A photograph of a woman with dark hair, smiling warmly at a young boy. They are both looking at something together, possibly a book or a document. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter.

Veteran Suicide Prevention through Effective Evaluation Practice:

Veteran Suicide Prevention Program Evaluation Toolkit



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2024



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I. Introduction

Why was the Veteran Suicide Prevention Program Evaluation (VSPE) Toolkit created?

Veterans are disproportionately impacted by suicide compared to the U.S. general population. In 2021, 6,392 veterans died by suicide. In the same year, the age-adjusted suicide rate of veteran men was 43% greater than that of non-veteran U.S. adult men, and the age-adjusted suicide rate of veteran women was 166% higher than that of non-veteran U.S. adult women. From 2020 to 2021, the age-adjusted suicide rate increased 6% among veteran men and 24% among veteran women, reinforcing the urgency to act.¹

Suicide is preventable.

Research shows that several programs, policies, and practices can prevent suicide in veteran populations. Designing and sustaining effective suicide prevention programs requires strong evaluation. Program evaluation helps ensure that a program is designed for success, that programs have the information they need to continually improve, and that key results are captured to demonstrate progress and help sustain the program.

This toolkit focuses on what you need to know to design a strong evaluation for your veteran suicide prevention work. Let's briefly review key concepts and resources for suicide prevention in veteran populations before we walk through key evaluation steps.

How do we prevent suicide among veteran populations?

There are several evidence-based upstream suicide prevention strategies that can help prevent suicide in veteran populations. Upstream suicide prevention strategies focus on either promoting protective factors or addressing risk factors for suicide.

For example, protective strategies include improving access to social and economic supports. Some examples include improving household financial security and stabilizing housing. Risk factor strategies include preventing and addressing exposure to trauma, financial stress, or limited access to healthcare. Some examples include supporting resilience through education programs, offering unemployment support practices, or increasing provider availability in underserved areas. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Suicide Prevention Resource for Action](#) describes what works to prevent suicide, including upstream approaches.²

Many veteran serving organizations (VSOs) across the U.S. are already successfully taking an upstream approach to suicide prevention and implementing programs that address the unique needs of veterans and military families, providing several examples to inspire action and learn from. The [Suicide Prevention Resource for Action](#) highlights many of these examples.

Introduction

Why is program evaluation so important, and why should I be thinking about evaluation from the outset?

Program evaluation provides data-driven decision-making to design and improve programs. Improving programs helps improve health outcomes. Program evaluation also helps track and share progress, a key component to sustaining the work. This toolkit focuses on two types of program evaluation:

- **Formative evaluation:** A type of evaluation conducted to inform program planning and adjustments.
- **Process evaluation:** A type of evaluation conducted to understand how a program is implemented and if it is happening as intended.

Formative and process evaluations are the building blocks for program design and improvements and serve as steppingstones to monitoring program outcomes and impacts later. This toolkit focuses on building critical capacity to develop and monitor program processes from the outset, helping to set the program up for success.

How will this toolkit help me design a strong evaluation?

The VSPE Toolkit is based on the [CDC Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health](#). The toolkit provides VSOs with usable content on formative and process program evaluation of upstream veteran suicide prevention programs.

This toolkit has an accompanying document called the [VSPE Workbook](#). It includes worksheets relevant to each toolkit section and two VSO case example evaluation projects. We recommend using the toolkit sequentially to work through each section and related worksheet, but you can use any toolkit component as needed.

This toolkit has not been validated for use in other populations or other types of programs, but the content and worksheets can be adapted for other uses. Additionally, this toolkit does not provide information on outcome evaluations which assess whether the program has achieved its intended goals, such as a reduction in suicide ideology.



Introduction

What is included with the VSPE Toolkit versus the related VSPE Workbook?

This document is the VSPE Toolkit. The concepts within this document can be applied using the [VSPE Workbook](#). See more about each document below.



The VSPE Toolkit

The toolkit is intended to provide evaluation concepts and considerations for newcomers to evaluation. The toolkit includes:

- **Educational content:** Each section starts with educational content that describes evaluation concepts and considerations for evaluation in practice.
- **Illustrative examples:** Each section highlights examples throughout to illuminate key concepts and steps. These are pulled from fictional case example evaluations, adapted from real VSO projects. The case examples can be found in the [VSPE Workbook](#).
- **Glossary:** Key evaluation concepts and terms throughout each section are included in a Glossary. Glossary terms are underlined throughout the document.



The VSPE Workbook

The workbook is intended for use alongside the toolkit sections to support each step. The workbook includes:

- **Worksheets:** There is an accompanying worksheet for each section of the toolkit. Use these to apply evaluation concepts in practice.
- **Full case example evaluation projects:** Two fictional evaluation project examples, adapted from real VSO projects, are provided for user reference. The VSPE Toolkit includes illustrative examples from these throughout its sections, but the full case examples can be found within the workbook. Examples include:
 - Olivetown for Vets case example of formative evaluation.
 - The Team Reconnect case example of process evaluation.

What will this toolkit help me learn and achieve?

This toolkit will help you:

- Understand the purposes of formative and process evaluation.
- Understand interest holder* roles in program evaluation and plan how to engage them in your evaluation.
- Develop a clear description and visual logic model of your program, including inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, contextual factors, and assumptions to guide your evaluation.
- Identify which part(s) of your program to evaluate and develop appropriate evaluation questions.
- Develop a data collection, management, and analysis plan, including indicators and data sources.
- Develop a strong plan to guide your evaluation project.
- Implement your data collection and analysis plan to interpret key findings.
- Justify your conclusions and make relevant recommendations.
- Plan how to communicate and share your evaluation findings with interest holders.

*The term “interest holder” is used to describe persons or organizations who have an investment in the evaluation, such as those served or affected by the program, those planning or implementing the program, those who might use the evaluation findings, and those who are skeptical about the program. This group was previously referred to as “stakeholders.” The decision to use the term “interest holder” was made to be sensitive to negative historical context and experiences, particularly among Indigenous communities, and to reflect the diverse individuals, organizations, and communities served by VSOs. We understand that some still use the former term, but we encourage a shift in language to “interest holder”. For more information, please refer to CDC’s Preferred Terms for Select Population Groups and Communities.³

Introduction

Who can I contact to learn more?

Visit the [VSPE webpage](#) or email vspevaluation@cdcfoundation.org for information on the CDC Foundation Veteran Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project. The VSPE webpage includes additional examples of VSPE project ideas, the impact of the VSPE project, and opportunities to collaborate with others working in veteran suicide prevention and program evaluation.

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II. Develop an Evaluation Engagement Plan

PURPOSE: An evaluation engagement plan identifies interest holders to engage in your evaluation. Interest holders are persons or organizations having an investment in the evaluation. This includes those served or affected by the program, those planning or implementing the program, those who might use the evaluation findings, and those who are skeptical about the program.

An evaluation engagement plan outlines how you will identify and involve interest holders throughout your evaluation project. Their engagement throughout the evaluation process may include developing appropriate evaluation questions, informing data collection activities, and interpreting and using findings.

THIS SECTION WILL HELP YOU:

- Identify interest holders related to the program you are evaluating or the specific evaluation project.
- Identify what evaluation findings are of interest for each type of interest holder.
- Determine a plan for how you will engage each type of interest holder throughout the evaluation.



Develop an Evaluation Engagement Plan

Importance of Interest Holder Engagement in Evaluation

Engaging interest holders is an important part of developing and completing an effective evaluation project. Interest holders can help describe the program, determine the most useful evaluation questions, consider the appropriateness of the evaluation, and use evaluation findings. It is important to ask your interest holders what success looks like, what types of evidence would be meaningful to help them, and if and how they plan to use the evaluation findings.

Identifying interest holders at the beginning of the evaluation project provides an opportunity to keep them informed throughout the process and helps ensure the findings are relevant to their needs. Not all interest holders will be involved in every part of the evaluation. Their participation and overall engagement with the project may vary based on

how they are related to the program and how the evaluation findings are relevant to them. This toolkit will prompt you to reflect on your interest holders to ensure they are included and engaged throughout the evaluation as planned. It is important to consider the **Federal Evaluation Standards** as you identify your interest holders and plans for engagement.

Identify Interest Holders

Interest Holder Categories

Different types of interest holders may relate to your organization, program, or evaluation project. See Table 2.1 for common interest holder categories, their definitions, and examples.





Develop an Evaluation Engagement Plan

The categories below can help you identify existing and new interest holders to your program and evaluation. Not all categories below may be relevant to your program or organization at this time. Table 2.1 can be used for future programs and evaluation efforts. Individuals or organizations may fall into two different interest holder categories. Choose the category that makes the most sense for this project if that happens.

For example, if your organization is funded by a group to host job training courses and the group also implements a portion of the training, they may be best categorized as an implementer. However, if the same group funds a job fair your organization implements on your own, they may be involved solely as a funder since they do not contribute to implementation.

Table 2.1: Definitions and Examples for Interest Holder Categories

Interest Holder Category	Definition	Examples of Interest Holders who fit in this Category
<u>Implementers/ Program Staff</u>	People who are directly involved in the implementation and operations of the program you are evaluating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intake Staff • Workshop Facilitators • Counselors
<u>Decision Makers/ Leadership</u>	People who can decide on strategic aspects of the program or organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Directors • Board Members • Program Managers
<u>Collaborators/ Partners</u>	People who actively support or have an interest in the program or people served by the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition Members • Advocacy Groups • Interested Parties/Groups
<u>Funders</u>	People who have directly invested or may invest in the program or organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government • Foundations • Endowments • Individual Investors
<u>Program Participants and Community Members</u>	People who are served or directly affected by the program or organization and community members in which the program operates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veterans • Service Members • Military Families

Engaging Interest Holders in Evaluation

Brainstorm potential interest holders who should be engaged in the program evaluation by discussing the guiding questions in Table 2.2 with your organizational leadership, program staff, and community members. These discussions will help you identify individuals, groups, and organizations to engage in each category.



Develop an Evaluation Engagement Plan

Table 2.2: Evaluation Engagement Considerations

Questions	Descriptions
Who does the program aim to serve? Who does the program currently serve?	Your program evaluation captures perspectives from people who are served or directly affected by the program. It is important to identify who the program will serve if you are in the process of developing a program. These interest holders likely have valuable perspectives related to your evaluation.
Who will help implement the program evaluation?	Other staff in your organization may need to be involved in implementing the program evaluation. For example, staff can provide program <u>data</u> , help distribute <u>surveys</u> , or recruit interview participants. Partners may share evaluation findings with others.
Who will directly use the program evaluation findings?	Organizational staff and leadership are often the <u>primary intended users</u> of evaluation findings. Funders may also consider evaluation findings to inform how they support the organization. Other organizations, such as those working on similar projects or supporting the same community, may be interested in applying what you learned from your evaluation.
Who will likely be affected by the evaluation findings?	Those affected by evaluation findings are often individuals, groups, or organizations interested in your program activities but are not directly involved in program operations or support. These may include other organizational staff, such as the marketing team, who may be interested because evaluation findings can provide information to inform their work. Program participants or community members will likely be affected by your evaluation findings and are interested in how the findings will impact them. For example, evaluation findings may inform necessary changes to the program activities or the organization's approach, which can lead to changes in how program participants are served.

Evaluation Engagement Plan

You are ready to develop your evaluation engagement plan after you have discussed and identified interest holders to involve and engage in your evaluation. The evaluation engagement plan clarifies who will be involved in the program evaluation, what evaluation interests they may have, and what role they may play. You can determine who should be involved through discussions with organizational leadership, program staff, and community members. Your evaluation engagement plan allows everyone to know what is expected.



Develop an Evaluation Engagement Plan



Please see an evaluation engagement plan example below. The [VSPE Workbook](#) also includes two full example evaluations adapted from VSO projects.

