



Chapter 10

Planning a
Focused Inquiry

In addition to analyses of the state required indicators, other project-identified outcomes, and project objectives, local evaluations include a focused inquiry for program improvement. Chapter 10 covers developing a plan to design and conduct the evaluation focused inquiry. Specifically, it presents considerations for:

- choosing the evaluation focus;
- developing project objectives and evaluation questions;
- choosing methods and instruments; and
- developing a timeline.

Earlier chapters examined aspects of participant outcomes and program practices that can guide and inform the evaluation. In practice, a focused inquiry generally addresses one or two aspects at a deeper level, such as:

- exploring reasons for lower or higher than expected indicator results;
- looking more deeply at groups of participants to understand larger patterns;
- finding out more about subgroup services and outcomes;
- gathering multiple perspectives on outcomes;
- supplementing outcomes with more information from schools; and
- gathering longitudinal information.

By focused inquiry we refer to the development of and data collection for key evaluation questions designed for program improvement. The evaluator works with project staff to identify a focus for the inquiry, then takes the lead in shaping the evaluation plan—refining evaluation questions, identifying appropriate methods and instruments, developing a timeline—and carrying out the plan.

In crafting the evaluation plan, the local evaluator draws on his or her evaluation expertise (e.g., informing staff about the trade-offs and consequences of choosing different methods) and facilitation skills (e.g., engaging staff in discussions and decisions about their evaluation). In most instances, the evaluator will have some background knowledge or familiarity with the project. For background on Even Start, the evaluator should consult the Even Start non-regulatory guidance, the Even Start statute, the project's previous evaluation report, and any state Even Start guidance.

Choosing the Evaluation Focus

Sources for identifying the focus include findings from a previous evaluation report (e.g., the average number of home visits is less than intended), changes in participation outcome data (e.g., results were lower than expected and there is no obvious reason why), current issues raised by staff (e.g., levels of reading skills differ by site), and concerns raised by collaborators or stakeholders (e.g., adult participants attend irregularly).

A project's objectives can be another source of focus. Each project has its own objectives, as stated in its approved application or RFP. These objectives are generally based on the Even Start program purposes (Section 1231 [20 U.S.C. 6381] Statement of Purpose) and on the 15 program elements as stated in the federal law (Section 1235 [20 U.S.C. 6381d] Program Elements). A review of progress in meeting the objectives can suggest an area of concentration for the focused inquiry, for example, *Are families staying in long enough to achieve learning outcomes?*

The local evaluator usually leads discussions with project staff to identify an area or areas for the focused inquiry. This discussion can take place at a staff meeting, a special meeting for focusing on evaluation (e.g., a yearly retreat), or with the project's advisory committee. Broad questions such as, *What questions do you have about the program?* can be too vague for staff to answer. More specific questions, such as, *What learning activities worked well for you this past year? What didn't?* are more useful. They may generate discussion about specific areas of concern.

The local evaluator should involve all project partners, if possible, in deciding the evaluation focus and manner of collecting data. The evaluator also may want to involve collaborating agencies in data collection. The more he or she can engage project staff, partnership members, and collaborators in decisions about the evaluation focus and the evaluation process itself, the more likely the findings will be understood and used.

Evaluations of new projects tend to focus on operations and ways to get the project started, such as *strategies for building collaborations*. As the project grows, other concerns arise, such as questions about the effects of program strategies on participant outcomes. Regardless of a program's development stage, the evaluator must keep the focus on improving services to maximize children's and adults' achievements.

If there are several ideas for the evaluation focus, the evaluator and project staff need to decide what is most important and useful to address in the coming year. The evaluator can lead this discussion to choose which questions are essential and which are less so.

Selecting an evaluation focus based on past performance indicator data. Based on past data, project staff may choose to pilot a solution or collect more information about possible solutions. One will be the focus of the evaluation. Examples of choices include:

- Performance indicator data showed that only 14% of parents took the TABE post-test. Further examination showed that the hours offered were insufficient to meet requirements. As a result, project staff used new strategies to increase the number of available hours. The next evaluation can focus on how the new initiatives are working.

Example: Engaging Collaborators

As her first step as an evaluator, Marilyn Muñoz forms an Evaluation Advisory Committee. It includes the project leader, partner agencies and organizations, primary collaborators, staff representatives, and other key players. At the first meeting she introduces evaluation as a way to learn about the project. She leads the discussion by asking questions such as What works well and what doesn't? What are the project's strengths and weaknesses? Where do we need to go back to the drawing board and reconsider? She uses the responses to determine the subject of the focused inquiry and evaluation questions.

Example: First-Year Focus

One evaluator encourages staff to focus the first-year evaluation on collaboration. In addition to child and adult education outcomes, the evaluation addresses getting services running, staff development and training, recruitment, establishing regular communications, etc. Her first-year evaluation also addresses benefits and barriers for collaborators. As a result, collaborators have become more involved with the project during its start-up and have taken an active role in recruiting and serving families.

- Analysis of adult reading achievement showed that adults who do not make progress on the TABE post-test enter Even Start at lower levels than adults who make gains on the TABE. Project staff members try a new strategy: family educators provide adult tutoring or instructional support during home visits to parents who scored low on the TABE pre-test. The next evaluation can focus on the effectiveness of this new strategy.
- Analysis of school age student performance indicators reveals an increase in school attendance but no increase in reading skills, despite the provision of after-school services. Project staff decide to enhance the after-school services, including additional parent-child interactive literacy activity time. The evaluation would concentrate on appropriate activities and their effects on children who are not meeting grade level expectations.

Developing Project Objectives and Evaluation Questions

Identifying objectives. Projects may identify further objectives to help meet performance indicator expectations or other education outcomes. These objectives are in addition to those stated in the approved application or RFP, and may or may not dovetail with the focused inquiry. They also may change every year.

Evaluators can help program staff identify or refine clear and reachable objectives. Some objectives may be connected to education outcomes. For example:

- By October 30, approximately 75% of participating families will demonstrate changes in their parenting and use appropriate literacy strategies to help their children make educational progress.
- By the end of the program year all parents will be surveyed about advocating for their children in school, e.g., their knowledge of parents' rights and responsibilities in the school system.
- By spring, a minimum of 50% of participating adults will show progress toward attaining one or more of their adult education goals.

Other objectives may pertain to project operations, such as

- All staff who provide direct services to families will participate in an average of five hours of general and individual professional development per month.
- Where appropriate, family members, family literacy staff, and other agencies will be involved in setting goals.
- At least 60% of families will remain in the Even Start project for at least one year.

Evaluators can help develop other objectives based on findings from previous evaluations such as recommendations, results from performance indicator data, or staff observations. The evaluator and staff will identify how to measure progress toward each objective. In some cases measuring the objectives will be straightforward; in others, the evaluator may have to ask questions to understand what criteria staff members consider important for achieving their objectives. The evaluator also ensures that there is a means for tracking whether or not the objectives have been met.

Designing evaluation questions for a focused inquiry. Once an evaluation focus has been determined, the next step is to develop relevant evaluation questions. Evaluation questions generally seek information about the value of intended actions or practices. For example, in response to lower than expected findings for children’s reading skills, a project may decide to make strengthening their children’s reading skills part of the parent education curriculum.

General evaluation questions include:

- *How effective is the new focus? What do parents learn? What do they do differently with their children? How do the new skills affect children’s scores on assessments of reading skills? How much do children’s reading scores improve?*
- *Which groups benefit most from the new attention to reading skills? Are parents who are highly engaged in reading to their children more or less likely to apply what they learn?*
- *Under what conditions is the new program element effective?*
- *How satisfied are staff, parents, and collaborators with the new program element?*

In other cases, project staff may decide to collect more information about ongoing practices. Then the evaluator can develop questions that are specific enough to generate usable information from which to develop strategies to strengthen program practices, such as:

- *How does the parenting component affect parents’ interaction with their children’s school?*
- *How does the Even Start project affect parent involvement in the school?*
- *How do oral language development opportunities for Even Start children vary by site?*

Good questions produce answers that can inform decisions. One way to check whether a question will yield useful information is to ask, “*What will the answer or answers tell us about our project? What are possible answers? What will we do if we know. . . ?*” Sometimes one question will be enough, or several questions may be needed.

