaluator

Getting the Most Out of Your Program Evaluation

School districts and community organizations are required by the U.S. Department of Education and many other funders to evaluate their prevention programs and activities. But often it can be difficult to know where to locate an outside evaluator, what qualities to look for, or how to establish a positive working relationship.

Dr. Peggy Glider, coordinator of evaluation and research for campus health services at the University of Arizona, has served as an evaluator on federal and state grants for the past 18 years. Most of these grants have focused on alcohol, other drugs, and violence issues. Dr. Glider frequently provides evaluation technical assistance to universities, school districts, and other groups and recently spoke to a group of federal grantees on hiring and working with outside evaluators.

Qualifications to Look For

Before you set out to hire an evaluator or subcontract with a firm or individual to provide those services, Dr. Glider advises that you spend some time thinking about your priorities and the kind of person you will need. She recommends that you consider the following qualifications:

► Experience with Target

Audience and Issues. Look for someone who has experience with your target pop-

ulation. If your prevention project targets elementary students, you need someone who understands how to work with that age group. Similarly, look for someone who is familiar with alcohol, drug, and violence prevention issues so that they can develop survey questions and strategies that are specific enough to generate the outcomes you need.

► Experience within the Target Environment.

If you are working in a school environment, your evaluator needs to understand how schools operate and how that envi-

ronment might affect an evaluation. For example, because most schools are only open 9 months out of the year, an evaluator will need to develop an evaluation plan that takes that schedule, and other school holidays, into account.

► Experience with Multiple Evaluation Strategies.

Most evaluators have a preferred way of doing things. A good evaluation has many different components; look for someone with experience using multiple strategies and a variety of statistical and analytical procedures and software.

► Availability and Flexibility.

Many quality evaluators are out there, but often the better they are, the less available they are. Make sure the evaluator has time to give you what you need. Also look for someone who will not dictate to you, but who will be flexible enough to see things from multiple points of view, including yours.

► Good Communication Skills.

A good evaluator will help you share your results with funders, parents, the school board, and other

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Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools to Host 2005 National Conference

Institutes and Workshops to Focus on Student Safety, Well-being, and Achievement

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) will host its 2005 National Conference in Washington, DC, August 15-17, 2005. The conference, *Tying it All Together: Comprehensive Strategies for Safe and Drug-Free Schools*, will bring together more than 2,000 national, regional, and local leaders in the fields of health, education, mental health, substance abuse prevention, and violence prevention to learn from national experts and each other.

The conference will address the issues for which OSDFS provides national leadership, including alcohol, tobacco, and drug prevention; violence prevention; comprehensive school health; mental health; physical education; and character, civic, and correctional education. The conference also will devote significant attention to the issues of emergency response and crisis management.

Conference Goals

The goals of the OSDFS 2005 National Conference are to:

- ▶ Showcase prevention programs that demonstrate effectiveness in reducing student alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, and that minimize school violence;
- ▶ Provide opportunities for leaders, decision makers, and policy setters to expand their knowledge about substance abuse, violence prevention, and other emerging issues facing schools today, including terrorism, crisis management, gangs, and drug testing;
- ▶ Gain knowledge and new perspectives from nationally known prevention experts, representatives from federal agencies, leaders from local and state agencies, and school and community leaders; and
- ▶ Maximize efforts to keep young people safe, healthy, and drug free by strengthening existing partnerships and collaborating on key priority issues.

Conference Institutes

The OSDFS 2005 National Conference will feature 13 two-hour institutes on key topics affecting schools today. Each institute will offer expert presentations and engage attendees in participatory activities (see opposite page for a complete list of institutes).

Who Should Attend?

The following individuals and groups should consider attending the OSDFS 2005 National Conference:

- ▶ OSDFS grantees
- ▶ Education and prevention leaders
- ▶ Representatives of federal agencies and national associations
- ▶ SEA and LEA representatives and Governors' staff
- ▶ Public and private school administrators
- ▶ Experts in the field of substance abuse and violence prevention
- ▶ School personnel (teacher, counselors, health educators)
- ▶ School safety and security officers, including school resource officers
- ▶ Community organizations, including faith-based organizations
- ▶ Representatives from alternative schools or charter schools. ☺

Conference Logistics

Hotel Information

The Marriott Wardman Park Hotel is the host site of the 2005 OSDFS National Conference however, due to the overwhelming registration response the room block is sold out. Rooms are available at the Omni Shoreham Hotel (across the street from the Marriott Wardman Park hotel) at the conference rate of \$153 plus tax. For reservations, call the Omni Shoreham Hotel at 800-843-6664.