Table 2.3: Team Reconnect Evaluation Engagement Plan Example

Interest Holder Category	Interest Holder Identification	Evaluation Findings of Interest	Interest Holder Role and Engagement
Implementers/ Program Staff	<p>Team Reconnect Evaluation Team</p> <p>Workshop Facilitators</p> <p>Workshop staff</p>	<p>Findings can help implementers and staff understand program strengths and opportunities for improvement. Additionally, <u>lessons learned</u> from this evaluation can be applied to our other workshops and programs.</p>	<p>Internal staff and implementers will be initially engaged with an announcement and brief overview at Team Reconnect staff meeting. Throughout the project, we will maintain engagement through staff meetings and emails. Internal staff and implementers will assist the evaluation team in understanding the workshop and its components. They will also help collect data.</p>
Decision Makers/ Leadership	<p>Team Reconnect Board</p>	<p>Findings can help inform the strategic oversight the Board provides. The findings should help our Board better understand our ability to critically examine our programs. This will hopefully increase their confidence in the programs we provide for our military families.</p>	<p>Decision makers will be initially engaged through an announcement and brief overview at a Board meeting. Throughout the project, we will maintain engagement through email updates, program committee and development committee meetings, and a data dashboard. Decision makers may also help in deciding how to utilize findings for program improvement.</p>
Partners/ Collaborators	<p>Other Veteran Serving Organizations (VSOs) with similar service delivery models</p>	<p>Other VSOs may be interested in learning from our evaluation findings and understanding what might work or not work for their programs. Partners and other collaborators will be able to adopt or adapt our workshop activities, the way in which we evaluated these activities, as well as apply our lessons learned and knowledge from the evaluation findings. When we collectively share best practices, we elevate the entire VSO.</p>	<p>Collaborators will be engaged initially through an outreach email describing the evaluation and welcoming participation. Throughout the project, we will maintain engagement with partners through active outreach activities, such as coalition meetings and email newsletters. They will also be able to engage with us through our website.</p>



Develop an Evaluation Engagement Plan

Table 2.3: Team Reconnect Evaluation Engagement Plan Example - Continued

Interest Holder Category	Interest Holder Identification	Evaluation Findings of Interest	Interest Holder Role and Engagement
Funders	<p>CDC Foundation</p> <p>Other potential future funders</p>	<p>Our evaluation project and findings can demonstrate to funders our commitment to evaluation, including <u>continuous quality improvement</u> to our programs. As a result, findings can help strengthen the foundations of our future programming and ability to garner future support from funders.</p>	<p>Funders will be engaged through group presentations and individualized follow-ups. Funders may ask for data or additional information to inform their decision to continue the level of funding.</p>
Program Participants and Community Members	<p>Veterans and their family members</p>	<p>Participants will be interested in learning what other participants are getting out of the program. Prospective participants can use this information to help decide if this is the right program for them. Community members will be interested in understanding whether this program is working as intended and get a better understanding of the value of this program through evaluation findings.</p>	<p>Existing and prior participants and community members will be actively engaged through in-person programming, alumni services, and email newsletters. They will also be able to engage with us through our website.</p>



Use Worksheet 1: Develop an Evaluation Engagement Plan and see Case Examples from Team Reconnect and Olivetown for Vets in the **VSPE Workbook** to guide development of your evaluation engagement plan.



III. Develop a Logic Model

PURPOSE: A logic model visually shows how your program is supposed to work and the relationships between program components. Developing a logic model involves identifying and illustrating the relationships among your existing or proposed program inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. A logic model visualizes the theory of change or how the program activities are expected to produce intended results or change.

THIS SECTION WILL HELP YOU:

- Define the following for the program components that you are evaluating:
 - Inputs
 - Program Activities
 - Outputs
 - Short-term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes
 - Assumptions.
- Identify best practices for developing a logic model.
- Develop a logic model that visualizes the theory of change for your program.

Develop a Logic Model

Components of a Logic Model

Logic model components include inputs, program activities, outputs, outcomes, and sometimes assumptions related to the program. Inputs are resources or assets that are necessary to implement the program. It is important to be sure you have enough resources for the program. Input examples include staff, space, money, curricula or materials, data, and equipment. For a program in the planning stage, you should include all inputs necessary for developing and implementing a program. You should list the inputs used for a program in the implementation stage.

Program activities are the activities that need to be implemented to achieve the expected results. All relevant activities should be included in the logic model. For example, you will want to include activities if your program provides training to community members and case management for veterans. Activities may vary based on a program's stage of development. You may shift from planning to implementation as your organization and program grow. The amount of detail in the logic model will depend on how much information is known about the activities and what it will take to implement them.

Outputs are direct products of program activities and the immediate measures of what the program's actions did. For example, outputs include a developed curriculum or a list of barriers experienced when implementing the program.

Outcomes are the expected changes from your activities that show progress toward your program's expected results. A change in outcomes occurs and can only be measured after a program activity is ongoing or completed. For example, you cannot expect mid-term or long-term outcome change when activities just started.

- Short-term outcomes are the results or effects of the activities that can be measured immediately or within a short timeframe of activity completion. Examples of short-term outcomes include increased participant knowledge, skills, and abilities gained from training.
- Mid-term outcomes are the results or effects that take more time to achieve and observe. Examples of midterm outcomes include increased participant *use* of knowledge, skills, and abilities gained from training, increased veteran connection with resources, and change in behavior, such as increased exercise or change in mental health practices.
- Long-term outcomes are the ultimate desired results or effects of program implementation. These outcomes can take several years (generally more than three years) to achieve and observe and often focus on population-level health outcomes, such as suicide morbidity and mortality, and systemic changes.

Assumptions are the beliefs or conditions assumed to be true for the program's success. These assumptions can change over time as you gain more information through program implementation, program evaluation findings, or experience changes in contextual factors. Listing all assumptions while developing your logic model allows anyone reviewing the logic model to be aware of underlying assumptions for your program. These assumptions may include statements such as the program will have continued funding, participants will actively take part in the training, facilitators will be willing to learn and use the curriculum, building specific skills through the program will be valuable for participants in achieving the outcomes, and participants will want to use the skills gained.

Develop a Logic Model

How Do You Develop a Logic Model?

You can start developing your logic model by filling in the components you already know about the program. You can start with the existing or proposed activities, outcomes you want to achieve, or inputs you know are available or needed. For example, if you start with program activities, identify what inputs you will need to complete those activities. Then, list what immediate result is expected from each activity and continue to work toward mid- and long-term outcomes. It can be helpful to work forward and backward as you develop the logic model to ensure your inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes remain aligned throughout this process.

Every logic model will look different. It is critical that the logic model clearly depicts the “if this happens—then that happens next” relationship between program components to demonstrate how the program activities are expected to lead to the intended results.

Arrows are a key feature of a logic model. Each arrow represents a relationship between components of your program. The logic model should not have many crisscrossing arrows or be cluttered, which can confuse readers. Arrows and flow should be easy to follow. Grouping related content within a box or by color coding is another way to signify relationships and organize information.

Worksheet 2: Develop a Logic Model shows how you can use text boxes, arrows, and colors to help the reader follow these component relationships from left to right to understand how the program is expected to work. These visual components (boxes, arrows, colors) are important features to help the reader easily follow along.

Logic models and [program descriptions](#) are closely related. You can use your logic model draft to develop or update your program description.

Developing a program description is discussed in the next section. A program description discusses how your existing or proposed program addresses the public health needs of the community you serve. You can also start with your program description and then create the logic model if that order makes more sense for your program. The program description and logic model should be aligned, but the program description can include additional information to accompany your logic model visual.



Please see example logic models below. The **VSPE Workbook** also includes two full example evaluations adapted from VSO projects.

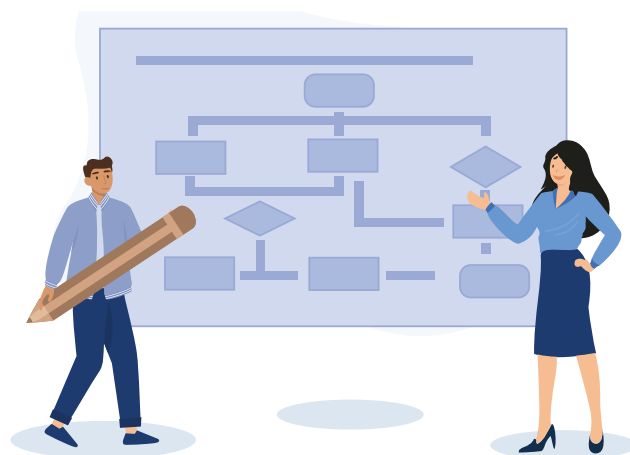


Figure 3.1: Team Reconnect Family Reunion Workshop Logic Model

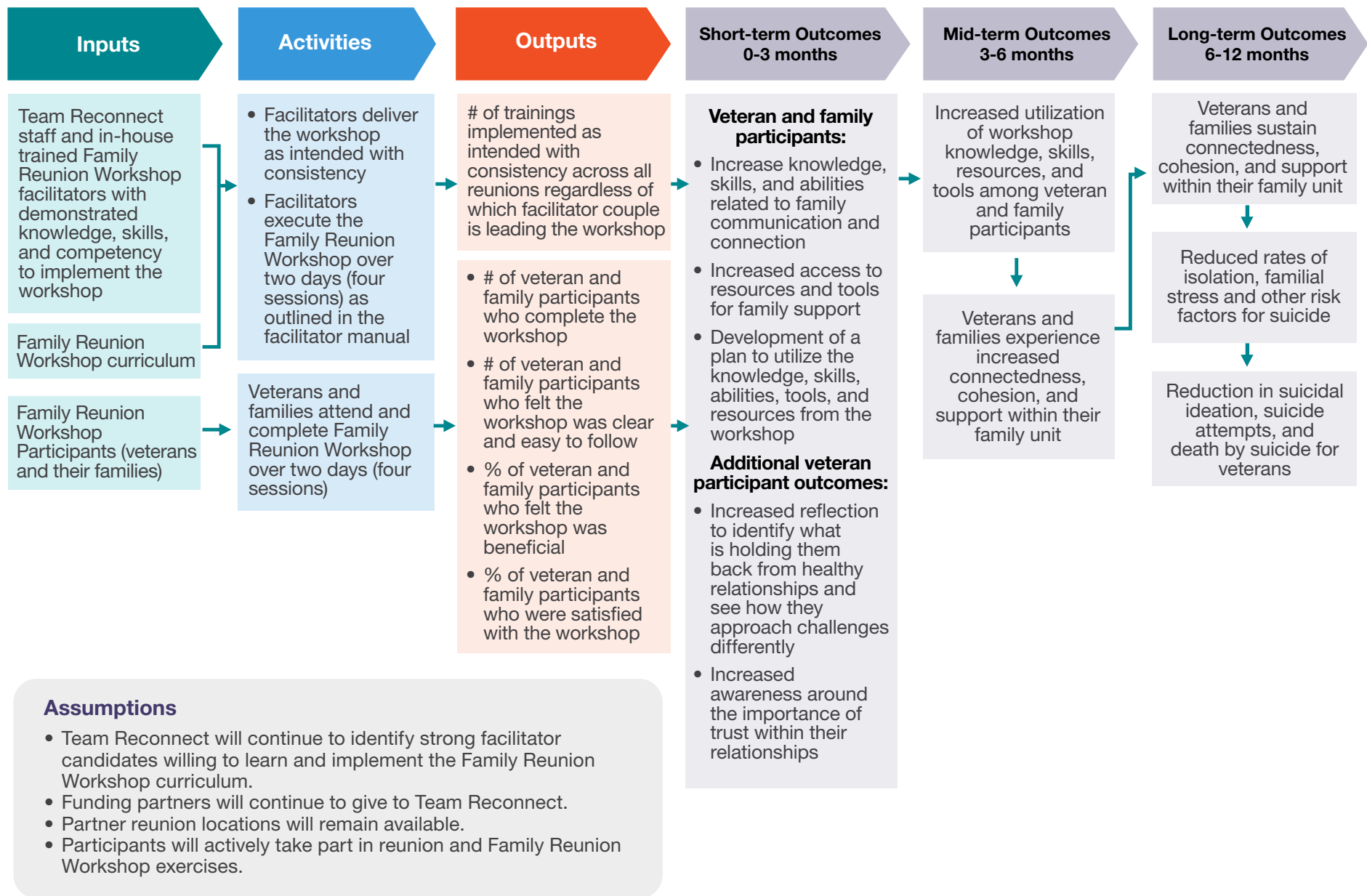
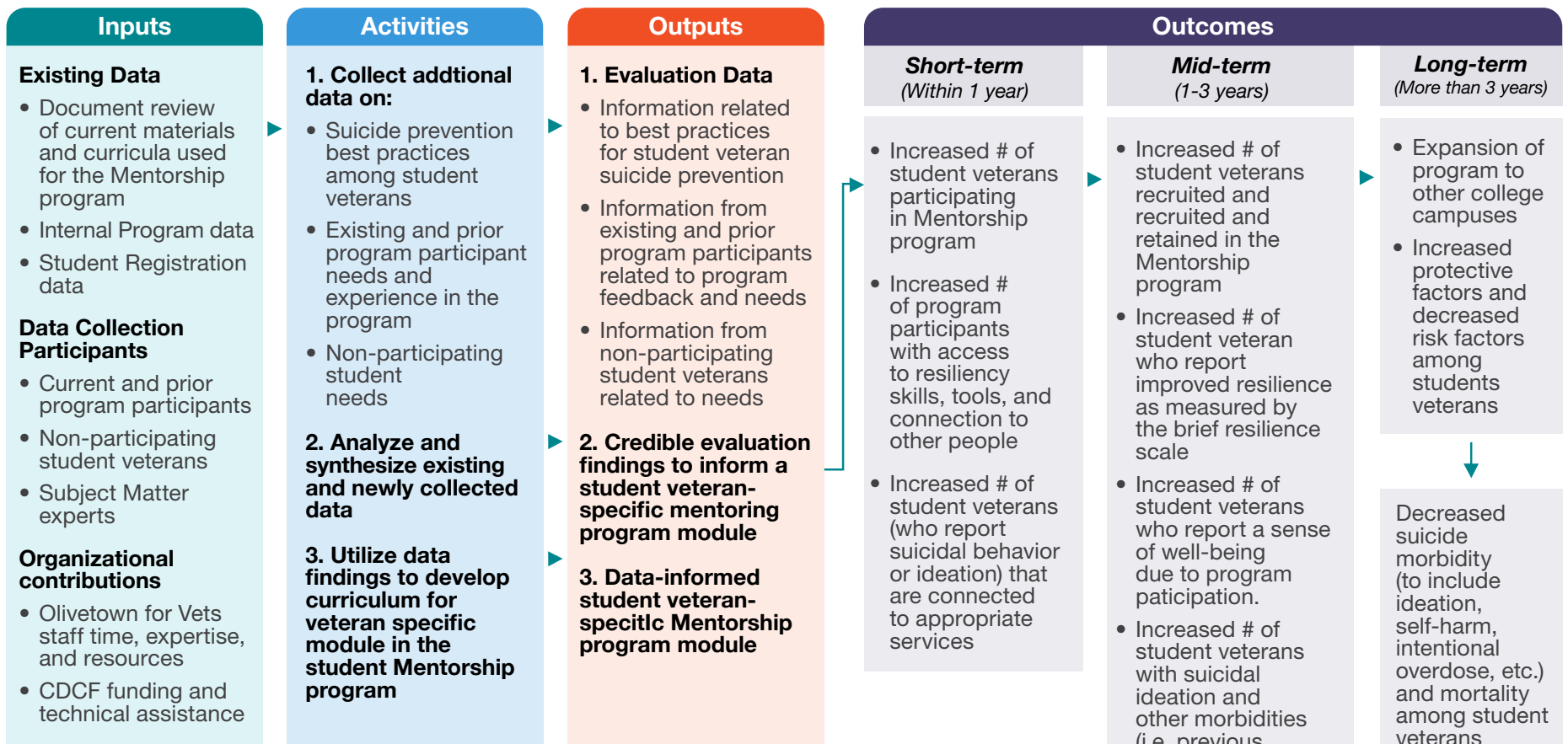


