



**SENIOR CENTERS:
*DEMONSTRATING
IMPACT &
RELEVANCE***

***CENTERS OF TODAY ... INVESTING IN TOMORROW
SENIOR CENTER STAKEHOLDER FORUM***

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Purpose of Senior Centers

- What do service providers feel is the purpose of senior centers?



Purpose of Senior Centers

According to participants of senior centers nationwide:

- Socialization
- Friendships
- Something to do
- Learning about health
- Learning new things
- Information about services
- Information on health – screenings and workshops



Purpose of Senior Centers

- Community Focal Points
- Provide nutritional, social and health supports
- A gateway to the nation's aging network—connecting older adults to vital community services
- Improve health or maintain good health
- Remain independent - delay institutionalization



Demonstrating impact

In order to demonstrate impact, one needs to document results.

The process of documenting results is known as **Program Outcomes Evaluation**.

What is Program Evaluation?

- Organizations work from their mission to identify overall goals which must be reached to accomplish their mission.
- In nonprofits, the overall goals are realized through the specific programs and services.
- Nonprofit programs are organized methods to provide certain related services to constituents (clients). Programs must be evaluated to decide if the programs are indeed useful to constituents.
- **Program evaluation is carefully collecting information about a program or some aspect of a program in order to make necessary decisions about the program**

Types of Program Evaluation

- **Goal-based** - evaluating the extent to which programs are meeting predetermined goals or objectives.
- **Process-based** - are geared to fully understanding how a program works -- how does it produce the results that it does
- **Outcomes-based** - facilitates your asking if your organization is really doing the right program activities to bring about the outcomes you believe should be achieved through your programs and services.



Why are Program Evaluations helpful?

1. Understand, verify or increase the impact of programs and services on clients.
2. Improve delivery mechanisms to be more efficient and less costly.
3. Identify program strengths and weaknesses to improve the program.
4. Verify that you're doing what you think you're doing.
5. Facilitate management's really thinking about what their program is all about, including its goals, how it meets its goals and how it will know if it has met its goals or not.
6. Produce data or verify results that can be used for public relations, political advocacy, fundraising and promoting services in the community.
7. Produce valid comparisons between programs to decide which should be retained, e.g., in the face of pending budget cuts.
8. Fully examine and describe effective programs for duplication elsewhere.



Why are Program Evaluations popular?

- Shift in government focus from services to tangible results
- The change in focus from outputs to outcomes
- Started at the federal level but has permeated all levels of government – and now private funders as well
- Future funding is dependent on demonstrating impact and “success”



Private Philanthropic Giving in the US

In 2005...

- Contributions from individuals - \$253 billion
- Contributions through bequests - \$29 billion
- Support through Foundations - \$38 billion
- Contributions through corporations - \$12 billion



Demonstrating Impact of a Program

Outcomes of a program with reference to whom?

- Participants
- Community
- Other agencies



Four Levels of Outcomes Evaluation

- reactions and feelings (feelings are often poor indicators that your service made lasting impact)
- learning (enhanced attitudes, perceptions or knowledge)
- changes in skills (applied the learning to enhance behaviors)
- effectiveness (improved performance because of enhanced behaviors)



Evaluation Tools

- Questionnaires/Surveys
- Interviews
- Documentation Review
- Observation
- Focus Group
- Case Studies
- Pre and post tests for specific interventions
- Standardized Instruments (social support, perceived health, depression, life satisfaction, etc.)

Developing an Outcome Evaluation Plan

- Identify one or two major **goals** of your senior center.
- For each goal, there should be several **objectives**.
- For each objective – there should be specific **services or programs** identified.
- For each objective, there should be a specific **outcome (expected impact)**.

Developing an Outcome Evaluation Plan

OBJECTIVES must be:

- S** Specific
- M** Measurable
- A** Assignable
- R** Realistic
- T** Time-limited



Developing an Outcome Evaluation Plan

Once you have identified all your outcomes:

- (i) Decide on a measurement tool (self designed or standardized)
- (ii) Develop a system for collecting data (staff, timelines, etc.)
- (iii) Note challenges in system
- (iv) Collect consistently
- (v) Start crafting a **narrative** – using data



Common Mistakes

- Don't balk at evaluation because it seems far too "scientific." It's not. Usually the first 20% of effort will generate the first 80% of the plan, and this is far better than nothing.
- There is no "perfect" evaluation design. Don't worry about the plan being perfect. It's far more important to do something, than to wait until every last detail has been tested.
- Work hard to include some interviews in your evaluation methods. Questionnaires don't capture "the story," and the story is usually the most powerful depiction of the benefits of your services.
- Don't interview just the successes. You'll learn a great deal about the program by understanding its failures, dropouts, etc.
- Don't throw away evaluation results once a report has been generated. Results don't take up much room, and they can provide precious information later when trying to understand changes in the program



Conclusion

- Start small and make it manageable.
- Train staff.
- Utilize students, interns and volunteers.
- Demonstrating impact (outcomes) is critical to your sustainability.
- Eventually all senior centers will be required to gather outcome data.
- Get a head-start yourself – otherwise the funder will dictate the outcomes.
- This project can be a powerful tool for advocacy, fundraising and public relations.