Another consideration for designing an evaluation question is whether the project administrator and/or staff members can act on an evaluation’s findings. Although a finding may suggest a useful action, the timing may not be right, or authority to act may rest outside the project personnel. For example, findings about the effectiveness of an instructional curriculum may be less useful if staff members can’t influence curriculum decisions. In such cases, the questions could be refined rather than abandoned: the evaluation could address approaches that augment the current curriculum, for example.

Below are suggestions for developing useful evaluation questions⁷:

- Phrase questions so that data can be collected to answer a specific question.
- Allow more than one possible answer to the question; that is, do not use yes or no questions.
- Check that project staff are interested in the questions and care about the answers.
- Confirm that project staff can articulate how they would use the data—ensure that questions are relevant to program operations.

Choosing Methods and Instruments

As the focused inquiry becomes clearer, issues of data collection methods will arise. The evaluator can ask staff members for input on the data collection design and method, e.g., whom to collect data from and what data to collect. Ultimately the local evaluator is responsible for refining the design and identifying the concrete activities. He or she has to make choices about the sample, methods, and instruments.

Sample. The evaluator must identify the appropriate sample. Sample choices are usually limited because the projects are small—the population is often so small the evaluator treats it as the universe, or whole population. Therefore, if the evaluator wants to make inferences or generalizations about the project's population, he or she needs to collect data from all participants, a challenging task. If the evaluator gathers observations from a population subset, he or she should ensure that the subset adequately represents the whole population.

Methods. The evaluator suggests methods for collecting information. Evaluators are encouraged to use relevant comparisons, e.g., similar participants. The Even Start evaluator is not usually in a position to conduct a randomized experimental evaluation study. However, a stronger evaluation will result if the evaluator chooses an appropriate comparison group. Evaluators may use statistical methods to adjust for initial differences between groups.

Comparisons can be made among different groups of participants (e.g., based on attendance hours, entry level scores), among different settings (e.g., observations of the same participants at the home visit and in the classroom), or at different times (e.g., observations of the same participants, in the same settings, at different times).

Evaluators should consider both quantitative and qualitative methods, since the strengths of one can compensate for the weaknesses of the other. Available data sources, such as content analysis of meeting minutes, family portfolios, teachers' observations, etc., can also inform the evaluation. Evaluators should select the most direct methods that provide reliable information, and consider triangulating data from different sources to enhance the dependability of data from small samples.

⁷ From Patton, M.Q., 1997. *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*. 3rd edition. CA: Sage Publications.

Instruments. Because available instruments are usually not specific enough for the project's needs, evaluators sometimes develop protocols to collect data about the local project. These instruments include measures associated with the project's design and implementation as well as participation. The evaluator may develop several instruments to gather information from multiple perspectives, e.g., staff focus group questions, parent surveys, and child interview guides.

Local evaluators may also choose questions from an existing instrument. However, evaluators who adapt existing instruments are encouraged to balance judgments about reliability and validity with the purpose and intended use of the focused inquiry.

Developing a Timeline

The timeline outlines what evaluation activities need to be carried out, by whom, and when. It differs from the Scope of Work and consultant agreement drawn up with the project administrator (see Chapter 9) in containing all the pieces for the focused inquiry, such as identifying the evaluation questions for the inquiry; how, when, and from whom data will be collected; and the timeline for analyzing, interpreting, and reporting the findings. The evaluation timeline also includes analyzing and reporting data the project routinely collects, including participant outcome data, attendance, and other program data. The evaluation timeline is specific enough that staff members know their responsibilities, and broad enough to allow some adjustments in case problems arise. Problems such as delays in getting data from partners, adverse weather conditions, or unexpected staff turnover may arise.

The local evaluator should review the timeline with project staff before finalizing it. During this discussion the evaluator can explain why certain methods were chosen, what trade-offs were made, and probable consequences of the decisions. This discussion may necessitate changes in the evaluation plan timeline. Staff knowledge may influence data collection, e.g., they may have a better sense of parents' and instructors' schedules, or timelines may need to be adjusted in terms of staff commitment.

Reviewing the timeline with staff members allows them to raise questions and concerns about approaches such as a survey versus individual interviews. Throughout these discussions, the evaluator considers alternatives and provides technical advice about the pros and cons of certain decisions. Finally, the evaluator revises the management plan and submits it to the project leader, who makes final decisions about the timeline.

The following page shows an example of an evaluation plan timeline.

Example: Evaluation Plan Timeline

Evaluation Activities	Responsibilities	Timeline
<p><i>Establish evaluation focus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meet to discuss evaluation focus 	<p><i>Evaluator, project staff, collaborators</i></p>	<p><i>Early September</i></p>
<p><i>Develop evaluation questions and suggested design and procedures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - meet with staff to discuss plan - revise plan based on discussion 	<p><i>Evaluator & staff</i></p> <p><i>Evaluator</i></p>	<p><i>End of September</i></p>
<p><i>Data Collection Activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - design and pilot protocols - obtain consent forms if needed - administer pre- and post-tests for state required performance indicators - identify and contact focus group participants - conduct focus groups with program participants - contact teachers for interviews - conduct interviews with teachers - determine how education records will be obtained - collect education records - meet regularly to provide updates 	<p><i>Evaluator</i></p> <p><i>Staff</i></p> <p><i>Staff</i></p> <p><i>Staff & evaluator</i></p> <p><i>Evaluator</i></p> <p><i>Staff</i></p> <p><i>Evaluator</i></p> <p><i>Staff & school collaborators</i></p> <p><i>Staff</i></p> <p><i>Evaluator & staff</i></p>	<p><i>October - February</i></p>
<p><i>Data Analysis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review and verify data - obtain performance indicator data from project - analyze performance & program objective data 	<p><i>Evaluator</i></p> <p><i>Evaluator & staff</i></p> <p><i>Evaluator</i></p>	<p><i>March – April</i></p> <p><i>May</i></p>
<p><i>Data Reporting</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - report & discuss preliminary findings - draft evaluation report - review report - submit final report 	<p><i>Evaluator & staff</i></p> <p><i>Evaluator</i></p> <p><i>Staff</i></p> <p><i>Evaluator</i></p>	<p><i>June</i></p>



Chapter 11

Reporting and Using
Evaluation Findings

Previous chapters of this *Guide* described strategies to help Even Start projects produce useful information for documenting literacy outcomes and improving program practices. The next step is to ensure that the overall evaluation findings are communicated in a manner that encourages Even Start staff and other stakeholders to use them. This chapter covers:

- maximizing the use of evaluation findings;
- the written evaluation report;
- levels of evaluation reporting;
- organization and content of reports;
- enhancing presentations of evaluation findings; and
- reporting data analyses.

Maximizing the Use of Evaluation Findings

Although evaluation is usually just one factor that influences program decisions, the evaluator should ensure that evaluation findings are presented in a way that makes them useful and able to inform decision making. Evaluators should consider the following points in planning for evaluation use:

Audiences. The first step to a useful evaluation is to identify its primary audience. Even Start project staff, partners, key collaborators, and advisory boards responsible for project management and implementation are the primary Even Start audience; they are most likely to act on the evaluation findings (e.g., increase the intensity of a program component, revise curricula, schedule staff development opportunities, improve data collection procedures). Another key information user is the SEA Even Start coordinator, who uses the findings to monitor program progress, make continuation funding decisions, and determine technical assistance and training needs.

Tailored presentation of findings. To maximize their use, evaluators need to tailor their presentation of findings to address what the intended audience wants or needs to know. Different audiences have different information needs and tolerance levels for details. Program staff may be interested in outcome data analyses that explore differences by subgroups or patterns based on program implementation, while state coordinators may simply want to know the percentage of participants who met state performance indicators.

Length of report. Evaluators who present findings without considering the needs or expectations of their audience often present too much information. A key deterrent to using evaluation findings is the mass of material that readers must wade through in order to answer their questions or find information of interest. Because the complete technical report chronicles all evaluation activities and findings, it can be effectively streamlined by including supporting information or additional analyses in appendices. Shorter evaluation progress or interim reports and executive summaries can effectively communicate “need to know” findings to most potential users.