Figure 3.2: Olivetown for Vets Logic Model for Student Veteran Mentorship Program at Olivetown University



Assumptions

- Both risk and protective factors influence a student Veteran’s ability to successfully transition from service and find new purpose within a new setting
- Building resiliency skills through peer mentorship is valuable to campus faculty, staff, and student veterans
- Student veterans will want to participate in this program both as mentees and mentors
- The Veteran Resource Center and mental health clinics on campus will agree to participate in the program implementation

Develop a Logic Model

How to Use Your Logic Model Throughout Your Program Evaluation

A completed logic model can help you determine the appropriate type of evaluation for your program and identify an appropriate evaluation focus based on the needs of the program and the interest holders. Strong logic models depict what should happen in a program and can help determine the components that need the most attention in the evaluation.

Formative evaluation can be used in the planning phase of a new program. Logic models help plan formative evaluation activities that will inform programming or refine the proposed program components.

Process evaluation can be used for programs or activities during implementation to assess if and how well the program is happening as intended. Logic models of established programs can also help identify gaps and opportunities for program improvement.

Interest Holder Engagement in Developing a Logic Model

You should engage with your interest holders when drafting your program description and logic model. This process may involve seeking feedback while creating the logic model or having them review and provide feedback on a draft logic model. Their involvement will allow you to incorporate their perspectives, which can increase interest holder buy-in. It will also allow everyone to clearly communicate the program's needs, how the program is being or will be implemented, and the intended program results.



Use Worksheet 2: Develop a Logic Model and see Case Examples from Team Reconnect and Olivetown for Vets in the **VSPE Workbook** to guide development of your program's logic model.



IV. Describe the Program

PURPOSE: A program description describes how your existing or proposed program addresses the public health needs of the community you serve. A program description provides a clear narrative of your organization and mission, the population you serve, and your program, including the components in your logic model, such as activities and intended outcomes.

THIS SECTION WILL HELP YOU:

- Clearly state the mission and goals of your organization.
- Describe the community you serve and how you aim to address their needs.
- Describe the program addressing the public health need, including:
 - program components from your logic model, such as inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, assumptions
 - program stage of development
 - alignment with an upstream suicide prevention approach, and
 - contextual factors that must be considered.

Describe the Program

A program description describes the program being evaluated in paragraphs, detailed bullet points, or a mix of both. The program description will help your evaluation team ensure the program activities, intended results, and relevant questions inform the [evaluation purpose](#) and focus. The amount of detail provided in a program description varies. A comprehensive program description generally includes the following:

- A brief description of your organization, including the organization’s mission or vision statement and goals.
- The program’s stage of development.
- Population served by the program to reduce suicide, including a description of individuals or groups your organization serves. For example, populations can include veterans, veterans and their families, student veterans, and female veterans. Include any information you have on how this population is impacted by suicide or the needs they may have to reduce suicide risk.
- The program components, such as activities and outcomes, and how they relate to one another to achieve the program goal.
- Contextual factors, which include internal or external factors that can influence the program’s ability to achieve its expected results.

Description of Your Program

Use the information below to develop a description of your program.

Organization and Program Goals

Developing a description of your program’s long-term goals (this could be the aim you hope to achieve in three years or longer) should outline what the program intends to achieve, such as reducing veteran suicide. Include any [baseline data](#) and additional information, such as a timeframe for achieving these goals if available.

Program Stage of Development

The program’s stage of development reflects whether it is in the planning or implementation phase. Sometimes, different activities within the same program occur at various stages. It is important to clarify if the stage of development differs between activities and the program. This level of detail allows you to ensure the focus of the evaluation is appropriate based on the program and the specific activities at the time of the evaluation. For example, you cannot measure change in participant knowledge or skill if you have not implemented the activity with participants.

Logic Model Components

In this section, include one to two sentences on each logic model component and explain their relationship across the logic model. Each logic model component is detailed in the [Develop a Logic Model](#) section.

Describe the Program

Contextual Factors

Contextual factors describe the larger environment and context surrounding the program. This description includes internal or external factors that can influence the program's ability to achieve its expected results. Contextual factors can affect participants, activities, or the program overall. It is important to be aware of these factors because they can influence the relationships presented in the logic model and program description. Contextual factors may include stability of funding, staffing, consistency in training delivery, lack of program familiarity among the population you want to reach, political environment, and competing priorities. Understanding the context allows you to design a realistic and responsive evaluation. You should include ways to consider or address these contextual factors in your program.

Alignment with an Upstream Suicide Prevention Approach

Include a description of how your program and program activities align with an upstream suicide prevention approach if relevant to your program.

How to Use Your Program Description Throughout Your Program Evaluation

Part of drafting an accurate and concise program description is determining the program's stage of development. Formative evaluation can be used to strategically plan programs or activities in the planning phase. Process evaluation can be used to assess the extent to which the program is happening as intended.

Identifying your program's stage of development can help you determine the focus of your evaluation. See more information about program stage of development on the previous page. The [Focus the Evaluation](#) section guides you to use your program description to refine the focus of your evaluation. You should complete this section after completing your program description and logic model. The program description will help your evaluation team ensure the program activities, intended results, and relevant questions inform the evaluation purpose and focus.

Interest Holder Engagement in Describing the Program

You should engage with your interest holders when drafting your program description and logic model. This engagement may involve seeking feedback while writing the program description or having them review and provide feedback on a draft. Their involvement will incorporate their perspectives, which can increase interest holder buy-in. It will also ensure that all interest holders can clearly communicate the program's need, how it is being or will be implemented, and the intended program results. Interest holders can also use this program description to communicate and share the program with others.



Use Worksheet 3: Describe the Program and see Case Examples from Team Reconnect and Olivetown for Vets in the [VSPE Workbook](#) to guide development of your program's description.



V. Focus the Evaluation

PURPOSE: Focusing your program evaluation helps identify the specific purpose and key questions to guide this evaluation project. These questions should be based on your program's stage of development, your interest holder needs, and your program's needs.

THIS SECTION WILL HELP YOU:

- Identify your evaluation purpose.
- Clearly state the mission and goals of your organization.
- Choose the most appropriate type of evaluation for this project.
- Identify up to three evaluation questions.
- Apply the **Federal Evaluation Standards** as you develop evaluation questions.

Focus the Evaluation

You will focus your evaluation after describing the program and making a logic model. It is not usually possible to evaluate the entire program all at once. You need to focus the evaluation on what is most important to learn at this point in time. This process of focusing the evaluation involves deciding the type of evaluation that should be conducted, identifying what questions need to be asked, why you should ask those questions, and how the evaluation findings will be used. Focusing the evaluation will also help you clearly communicate the purpose and value of the findings.

Types of Evaluations

The program's stage of development will inform the type of evaluation. This toolkit focuses on programs in the planning or implementation stage. Programs in the planning stage can use formative evaluation, and programs in the implementation stage can use formative or process evaluation. Programs in the later stages can also use outcome evaluation, assessing if the intended outcomes are achieved. However, programs in the planning or implementation phase are generally not ready for outcome evaluation. Therefore, this section will focus on formative and process evaluations.

Formative and process evaluations are critical! Using formative or process evaluations ensures you are taking a data-informed approach to develop and implement your program and allows you to say with more certainty that you know how your program is working once you evaluate its processes. These types of evaluation will also lay an essential foundation for later outcome evaluation, once you have a clear understanding of program processes. The findings may not reflect what you expect if you leap ahead to evaluating program outcomes without doing a formative or process evaluation. Further, you may be unable to attribute any positive changes to your program, unless you are certain your program is functioning as intended.

Develop Evaluation Questions

You can develop evaluation questions once you identify the type of evaluation you need. The needs of your interest holders, staff, and community members should inform your evaluation questions. These evaluation questions will guide the rest of your evaluation design.

Strong evaluation questions are open-ended, asking "how", "to what extent", and "why" or "why not" something may be happening. Evaluation questions should not be close-ended. Avoid using "yes or no" questions or the types of questions that can be answered easily without context to truly understand what is happening. For example, instead of asking, "Were the right participants reached?", ask "Who is being reached?", and "How are they reached?". Evaluation questions do not have to always focus on the entire program. They can and often should focus on specific aspects of the program.

Focus the Evaluation

Table 5.1 provides general examples of evaluation questions for each type of evaluation.

Table 5.1. Develop Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Question Types	
<p>Formative Evaluation Questions can help identify who has a need/needs help from a program, what aspects of the program are needed, and how the program can be best implemented for the population of focus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formative evaluation may be used before developing a program, when starting a program, or when identifying new improvements for an existing program. Formative evaluation can help you understand the needs of the population you are trying to support and how to best address these needs. Findings from a formative evaluation can inform program planning so that programs can be responsive to identified community needs. 	<p>Process Evaluation Questions can document whether a program was implemented as intended and why or why not.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process evaluation may be used while the program is being implemented or after implementation. Process evaluation can help you understand if the program activities are being implemented as intended, who is reached through those activities, and other implementation aspects. For example, process evaluation can help determine if the program uses resources efficiently. Findings from process evaluation can help identify what is working, what is not, and opportunities for program improvement.
General Examples of Evaluation Questions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who has the need? What is the need? What type of program can we implement to meet this need? How can we best implement the program to meet this need? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How and to what extent was the program implemented as planned? Who is being reached, and how are they reached? What and how are resources utilized? What resources are still needed?



Please see example evaluation questions below. The [VSPE Workbook](#) also includes two full example evaluations adapted from VSO projects.

