**Checklist of Basic Evaluation Steps**

This section provides a basic step-by-step guide to conducting an evaluation of a farmers’ market incentive program. The *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health (1999)* was employed to a) identify barriers and facilitators to implementation of the NYC Health Bucks program and b) to assess overall effectiveness of the program at the community and individual level, in order to improve on the existing program model and to inform other organizations wishing to implement similar interventions.

The following evaluation checklist, adapted from the CDC Framework (Exhibit 1), will assist you and your evaluation team in following the essential steps for program evaluation in public health systems.

✔️ **Step 1: Engage Stakeholders**

At the beginning of your evaluation make sure to include those involved in program operations, those served or affected by the program, and primary users of the evaluation.

**Why Should You Engage Stakeholders in Your Evaluation?**

- To understand how the program works from a variety of perspectives
- To ensure your evaluation accurately assesses goals and expected outcomes of the program, and addresses the interests and concerns of all involved parties
- To obtain input on your proposed design and evaluation strategy
- To assist with data gathering and refinement of data collection approaches
- To support you and your evaluation team in analyzing, interpreting, and disseminating your findings

**How Should You Engage Stakeholders in Your Evaluation?**

The level and type of engagement will vary depending on the specific goals of your evaluation. Examples of soliciting input and feedback from key stakeholders may include informal communications such as email or phone conversations, formal in-person or telephone interviews, self-administered web and/or written surveys, or focus group discussions.

Ideally, stakeholders engaged may include:

- Staff involved in program administration and implementation
- National, State and/or local officials
• Participating community organizations
•Researchers and organizations with experience conducting similar evaluations
• Farmers’ market owner/operators, managers, farmers, and vendors
• Those served or affected by the program (i.e., farmers’ market shoppers, residents of neighborhoods near farmers’ markets, participants in WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and other nutrition/food programs, and other groups.

--- Evaluation Tip ---

Engage stakeholders at all levels. Building partnerships with multiple stakeholders is critical for program success. Needed partners will vary but may include vendors, health clinics, community residents, community-based organizations, universities, local policy makers, and other organizations.

✔ Step 2: Describe the Program

Describing components of the program such as its context, mission, resources, target populations, expected activities and outcomes, and success criteria will prepare you for designing the evaluation (described in Step 3). It might be helpful to describe the following program characteristics:

• Summarize the problem or issue that the program addresses and describe the broad environmental context in which the program operates. For example, in neighborhoods targeted by the Health Bucks program, poor nutritional knowledge and behaviors are coupled with significant financial and geographical barriers to accessing healthful foods such as fruits and vegetables, contributing to high overall obesity rates and health disparities among area children and adolescents. Understanding the setting and environmental context of the program will ultimately influence your evaluation design, data collection methods and tools, and assist you and your team in interpreting your findings. Using a social ecological approach that considers all the factors (e.g., levels of nutritional knowledge, geographic barriers, cost of food, etc.) that are associated with obesity rates and health disparities is important in designing the program and the evaluation.

• Describe the program’s mission and goals.

• Outline program activities and create a timeline for each activity.
Program activities might include recruiting farmers’ markets and community organizations to distribute incentives, community outreach/promotional activities, collecting and reimbursing farmers’ markets for redeemed incentive coupons, nutrition education for consumers.

- Identify community resources (i.e., financial, staff expertise, technology, tools) that are needed to conduct program activities.

- Detail program outcomes.
  - Think about outcomes at both the individual and community level. For example:
    - An individual-level outcome would be an increase in frequency or number of people shopping at local farmers’ markets.
    - A community-level outcome would be an increase in the number of farmers’ markets in underserved areas.
  - Also consider varying timeframes; your program might target short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes.
    - Short-term outcomes might include: Increasing the number of farmers’ markets and vendors participating in your program, accepting SNAP benefits, or using wireless EBT technology, and increasing awareness of the program among local residents.
    - Intermediate outcomes might include: Increasing the number of farmers’ markets operating in local neighborhoods, improving the amount, quality, and variety of produce offered by vendors at farmers’ markets, and increasing nutritional knowledge, purchase, and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables among targeted populations.
    - Long-term outcomes might include: Improving overall dietary quality, reducing child and adult obesity rates, and reducing nutritional disparities.

- Use your program description to develop a program logic model (see page 27 for an example of the Health Bucks Logic Model) as a tool for planning and evaluation of ongoing activities. A logic model describes program inputs (e.g., resources), outputs (e.g., activities), expected outcomes (short, intermediate and long-term) and assumptions or external factors that may influence program results. Developing a comprehensive logic model can help you to identify key process and outcome questions for your evaluation. There are many good tips for creating a useful logic model posted online; CDC’s Healthier Workplace Initiative Logic Model page or CDC’s Developing and Using a Logic Model Evaluation Guide page are good places to start.

---Evaluation Tip---

Ensure comprehensive understanding of program operations before designing and implementing your evaluation. The activities in Steps 2 and 3 will help you accomplish this.
✓ **Step 3: Focus Evaluation Design**

A comprehensive and systematic evaluation design is beneficial to both stakeholders and the evaluation team. CDC states that a thorough evaluation plan “creates an evaluation strategy with the greatest chance of being useful, feasible, ethical, and accurate.” The following are recommended steps in designing your evaluation:

- Think about the goals of your evaluation: what are you trying to achieve? Possible motivations might be program improvement, stakeholder engagement, or demonstration of program success for potential funders or others who may wish to expand or implement similar programs. An evaluation may serve any or all of these purposes, but clearly defining your goals from the start will help to guide your overall design.

- Obtain information on other similar evaluations already conducted or in process, and consider whether any components of their evaluation design may be incorporated into your own.

