

USING EVALUATION TO IMPROVE OUR WORK: A RESOURCE GUIDE

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Self-evaluation tools for VHA projects,
programs, and teams

- ◆ The Team Development Measure[®] is useful for identifying ways to improve teamwork
- ◆ The After Action Review is useful for reflecting upon a project during and after its completion
- ◆ Additional resources describe the value of implementation and suggest ways to enhance group effort

Susanne Salem-Schatz, ScD, VA Center for Implementation
Practice and Research Support

Diana Ordin, MD, MPH, VA Office of Quality and Performance

Brian Mittman, PhD, VA Center for Implementation Practice
and Research Support

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS EVALUATION AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

What is evaluation and why do we need it?

Improving our work is our work and VHA staff are continuously striving to improve programs, service, and quality of care for veterans. Evaluation allows us to systematically assess the impact of the changes we make. It is an essential component of a learning organization and use of evaluation tools and techniques is needed throughout VHA, from front-line care delivery to national programs.

Evaluation may answer such questions such as:

- What was the impact of our new program? Did we achieve our aims?
- What were the key barriers and facilitators to accomplishing our goals?
- How effectively did we work together as a team?
- Was our new program cost-effective? What was our return on investment?
- Is it time to retire this program? Does it still add value?

There are two basic types of evaluation:

- *Formative evaluations* are used to guide the ongoing development and evolution of a program or improvement initiative.
- *Summative evaluations* provide information about program effectiveness and impact.

Either of these evaluation approaches may be used with varying scope and complexity, ranging from large, formal, well-funded endeavors by trained specialists using complex statistical methods to a simple structured evaluation conducted by a single team at the end of a meeting or event.

For both formative and summative approaches, regardless of scope or complexity, **evaluation:**

- **Is a planned, purposeful and systematic process, *that***
- **Involves collecting data on work, programs, and organization, *which***
- **Enhances knowledge and decision-making.**

Examples of current program/project evaluation in VHA

Formative evaluation is already embedded into many aspects of our work. For example, the Office of Emergency Management in the Center for Environmental and Occupational Safety and Health (CEOSH)⁴ provides guidance for the After Action Reviews that must be conducted following each real and simulated emergency event. All VAMCs conduct root cause analyses to evaluate problems and prioritize solutions following adverse events. The VHA System-Wide Ongoing Assessment and Review Strategy Program (SOARS)⁵ provides tracer and self-assessment tools and consultation addressing nearly all aspects of medical center operation to facilitate ongoing self-evaluation and improvement.

⁴ http://vaww.ceosh.med.va.gov/ceosh/Guidebooks/EMP2009/2009_EMP.htm, chapter 11

⁵ <http://soars.vssc.med.va.gov/Pages/default.aspx?sdupgwelredir=1>

New programs and initiatives have utilized formal external summative evaluations (e.g., the Office of Systems Redesign and Employee Educational Service’s evaluation of the initial FIX collaboratives⁶ to improve patient flow).⁷

Evaluation is particularly aligned with the work of quality improvement and systems redesign. Improvement initiatives addressing an array of administrative and clinical processes collect data and use cyclical approaches or “small tests of change” (e.g., Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles⁸) for formative evaluation to guide improvements. The Office of Systems Redesign’s *VHA Systems Improvement Framework Guidebook*⁹ provides detailed descriptions of these systematic approaches to change and measurement.

How, why, and when to use this guide

The tools and guidance offered in the *Using Evaluation to Improve Our Work: A Resource Guide* (Resource Guide) are designed to help VHA staff and leaders expand and deepen current evaluation activities. For example, in addition to tracking whether an improvement initiative or program achieves its intended goal, evaluation can be used to determine how well an improvement team is doing the “work of improvement” by answering the following types of questions:

- How effectively is our team working? What could we do to improve our teamwork?
- Were we able to apply the appropriate improvement strategies for our team’s work? What would we need to do this better?
- Did we have sufficient resources and support available to ensure our team’s success? Are the right people involved? What (or who) could help us be even more successful?

At all levels of the organization, evaluation provides an opportunity to reflect on our work and to improve our approaches to team-based problem-solving. Incorporating a practice of ongoing assessment, learning, and improvement into our work is a necessary step on the path to becoming a world-class learning organization.

Ideally, evaluation planning is an intrinsic part of project planning. The tools and links in this Resource Guide can help you plan in advance the types of evaluation you want to embed in your project. The evaluation plan may incorporate activities included in this Resource Guide at the end of a project, at a midpoint, or even in the beginning phases to inform the group’s work.

Finally, program evaluation is distinct from performance appraisal; approaches in this guide are not intended for use in the assessment of groups or individuals for performance reviews.

What is in this guide?

This Resource Guide provides two easy-to-use tools adapted for VHA to support groups interested in evaluating their daily work or special projects. These tools were considered priorities based on input

⁶ The VHA Systems Redesign FIX Collaboratives are based on the concepts presented in “Sirkin H, Stalk G Jr. Fix the process, not the problem. *Harv Bus Rev.* 1990 Jul-Aug;68(4):26-33.”

⁷ For additional information on this evaluation, contact Fabiane Erb Fabiane.Erb@va.gov

⁸ Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle (also known as the Deming or Shewhart Cycle) is shorthand for testing a change by developing a plan to test the change (Plan), carrying out the test (Do), observing and learning from the consequences (Study), and determining what modifications should be made to the test (Act).

⁹ <https://srd.vssc.med.va.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

from key stakeholders at various levels of VHA. The tools, which may be used by any team during all phases of their work, are:

- ***The Team Development Measure*** ^{©10}, which is useful for identifying ways to improve teamwork and tracking team development and
- An ***After Action Review***, which helps teams reflect on their efforts to identify strong practices, facilitators and barriers, and improvement opportunities.

There is also a section containing *links and references to a broader range of evaluation guidance and resources*. *Using Evaluation to Improve our Work: A Resource Guide* will grow over time as additional tools and resources are developed or adapted from existing sources and as users provide feedback.

Whatever approach you take or tools you choose, incorporating systematic evaluation into our work will enhance our ability to provide the best level of service and quality of care to our Veterans.

¹⁰ The Team Development Measure® (TDM) is used with permission from the developer, E. R. (Bill) Mahoney, PhD