Figure 5.2: Olivetown for Vets and Team Reconnect Evaluation Question Examples

Examples of Formative Evaluation Questions	Examples of Process Evaluation Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation Question #1: What do Olivetown University student veterans need from a peer mentorship program? Evaluation Question #2: What are the best practices for preventing suicide among student veterans in higher education settings? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation Question #1: To what extent was the Family Reunion Workshop delivered as intended across all workshops regardless of facilitators or location? Evaluation Question #2: To what extent are the Family Reunion participants having a positive experience with the Family Reunion Workshop?

Focus the Evaluation

How to Use Your Evaluation Questions Throughout Your Program Evaluation

The evaluation focus should be determined by the information that will be most useful to the program and interest holders. Your key questions, developed with utility in mind, should anchor you to the purpose of your evaluation throughout each step of the project.

Apply Federal Evaluation Standards

Consider what is possible with existing time and resources and what is useful for your interest holders when focusing the evaluation. Limit your evaluation questions to no more than three or four, so that you can focus on fully answering each of them. Apply the **Federal Evaluation Standards** to each evaluation question identified to decide which questions should be prioritized for this evaluation project.

Interest Holder Engagement in Focusing the Evaluation

It is important to engage your interest holders as you determine the evaluation focus. Engaging your interest holders in this process can increase buy-in, make sure the evaluation fits their needs, and increase the eventual use of the evaluation findings. Interest holder contributions to focusing the evaluation can range from providing high-level feedback about the purpose to in-depth involvement in developing key evaluation questions. This level of engagement will allow your evaluation and key evaluation questions to reflect your interest holder perspectives.



Use Worksheet 4: Focus the Evaluation and see Case Examples from Team Reconnect and Olivetown for Vets in the **VSPE Workbook** to guide development of your evaluation questions.





VI. Collect Evaluation Data

PURPOSE: Identify the data needed to answer your evaluation questions. This process involves selecting indicators, data sources, and data collection methods to inform the answers to your evaluation questions.

THIS SECTION WILL HELP YOU:

- Develop appropriate indicators that can inform answers to each of your evaluation questions.
- Identify appropriate data sources and collection methods for each indicator.
- Develop data collection instruments to collect primary data for your indicators, if needed.
- Develop a plan for collecting and managing evaluation data.

The Connection Between Collecting Evaluation Data, Analyzing Data, and Justifying Conclusions

You should use the **Collect Evaluation Data** and **Analyze Evaluation Data** sections and the related **VSPE Workbook** together to plan your evaluation methods. The Collect Evaluation Data section will help you identify indicators, data sources, and methods for collecting evaluation data. You can then use the Analyze Evaluation Data section to determine how you will analyze the data collected. The **Justify Conclusions** section will then help you interpret the analyzed data and make actionable recommendations.

Indicators

Indicators are data that help answer your evaluation question(s). One evaluation question might require multiple indicators to provide a complete answer.

Below, we discuss three key considerations when selecting indicators for your program evaluation:

1. Determine whether you need formative or process indicators (or both) based on your evaluation questions.
2. Consider how indicators could be measured using quantitative and/or qualitative measures and when to use each.
3. Ensure indicators are stated in a specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (**SMART**) manner for effective goal setting and objective development.

Formative and Process Indicators

This toolkit focuses on formative and process evaluation for programs in the planning or implementation stages.

- **Formative indicators** help you understand program or community needs and how best to address them.

Examples of formative indicators are:

- Needs of the people you are serving or plan to serve.
- Existing community resources.
- Gaps in community resources.
- Perspectives on how best to reach a community.
- Perspectives on how to successfully implement a program.

- **Process indicators** help you understand how well program activities are being implemented and identify opportunities for improvement.

Examples of process indicators are:

- Number of trainings conducted.
- Number and percentage of unemployed veterans who attended the training.
- Number and percentage of participants who completed the training.
- Number and percentage of participants who were satisfied with the training.

Indicators are often quantitative. These can be counts, percentages, or both, depending on what you are trying to understand. Percentages are helpful when comparing if the total numbers in each group are different. However, a table with only percentages does not tell you about actual underlying numbers, which is also important to know. Use percentages when feasible, but always remember to include the number or count as well.

Indicators can also be qualitative, such as participant perceptions or opinions. Please see more on quantitative and qualitative data in the table below, as well as examples of the types of questions these data might be used to help answer.

Types of Data

Table 6.1. Types of Data, Formats, and Use

Type of Data	Description	Can be used to answer...
Quantitative data	Number-based data such as counts, scales, or data categorized based on what is being measured. Common examples of these data are age, days, height in feet, amount in dollars, or the number of suicide attempts. This data can be textual, such as categories, but it can be easily expressed using numbers.	Who, what, when, and how many? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who participated? • How many were satisfied with the program? • Which activities occurred? • When did the activities occur?
Qualitative data	Non-numerical textual data such as testimonials, descriptions, or observations. These data are often gathered using individual interviews, focus group discussions, recordings, or observations. Qualitative data cannot be counted or easily expressed using numbers. However, there are times when numbers are used to express how many people discussed certain types of issues or themes.	What is the need, why/why not, and how? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What needs do veterans have? • How well was the program implemented? • Why did specific groups have limited participation? • How were the lessons applied? • What barriers exist?

► Develop SMART Indicators

Develop indicators that are SMART to ensure you are gathering appropriate information for your evaluation. Making all your indicators SMART may or may not be feasible depending on your program's stage of development. However, you should aim to make your indicators as specific as possible.





Please see examples of specific evaluation indicators below. The [VSPE Workbook](#) also includes two full example evaluations adapted from VSO projects.

Figure 6.1
Olivetown for Vets Formative Indicator Examples

Formative Indicator Examples:

Evaluation question: What do Olivetown University student veterans need from a peer mentorship program?

- *General, non-specific indicator:* Needs of student veterans.
- *More specific indicator:* Identified needs of prior and current student veteran mentorship program participants at Olivetown University.

Figure 6.2
Team Reconnect Process Indicator Examples

Process Indicator Examples:

Evaluation question: To what extent was the Family Reunion Workshop delivered as intended across all workshops regardless of facilitators or location?

- *General, non-specific indicator:* Participants who thought the workshop was good.
- *More specific indicator:* Number and percentage of participants who found the 2023 Family Reunion Workshop to be well facilitated (defined by a rating of 4 or higher).

Data Sources

After determining appropriate indicators and data types, identify data sources to gather information on your indicators. There are two main types of data sources: primary and secondary data sources.

- Primary data sources are data that do not already exist. You will need to collect these data specifically for your program evaluation. Collecting data from primary data sources often requires additional time and resources. These data will be specific to your program evaluation questions and data needs.
- Secondary data sources are existing data initially gathered for another purpose but can be used for your evaluation. Secondary data sources can exist within (internal) or outside (external) your organization.
 - Internal program data sources refer to data already collected for program purposes, such as attendance logs and program documents.
 - External data sources refer to data collected outside your organization, such as vital statistics records, law enforcement data, and census data.

Data Collection Methods

Answering your evaluation questions requires considering multiple viewpoints, values, needs, and interests. You can achieve this by collecting evaluation data from different data sources, and each may require a different method.



Please see an example of data sources and collection methods below. The [VSPE Workbook](#) also includes two full example evaluations adapted from VSO projects.

Figure 6.3: Team Reconnect Data Sources and Methods Example

Data Sources	Data Collection Methods
Training attendance records and administrative documents from 2023	Training attendance records and administrative documents will be reviewed to collect these existing data. Sign-in sheets for all trainings are completed by facilitators attending orientation and training.
Family Reunion Workshop observers	<p>Observation Assessment will be completed by observer on paper. The instrument is still to be developed but the planned question is below.</p> <p>Observation Assessment question: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: The facilitator provided the necessary information for the key concepts for each session.” Measured using a 1-5 Likert Scale where 1 is the lowest (Strongly disagree) and 5 is the highest (Strongly Agree).</p>
Family Reunion Workshop observers	<p>Observation Assessment will be completed by observer on paper. The instrument is still to be developed but the planned question is below.</p> <p>Observation Assessment question: “Please share additional observations about how well the facilitator provided the necessary information for the key concepts for each session” Text-box question.</p>



Collect Evaluation Data

There are several common types of data collection methods used in program evaluation. Use Table 6.2 to consider some of the advantages and disadvantages of common data collection methods when planning your program evaluation. This table does not include all possible methods nor all potential advantages and disadvantages. This table highlights some key considerations.

Table 6.2. Common Data Collection Method Advantages and Disadvantages

Methods and Definitions	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Surveys Method of collecting data from a structured form of questions</p> <p>Can collect quantitative data through closed-ended questions and qualitative data from open-ended questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can obtain data from a large <u>sample</u> of people. • Does not typically require a lot of money or time for data collection and analysis. • Can be more representative of the population of interest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to obtain information on sensitive topics. • Surveys can be susceptible to <u>biases</u> from the respondents or due to the way the questions are worded. • Can generally lack context in responses. • Can have limited participation among some groups due to access, distrust, or lower literacy.
<p>Tests Method of collecting data from a standardized assessment</p> <p>Could be <u>pre- and post-training tests</u> on knowledge/skills or health tests such as blood pressure readings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be easy to administer if your test is developed and field-tested properly. • You can tailor pre- and post-tests specifically to your data needs. • Can generate data on program knowledge and skills or health status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some tests may require expertise and specialized training for proper test design, implementation, and analysis. • Some tests may be perceived as more intrusive to the participant.
<p>Interviews Method of orally asking open-ended questions</p> <p>Can be <u>structured</u> (questions are written out the exact way they must be asked) or <u>semi-structured</u> (topics are listed, and examples of <u>probes</u> are provided)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide more in-depth information on context around thoughts, feelings, and experiences. • Can be flexible, allowing researchers to ask follow-up questions and delve into specific topics. • Useful as a follow-up to other methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Susceptible to multiple biases from the interviewer and the respondent. • More time-consuming and expensive compared to other data collection and analysis methods. • Not generalizable to the broad population. • Might be perceived as more intrusive to the participant.

Table 6.2. Common Data Collection Method Advantages and Disadvantages - Continued

<p>Focus Groups Method of asking questions orally of a group of participants (4-8)</p> <p>Can be structured (questions are written out the exact way they must be asked) or semi-structured (topics are listed and examples of probes are provided)</p> <p>Led by a facilitator who guides the group based on specific topics to understand perspectives rather than achieve consensus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide more in-depth information on the context around perceptions, insights, attitudes, experiences, or beliefs. • Can be flexible, allowing researchers to ask follow-up questions and delve into specific topics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not provide information at the individual level and can be sidetracked by a few individuals. • Susceptible to multiple <u>biases from the facilitator</u> and the focus group participants.
<p>Observations Method of collecting data by observing and recording actions and interactions of participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful for understanding the context through demonstrated behavior, events or physical characteristics of an activity or program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be susceptible to <u>observer bias</u>, which means that the observer’s expectations influence what they perceive or record in their work. • May be susceptible to “<u>Hawthorne effect</u>”, which is when people act differently when they know they are being observed.
<p>Document review Method of collecting data from documents such as records or reports, recordings, and videos</p> <p>Should be used with other types of data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides an understanding of existing knowledge on a subject. • Can help formulate questions for other methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not always comprehensive. • Documents may contain errors, omissions, or exaggerations. • Requires time and research skills.

Determine Appropriate Data Collection Methods

There is no single best way to collect and analyze data to answer evaluation questions. It will always depend on your evaluation.

Use multiple data collection methods that capture different data types whenever possible and appropriate. A mixed methods evaluation uses both qualitative data and quantitative data. This approach provides more comprehensive answers and can minimize the disadvantages of data collected by a single method. For example, analyzing the number of participants who finished the program (quantitative data) does not provide a complete answer if you want to understand if participants were satisfied with the program. Collecting additional qualitative data on whether participants were satisfied with the program can provide a fuller picture of participant satisfaction. Quantitative and qualitative data tell a more robust story when layered together.

Data Collection Design Considerations: Build Data Collection Instruments

There are two overarching types of questions included in data collection instruments: closed-ended and open-ended.

▶ Closed-ended questions

- Questions with a limited set of responses to choose from, such as multiple choice, binary choice like yes/no or true/false, or rating on a scale.
- Best for quantitative data collection.

▶ Open-ended questions

- Questions that offer space to share thoughts and opinions in an open-text or oral format.
- Best for qualitative data collection but can be included in quantitative collection instruments.

Data collection instruments can include just one type of question or include both closed and open-ended. For example, interview guides often include more open-ended questions to facilitate participant discussion. However, surveys can include both open-ended and close-ended questions.