- Identify evaluation questions and methods (see Program Evaluation: Techniques and Tools for additional information about research methods).

- Identify appropriate respondent groups for the evaluation.
  - Individuals, groups, or organizations involved in *program implementation*
  - Individuals, groups, or organizations *targeted by the intervention*
  - Other program *stakeholders* as identified in Step 1 above as appropriate
  - Consider whether there is a group of respondents not associated with or targeted by the program who could serve as a *comparison* or *control group*

- Determine what is feasible within the time and resources available for conducting the evaluation.

- Identify with whom the evaluation findings will be shared, as this may help determine the format of your dissemination products (see Step 6 for details).

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**Evaluation Tip**

Engagement of all stakeholders during the evaluation design process will ensure that evaluation questions and the evaluation design are appropriate for the target audience(s) and feasible within the allotted resources.
**Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence**

Once the evaluation design has been determined, the data collection tools and processes can be developed. Initial formative conversations with key stakeholders will help guide the development of data collection instruments and evaluation activities (e.g., interviews, surveys, etc.), which will be used to gather substantive information about the program.

Choose data collection methods that will generate different types of information, (e.g., qualitative and quantitative), and allow for input from various sources. For more information about the benefits and drawbacks of different types of data collection methods, refer to the Program Evaluation: Techniques and Tools section.

- **Identify existing data sources**
  - Administrative data or records already collected by the program
  - Local survey data collected on an ongoing basis for outcomes of interest

- **Develop data collection protocols and instruments**
  - Consent forms, interview and moderator guides, training materials
  - Protocols for interviews, focus groups, and observations and site visits
  - Surveys and observation forms

- **Develop an analysis plan summarizing how you will use the data you collect to answer evaluation questions. Engage key stakeholders in analysis plan development to ensure the approach meets their needs and to obtain sign-off on all aspects of design and analysis.**

- **If needed, obtain necessary approvals for data collection, such as IRB approval**

- **Collect your data**
  - Identify the appropriate time frame for data collection from each group. (Which groups should be surveyed first? Will there be a baseline data collection phase? At what points during and after the program should data be collected?)
  - Consider resources, including recruitment and training of data collection staff, as well as analytic capabilities
  - Develop recruitment strategies
  - Recruit participants or respondents

- **Analyze the data collected from a variety of sources**
  - Specific analysis methods will depend on the type of data and the needs of the evaluation
    - Relatively simple analytic approaches may be appropriate if results are primarily intended for internal use and/or for non-technical audiences.
- If findings will be disseminated more widely, particularly to more technical audiences like academics or policymakers who require rigorous evidence of impacts on outcomes, more sophisticated analytic techniques may be required.

- Keep your analytic goals and capabilities in mind from the outset when designing data collection instruments and tools. This will prevent wasting limited resources on data that will not ultimately be useful in the analysis phase.

  - Qualitative analysis methods may include summarizing key themes or findings from interviews or focus groups, or more sophisticated analysis techniques using qualitative analysis software such as Nvivo or ATLAS.ti.

  - Quantitative analysis methods may include simple descriptive tables and charts with results from surveys or observations, or more complex statistical analyses to make comparisons between different subpopulations and/or over time using statistical software such as SAS, Stata, or SPSS.

  - Consider whether a partnership or contract with an external entity, such as a university or state department/agency with expertise in complex data analysis, may be helpful.

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**—Evaluation Tip—**

Do not underestimate time and level of effort for human subjects research (i.e., Institutional Review Board -IRB) paperwork, evaluation plan clearance, or other review requirements specific to your organization. The level and type of review needed will depend on the evaluation funding source, objectives (e.g., program improvement vs. generalizable research), publication plans, and data sources. Be sure to comply with all local review requirements, and build flexibility into the data collection timeline in case of unanticipated holdups.

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✓ **Step 5: Justify Your Conclusions**

After data collection and analysis is complete, interpret your findings into meaningful results for your target audience(s). The following tips may help translate the findings into practical recommendations.

- Work towards a consensus of all key stakeholders concerning their expectations:
  - Will everyone apply the same criteria for assessing a program’s performance? Be aware that not everyone defines “success” in the same way.
  - Does everyone agree on how to examine, summarize, and interpret evaluation data?
• Formulate conclusions based on evidence gathered and judged against agreed-upon standards set by stakeholders. It’s best to agree on this in advance, and write up an analysis plan that everyone agrees you will stick to later on (see Step 4).

• If the evaluation shows meaningful results, create recommendations based on the findings and the broader context in which the program operates. The broader context could include different target audiences, fiscal considerations, the physical environment, program operations, and policy issues. Results do not necessarily need to show a program was successful for the results to be meaningful. For example, redirecting program implementation efforts can provide valuable information to program staff and key stakeholders, and can ultimately lead to programmatic and evaluation improvements.

• See Step 6 for examples of how to formulate recommendations appropriate for a variety of target audiences.

--- Evaluation Tip ---

Ensuring the independence of evaluators can help to avoid bias or the appearance of bias in your results. When possible, evaluation teams should be led by and/or include individuals who would not be affected by evaluation results to support the credibility of the results.

✔ Step 6: Share Lessons Learned

Sharing all the details about the evaluation (e.g., design, processes, findings, and recommendations) helps to assure that the evaluation findings are used, disseminated appropriately and adapted to similar programs. Strategies for sharing lessons learned include the following:

• Communicate your findings with the community and stakeholder organizations.

• Inform program funders about evaluation and policy implications of evaluation results.

• Consider wider dissemination—who else might benefit from your lessons learned?

--- Evaluation Tip ---

Close the feedback loop—make sure to share your evaluation results with all respondent groups and stakeholders.