Travel Information

Air travel reservations may be made to any of the three Washington metropolitan airports—Reagan National, Baltimore/Washington International, or Dulles International. Train travel can be booked into Washington's Union Station. For more transportation information, visit www.OSDFSNationalConference.org and click on Transportation.

Registration Fees

Registration Fee: \$225

Through June 30

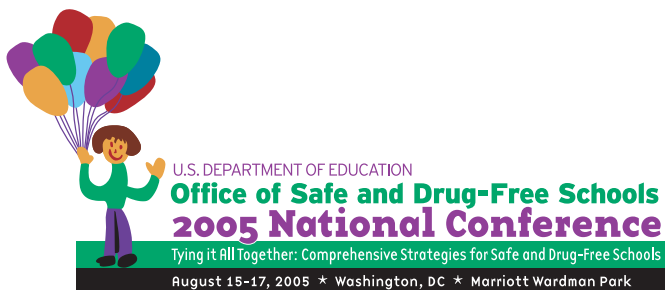
Late Registration: \$325

July 1 – August 5, 2005

On-site Registration: \$500

August 6 – 17, 2005

If you have any questions, please contact the Conference Registrar at OSDFSRegistrar@esi-dc.com. ☺



For more information about the conference, visit www.OSDFSNationalConference.org

Institutes and Workshops for the 2005 OSDFS National Conference

Institutes

The institutes listed below are planned for the OSDFS 2005 National Conference, *Tying it All Together: Comprehensive Strategies for Safe and Drug-Free Schools*.

Engaging Our Youth in Creating Safe and Drug-Free Learning Environments: A Paradigm Shift for Educators and Students. This institute will demonstrate how student engagement creates safe learning environments, drug-free schools, and positive impacts on students, teachers, schools, and communities.

Emerging School Health and Environmental Health Issues. This institute will provide an overview of emerging topics in school health and environmental health and offer resources for attendees to help address these issues. It also will address how to tie together various efforts, such as those at the health department and educational entities, on common health issues.

Mentoring: Community Partnerships to Create Better Schools. This institute will provide an overview of the research on youth mentoring, including the implications for practice and policy. It will address how mentoring works and the fundamentals of what

programs need to succeed. It also will focus on the potential benefits of partnerships between schools and community-based organizations.

Addressing Children's Mental Health Needs. This institute will provide an overview of the broad continuum of children's mental health needs and services. It will focus on the mental health needs of children both in uneventful times and during times of crises.

Future of Youth Wellness: A Comprehensive Approach to Physical Education. This institute will feature a Physical Education Program (PEP) grantee and leading experts in the field of health and physical activity who collectively will discuss topics, trends, challenges, and successful program models in physical education and nutrition.

Emerging Issues in Research, Evaluation, and Data in Safe and Drug-Free Schools. This institute will highlight new information from research, evaluation, and data collection that relates to the prevention of youth drug use and violence.

Effective Prevention Strategies: Comprehensive Approaches to Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools. This institute will provide an understanding of the charac-

teristics of effective, comprehensive approaches to violence and substance abuse prevention in schools and communities.

Student Drug Testing: Recent Research, Legal Implications, and Practical Implementation. This institute will present an overview of school-based student drug-testing programs funded through the U.S. Department of Education.

Emergency Preparedness, Crisis Management, and School Safety. This institute will equip school and community professionals with the key principles of emergency planning and crisis response and showcase up-to-date knowledge of how to develop, implement, and practice crisis response plans.

Introduction to the Crisis Planning Process (Parts 1 and 2): ERCM "101" Institute. This institute will provide a broad overview of the four phases of crisis planning. Part 1 will focus on mitigation/prevention and preparedness. Part 2 will focus on response and recovery.

Emergency Preparedness, Crisis Management, and School Safety Institute: Special Session (Required for ERCM FY 2003-04 Grantees). This institute will equip school and community professionals

with the key principles of emergency planning and crisis response and showcase up-to-date knowledge of how to develop, implement, and practice crisis response plans.

Lessons Learned (from State Grant Programs). This institute will demonstrate results and lessons learned from the federal dollars the U.S. Department of Education has invested.