Clear messages. Simplicity and clarity should guide reports of evaluation findings; avoid evaluation jargon and use everyday language. Represent data visually to highlight key findings.

Availability of findings. Timing is everything. Evaluation results that are ready when they are needed are far more likely to be used. Evaluations that address the right issues but arrive “after the fact” may be irrelevant. Evaluators need to balance the thoroughness of their data collection and analysis with the need to deliver accessible findings in a timely manner. “Timely” does not necessarily mean “fast”; rather, it calls on the evaluator to adjust the evaluation schedule so that findings are ready when they will have maximum impact. This may require interim reports or progress memos as needed to inform decisions.

The Written Evaluation Report

Programs should require their independent evaluator to produce a written report of findings and recommendations for improvement. Although there are many options for disseminating evaluation findings, a written report is the most comprehensive format for presenting participant outcomes, answering key evaluation questions, and analyzing data collected from various information sources. Further, a written report has value as a “stand alone” document which serves several important functions:

Accountability. The written report shows evidence of program effectiveness in addressing the state performance indicators and program objectives, and documents compliance with the federal statute. The medium of print formalizes the evaluation and adds credibility and authority to the presentation of evaluation findings.

Historical context. Evaluation reports create a historical record documenting the population served, participant and program accomplishments, and changes in program design over time. This documentation provides an historical perspective and ensures program continuity in cases of staff, evaluator, and/or administrator turnover.

Educating and informing others. The written report promotes understanding. Audiences who are unfamiliar with the Even Start program can use the evaluation report to gain a better understanding of program goals as well as the specifics evaluated e.g., the community context, population profile, program services, and unique features of the Even Start program.

Advocacy and support. By documenting project accomplishments and participant outcomes, the evaluation report is a valuable resource for generating support for Even Start family literacy programs. Evaluation findings can educate policy-makers about the effectiveness of the Even Start model, encourage new collaborations, and enhance program services and operations.

Levels of Evaluation Reporting

The three levels of the written evaluation report are distinguished by the amount and type of information presented, intended audience, and potential use. They are (1) Technical Report, (2) Interim Reports or Progress Memos, and (3) Executive Summary.

The **Technical Report** is the most comprehensive compilation and presentation of information generated by the evaluation. The technical report is often written as an end-of-year report for Even Start programs and is used to meet all of the functions described in the preceding section. Although the technical report is the most informative of all reporting formats, its length and detailed presentation of data tend to limit its audience to the primary users, i.e., Even Start staff and others who implement programs.

Interim Reports or Progress Memos meet the specific information needs of project staff during the course of the project year. Progress reports may also be required by state coordinators and others who monitor program implementation. Interim reports or progress memos are most useful for:

- reporting progress in achieving participant outcomes (e.g., percentage of participants who have achieved project-specified benchmarks related to the state performance indicators at mid-year);
- describing accomplishments and challenges in program operations at a specific time (e.g., number of families served and retention rate, identification of effective strategies to guide staff recruitment efforts); and/or
- presenting findings on a specific area of concern (e.g., results from a parent satisfaction survey on the need to improve program services).

Interim reports or progress memos are typically brief. Depending on the audience and purpose of the report, they can present data formally or informally. Interim reports or progress memos maximize the use of evaluation findings because they have a limited focus and emphasize “need to know” data that are provided while the project is operating and staff or others can take immediate action.

The **Executive Summary** is the short version of the technical report. It communicates essential information about the study’s purpose, design, and key findings without burdening the reader with the complete report. State reporting requirements may specify the length and desired content to be covered. A comprehensive executive summary should contain condensed information from all the major sections of the technical report. It should be written as a stand-alone document that can be included with the technical report or reproduced separately and disseminated as needed.

More focused executive summaries can address an audience’s specific information needs (e.g., state coordinators might request an executive summary of project status with respect to the state performance indicators). Evaluators may need to develop two to three versions of executive summaries, each highlighting the findings of most interest to a given audience.

Organization and Content of Reports

Evaluation findings may be presented in a variety of formats—written reports, oral presentations, and discussions with question/answer interactions. The example below identifies information that may serve the written evaluation report as well as other avenues for reporting Even Start evaluation results. The sample Table of Contents below is followed by more detailed descriptions of information each section of the report could contain. Section headings refer to sections of the sample evaluation report.

Example: Even Start Evaluation Report Table of Contents

I. Program Description

- Program Goals*
- Program Services*
- Partnership Entities and Key Collaborators*
- Participant Profile*
- Staffing*
- Response to Previous Year's Recommendations*

II. Study Design

- State Performance Indicators/Participant Outcomes*
- Project Objectives*
- Evaluation Focus and Key Evaluation Questions*
- Evaluation Design: Data Sources, Sample, and Methods*

III. Evaluation Findings

- Participant Outcomes: State Performance Indicators*
- Other Participant Outcomes*
- Program Participation: Attendance and Retention*
- Findings Related to Key Evaluation Questions*
- Interpretation/Discussion of Findings*

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

- Summary of Findings*
- Progress based on Previous Year's Recommendations*
- Recommendations for Improvements*

Appendices

- Instruments*

Part I: Program Description. Information about a program's goals, services, and characteristics of the participants served is essential for ensuring that all readers understand the context of the program being evaluated. This information also helps the reader interpret the evaluation findings. We recommend that all presentations of evaluation findings begin with a program description (one to two pages in the technical report) or highlights of program features (Executive Summary or PowerPoint presentation). The table on the next page presents key content the program description could include.

Example: Program Description

Program Goals	<i>The CV Even Start Family Literacy program completed its fourth year of operation as a cooperative effort between the Library and its co-applicant, the School District. The Even Start program goal is to improve the educational opportunities of families by 1) helping parents become full partners in the education of their children, 2) assisting children in reaching their full potential as learners, and 3) providing workforce and literacy training for parents.</i>
Program Design	<i>The program design incorporates aspects of both a home-based program and the Kenan Family Trust center-based model. As part of the center-based program design, parents attend adult education classes while their children attend a Head Start preschool program or an enriched childcare program, which is available for children ages birth to 5. Parents also participate in parent education class/support groups and parent-child interactive literacy activities. Families receive instructional support services twice a month during home visits.</i>
Program Services	<i>An intensive year-round program, CV Even Start offers 600 hours of ESL instruction and 300 hours of GED preparation. The Head Start preschool program offers 800 hours of early childhood education. Families may also participate in 150 hours of parenting-related classes or activities over the course of the project year.</i>
Partners & Collaborators	<i>The Library serves as the fiscal agent and provides a variety of services for staff and participants, including free book distribution, individualized tutoring, and small group literacy instruction. The district supports the program by providing facilities, staff training, and early childhood education programs. The co-applicants established a collaborative agreement with the High School District Adult School for adult education services and childcare.</i>
Participant Profile	<i>The project serves low-income, Hispanic families living in the attendance areas of three elementary school schools: VS, LV, and HS. During the 2002-03 school year, the project served a total of 32 families (32 adults and 48 children). Of the families enrolled in the Even Start program, three (7%) received TANF and four adults (10%) were employed. Nearly two-thirds of the families (61%) reported living on an annual income of \$19,999 or less. None of the adults possessed a high school diploma.</i>
Staffing	<i>A full-time family literacy director coordinates the program. The program is staffed by three instructors responsible for developing and delivering the home-based instructional programs. Instructional staff (provided through in-kind contributions) includes ESL/GED instructors (Adult School) and preschool teachers (Head Start). All instructional staff members possess the minimum required qualifications for their positions.</i>
Unique Features	<i>The program is designed to serve the literacy and employment needs of families participating in the Welfare-to-Work program and offers individualized services to accommodate the schedules of working adults.</i>

Part II: Study Design. This section describes the key features of the evaluation plan. It should include information on the study's goals, focus, assessments, and data collection design. The description of the study's design helps the reader determine whether the evaluation was methodologically sound and likely to produce credible findings. This section of the technical report may be brief (3-4 pages) but should include sufficient information to communicate:

- Purpose of the evaluation study (e.g., evaluation goals, target audience and expectations for how the data are to be used, reference to evaluator/agency conducting the study);
- State performance indicators, project objectives, and other participant outcomes (e.g., lists, summaries, or references to participant outcomes that are the focus of the study);
- Focus area(s) of inquiry (e.g., focus area(s) and project-identified evaluation questions to be answered as part of the study); and
- Data collection plan (e.g., assessments used to measure outcomes and gather information related to evaluation questions, sample, methods for data collection).