Questions should be clear and easy to understand. A multi-barreled question asks about more than one thing within the same question. Avoid multi-barreled questions by only asking one question at a time. For example, instead of asking “How satisfied were you with the lesson and activity?”, ask “How satisfied were you with the lesson?” and “How satisfied were you with the activity?”. It is important to refrain from asking a question in a way that leads the respondent to answer a certain way. For example, instead of asking, “Tell us why you loved the training,” you might ask, “How did you feel about the training?”.

Increase Participation in Your Data Collection

You can adopt different strategies to increase participation in your data collection depending on your data collection method, the type of participants you want to reach, and the resources that are available.

A few common strategies are to offer incentives to personalize invitations to participate and to send follow-up messages to potential participants. While offering incentives, you need to ensure your incentives meet ethical standards and are not considered coercive, excessive, or inappropriate. For example, offering \$100 to complete a five-minute survey would likely be considered excessive, and telling a potential participant they may lose access to needed services if they do not participate in the data collection would be considered coercive and inappropriate.

Collect Evaluation Data

Data Management

Create a plan to safely store, manage, and review your collected data. Start by deciding how to transfer the data from instruments to where they will be stored and managed. These transfers can be automated or manual. For example, some survey software will output data directly into Excel sheets, but you will need to manually enter the data if you are using paper surveys.

You should maintain a system of organizing all the data. Use a consistent naming system when creating and saving data files. The files can include information about how you collected data, such as type of data, date, and location of data collection. A sample file name using this approach would be “04.14.23_ FocusGroup1_ Springtown.”

Review the collected data as soon as it starts coming in. Plan how often you will review, save, and store data. Consider how you organize the data and check for quality. Quality checks assess missing information, consistency with responses such as spelling or use of acronyms, and accuracy. For example, it’s always a good idea to have someone check for mistakes or typos if manually entering data. Store data in a secure location (physical or virtual) regardless of the data type. Limit access to data to individuals who need the information for their responsibilities. Assign roles and responsibilities among staff to name who will be responsible for these processes.

Interest Holder Engagement in Collecting Evaluation Data

Gather interest holder perspectives on data collection to ensure what you collect is meaningful. Interest holders may recommend relevant data sources and help provide access to these data sources. Collaborating with interest holders increases the likelihood the data sources will accurately represent the population you serve. Working with interest holders when collecting evaluation data can also support the effective implementation of your program evaluation.



Use Worksheet 5: Collect Evaluation Data and see Case Examples from Team Reconnect and Olivetown for Vets in the **VSPE Workbook** to identify indicators, data sources, and data collection methods that align with your evaluation questions.





VII. Analyze Evaluation Data

PURPOSE: Data analysis is a systematic approach to examine and make sense of data so you can interpret meaning, draw conclusions, and make recommendations. Planning your analyses involves identifying what type of data are being collected, how the data will be appropriately analyzed, who will conduct the analyses, and how often the analyses will occur.

THIS SECTION WILL HELP YOU:

- Understand considerations for analyzing quantitative and qualitative data.
- Develop your plan for analyzing evaluation data.

Analyze Evaluation Data

The Connections Between the Collect Evaluation Data, Analyze Evaluation Data, and Justify Conclusions Sections

Use the **Collect Evaluation Data**, **Analyze Evaluation Data**, and **Justifying Conclusions** sections and related **VSPE Workbook** together to plan your evaluation methods. Use the Collect Evaluation Data worksheet to develop a data collection plan, including identifying indicators, data sources, and methods. Then, use this content and the Analyze Evaluation Data worksheet to determine how you will appropriately analyze the data. Use the Justify Conclusions worksheet after implementing your evaluation to interpret the evaluation findings and make actionable recommendations.

Analyzing Data

Analyzing evaluation data systematically will help you interpret its meaning. Consider the following when analyzing evaluation data for your evaluation questions.

1. Determine which analysis methods are appropriate for each data collection method.

Data analysis methods depend on the type of data you have collected, such as quantitative, qualitative, or both. Reflect on your evaluation questions as you determine which data to collect and the analysis methods to use. This will help ensure you have the information needed to answer your questions.

► *Specific Considerations for Analyzing Quantitative Data*

Quantitative data require statistical analysis. A common type of statistical analysis is descriptive analysis. This type of analysis describes or summarizes the sample rather than drawing conclusions from it. Common calculations include frequencies, counts, percentages, and averages. You can present findings from a descriptive analysis as tables, graphs, or other data visualizations. You can use Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets for common calculations.

More advanced statistical analysis examines relationships between two or more characteristics of a population or between different populations using statistical tests. Formative and process evaluation methods rarely require advanced statistical analysis.

► *Specific Considerations for Analyzing Qualitative Data*

Qualitative data generally requires content or thematic analysis. Thematic analysis systematically examines qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, to identify patterns. This examination involves coding, which is the application of codes (labels) to your data. A code is a one- to two-word label used to help identify themes in the data related to your evaluation questions. Themes are higher-level concepts and ideas that appear repeatedly throughout the analyzed qualitative data.

Store all codes in a codebook. A codebook lists codes, code definitions, corresponding themes, and any other information that would help apply and identify codes. All involved coders should use this codebook. Qualitative data can be analyzed in Microsoft Excel or Microsoft Word. Advanced software, such as MAXQDA or NVivo, or hiring a qualitative data analyst may be needed for large amounts of qualitative data.

You can use descriptive analysis when reporting the number of participants, the number of participants who discussed specific themes, and other information from the qualitative data. You can use counts to share how frequently specific themes come up and provide example quotes to illustrate the themes.

Analyze Evaluation Data

2. Determine when and how often data analysis will happen.

Indicate whether the analysis will occur regularly, such as monthly, or at a specific time, like at the end of the four-week program. Quantitative data analysis can happen just once or regularly at different points across time, such as quarterly or at specific times throughout the year. Qualitative data analysis can also happen once or regularly at different points across time. Qualitative data analysis can be more time-consuming and labor-intensive than quantitative analysis. Make sure there is enough time to appropriately conduct the analysis you choose.

► **Identify who will conduct the data analysis.**

Whoever conducts the data analysis should have data analysis skills and know enough about the program being evaluated to meaningfully interpret the data.

► **Decide on resources and software needed to conduct the analysis.**

You can use many different computer programs to store and organize textual data, perform common calculations, and create tables and graphs. You can perform quantitative and qualitative analyses in Microsoft Excel.

Other software exists for more complex data analysis. You should consider whether advanced data analysis software or hiring an analyst is necessary for your project. Make sure the analyst is familiar with whatever data software you will use if you consider hiring an analyst.



Please see example data sources and analysis methods below. The [VSPE Workbook](#) also includes two full example evaluations adapted from VSO projects.

Figure 7.1: Team Reconnect Data Analysis Methods Example

Data Collection Methods	Data Analysis Methods
Document review of training attendance records and administrative documents	Descriptive analysis will be completed in Excel to summarize the number of individuals completing facilitator training, including their demographics such as years of experience, age, or gender.
Review of customer relationship management system data from 2023 Workshops	Descriptive analysis will be completed in Excel to summarize workshop information, including workshop location, dates, and other factors, including participant demographic data.
Observation Assessment completed by workshop observer	Descriptive analysis will be completed with quantitative assessment data in Excel. Additional statistical analysis will be conducted to assess distribution across workshop observer responses. Thematic analysis will be completed for open-ended responses in Microsoft Word. Findings from this analysis will be synthesized with findings from analyzing wrap-up survey data. Comparisons will be made by workshop facilitator and location.
Wrap-Up Survey completed by participants	Descriptive analysis will be completed with quantitative survey data in Excel. Additional statistical analysis will be conducted to assess satisfaction across participant responses. Thematic analysis will be completed for open-ended responses in Microsoft Word. Findings from this analysis will be synthesized with findings from analyzing observation assessment data. Comparisons will be made between the workshop facilitator and location.



Analyze Evaluation Data

Once you get data from your evaluation methods, you can analyze that information. Below are general steps to complete to analyze evaluation data.

Review and clean the data. Data cleaning is the process of correcting data errors to prepare data for analysis. Errors in data collection include things such as the wrong box checked, the wrong response category used, or a duplication of data. You should document errors found and corrections made, keep an original copy of the data file, and save a new copy to make any adjustments or corrections.



Describe the sample. Describing the data sample includes providing important information about who participated in your data collection. This should be done for each data collection method, including quantitative and qualitative sources.



Analyze data that are relevant to answering your evaluation questions. You can do this by focusing on particular data, such as relevant interview or survey questions, and examining how these results differ across demographics and other factors.



Maintain secure and confidential data. Always de-identify data and keep participant information confidential. For example, you will need to redact information if something was said in a focus group that could identify a participant to ensure anonymity. After analysis, destroy any file or recording if you are unable to redact identifiable information.

Interest Holder Engagement in Analyzing Data

Engaging interest holders in analyzing data allows you to understand the information your interest holders may need. Your data analysis methods should provide relevant information to your interest holders. This will help build trust with interest holders and increase their use of the program evaluation findings.



Use Worksheet 6: Analyze Evaluation Data and see Case Examples from Team Reconnect and Olivetown for Vets in the [VSPE Workbook](#) to plan your data analyses.



VIII. Develop and Implement the Evaluation Plan

PURPOSE: An evaluation plan describes your evaluation's purpose and your proposed evaluation methods. The evaluation plan compiles your identified methods, serves as a guide throughout your evaluation project, and allows others to understand your process.

THIS SECTION WILL HELP YOU:

- Plan and organize all necessary sections of your evaluation plan.
- Prepare for implementation of your methods, including data collection and analysis.
- Advance towards justifying conclusions and making recommendations.



Develop and Implement the Evaluation Plan

The Connection between the Evaluation Plan and Prior Toolkit Content

Each previous section and the accompanying worksheets can be used to build your evaluation plan. This information will equip your team to develop an actionable plan for implementing a strong evaluation. Relevant worksheets to develop your evaluation plan include:

- **Worksheet 1:** Develop an Evaluation Engagement Plan
- **Worksheet 2:** Develop a Logic Model
- **Worksheet 3:** Describe the Program
- **Worksheet 4:** Focus the Evaluation
- **Worksheet 5:** Collect Evaluation Data
- **Worksheet 6:** Analyze Evaluation Data
- **Worksheet 7:** Develop and Implement an Evaluation Plan
- **Worksheet 8:** Justify Conclusions

Evaluation Plan

An evaluation plan creates a shared understanding of the project's purpose, questions, and methods. A strong evaluation plan promotes a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities for completing the evaluation project. This helps with implementation and a smoother transition when there is staff turnover or newcomers to the project.

You can apply the content and steps for writing an evaluation plan to any public health program. An evaluation plan is a dynamic tool you should update to reflect program changes, shifting priorities, and resources. You can share this plan with individuals supporting the evaluation, people involved in the program operations, or people interested in understanding the program's evaluation process.

The details included in each section of the evaluation plan will vary based on the evaluation project and organizational guidelines.



Use Worksheet 7: Develop and Implement an Evaluation Plan and see Case Examples from Team Reconnect and Olivetown for Vets in the **VSPE Workbook** to guide development of your evaluation plan.

Table 8.1: Evaluation Plan Sections

Section of an Evaluation Plan	Description	Suggested length
Title Page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes the title of the evaluation plan, the organization’s name, the program’s name, the type of evaluation being conducted (formative or process), authors of the plan and their affiliations, and the finalization date of the evaluation plan. 	1 page
Table of Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lists the sections within the evaluation plan along with page numbers. 	1 page
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a short description of the organization, its mission and vision, and information about the need for veteran suicide prevention programs. Information about the organization and mission should come directly from the completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worksheet 3: Describe the Program (organization and mission section) 	1-3 paragraphs
Program Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes a comprehensive description of the program, including the population served by the program, program goals, program stage of development, narrative of program components, the program logic model (can be included as an Appendix), contextual factors, and alignment with an upstream suicide prevention approach. This information should come directly from the completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worksheet 2: Develop a Logic Model Worksheet 3: Describe the Program 	1-3 pages
Evaluation Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes the purpose and evaluation questions for this project, evaluation interest holder and contributions, how the Federal Evaluation Standards informed the evaluation focus, and any anticipated barriers or facilitators to the evaluation process. Can include a short description of any prior evaluations conducted for this program and relevant evaluation findings. This information should come directly from the completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worksheet 1: Develop an Evaluation Engagement Plan 	1-2 paragraphs
Evaluation Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes the evaluation indicators, data to be collected, and how data will be managed, analyzed, and interpreted. This information should come directly from the completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worksheet 5: Collect Evaluation Data Worksheet 6: Analyze Evaluation Data 	1-4 paragraphs supported by 1-3 tables
Intended Utilization of Evaluation Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes how the program and interest holders intend to use the evaluation findings. Some of this information should come directly from the completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worksheet 1: Develop an Evaluation Engagement Plan Worksheet 4: Focus the Evaluation 	1-2 paragraphs
Communication and Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes how evaluation findings will be shared within the organization and externally with others. This information can be used to complete the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worksheet 9: Develop a Communication and Dissemination Plan 	1-2 paragraphs
Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a proposed timeline of completed evaluation activities, including the dates and who is responsible. 	1-2 paragraphs or 1 table



IX. Justify Conclusions

PURPOSE: Justifying conclusions ensures your program evaluation data are appropriately interpreted to develop relevant, actionable recommendations.