Emerging Issues. This institute will identify emerging issues related to drug abuse and violence facing today's students in grades K-12, such as truancy, bullying, gang-related violence, and hate crimes, and how these issues affect the learning environment.

Workshops

A series of interactive workshops will be offered during the 2005 National Conference. Facilitated by subject matter experts, federal agency representatives, leaders from state and local education agencies, and current federal grantees, these workshops will provide attendees with opportunities to participate in discussions, question and answer sessions, and hands-on activities to explore OSDFS priority topics in depth and engage in dialogue about new and emerging issues. 🗣️

DID YOU KNOW?

According to the 2004 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study conducted by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, the number of parents who report *never* talking with their child about drugs has doubled in the past six years, from 6 percent in 1998 to 12 percent in 2004.

Source: "Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, 2004—Parents," Partnership for a Drug-Free America.

Evaluators continued from page 3

stakeholders. Look for someone who can explain things to you in a way that you understand it, not in a way that is over your head or uses jargon.

► **Willingness to Be a Team Player.** In order to do a high quality job, the evaluator will need to know how the entire program operates. Look for an evaluator who will work well with your program staff. "If an evaluator is a true member of the team and understands the program fully, he or she is in a better position to interpret the data," Dr. Glider explained. "Data is always interpreted in the context of program participants and what they experienced; a good evaluator works with program staff to interpret

data and make decisions about its meaning."

Where to Find an Outside Evaluator

There are several resources for locating qualified outside evaluators. Begin with your local college or university. Psychology, sociology, and educational psychology departments often have faculty or graduate students who are interested in prevention issues.

State departments of education, health, and justice also are excellent resources. Those agencies have personnel who are responsible for overseeing issues related to substance abuse and violence prevention and often work with evaluators whom they can recommend.

Other potential resources include local school districts or social service agencies that have conducted evaluations. Contact them to ask who conducted their evaluation and whether they were pleased with the work.

Finally, there are several national associations that maintain databases of members looking for evaluation jobs. See sidebar for details.

How to Hire an Outside Evaluator

Before you post a job announcement, define the scope of work. What do you think needs to be accomplished? What types of data do you think you will need to collect? What data do you already have that might be

useful? What roles will program staff play in the evaluation process?

Then, draft the job announcement. Describe your program so that evaluators will understand your target population and setting. List the basic job qualifications and include instructions on how to apply.

Request a sample of a previous final report. "I always ask for a product that the evaluator has produced," Dr. Glider noted. "Looking at a sample final report will help you determine how well the evaluator communicates. If you can't understand what you're reading, the person isn't a good match for you."

During the interview process, ask candidates to describe their understanding of your program's intent and the goals to be attained. Have them describe the general evaluation approach they would take. Ask candidates to describe their previous experience and preferred working style. Discuss other current commitments that might affect their ability to work on your project.

Dr. Glider recommends requesting at least three references from other programs and following up with those references. "When you call references, ask them if they would hire the candidate again," she suggested. "Did they deliver reports on time? Were they secretive about data?"

Once you select an evaluator, develop a contract and put everything in writing. Be

Looking for an Evaluator?

There are several national associations that maintain online databases where you can post an evaluation job announcement. These include:

► **American Evaluation Association.** An international professional association of evaluators devoted to the application and exploration of program evaluation, personnel evaluation, technology, and many other forms of evaluation. www.eval.org/JobBank/jobbank

► **National Council for Measurement in Education.** A professional organization for individuals involved in assessment, evaluation, testing, and other aspects of educational measurement. Members are involved in the construction and use of standardized tests, new forms of assessment, program design, and program evaluation. www.ncme.org/careers

OSDFS Funding Update

Three FY 2005 Discretionary Grant Opportunities Still Available

sure to describe the general responsibilities of the evaluator, the lines of authority, and the billing procedures and schedule. List all deliverables and a timetable for receiving them. Also include details about ownership of data and publication rights. Can the evaluator write about your program and publish it without your input?

"The most important point is to build a team from the very beginning," Dr. Glider emphasized. "Both your program staff and the evaluator need to view the relationship as a partnership so that you can use your data to continuously improve the program." ❧

The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) announces that the following three discretionary grant opportunities are still available in fiscal year 2005:

▶ **Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Models on College Campuses Grant Competition.** This program provides awards to maintain, improve, further evaluate, and disseminate models of alcohol and other drug prevention at institutions of higher education. For information, contact Vera Messina (vera.messina@ed.gov) or Ruth Tringo (ruth.tringo@ed.gov).