Part III: Evaluation Findings. The findings section of the evaluation report presents analyses of the data and describes findings on family participation patterns, participant outcomes, and evaluation questions. (Suggestions for analyzing and reporting specific types of data are provided in Chapters 3-7 of this *Guide*.) The findings section is also the appropriate place in the report for the evaluator's comments on the quality of the data and any background information that may help the reader understand issues that may have affected data accuracy or completeness (e.g., due to a late start-up date, the project is reporting pre-/post-test data based on five months of program implementation). See below in this chapter for a discussion of presentation of findings.

Part IV: Conclusion and Recommendations. The final report should close with a conclusion and recommendations for improvement. The conclusion concisely summarizes key findings, answers the key evaluation questions, and draws conclusions about the program's effectiveness in achieving outcomes and state performance indicators. As stated above, evaluators are encouraged to be brief and to present their summary statements clearly and simply. Presentations of evaluation findings should end with a conclusion (one to two pages in the technical report) or summary statements (Executive Summary or PowerPoint presentation). The example on page 106 shows key content the conclusion could present.

Recommendations for Improvement. All Even Start evaluation reports should include recommendations for improvement. They are the formal link between evaluation findings and their use for program improvement by staff and others. Methods for developing recommendations are varied and reflect the extent to which staff and other stakeholder have been involved in the

Example: Recommendation for Improvement

Comparisons of students' mean pre- and post-test CASAS reading scores show little evidence of student growth in reading. The ABE Performance Indicator states that 50% of students will make a three-point post-test gain on the CASAS reading sub-test. Only one student (6%) achieved the performance indicator.

In response to last year's recommendations for improvement, the program increased the number of instructional hours offered in adult education. Currently the class offers 225 hours of instruction; students attended an average of 135 hours (60% attendance rate).

It is recommended that the program increase the intensity of the adult education program offerings to a minimum of 60 hours a month and develop incentives to encourage students to attend more consistently. The adult education teacher may also wish to review the adequacy of the current reading curriculum for adults with learning disabilities and examine lesson plans to ensure that sufficient time is allocated to reading activities.



Example: Conclusion

Project/ Family Summary	<i>The Even Start program has successfully operationalized the four components of family literacy in a home- and center-based program and served a total of 50 families (50 adults and 80 children) during the 2001-2002 school year. These families represent an extremely high need population: average family income is less than \$11,000; fewer than half the adults have completed nine years of schooling; and one-third of the children between birth and age 3 have been diagnosed with severe developmental disabilities.</i>
Attendance/ Retention Summary	<i>The family retention rate for the school year is 75%, including seven adults who achieved their goals and graduated from the program. This highly intensive program provides almost 650 hours of ESL instruction and over 300 hours of parenting-related classes or activities. Most families met the program expectation that they would attend a minimum of 70% or more of the classes offered within each component.</i>
Performance Indicator Status	<i>Findings from the fourth-year evaluation study showed that, with the exception of the indicator related to GED attainment, participants met and exceeded the state performance indicators for adults and children. Of the 10 adults enrolled in GED preparation classes, two (20%) successfully completed their studies. (Indicator specified a 50% completion rate).</i>
Evaluation Question (Focused Inquiry)	<i>The key evaluation question examined the effect of home visits on family participation and retention rates. The study findings indicated that families who received two home visits a month participated at a higher rate and remained in the program longer than families who received only monthly or quarterly visits. Families who received more frequent home visits attended an average of 80% of their class offerings (compared to 65% for families visited monthly). All “two-visit/month” families are still enrolled in the program.</i>

evaluation study. Recommendations may be developed collaboratively by staff and the evaluator, or they may be developed by the evaluator and presented to staff for discussion and modification. Evaluators who involve staff and other stakeholders in developing recommendations ensure maximum ownership of the findings and agreement with any suggested corrective action. Below are qualities that evaluators and project staff should consider in developing their own recommendations for improvement:

- The problem should be well defined and supported by data in the findings section of the report.
- The recommendation should be action-oriented and offer a variety of potential solution strategies.
- Multiyear evaluations should include a progress report on recommendations proposed in previous studies.

Enhancing Presentations of Evaluation Findings

We encourage evaluators to enhance their presentations of findings with visual representations of both quantitative and qualitative data. Tables and figures are effective ways to communicate evaluation findings because pictures of patterns, trends, and relationships help the reader to assimilate information more easily. Visual or graphic forms are also efficient: they can present a considerable amount of data in a limited space. The evaluator should ensure that the visual representations he or she chooses are the most accurate, complete, and effective presentation of the findings. Readers of evaluation reports are cautioned that visual representations, although often pretty and compelling because of their

apparent simplicity, must be used and interpreted with care. The following are general tips for using tables and figures to represent data visually.

- Consider the nature of the findings and select the most effective type of visual (e.g., tables, charts, or graphs) for presenting data.
- Be selective. Don't overload images with information.
- Prepare the reader by describing the purpose of the tables, charts, or graphs.
- Title the visual clearly and label all rows, columns, sections, etc.
- Indicate the number of participants that the data represent.
- Indicate what the scores represent (e.g., standard scores, percentiles) and include a written interpretation of the data.
- Recognize that visuals alone cannot tell the whole story.
- Recognize the limitations of visuals, e.g., over-simplification of data, selective presentation of findings, which can lead to inaccurate conclusions.

Using tables to present data. Tables present numbers or text in rows and columns. Although tables present large quantities of data concisely, they are less valuable for showing trends or illustrating data patterns. Tables are most useful when it is critical that the values are displayed accurately (e.g., differences in pre- and post-test mean scores). For example, in Even Start evaluations, tables can effectively display participant profile data, attendance and retention findings, and results from pre- and post-test assessments. (See sample tables below, in this chapter). To ensure that tables convey all the information necessary for interpreting the data, evaluators are encouraged to include:

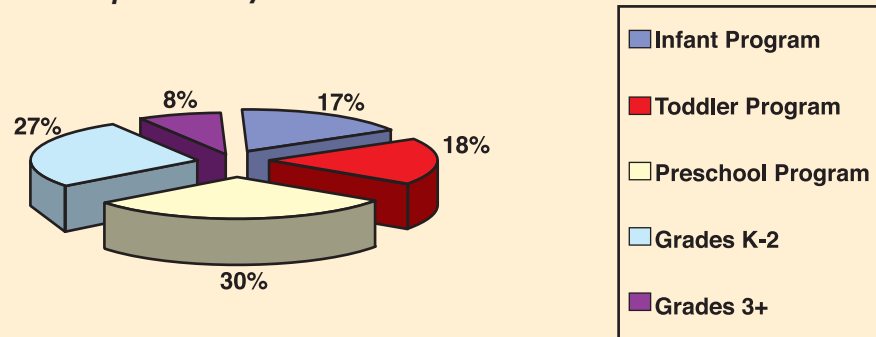
- An introductory paragraph describing the table's purpose and the content covered (e.g., the assessment and interpretation of scores);
- A title that includes all pertinent information (e.g., type of data, comparisons of different groups, time period, assessment used, target group represented, number of participants);
- Labels for each column and row; and
- A concluding paragraph that summarizes the key findings and notes the statistical and practical significance of the findings, where appropriate.

Figures—charts, graphs, or other illustrations—are useful for presenting quantitative or qualitative data visually. Figures are effective because they provide “pictures of the data,” making statistical analyses of complex data quickly and easily understood by all audiences. There are three primary forms of figures that evaluators might include in their evaluation reports.

Pie Charts show 100% of a variable divided into different parts or slices (of a pie). Pie charts can be used to present quantitative or qualitative data and are most useful for showing the relationship of the parts to the whole. Pie charts can effectively present information about participants and program services.