THIS SECTION WILL HELP YOU:

- Summarize and synthesize data from different data sources.
- Interpret evaluation findings within the context of your organization to answer your evaluation questions.
- Develop actionable and data-driven recommendations from your program evaluation.



Justify Conclusions

The Connections Between Collecting Evaluation Data, Analyzing Evaluation Data, and Justifying Conclusions

The **Collect Evaluation Data** and **Analyze Evaluation Data** sections and related **VSPE Workbook** helped you determine your program evaluation methods. Use Worksheet 8: Justify Conclusions to summarize and interpret the evaluation data collected to develop relevant, data-driven recommendations.



Justified Conclusions

You are ready to develop and justify conclusions after implementing your evaluation methods. Evaluation data do not speak for themselves and will need to be interpreted within the context of the program and the organization. Evaluation findings should reflect answers to the original evaluation questions and speak to the merit, worth, or significance of the existing or proposed program.

Summarize Evaluation Data

Implement the plans in your Worksheet 6: Analyze Evaluation Data to examine and summarize your data. Summarize all your data, by data source. For example, you should have summaries for interview data and survey data if you collect both. For each data source, first describe the participant sample who completed data collection. This includes the number of participants and their demographics, such as their gender, race, and age. Then, describe the data related to your evaluation indicators, such as participant engagement or satisfaction. You can further organize and report the data by meaningful categories to draw comparisons. For example, organize data by participants in the Spring session and those in the Fall session to examine for any patterns. Summary statements should include:

- Summary of data collection sample demographics across each data source.
- Summary of results related to indicators from each data source.



Justify Conclusions



Please see an example of a summary statement below. The **VSPE Workbook** also includes two full example evaluations adapted from VSO projects.

Figure 9.1 Team Reconnect Summary Statement Example

Data Source	Summary Statement
Observer Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample Demographics • Indicator Results <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was just one observer for this workshop. The observer was male, White, and had served as an observer for five other workshops. • The observer strongly disagreed (1 out of 5 on a Likert scale, where 5 was “strongly agree”) that the facilitators successfully engaged participants in the Workshop content. When prompted to share perceptions related to how well the facilitators engaged participants, the observer noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>“Facilitators delivered all content in the same way throughout the day.”</i> – <i>“Participants seemed to be somewhat tired or disengaged as the day went on.”</i>
Wrap-Up Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twenty-seven couples participated in the 2022 and 2023 Family reunion workshops, resulting in 54 total participants: 53.7% (n=29) women and 46.3% (n=25) men. Most participants identified as White (42.6%) or African American or Black (24.1%), and 11.1% (n=6) identified as Hispanic. • Seventy-two percent (n=39) of the participants agreed (38.9%, n=21) or strongly agreed (33.3%, n=18) that the Family Reunion Workshops were facilitated well. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Among those who shared follow up comments (25.9%, n=14), nine (64%) expressed interest in different types of learning activities. For example, one participant shared, <i>“I like changing it up and moving around when doing a workshop like this. Makes it more interesting and better for my back.”</i>

Synthesize Evaluation Data

Data synthesis can begin once you have basic summaries of your data. Data synthesis compares data findings from different methods together to look for patterns. Examine the data overlap for patterns of agreement, commonalities, and differences across data sources. Identify which findings are consistent and which findings are contradictory across the different methods if multiple data collection methods were used to answer one evaluation question. Decide if you need more information to fully interpret the findings.

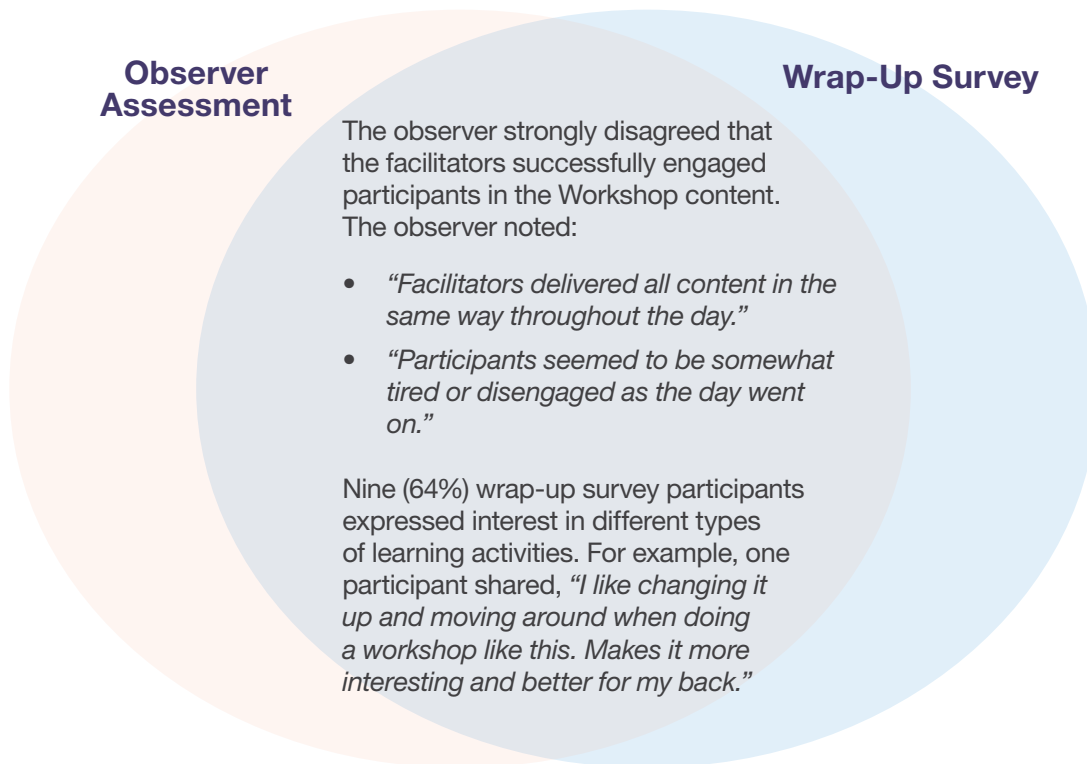


Justify Conclusions



Please see an example of data synthesis below. The [VSPE Workbook](#) also includes two full example evaluations adapted from VSO projects.

Figure 9.2 Team Reconnect Data Synthesis Example



Interpret Evaluation Findings

You will interpret the evaluation findings after completing a synthesis of the data. Interpreting findings is the act of determining the meaning or significance of your data. This process is necessary to answer the evaluation questions, draw conclusions, and develop relevant, actionable recommendations. Engage interest holders to ensure their perspectives are considered during this process.

Considerations to guide the interpretation of your evaluation findings:

- Begin by reflecting on your evaluation questions and interpret data to provide answers for each of them. Document the similarities and differences until a complete picture is available to make conclusions.
- Use a baseline for comparing evaluation findings when available. A baseline is a historical reference or starting point that can be used to draw comparisons. Baseline data are not typically available for formative evaluation findings since the program is in development.
- Consider the context of the program and the organization when interpreting the findings.
- Identify the limitations of your data collection methods and determine how that may have affected your evaluation findings.
- Consider the [Federal Evaluation Standards](#) as you interpret findings and prepare to develop recommendations.



Justify Conclusions



Please see an example of evaluation findings below. The **VSPE Workbook** also includes two full example evaluations adapted from VSO projects.

Figure 9.3: Team Reconnect Evaluation Findings Example

Both the Observer Assessment and the Wrap-Up Survey results indicate that the facilitators could improve their ability to engage participants. The overall participant ratings were fairly good, but the observer rating for engagement was low. The qualitative feedback indicated interest in a variety of learning activities. This finding relates to both of our evaluation questions.

Evaluation Question 1: To what extent was the Family Reunion Workshop delivered as intended across all workshops regardless of facilitators or location?

Findings from the observer assessment and participant Wrap-Up survey indicate that the facilitators were successful in their facilitation of the workshop. Compared to the average engagement score (mean=4.3) for facilitators across workshops, the facilitators for this workshop were less successful with a score of 2. This suggests that these facilitators are not necessarily using the same engagement tactics as other facilitators, and this is an opportunity for improvement.

Evaluation Question 2: To what extent are the Family Reunion participants having a positive experience with the Family Reunion Workshop?

Findings from the participant Wrap-Up survey indicate an overall positive experience with the workshop: 72.2% (n=39) of participants thought the workshop was well facilitated, 80% (n=43) thought the curriculum was easy to follow, 91% (n=49) felt the workshop was beneficial, and 91% (n=49) were satisfied with the workshop. As discussed in Evaluation Question 1, findings from the observer assessment indicate that engagement could be improved, and Wrap-Up survey participant feedback aligned with this.

Develop Recommendations

The next step is to develop relevant, actionable recommendations. [Evaluation recommendations](#) are data-driven suggestions based on what was learned through the program evaluation. Recommendations help guide the next steps for the program, such as how the program should be developed or adapted (formative evaluation) or how the program is working and can be improved (process evaluation). Recommendations also include suggestions for future evaluation opportunities.

Appropriate recommendations help increase the credibility of the program evaluation and build trust among program staff and interest holders. Below are things to keep in mind when developing appropriate recommendations:

- Strive to keep personal [bias](#) away. Remain objective when developing and presenting data-driven recommendations.
- Develop recommendations that align with the values of the organization and interest holders. You can achieve this by continuously engaging them throughout the evaluation process.



Justify Conclusions

- Share draft recommendations to get feedback from interest holders. This process can minimize the effects of any personal bias and ensure your recommendations align with the organization and interest holder values.
- Keep organizational and program context in mind to ensure your recommendations are feasible for the program and partners to act on.
- Present recommendations as options and not as directives. Interest holders may have perspectives different from your own. Leave room for multiple viewpoints.
- Strengthen recommendations by anticipating what concerns may arise based on social and political contexts. For example, if your organization's priorities are changing, your recommendations should account for potential change and reflect this new direction.



Please see an example of evaluation recommendations below. The [VSPE Workbook](#) also includes two full example evaluations adapted from VSO projects.

Figure 9.4: Team Reconnect Evaluation Recommendations Example

Based on these findings, we recommend identifying ways to improve participant engagement.

- Collaborate with workshop managers, facilitators, and partners to identify successful engagement tactics for adult learning.
- Update workshop curriculum and facilitator training based on the best practices identified.

Share your conclusions and actionable recommendations internally and externally using appropriate communication methods. The goal is to ensure that the evaluation findings are understood and that recommendations are acted upon.

Interest Holder Engagement in Justifying Conclusions

Involve interest holders in this process to ensure your interpretation reflects their perspectives and needs. Interest holders can be involved in different ways, such as interpreting evaluation data to determine evaluation findings, reviewing findings, or helping to develop relevant and actionable recommendations. Involving your interest holders builds trust in the process. Your interest holders may become more interested in using the evaluation findings, sharing lessons learned, and acting on recommendations.



Use Worksheet 8: Justify Conclusions and see Case Examples from Team Reconnect and Olivetown for Vets in the [VSPE Workbook](#) to ensure your program evaluation data are appropriately interpreted to develop relevant, actionable recommendations.



X. Develop a Communication and Dissemination Plan

PURPOSE: A communication and dissemination plan shares your evaluation findings and lessons learned with interest holders and relevant audiences. Your plan should include key messages from your evaluation findings and define the communication products and dissemination channels you will use to share those messages. This will ensure your intended audiences receive and hopefully use the evaluation findings.

