Checklist

Key elements of an evaluation report

The following sections are typically included in a formal evaluation report. Items marked with an asterisks (*) are core elements that should be included in any evaluation report, while the other items may only be necessary for certain audiences.

❑ ***Title, author/organization, and date of report**
- ➢ Let the reader know what the program/organization is and when the evaluation was conducted.
- ➢ Identify if the evaluation was conducted by an outside evaluator, or by program staff.

❑ ***Page numbers**
- ➢ Always put page numbers on your documents.

❑ **Table of contents**
- ➢ Give the reader an overview of the topics addressed.
- ➢ Make it easier to refer to specific sections.
- ➢ In Microsoft Word, click Insert > Reference > Index and Tables.

❑ **Acknowledgements**
- ➢ Say "thank you" to everyone who made the evaluation research possible, including participants, school staff and other "program hosts," volunteers, staff, funders, etc.

❑ **Executive summary**
- ➢ Most people will only read the short version, so summaries are very important.
- ➢ Include a brief description of the program and the evaluation methods, and then present the key findings and recommendations in dot points or short paragraphs.
- ➢ Summaries should typically be 1-2 pages long. For long evaluation reports (20+ pages), the "rule of thumb" is 1 page of summary (maximum) for each 10 pages of report (e.g., a 60-page report could have a 6-page summary).

❑ **Program description**
- ➢ Describe the setting, audience/participant groups, activities, and dose (number of sessions).
- ➢ If an evidence-based program or model was used, identify it and say something about fidelity and local adaptations.
- ➢ Level of detail should fit with what the audience needs. If the evaluation report audience is already very familiar with the program, less description is needed.

❑ ***Methods (also referred to as "Methodology," "Research Design," or "Evaluation Plan")**
- ➢ Describe the What, How, When, and Who of the evaluation (refer to the evaluation planning guidance in Part 1 of this toolkit).
- ➢ Components of a Methods section:
  What
  - o Purpose of the evaluation, evaluation/research questions (identify process evaluation and outcome evaluation questions), and/or the desired outcomes being assessed (desired outcomes can be included in the Program Description section or the Methods section)

How
- o *Evaluation method(s) used (survey, focus group, key-informant interview, observations, records, clinical assessment, etc.)
- o *Data collection method (self-administered, face-to-face interview, phone, mail, online, etc.)
- o *Instrument name and source (homegrown, external, or mixed)
- o Topics or indicators covered by the instrument(s)
- o Definitions of measurement terms, if needed
- o Specify if the evaluation method was anonymous or not
- o *Describe any consent process that was used (e.g., active or passive parental consent)
- o Payment (sometimes called "remuneration") or incentives given to evaluation participants
- o Describe statistical analysis, if done

When
- o *When the data were collected (time period or dates)
- o *Timing relative to program participation/evaluation design (post-program only, retrospective post, pre and post, pre/post with follow-up)

Who
- o *Sampling method (census, purposive, convenience, random, cluster; see *Sampling Methods Commonly Used in Program Evaluation* Tip Sheet in Part 1 of this toolkit for descriptions)
- o *Total number of program participants AND total number of respondents/participants for each evaluation method: What percent of program participants completed the evaluation tool(s)? (also referred to as the Response Rate)
- o Fully describe any comparison groups that were used (how they were selected, similarities and differences with treatment group)

❑ ***Participant/respondent characteristics**
- ➤ Describe the basic demographic characteristics of those who participated in the evaluation methods (gender, age, grade level, site/setting where participated, etc.).
- ➤ This information is sometimes presented in the Methods section, or in the Results section, or as a stand-alone section.

❑ ***Results (also referred to as "Findings")**
- ➤ The heart of the evaluation report, this will likely be the longest section.
- ➤ Use headers and sub-headers to break up the results section by topics, method types, or program components.
- ➤ Present basic frequencies first (e.g., numbers and percents for each response category), and then present cross-tabulations or other additional analysis if available.
- ➤ Use a combination of tables and narrative. Charts and graphs can help to highlight key points, or to visually display trends or other phenomena that are easier to comprehend in a visual format.
- ➤ Stick to the facts and wait until the Discussion and/or Conclusions sections to begin interpreting or contextualizing results. The tone of a Results section should be cool and objective.

❑ **Discussion**
- ➤ An optional section that synthesizes results and may make connections to other sources of data, such as evaluation results from previous years.

- ❑ **Limitations of the evaluation research**
  - ➢ All research has limitations and it is important to acknowledge them and to identify possible ways these limitations may have biased the results.
  - ➢ Examples of common limitations are: small sample sizes; low generalizability of results due to non-probability sampling methods, such as convenience or purposive sampling (in other words, the people who filled out the survey may not be typical of program participants in general because of the way they were invited to do the survey, which means the results cannot be generalized to the broader population); missing components of the evaluation in current report; low response rate; data collection problems; flaws in an instrument.
  - ➢ This information could be presented as its own section, or as part of the methods or discussion sections.

- ❑ ***Conclusions (also referred to as "Key Findings," or "Lessons Learned")**
  - ➢ Give the reader the "take-home points."
  - ➢ Briefly list the main findings of the evaluation in bullet points or concise paragraphs with sub-headers.
  - ➢ Refer back to your evaluation questions, ABCDE outcome statements, and/or logic model to help frame the conclusions.

- ❑ ***Program recommendations/policy implications, or suggestions for improvement**
  - ➢ Very important section! This is the reason for doing the evaluation.
  - ➢ Let key findings drive the recommendations and avoid making recommendations that are clearly beyond the scope of the evaluation results.
  - ➢ Recommendations can include specific strategies for improving programs/services, and general recommendations about issues that need to be explored further.