Pie Chart

Enrollment Data: Child Participants in Early Childhood Education Classes



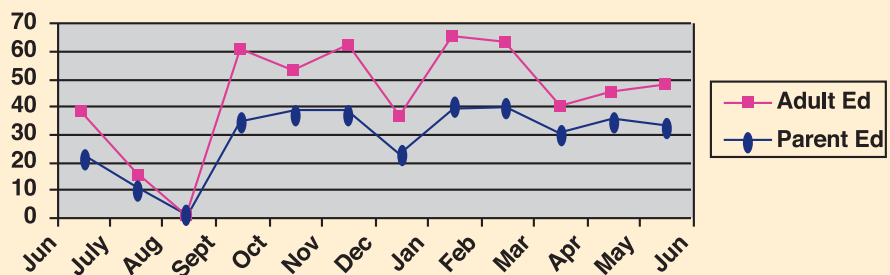
Total Number of Children Served = 78

Bar Graphs use the symbol of a bar to display data and show status at different times, such as participants' reading test scores at pre- and post-testing, or different variables for the same time period (reading, writing, math scores at post-testing). Bar graphs are particularly useful for illustrating achievement of performance indicators and displaying analyses that explore comparisons, patterns, or trends in the data. (See example of a bar graph on page 110.)

Line Graphs convey information plotted on a graph. Line graphs can show results from two or more variables across time and illustrate trends or changes in the data (e.g., participant attendance by program component).

Line Graph

Average Number of Adult Education and Parent Education Hours Attended by Month



Reporting Data Analyses

Reporting participant outcome data. A key purpose of an Even Start evaluation is to show evidence of participant progress in achieving state and other project-identified outcomes. At a minimum, the evaluation report should present analyses of participant outcomes on state performance indicators. The report should offer statistical analyses of assessment results, reference each performance indicator, and include written comments to help the reader interpret the findings.

Example: Participant Outcome Results

ABE Performance Indicator: Fifty percent of adult learners enrolled in Adult Basic Education classes who achieve a pre-test scale score of 211 or higher on the CASAS Reading and Math Tests will demonstrate a three-point post-test gain in each subject area after a minimum of 100 hours of instruction.

The Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) reading and math subtests are administered on a pre- and post-test basis to adults who completed a minimum of 100 hours of ABE instruction over the course of the project year. All enrolled students were administered the CASAS pre-tests (n=30); 70% (n=21) completed the reading post-test and 63% (n=19) completed the math. Table 1 shows participants' mean pre- and post-test scores and the percent that achieved the ABE Performance Indicator.

Table 1
CASAS: Analyses of Matched Pretest/Post-test Scores

Subject	Number	Mean Scaled Score Pretest	Mean Scaled Score Post-test	Mean Difference	Percent Achieving ABE Performance Indicator
Reading	21	237.38	243.85	+6.47*	18 (86%)
Math	19	227.52	231.68	+4.16	12 (63%)

*Difference is statistically significant ($p < .01$)

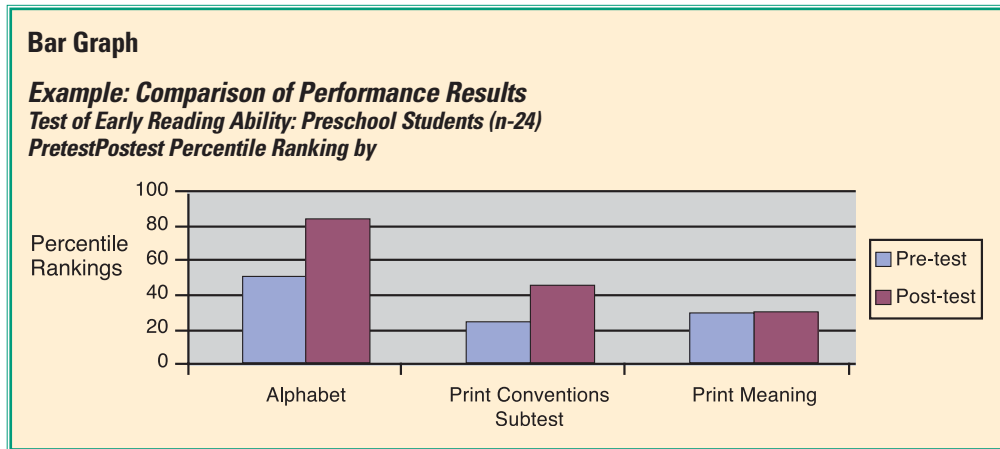
Summary: *The project met and exceeded the ABE Performance Indicator (86% achieved the reading indicator and 62% achieved the math performance indicator). At post-testing, 14 students scored at the highest level of the CASAS reading test (Advanced Adult Secondary) which suggests that they “can comprehend college textbooks and apprenticeship manuals.” The increase in scaled scores from pre- to post-testing is statistically significant, meaning that the difference is not attributable to chance.*

Interpretation of Table: Row 1 – Reading. *Twenty-one participants were pre-tested on the CASAS reading test and then post-tested after a minimum of 100 instructional hours. The pre-test mean (average) scaled score for these participants was 237.38; the mean post-test score was 243.85. The mean post-test score is 6.47 points higher than the mean pre-test score and the difference between scores is statistically significant. Of the 21 participants, 18 or 86%, achieved the performance indicator of a 3-point gain.*

Reporting supplemental analyses of participant outcomes. In addition to presenting data specific to the performance indicators and other project-identified outcomes, evaluators are encouraged to analyze the data further to explore patterns or trends. Suggestions for supplemental analyses include:

- Relating outcomes to each other (e.g., analyzing differences in achievement on literacy/language subtests or other areas of development);
- Relating outcomes to program participation (e.g., analyzing achievement patterns based on contact hours or length of enrollment in program);
- Comparing outcomes to previous year's outcomes (e.g., documenting differences in achievement patterns over time);
- Looking more deeply at individual cases to understand larger patterns (e.g., reviewing family case histories to find trends or patterns influencing achievement or lack of progress); and

- Conducting comparison studies of sub-groups (e.g., participants receiving services from different providers).



Reporting program participation data: attendance and retention. Family participation in program services is a critical variable in achieving participant outcomes. As such, it is helpful to include findings describing participant attendance patterns and retention rates in the evaluation report. This section could include analyses of adult and child attendance data for the key program services offered over the project year, the percent of participants who met the project’s attendance expectations, and annual family retention rates.

Example: Participation Data
Adult Attendance by Component: Median Number of Hours, Range, and Attendance Rate

Program Component	Number of Participants	Median Number of Hours	Range of Hours	Average Attendance Rate*
Adult Education: ESL	33	462	124-717	88%
Parent Education	33	176	77-225	75%

** Project Attendance Policy: Participants attend a minimum of 75% of their classes in each component.*

Example: Participation Data
Number of Families Served: 44
Number of Families Dropped from Program: 16

Reasons why 16 families exited the program prior to attaining their goals.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1) Moved out of the area: | N=6 (6 participants or 37%)* |
| 2) Illness/Mental Health Issues: | N=5 (31%)* |
| 3) Reasons Unknown | N=3 (19%) |
| 4) Poor Attendance | N=2 (13%) |

** During the 2002-03 project year, the program recruited families involved in the court system. These families were not sufficiently stable to participate fully in a family literacy program.*

Reporting findings from a focused inquiry. The findings section of the report should conclude with a presentation and discussion of data that address the key evaluation questions in the focused inquiry for that project year. This section may present more in-depth analyses relating outcome findings to program implementation and/or findings from additional data collection efforts (e.g., survey or interview findings on program implementation concerns, participant perceptions of program services, achievement based on established milestones).

Example: Focused Inquiry Results

Key Evaluation Question: How have parents changed their parenting practices at home to support the development of their children's literacy skills?

In individual interviews with the program evaluator, a randomly selected sample of parents (n=15) offered their perspectives on changes in their parenting behaviors. In response to an open-ended question asking parents to describe if they did anything differently at home after having participated in the program, parents reported that they a) read on a daily basis (n=13), b) visited the library more frequently (n=11); c) engaged in interactive reading behaviors (n=10); and d) helped children with homework (n=8). Selected self-reported changes in parenting behaviors are provided below.