THIS SECTION WILL HELP YOU:

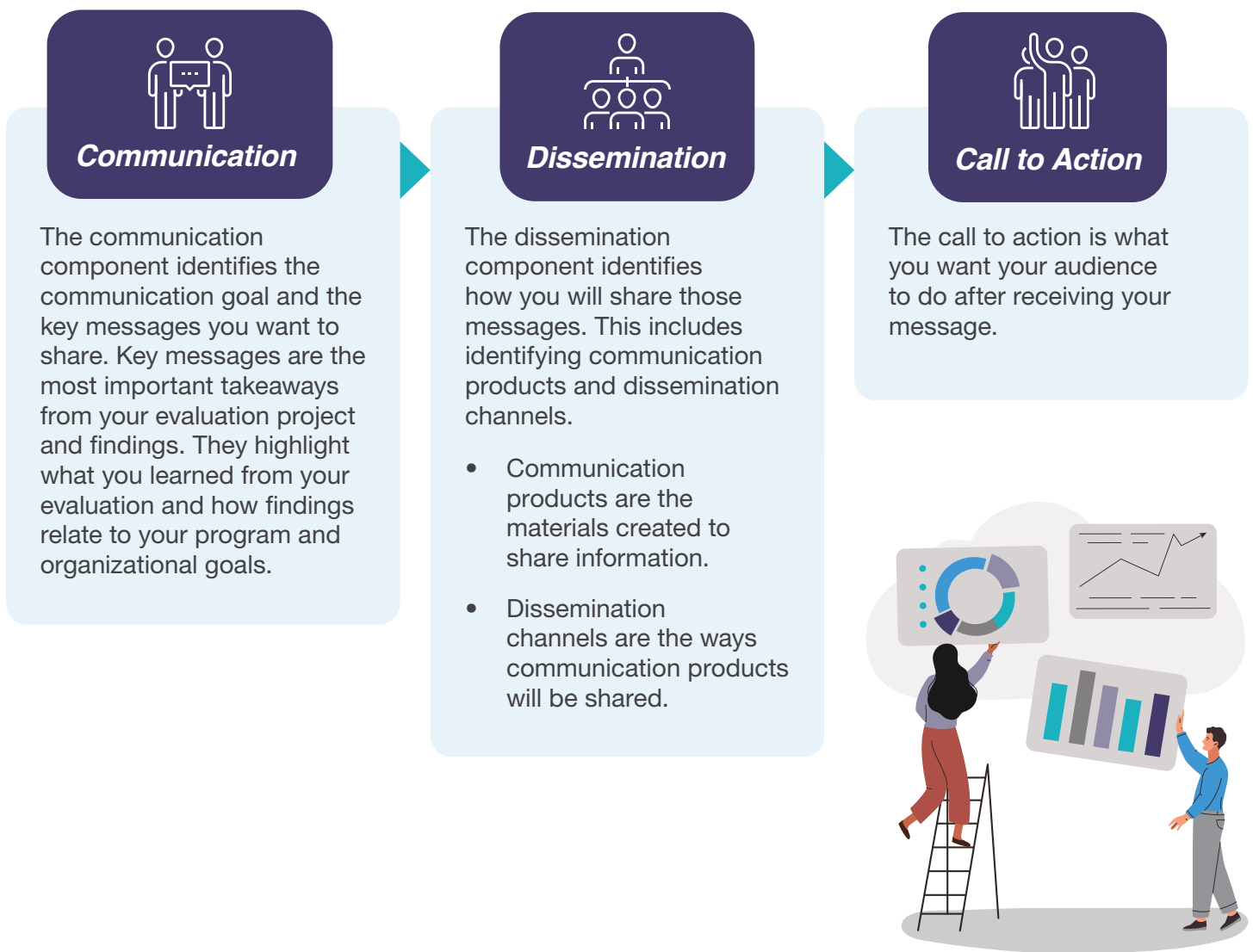
- Identify goal(s) for the communication and dissemination plan.
- Identify key messages for your interest holders.
- Draft key messages related to the evaluation project and findings.
- Select appropriate channels to communicate key messages to your interest holders.
- Develop a communication and dissemination plan for this evaluation.

Develop a Communication and Dissemination Plan

What is a Communication and Dissemination Plan?

A communication and dissemination plan includes the key messages that will be communicated to interest holders, how those messages will be communicated, when they will be communicated, and what actions you expect people to take. You can develop a communication and dissemination plan with support from with individuals who work on communications or marketing for your organization. You can also include other interest holder perspectives to complete this activity.

Communication and dissemination plans have three main components: communication, dissemination, and the call to action.



Develop a Communication and Dissemination Plan

To develop a communication and dissemination plan do the following:

Determine the Audience(s)

Identify audiences for your communication strategy. You can use your completed Worksheet 1: Develop an Evaluation Engagement Plan to review your project interest holders and prioritize audiences who need to receive information about your evaluation. A detailed communication plan will include multiple audiences. A best practice is to share findings with those who supported the implementation of the evaluation and those who provided data for the evaluation. You may also want to share your findings with new audiences or interest holders. For example, you can use evaluation findings to attract new funders for your program. Consider what new potential interest holders need to know about your program and project. It is important to think about how each audience can use your evaluation findings for their own needs and to support the program's goals.

Develop Key Messages

You can use the recommendations from the Justifying Conclusions worksheet to help develop key messages. Key messages highlight what you learned from your evaluation and how they relate to your program and organizational goals. You can develop key messages from the answers to your evaluation questions and from any evaluation lessons learned. Be transparent about your findings. Key messages can include both positive findings and less favorable findings. Evaluation findings are valuable and identify where to focus your attention next.

Determine Communication Products

Consider your audiences and key messages to determine which communication products to develop. Communication products may not be the same for each audience. For example, the level of detail you provide to an internal staff person (detailed) may differ from what you provide to a board member (higher level with less detail). Identify and include what action(s) you expect each audience to take after receiving your message.

Communication products should be consistent in their messaging and not contradict one another. It is possible to have similar products for audiences, but always tailor your messages and format to your specific audience.

Factors to consider include literacy level, level of detail to include, graphics, and length. Table 10.1 includes examples of communication products and how they can be used to communicate with different audiences. Please note this is not a comprehensive list and may vary based on your organization's current communication practices with these audiences.

Select Dissemination Channels

Dissemination channels are ways to share communication products with audiences. Consider the type of communication and the audience to determine the appropriate dissemination channels. For example, you can use social media to share information with community members. However, you might choose an email newsletter to share information with your organization's board. Use dissemination channels that already exist within your organization before creating new ones.

Plan to Implement the Communication and Dissemination Activities

Implementation planning includes communication products, dissemination channels, implementation activities to develop and share products, time frame, and who is responsible for these actions. An [implementation plan](#) can help clarify the roles and responsibilities of team members who will have the [capacity](#) to support the plan. You may have an internal communications team at your organization that can help with implementation. You can have other team members implement some of the communication and dissemination activities if you do not have internal communication support.



Develop a Communication and Dissemination Plan

Table 10.1. Types of Communication Products and Audiences

Types of Products	Appropriate Interest Holder Audiences
<p>Reports Two common types of reports include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation reports provide detailed information about the purpose, methods, findings, and lessons learned from the evaluation. • Annual reports provide information about your organization for the previous year. These documents are typically used to continue engagement with funders and others interested in your organization. 	<p>You can share reports with a variety of audiences, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational decision-makers and leadership • Internal staff • Funders • Collaborators/partners • Community members. <p>Some audiences do not have time to read a lengthy report and will prefer a briefer product.</p>
<p>Project Summary/ Executive Summary A project or <i>executive summary</i> is a one-to-two-page document that provides a high-level overview of the evaluation project, including the purpose, methods, findings, and lessons learned from the evaluation.</p>	<p>You can share a <i>project summary</i> or executive summary with multiple interest holder audiences, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational decision-makers and leadership • Internal staff • Funders • Collaborators/partners • Community members. <p>You can share the more detailed report if someone wants additional information.</p>
<p>One-pager/Flyer A one-pager or flyer is a one-page document that provides a high-level overview of the project and findings. It will typically have visual images and accompanying text.</p>	<p>You can share a one-pager or flyer with a variety of audiences who want brief or high-level information. Appropriate audiences include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal staff • Community members • Funders • Program participants/future participants • Collaborators/partners • The general public.
<p>Infographic An infographic is primarily a visual document that uses images (photos or other graphics) to illustrate data and evaluation findings. There may be one or two sentences to explain each data visualization. This is not a text-heavy document.</p>	<p>You can share infographics with multiple audiences who want brief or high-level information without a lot of background on the project. Appropriate audiences include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual/corporate donors • Program participants/future participants • Collaborators/partners • The general public • Community members.


Develop a Communication and Dissemination Plan

Table 10.1. Types of Communication Products and Audiences - Continued

Types of Products	Appropriate Interest Holder Audiences
<p>Data Dashboard A data dashboard is a tool for tracking, analyzing, and displaying data. Some dashboards can be updated automatically to track real-time data. Programs like Salesforce or Power BI can develop data dashboards.</p>	<p>Data dashboards are often used as an internal <u>monitoring</u> and management tool for the organization or program. Evaluation data can be integrated into dashboards and can be shared with a variety of audiences, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational decision-makers and leadership • Internal staff.
<p>Blog A blog is a short story written for newsletters or other digital formats. It typically provides a personal story or connection to the main topic.</p>	<p>A blog is an informal communication product. You could share this product with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborators/partners • Funders • Community members • The general public • Program participants/future participants.
<p>Social Media Campaign A social media campaign can include multiple messages, posts, and stories to draw attention and encourage a specific call to action from the audience. You can tailor campaign content for your audience and specific platforms, such as X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, and LinkedIn.</p>	<p>You can share social media campaigns with a variety of audiences, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborators/partners • Funders • Community members • The general public • Program participants/future participants.
<p>Newsletter A newsletter is a timed publication that can include updates from the organization, blogs, articles, or other resources pertinent to the audience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can share this communication product with all audiences.

Interest Holder Engagement in Communication and Dissemination

Involve interest holders in this process to ensure your communication products are appropriate for your interest holders and their needs. Interest holders can be involved in different ways, such as determining which findings or key messages relate to their needs and how best to communicate this information. Involving your interest holders will ensure your communication products are appropriate, accessible, and useful for them. Your interest holders may become more interested in using the evaluation findings, sharing lessons learned, and acting on recommendations.



Use Worksheet 9: Develop a Communication and Dissemination Plan and see Case Examples from Team Reconnect and Olivetown for Vets in the **VSPE Workbook** to guide development of your communication and dissemination plan.



XI. Conclusion

Thank you for using the VSPE Toolkit. We hope this toolkit and the **VSPE Workbook** are helpful for you in your program evaluation efforts.

Visit the **VSPE webpage** or email vspevaluation@cdcfoundation.org for information on the CDC Foundation Veteran Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project.

Glossary of Terms

Accuracy: An evaluation standard that ensures that the evaluation is conducted using best practices for collecting credible evidence to provide a valid reflection of the program and appropriately answer the evaluation questions.⁴

Activities: The actual events or actions that take place during the program to achieve the expected program results.

Appendix(ces): A section with supplementary materials at the end of a report or document. Appendices in the VSPE Workbook case examples include a logic model, data collection instruments, and other materials supporting the context of the evaluation plan.

Assumptions: Underlying expectations or beliefs that a program and the resources involved will work.⁵

Averages: The statistical summary of a data set in one value.

Baseline data: Initial data collected before the program implementation used to assess the effect of the program and to compare what happens before and after the program has been implemented.⁶

Bias: Any systematic tendency in the collection, analysis, interpretation, publication, or review of data that can lead to conclusions that are systematically different from the truth.⁷ Bias in evaluation occurs when the evaluator's beliefs or expectations influence data collection, analysis, or interpretation.

Capacity: What a person, group, or organization can achieve or do; what something, such as a program, can manage.⁸

CDC Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health: A CDC model that guides public health professionals in their use of program evaluation. It is a practical, nonprescriptive tool designed to summarize and organize essential elements of program evaluation.

Closed-Ended Questions: Questions with a limited set of responses, such as multiple choice, binary choice like yes/no or true/ false, or rating on a scale.

Code: A one- to two-word label to help identify themes in qualitative data.

Codebook: List of codes, code definitions, and when or when not to apply them within a set of qualitative data.

Collaborators: Those who actively support or are involved in the program or evaluation.

Communication Products: Materials created to share information with others.

Community Integration Model: A service model that serves as a one-stop shop to connect and refer veterans to additional appropriate wrap-around services and supports. This model intends to remove barriers for veterans to access relevant resources.

Community Members: Those who are part of the community which the program intends to serve.

Conclusions: Evaluation conclusions are justified when they are backed by evidence (credible data) and interpreted through interest holders' values.⁹ Conclusions become justified when analyzed and synthesized findings (evidence) are interpreted through in the program context and interest holder values.

Connectedness Model: A service model focused on increasing veteran connectedness to other people, including to other veterans, family, friends, and the community.