▶ **Demonstration Grants for Student Drug Testing.** This program provides funds to develop and implement, or expand, school-based mandatory random or voluntary drug-testing programs for students in one or more grades 6 through 12. For information, contact Robyn Disselkoe (robyn.disselkoe@ed.gov) or Sigrid Melus (sigrid.melus@ed.gov).

▶ **Emergency Response and Crisis Management Plans Grant Competition.** This program provides funds to local education agencies to strengthen and improve emergency response and

crisis management plans. For information, contact Tara Hill (tara.hill@ed.gov). This information is for advisory purposes only and is subject to change. This is not an official application notice of the U.S. Department of Education. For information regarding any of these discretionary grant competitions, please contact the competition managers listed above. Updated grant forecasts also can be found at www.ed.gov/fund.

More Evaluation Tools for Educators and Prevention Professionals

Resources on Evaluating Prevention Programs and Strategies

The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's (CSAP) National Centers for the Application of Prevention Technologies (CAPTs) are resource centers that assist state agencies and local communities in applying research-based knowledge to their prevention programs, practices, and policies.

Several of the CAPT Web sites offer excellent evaluation resources.

Northeast CAPT Evaluation Resources

The Northeast CAPT has an entire section of their Web site devoted to evaluating prevention programs and strategies. Learn how to conduct an evaluation and how to locate, hire, and manage a qualified evaluator. Visit www.northeastcapt.org/resources/program/program_evaluation.html

Western CAPT Evaluation Resources

The Western CAPT Web site offers a step-by-step "how to" guide on planning and implementing an evaluation of your prevention program. Each section includes worksheets, tools, and real-life examples of how to conduct user-friendly evaluations. Visit <http://casat.unr.edu/bestpractices/eval.htm>

Central CAPT Evaluation Resources

The Central CAPT Web site features an online training module, "Approaches to Prevention Evaluation." Visit www2.miph.org/capt_eval.

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For more information about the CAPTs and what they have to offer, visit CSAP's CAPT Web site at www.captus.org.

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The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools supports efforts to create safe schools, respond to crises, prevent drug and alcohol abuse, ensure the health and well being of students, and teach students good citizenship and character. OSDFS coordinates ED's efforts in these areas with other federal agencies and also leads ED's homeland security efforts. Visit them online at www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs.

Expressions of opinion in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Education or Learning Systems Group.

Contributors to this issue: Eileen Frueh, Greg Wells.

The Challenge c/o Learning Systems Group 1150 Connecticut Avenue NW, #1100 Washington, DC 20036 Tel: (202) 628-8080 Fax: (202) 628-3020 www.thechallenge.org

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National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) recently announced the launch of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-TALK. The national hotline is part of the National Suicide Prevention Initiative, a collaborative effort led by SAMHSA. A new Web site is also available at www.suicide-preventionlifeline.org.

Alcohol Prevention for Middle Schoolers

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) has released a new version of "The Cool Spot," the Institute's Web site for middle school students. The Web site's new content is based



on curriculum for grades 6-8 developed by NIAAA-supported researchers at the University of Michigan. It is aimed at giving young teens a clearer picture about alcohol use among their peers and helping them learn skills to resist pressure to drink alcohol. Visit: www.thecoolspot.gov.

Talk with Fifth Graders About Alcohol

In March, fifth- and sixth-grade classrooms across the nation were mailed materials for a program called Reach Out Now: Talk with Your Fifth Grader about Preventing Childhood Alcohol Use. The program provides teachers, students, and parents informa-

tion about the risks of underage drinking. A collaboration between SAMHSA and Scholastic, Inc., in consultation with NIAAA and the U.S. Department of Education, the products include lessons and in-class activities for teachers, as well as a "take-home" packet for students and parents. For more information and copies of the materials, visit www.teachin.samhsa.gov.

New NREPP Web Pages

New National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) pages are posted on the SAMHSA Model Programs Web site. These pages describe the new NREPP criteria and process, and include a discussion of how the existing programs will be screened against the new review criteria. Visit: www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov.



The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools National Conference will be held August 15-17, 2005, in Washington, DC. For details, visit: www.osdfsnationalconference.org

Learning Systems Group 1150 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 1100 Washington, DC 20036

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OSDFS National Conference Update

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