"Now I go to the library and I try to read to my children every night. Before, I didn't read at all."

"I don't watch soap operas anymore. Instead of spending one hour watching TV every night, I spend the time playing word games with my girls. We play together and then read books."

"I read more to my daughter. I ask her questions about the books we read. I never did that before the program. Also, I never helped my older child. Now I do homework with him."





Chapter 12

**The State Coordinator's Role
in Local Evaluations**

This chapter identifies state leadership actions that can influence the quality of evaluations at the local level. It describes five goals for state coordinators:

- establishing and communicating state requirements and policies;
- providing information, training, and support to evaluators;
- training project staff in evaluation concepts;
- reviewing and offering feedback on evaluation plans and reports; and
- using the local evaluation results.

While the other chapters in this *Guide* are targeted to local evaluators and project directors, state-level leaders also create conditions for high quality and useful local evaluations. This chapter encourages state coordinators to review their options for improving local evaluation practice.

The ideas in the *Guide* are relevant to all states—even those with only a few Even Start projects. Some of the ideas may require that the Even Start state coordinator use state-level administrative or technical assistance funds to add the expertise of a state evaluator, such as a staff member skilled in evaluation or an outside contractor, to support local evaluation activities and conduct statewide activities such as summarizing results from local programs. State coordinators may suggest to local projects a single evaluator to conduct many local evaluations. (It is important to remember, however, that local evaluations need to have specific local relevance, including customized information for program improvement.)

A state's ability to implement some strategies may be influenced by the size of the state allocation. Some will need creative solutions such as joining with related state agencies or Even Start coordinators from other states to accomplish improvements. All states should consider acting on these five goals to support high quality local evaluations:

1. Establish and communicate state requirements and policies for local evaluations;
2. Provide information, training, and support to evaluators,
3. Provide training in evaluation concepts to project staff;
4. Review and provide feedback on evaluation plans and reports; and
5. Use the results of local evaluations.

Each goal is discussed below with examples from several states. There are many ways to address each goal, of course, and states will tailor actions to state circumstances.

Establishing and Communicating State Requirements and Policies

Strengthening local evaluation practice begins by clarifying expectations and communicating a vision of local evaluation to program directors and evaluators. Local evaluators and the project staff must know what is expected.

States may elect to formalize evaluation requirements through policies that govern how projects select evaluators and what evaluators are expected to do. For example, a state may govern evaluator qualifications, even providing a list of approved evaluators from which projects select. Or a state may define expected evaluation tasks and the level of compensation. It has become common for states to require evaluators to summarize and report data relevant to state performance indicators. Some states operationalize requirements in the form of report templates that guide data collection and reporting. State coordinators should ensure that projects spend enough resources on evaluation to do an effective job of collecting data for evaluation questions and analyzing outcomes to guide program improvements.

To clarify expectations, state coordinators can:

- define the expected roles of local evaluators in written policy, specifying the intended functions of local evaluation and the minimum expectations for all local evaluations;
- provide information about the range of costs typically required to meet the minimum expectations;
- provide general information about expected evaluator qualifications while not being overly prescriptive;
- allow evaluators flexibility to include evidence for questions that are important to the local context; and
- provide guidance for what information should be reported annually.

The focus of local evaluation should not be narrowed to collecting and reporting only performance indicator data. However, states should define the evaluator's expected role with performance indicators. They should state expectations for quality control associated with data collection for the performance indicators; analyses that go beyond simply summarizing and reporting information; meaningful comparisons of results of performance indicators with other data; and/or identifying recommendations emerging from the indicator results. Monitoring the degree to which local projects comply with legal requirements is not the evaluator's role.

Evaluation vs. Monitoring
Supporting local evaluation is different from monitoring local projects. State coordinators monitor the degree to which local projects comply with legal requirements, report on the state's performance indicators, and fulfill their approved objectives. In such monitoring, the state coordinator may use some of the same tools that evaluators use, e.g., a statewide database to track participant attendance, but the purpose of monitoring differs from that of local evaluation, which is to collect evidence to inform improvements in the local program.



Example: Common Framework of Expectations

One state coordinator worked with a small group of experienced evaluators to develop a framework for local evaluations. The framework specified the evaluator's role in overseeing the summary and reporting of performance indicator data, designing and conducting an annual focused inquiry based on one or more research questions, and making recommendations for program improvement. The coordinator presented the framework to the state's Committee of Practitioners to be approved as Even Start policy, and the framework accompanied the request for new grant proposals and documentation required for continued funding.

Example: Targeted Training Opportunities

One state allots a special day for evaluators in each statewide training conference. Agendas are planned by an evaluation consultant working with local evaluators. Local evaluations are presented as cases, along with sessions on issues of interest, e.g., statewide results, selecting early childhood progress measures, ways to summarize data, importing data into spreadsheets, etc. As a result, evaluators have become colleagues and tap each other's expertise throughout the year.

Providing Information, Training, and Support to Evaluators

Evaluators usually want more information from states about Even Start operations, evaluation expectations, performance indicators, best program practices, and evaluation design options. They appreciate the opportunity to meet with fellow evaluators and learn how others approach data collection. Some states have an annual cycle of evaluator training.

State coordinators should consider the value of:

- providing at least one annual training opportunity for local evaluators;
- providing annual training in the state's required performance indicators and reporting system;
- encouraging evaluators to attend appropriate portions of statewide Even Start meetings (and encouraging projects to include time to do so in their agreements with evaluators);
- including evaluators on project listservs so they can keep up with changes in Even Start;
- offering orientations or mentorships for new evaluators to provide information such as that contained in this *Guide*; and
- presenting evaluators with information about statewide results for comparative purposes.

States cannot provide complete training in basic evaluation methods, but rather demonstrate the application of evaluation methods to Even Start circumstances. State coordinators should engage someone with evaluation expertise to help design and provide training. The person selected should have a neutral perspective and the respect of the state's professional evaluators.

Training Project Staff in Evaluation Concepts

Even Start project leaders may have no prior experience with hiring independent evaluators, developing an evaluation plan, or using the results of evaluations. Lack of knowledge may put them in an awkward position during hiring and may limit their abilities to ask for—and actually receive—what they need from an evaluator. State coordinators are best positioned to provide “consumer” information, but they need to do so before projects have engaged evaluators and evaluators have begun collecting data.

State coordinators should consider providing:

- information about evaluator qualifications in the request for proposals;
- information about evaluation expectations in orientations for new projects;
- this *Guide* or similar materials to all new projects;
- cost guidelines for evaluations;
- any applicable state procurement policies or hiring guidelines;
- sample evaluation agreements with local projects;
- model evaluation reports as well as criteria for determining the quality of evaluations;
- and
- clarifications about the differences between advocacy and evaluation for continuous improvement, and reinforcements of those distinctions at every opportunity.

It is as important to inform local projects about using evaluation findings and their responsibilities in seeking useful information as it is to address the technical aspects of hiring an evaluator. Hosting sessions that evaluators and project staff members attend together can help raise issues associated with working together, although it is also a good idea to allow each group to meet separately. State coordinators should work with projects to change evaluators when the evaluator is not generating useful information and support has been provided to him or her.

Reviewing and Offering Feedback on Evaluation Plans and Reports

State coordinators who read and react to evaluation reports in a timely manner demonstrate the importance of producing quality evaluation reports. The state coordinator's attitude about the value of evaluation will come through in the attention paid to evaluation results—an attitude that can influence the value that local projects place on evaluation. By paying attention to the findings reported by evaluators, state coordinators communicate how much they value the evaluator's independent perspective.

A state coordinator's reviews can have different purposes: looking for evidence of best practices to be shared with other projects; identifying project needs that can be addressed with additional resources or supports; identifying issues that require more information; and/ or identifying strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation approach. Feedback in any of those areas can reinforce the importance of solid local evaluations.

Of course, it may not be possible for the state coordinator to review all evaluation reports personally, but systems can be set up through which all written reports receive some attention and feedback.