Contextual Factors: Any internal or external factors of the program that can interact with and influence the program or intervention, such as environmental, social, or political.

Glossary of Terms

Continuous Quality Improvement: Applying what you have learned as you evaluate to further improve your program.¹⁰

Data: Qualitative or quantitative information that helps answer research and evaluation questions.

Data Cleaning: Correcting errors to prepare data for analysis.

Data Collection: Systematic gathering of information to answer evaluation or research questions.

Data Collection Instruments: Tools to collect data, such as surveys, interview guides, focus group discussion guides, and observation tools.

Data Collection Method: The way credible information is collected. For program evaluation, data collection can include methods such as literature reviews, document reviews, interviews, observations, surveys, expert opinion, and case studies.¹¹

Data Management: Safely storing, transferring, and managing data.

Data Sources: Location where data (needed information) can be gathered from.

Data Synthesis: Bringing together results and examining the findings for patterns of agreement, convergence, divergence, or discrepancy.¹²

Data Visualization: A method of displaying data and findings visually.

Decision Makers: People with the power and influence to decide on aspects of the program.

De-identify: Removing or obscuring information that could reveal a data collection participant's identity.

Descriptive Analysis: A type of analysis that helps describe or summarize the data and simple patterns within the data. Examples of descriptive analysis may include counts, percentages, and averages.

Dissemination: A method of sharing information with others.

Dissemination Channels: The ways in which information or communication products will be shared. For example, through email listserv, social media, or presented in person.

Document Review: The act of obtaining data from documents such as records or reports, recordings, and videos.

Ethical: Regarding the rights and interests of those involved and affected.

Evaluation Findings: Conclusions drawn from analyzing and interpreting evaluation data.

Evaluation Focus: The specific program areas you intend to evaluate for an evaluation project.

Evaluation Methods: An approach to carrying out necessary evaluation activities, including partner engagement, data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Evaluation Plan: A written document describing the overall approach to guide an evaluation. This includes what will be done, how it will be done, who will do it, when it will be done, why the evaluation is being conducted, and how the findings will likely be used.⁴

Evaluation Purpose: The overall intent of the evaluation.

Evaluation Questions: Overarching questions that guide evaluators to collect credible, reliable, and useful information to fulfill the purpose of the evaluation.

Evaluation Recommendations: Data-driven suggestions based on what was learned through the program evaluation.

Glossary of Terms

Executive Summary: A nontechnical summary statement designed to provide a quick overview of the full-length report.⁴

External Data: Data collected outside your organization, such as vital statistics records, law enforcement data, and census data.

Facilitator Bias: The influence of the focus group facilitator on the data collected from participants. This may result from several factors, including the physical and psychological characteristics of the facilitator, which may affect the participants and cause differential responses among them.

Federal Evaluation Standards: U.S. Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) standards for program evaluation. These include relevance and utility, rigor, independence and objectivity, transparency, and ethics.

Focus Group: A group of people engaged by a trained facilitator in a group discussion designed for sharing insights, ideas, and observations on a topic of concern.⁴

Formative Evaluation: A type of evaluation conducted to inform program planning and adjustments. For example, to understand community needs and how to address those needs appropriately through a program (needs assessment). Formative evaluation can be used before a program exists, during program development, when starting a program, or when identifying improvements for a program.

Formative Indicators: Measurable information to help you understand community and program needs and how best to address them.

Frequencies/counts: A statistical calculation describing how often a specific event or observation occurs.

Funders: People or organizations directly investing money in the organization, program, or activities,

such as federal agencies, foundations, or private donors.

Hawthorne Effect: This occurs when the mere fact that people are being observed makes them behave differently.¹⁴

Implementation Plan: Document to help coordinate responsibilities for carrying out activities.

Implementation Stage: Program status where a program and its activities are already happening.

Implementers/Program Staff: Those directly involved in the organization's implementation and operations.

Incentives: Rewards given to encourage participation, such as snacks or gift cards.

Indicators: Measurable information used to determine if a program is being implemented as expected and achieving its outcomes.¹⁵

Inputs: Necessary resources that go into a program to implement the activities successfully. Inputs include people, equipment, facilities, and other things used to plan, implement, and evaluate programs.⁴

Interest Holder: Persons or organizations with an investment in the evaluation, such as those served or affected by the program, those planning or implementing the program, those who might use the evaluation findings, and those who are skeptical about the program.

Interest Holder Engagement: The process of reaching out and inviting relevant interest holders to participate in program or evaluation activities.

Interest Holder Identification: Process of identifying which people, groups, and organizations have an interest in the program or evaluation.

Glossary of Terms

Internal Program Data: Data already collected for program purposes, such as attendance logs and program documents.

Interview Guide: A document that lists the issues or specific questions to be raised during an interview.⁴

Interviewer Bias: The influence of the interviewer on the interviewee. This may result from several factors, including the physical and psychological characteristics of the interviewer, which may affect the interviewees and cause differential responses among them.⁴

Key Messages: The most important takeaways from your evaluation project and findings.

Lessons Learned: Valuable knowledge or understanding gained from the experience of conducting the evaluation.

Literature Review: A data collection method that involves identifying and examining research reports, published papers, and books.⁴

Logic Model: A visual representation of how your program is intended to work, including the relationships among the resources you have to operate the program, the activities you plan to do, and the changes or results you hope to achieve.⁵

Long-term Outcomes: Desired results or effects of program implementation. These activities can take several years (generally more than three) to achieve and observe, and timeframes for expected outcomes can vary between programs.

Mid-term Outcomes: Mid-term outcomes are the results or effects that can be expected before long-term outcomes but which take more time to achieve and observe than short term outcomes. Examples of mid-term outcomes include increased participant use of knowledge, skills, and abilities gained from training, increased veteran connection with resources, and change in behavior, such as

increased exercise or change in mental health practices.

Mission Statement: Statement of how an organization or program will achieve its intended vision.

Mixed Method Approach: Data collection and analytical approach that uses both qualitative and quantitative data.

Monitoring: A systematic process of gathering and studying data to evaluate the performance and gain early insights into a project, program, or policy in question.

Morbidity: The state of being ill or diseased. Morbidity is a disease or condition that alters health and quality of life. Note: In public health, the terms “morbidity” and “disease” are not limited to just medical conditions but also span other public health challenges, such as suicide. Examples of suicide morbidity include suicidal ideation, self-harm, and suicide attempts.

Mortality: Death. Usually, the cause (a specific disease, a condition, or an injury) is stated.

Multi-Barreled: Having two or more dimensions. A multi-barreled question asks two questions within one. For example, “How helpful were the in-person training and the take-home materials?” This question asks about in-person training and take-home materials, which can confuse the respondent and result in low-quality data.

Needs Assessment: A type of formative evaluation to identify and determine the existing assets and needs, or gaps, between the current status and the desired outcomes of a program.

Observer Bias: A type of bias occurring when researchers’ or observers’ expectations, opinions, or prejudices influence what they perceive or record in a study. It often affects studies where observers know

Glossary of Terms

the research aims or hypotheses.¹⁶

Open-Ended Questions: Questions with space to share thoughts and opinions in an open-text or oral format.

Outcomes: Desired results of the program—what you achieve through your program or intervention.⁴

Outcome Evaluation: A type of evaluation conducted to assess if the intended short-term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes are being achieved. The outcomes of the evaluation focus will depend on the program's stage of development. For example, a program in year two may be prepared to assess mid-term outcomes but not long-term outcomes. Programs in the planning or implementation phase are not likely ready for outcome evaluation. Outcome evaluations may focus on benefits, such as changes in participants' knowledge and skills, risk or protective behaviors, and changes in morbidity and mortality.

Outcome Indicators: Measurable information used to assess whether the program achieves the expected effects or changes in the short-, mid-, and long-term.

Outputs: The direct products of program activities and the immediate measures of the program's actions.⁴ For example, the number of training sessions conducted, and the number of participants trained.

Partners: Those who actively support or are involved in the program or evaluation.

Planning Stage: Program status where a program and its activities are still being determined or are in development.

Pre- and Post-Tests: A method of collecting information before and after an activity to assess change among participants. For example, pre- and post-tests can assess skills before and after a training that is intended to increase specific skills.

Primary Data: Data that does not already exist but needs to be collected by an evaluation team specifically for the evaluation study.⁴

Primary Intended Users: People who are most positioned to use the evaluation findings for decision-making.

Probes: Follow-up questions that ask the participant to provide additional information about their previous response in qualitative data collection. It is usually used when participants' responses are vague or the interviewee wants more specific and in-depth information.

Process Evaluation: A type of evaluation conducted to understand how a program is implemented and operates and if it is happening as intended.

Process Indicators: Measurable information used to help you understand how well program activities are being implemented and identify opportunities for improvement.

Program Components: Crucial parts of a program, including inputs, program activities, outputs, short-term outcomes, mid-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes.

Program Description: A narrative explaining how your program is intended to work, including the relationships among the resources you have to operate the program, the activities you plan to do, and the changes or results you hope to achieve. This narrative goes with the program logic model.

Program Evaluation: A systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using data to assess program implementation, make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, or inform decisions about future program development.⁴

Program Goal: Statements of long-term program outcomes that align with the organization or program mission.

Glossary of Terms

Program Participants: Those who are served or directly affected by the program or organization.

Project Summary: A one-to-two-page document that provides a high-level overview of the evaluation project, including the purpose, methods, findings, and lessons learned from the evaluation.

Protective Factors: Factors that decrease the risk for outcomes, like suicide, before someone might be in crisis or in need of intervention. For example, protective factors for suicide include effective coping and problem-solving skills, support from partners, friends, and family, and reduced access to lethal means among people at risk.

Qualitative Coding: Applying codes (labels) to your qualitative data.

Qualitative Data: Non-numerical textual information such as testimonials, descriptions, and observations.

Quantitative Data: Number-based information such as counts, scales, or data categorized based on what is being measured.

Redact: Removal of content that should not be included.

Risk Factors: Factors that increase the risk for outcomes, like suicide, before someone might be in crisis or in need of intervention. For example, risk factors for suicide include lack of access to services and resources, a sense of hopelessness, and social isolation.

Sample: A group representing a larger population that participates in data collection.

Secondary Data: Existing data initially gathered for another purpose but can be used for your evaluation. Secondary data sources can exist within (internal) or outside (external) your organization.

Semi-structured Interviews: A method of qualitative data collection guided by a document (interview guide) that can be used flexibly to raise issues or

specific questions during an interview.

Short-term Outcomes: Short-term outcomes are the results or effects of the activities that can be measured immediately or within a short timeframe of activity completion. Examples of short term outcomes include increased participant knowledge, skills, and abilities gained from training.

SMART: An acronym that stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. This acronym is usually used to set the goals and objectives of a project, program, or practice. This is also used to develop strong evaluation indicators.

Stage of Development: Describes the status of a program. For example, if a program is in the planning or implementation stage.

Stakeholders: Term that refers to individuals or organizations with vested interests in the evaluation process. This includes those directly impacted by the program, involved in its planning and execution, potential users of the evaluation findings, and skeptics of the program. However, due to negative and harmful historical associations in some contexts, the term “interest holders” is increasingly favored as a replacement.

Statistical Analysis: The manipulation of numerical or categorical data to make predictions, draw conclusions about relationships among variables, or generalize results.⁴

Statistical Test: A method to determine whether the available data supports a hypothesis or assumption. This method enables researchers and evaluators to make data-informed statements about the likelihood of certain population characteristics or patterns.

Structured Interviews: A method of qualitative data collection guided by a document (interview guide) where questions must be asked in a specific way.

Survey: A method of collecting data using structured questions by phone, internet, mail, or face-to-face.

Glossary of Terms

Systematic: Following specific methods to do something.

Thematic Analysis: A method of systematically examining qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, to identify patterns.

Themes: Higher level concepts and ideas that appear repeatedly throughout analyzed qualitative data.

Theory of Change: A rationale for the expected links between program resources, activities, and outcomes. It explains how and why activities are expected to lead to outcomes in a particular order.⁶

Upstream Suicide Prevention Approach: An approach focused on preventing suicide in the first place by reducing the risk factors and enhancing the protective factors that influence whether a person may become at risk for suicide. The Community Integration Model and Connectedness Model are examples of Upstream Approaches to suicide prevention.

Utility: An evaluation standard that identifies the practical value of conducting the evaluation. This value helps shape the extent to which an evaluation produces and disseminates reports that inform relevant audiences and have a beneficial impact on their work.⁴

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Visit the [VSPE webpage](#) or email vspevaluation@cdcfoundation.org for information on the CDC Foundation Veteran Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project.