Example: Getting Off to a Good Start

In one state, the request for new proposals includes the state's policy on local evaluation and a one-page description of what is expected of the local evaluation during the project's first year of operation. Projects can go to a website for information about Even Start, including examples of local evaluation reports, the state's performance indicator requirements, and last year's statewide indicator results. Numerous directories, including a directory of evaluators, are available online.

Example: Team Review of Reports

Local evaluators work with a team from the state agency to review local evaluation reports. Each report is reviewed by a team of two who follow a protocol for providing written feedback about the quality of the evaluation plan and execution. The teams can review and write feedback on three or four reports each day. One goal is to identify strong models that can be shared throughout the state.



Example: Troubleshooting with All Parties

Based on this year's review of performance indicator data, the state coordinator is concerned about three projects from the standpoint of limited participation by families and disappointing results for families that are reported. The Stoneway Even Start project is one of the three.

The state coordinator has just received Stoneway's annual evaluation report which indicates, among other issues, that none of last year's recommendations were implemented due to staff turnover. On the bright side, the report also describes progress that adults are making on learning skills using a pilot curriculum with its own assessments.

The state coordinator calls Stoneway's director and asks for a meeting that includes the project evaluator, leaders from partner agencies, and lead staff to discuss expectations for the coming year.



The state coordinator might share the review of reports with colleagues in the state agency who work in cooperating programs such as adult education or with independent consultants. Peer reviewers—other local evaluators or project directors—can be ideal reviewers. Peer reviewers should use a structured process and ensure that confidentiality is respected and a spirit of improvement characterizes the review comments.

State coordinators should:

- establish the expectation of receiving an evaluation report from each project at least annually;
- find a way to give some feedback to project leaders and evaluators about all evaluation reports each year;
- consider that the primary function of evaluation reports is an analysis of information that the evaluator has collected for improving the local project;
- periodically share the strongest examples emerging from reviews;
- provide general feedback about the patterns observed in the reviews; and
- develop a strategy for working with evaluators whose work falls short of expectations.

Using the Local Evaluation Results

The state coordinator's use of local evaluation findings conveys the most powerful message about the utility of local evaluations. In some states, coordinators rely on local evaluation reports as the source of data about performance indicator results—automatically elevating the importance of the evaluator's role in contributing to Even Start's effectiveness. In others, state coordinators have found ways to weave the usefulness of local evaluations into a range of operations.

State coordinators should consider:

- including the evaluator in their on-site program visits and incorporating questions from the local evaluation in discussions with project staff about progress;
- acknowledging to the local project director and the evaluator the receipt and review of each year's report;
- including in their policies on local evaluation the expectation that after a project's initial year of operation, each evaluation report will include information about responses to recommendations made in previous years' evaluation reports;
- using the local evaluation as a source of information when determining which programs most need technical assistance;

- sponsoring sessions at state conferences about the results of particular evaluations that are relevant to many programs; and
- incorporating information from local evaluations in statewide reports.

These recommendations may require a change in culture in some states toward a more public and explicit use of local evaluation results to strengthen family literacy programs.

State coordinators who have already taken action in each goal area should share with other states their ideas for improvement strategies, including ways to fund activities. The ideas above may inspire ways to build on existing foundations.

For states that have few strategies in place, implementing ideas from several goal areas should speed the rate of visible improvements in evaluations and programs. Other state coordinators are an important resource and can augment the ideas presented in this chapter.



Glossary

This glossary is intended for the purpose of clarifying items in the *Guide*.

Adult education: One of the four core instructional components that local Even Start projects must provide as part of “family literacy services.” The adult education component provides high-quality, intensive instructional programs in adult literacy or adult basic education, including English language literacy as necessary, that leads to economic self-sufficiency. (Sections 1231(1), 1235(4) and 9101(20), ESEA; 20 U.S.C. 6381, 6381d(4) and 7801(20).) Section 1235(10) of the Even Start statute (20 U.S.C. 6381d(10)) requires adult education services to be based on scientifically based reading research to the extent that research is available.

Attendance patterns: Information about how and when participants attend instructional components, determined by analyzing participant attendance data. Attendance patterns help determine whether participants are attending enough class hours for a long enough time to achieve their program goals.

Attendance rate: A percentage based on the number of hours a participant attended program services out of the total number of instructional hours he or she could attend. Attendance rates help determine whether participants are attending program services consistently.

Bar graph: A graph that uses a bar to display data for variables, including groups over time. The height of the bar shows how many things or people are in a group.

Benchmark: A standard or point of reference (often a milestone related to an outcome).

Collaborator or collaborating agency: As used informally in the Even Start context, a collaborator or collaborating agency or organization generally means an organization, agency, or entity that may provide program services but is not a formal partner in the “eligible entity” partnership that receives the sub-grant from the SEA.

Continuous improvement: The use of evaluation data to make sure that program instruction and services keep improving over time.

Core instructional components: All Even Start programs are required to provide instruction in 1) adult literacy; parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency (*adult literacy or English language instruction*); 2) age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences (*early childhood education*); 3) training for parents to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children (*parenting education*) and 4) interactive parent-child literacy activities.

Criterion-referenced tests: Standards-referenced tests or proficiency tests that measure how well a student performed against a certain criterion or standard.

Curriculum: The sequence of instructional content and skills designed to ensure that students understand and are able to achieve proficiency on standards.

Disaggregation: Separating data into groups by variables (e.g., attendance rate, length of time in program, age, pre-test status) in order to see patterns.

Early childhood education services: One of the four core instructional components that local Even Start projects must provide as part of “family literacy services.” The early childhood education instructional component provides high-quality, intensive, and age-appropriate early childhood educational services to prepare children for success in school and life experiences (Sections 1235(4) and 9101(20), ESEA; 20 U.S.C. 6381d(4) and 7801(20)). Section 1235(10) and (12) of the Even Start statute (20 U.S.C. 6381d(10) and (12)) require early childhood education services to be based on scientifically based reading research to the extent that research is available and to include reading-readiness activities for preschool children based on scientifically based reading research to the extent available, to ensure that children enter school ready to learn to read.

Evaluation question: A clear statement in the form of a question to elicit information that an evaluator and program staff wish to study.

Executive summary: A brief, condensed version of a technical report. Drawing on all major sections of the report, an executive summary may be a stand-alone document, either included in front of the technical report or reproduced separately and disseminated as needed.

Expected outcomes: The effects on participants that can be anticipated as a result of full participation in a program that is implemented as intended.

Fidelity: Delivering actual services according to their original design.

Focus group: A group of people who have shared an experience (for example, parents of school age children) and are asked to reflect on that experience through a semi-structured discussion.

Focused inquiry: A systematic exploration of a program interest or concern. The evaluator and program staff develop one or more guiding questions for the inquiry; the evaluator collects and analyzes data.

GPRA indicators: By requirement of the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA), each federal executive agency has established sets of statements of measurable outcomes.

Grade-equivalent or developmental age score: The school grade level or chronological age for which a given score is the estimated median or mean.

Independent evaluation: A program evaluation which uses an independent evaluator (also referred to as an outside evaluator or an external evaluator) to provide an objective and unbiased report of findings for program improvement. The statute requires each local Even Start program to have an independent evaluation.

Independent evaluator: A consultant to the Even Start program, the independent evaluator generally should not be an employee of a partner responsible for administering the Even Start project. An exception would be an employee of a large school district or institution of higher education who may serve as the project evaluator provided that he or she does not work in the department that administers the Even Start program or provides program services.

Instructional approach: The combination of materials and teaching methods or pedagogy that are used to deliver the curriculum.

Instructional opportunity: The number of instructional hours offered during the project year (see program intensity).

Instrument: A measure or protocol designed to capture information from respondents in a systematic way. An instrument can include tests of knowledge or ability, surveys of perceptions, rating scales to assess satisfaction, and so forth.

Interactive literacy activities (ILA): Interactive literacy activities between parents and children (formerly called parent and child activities [PACT]). One of the four core instructional components that local Even Start projects must provide as part of “family literacy services.” The interactive literacy activity (ILA) instructional component provides high-quality, intensive, interactive literacy activities between parents and their children. (Section 1235(4) and 9101(20), ESEA; 20 U.S.C. 6381d(4) and 7801(20).) Section 1235(10) of the Even Start statute (20 U.S.S. 6381d(1) requires instructional components to be based on scientifically based reading research, to the extent that research is available.

Interim report: A periodic report to meet a project’s real-time information needs before a final report is complete. The interim report may 1) report progress toward achievement of participant outcomes, 2) describe accomplishments and challenges in program operations at a specific point, and 3) present findings on a specific area of concern.

Learning milestones: Key achievements that mark progress toward longer term educational outcomes.

Likert scale: A rating scale measuring the strength of agreement with a statement, usually four or five points on a scale represented by a number.

Line graph: A figure that conveys information that is plotted on a graph. A line graph can show results from two or more variables across time.

Mean hours of attendance: The average number of hours of attendance. The mean is obtained by dividing the sum of participants' attendance hours by the total number of participants.

Median attendance rate: The midpoint in a series of numbers of hours that participants attended. Evaluators often analyze median rather than mean hours because the median better reflects the wide **range** of hours attended.

N: The number of people or things in a group that were studied, expressed as N= (e.g., N=15)

Norm-referenced test: Any test for which the scores are compared to the scores of a "norming group" (a representative cross-section of subjects who have taken the same test). Norm-referenced tests show how the test-taker's score compares to the distribution of scores. (For a test-taker at the 50th percentile, it means 49 out of a hundred test-takers would have scored lower than the test-taker.)

Outcome measure: The measure of expected change—usually the difference in scores before and after an intervention or the attainment of particular criteria.

Parenting education: One of the four core instructional components that local Even Start projects must provide as part of "family literacy services." The parenting education instructional component provides high-quality and intensive instructional programs for parents about how to be the primary teacher for and full partners in the education of their children and support their children's educational growth. (Section 1235(4) and 9101(20), ESEA; 20 U.S.C. 6381d(4) and 7801(20).) Section 1235(10) of the Even Start statute (20 U.S.C. 6381d(1) requires instructional components to be based on scientifically based reading research, to the extent that research is available.

Participant attendance: The actual number of hours that a participant attended classes or participated in program services.

Participant learning outcomes: Expected learning results for all participants. These outcomes include state-required performance indicators.

Participation calculations: Measurements of different program variables—program intensity, participant attendance, attendance rate, and length of enrollment. These calculations should be based on instructional activities within the four core Even Start components.

Participation expectations: Program requirements or policies for continued participation. The expectations state, for example, the number of hours of attendance or the percentage of time families are expected to attend program services.

Participation variable: An amount. Program intensity, participant attendance, attendance rate, and length of enrollment are variables in Even Start family participation patterns. The evaluator and program staff analyze variables to understand and explain differences in participants' achievement rates.

Partnership: An eligible entity that may apply for an Even Start subgrant is a partnership between one or more LEAs and one or more other non-profit public or private entities.

Percentile: A number showing how many cases, out of every hundred, fall below the point (score, amount) in question.

Performance indicators: Measurable indicators or standards established by states in response to the requirement to develop program quality indicators in three areas of adult learning achievement and three areas of child learning achievement; also called performance standards, state literacy indicators, or quality indicators.

Pie chart: A round (pie) chart that shows 100% of a variable divided into different parts; used to show the relationship of parts to a whole.

Pre-post testing: Giving the same test before a program intervention, and just after the intervention.

Professional development: As defined in section 9101(34) of the ESEA, specific activities that, among other things, improve and increase teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach, and enable teachers to become highly qualified. Professional development includes activities that are high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher's performance in the classroom, and, activities that advance teacher understanding of effective instructional strategies that are based on scientifically based research. (Section 9101(34), ESEA; 20 U.S.C. 7801(34).)

Program director: The person(s) directly in charge of the local Even Start program; also called program coordinator, program leader, project manager, or program co-coordinator.

Program elements: As used in the Even Start statute, fifteen activities and services that local Even Start programs must provide (Section 1235, ESEA; 20 U.S.C. 6381d). These required program elements include: identifying and recruiting

families most in need of Even Start services; screening and preparing participants for full participation; developing flexible scheduling and support services; offering high-quality, intensive instructional programs in the four core instructional components; meeting specific staff qualifications; training staff; offering home-based instructional services; offering year-round services; coordinating with other programs; delivering instructional programs based on scientifically based reading research; supporting regular attendance and retention; creating reading readiness activities for preschool children based on scientifically based reading research; ensuring continuity of services; providing services to families most in need; and using an independent local evaluation for program improvement.

Program intensity: The total number of hours of instruction the average participant would receive if he or she were enrolled for the entire project year and had a 100% attendance rate.

Program theory: The underlying logic that explains how particular program activities and approaches are intended to produce short- and long-term results.

Qualitative methods: Evaluation approaches that are primarily descriptive and interpretative. Qualitative research typically uses observation, interviews, and document reviews to examine quality, meaning, and context.

Quantitative methods: Evaluation approaches that primarily involve numerical measurements and data analyses by statistical methods.

Range: All the values (amounts, numbers, scores) from lowest to highest; the distance a whole group covers.

Raw score: Basic units of observation; stated as the number correct, the number of errors, or the time for completion.

Relational database: A collection of data items organized as a set of formally-described tables from which data can be reassembled in many different ways without having to reorganize the database tables.

Reliability: A measure of stability, that is, the extent to which results will be the same each time a measure is repeated under the same conditions.

RFP or request for proposal: To be eligible to receive a new subgrant of Even Start funds, an eligible entity must submit an application to the state educational agency (SEA). The application must be in the form and contain or be accompanied by the information required by the SEA, and include specific information required by section 1237 of the Even Start statute. (Section 1237, ESEA; 20 U.S.C. 6381f.) Some states refer to the application as an RFA or request for applications.

Sample: A smaller part of a larger group of people (the whole group is “the universe”). The sample may or may not be chosen by chance. When used as a verb, sample means to choose this smaller group.

Scientifically based reading research (SBRR): Research that (a) applies rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties; and (b) includes research that –

- (i) employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
- (ii) involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;
- (iii) relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations; and
- (iv) has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review. (Sections 1208(6) and 1232(e)(4), ESEA; 20 U.S.C. 6368(6) and 6381a(e)(4).)

Significance: The degree to which a value is greater or smaller than would be expected by chance. Typically, a relationship is considered statistically significant when the probability of obtaining that result by chance is less than 5%.

Stakeholder: Individuals, groups, or organizations with an interest in how well a program functions and/or who have decision-making authority over program funding, implementation, and use of evaluation findings.

Standard score: A type of score derived from the standard deviation and the mean of a distribution of scores. Standard scores are superior to other types of derived scores because they can be added, subtracted, or averaged and facilitate comparisons across tests. Also called scale score.

Standardized: A consistent way of giving, scoring, and/or interpreting tests; the same or similar tasks are given under the same conditions to all students and scored the same way.

State coordinator: The state education official responsible for administering the federal Even Start grant to the state.

Support services: One of the 15 program elements that each local Even Start program must provide when those services are unavailable from other sources and are necessary for an eligible family's participation in Even Start activities. As indicated in the statute, examples of such support services include child care for the period that parents are involved in the Even Start program and transportation for the purpose of enabling parents and their children to participate in the Even Start program. (Section 1235(3)(B) and (C); 20 U.S.C. 6381d(3)(B) and (C).)

Technical report: Typically the end-of-year written report, it is the most informative of all reporting formats. It contains comprehensive analyses of participant outcomes, answers key questions, summarizes all evaluation findings, and presents recommendations for improvement.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): Federal block grant program that provides assistance and work opportunities to needy families by granting states federal funds and flexibility to develop and implement their own welfare programs.

Triangulation: Studying an issue using several different methods (e.g., a survey and focus groups), to determine whether or not results converge.

Universe: The full population in contrast to a sample, or a portion of a population group. An evaluator might give tests to all primary grade students in a district (the universe) rather than sample or select from the primary grade students.

Validity: The measure of how well a scale or test shows what it is supposed to show. There are several types of validity—each (concurrent, content, criterion, predictive) must be evaluated separately.