WATER WORKS

A Guide to Improving Water Access and Consumption in Schools to Improve Health and Support Learning

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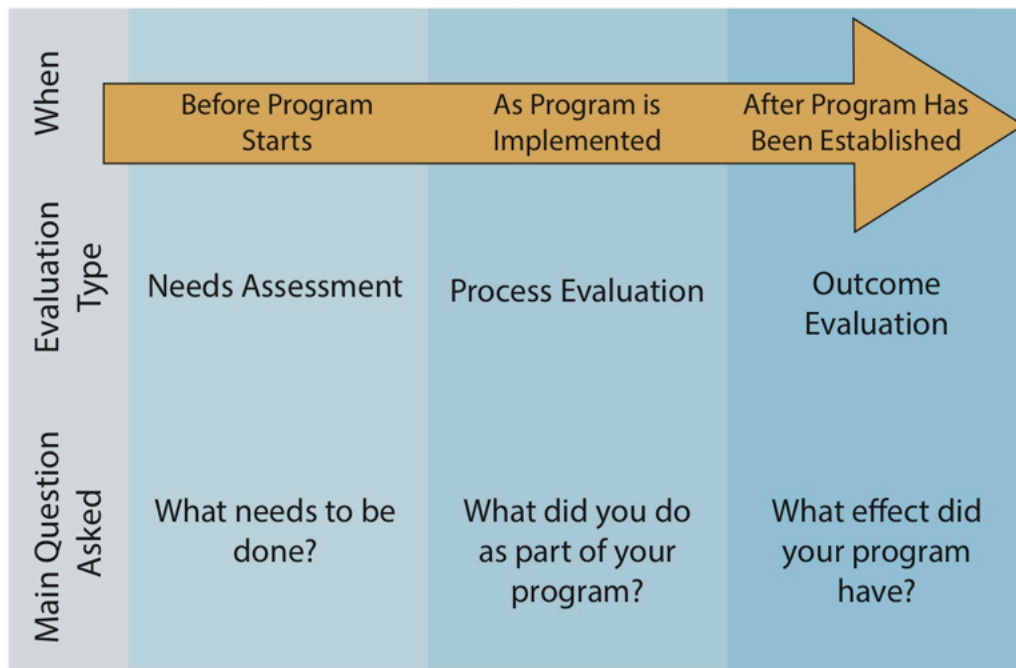
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Note

While we have attempted to provide the most up-to-date information and website URLs at the time of publication, some information may have changed.

ACTION 4 - MONITOR PROGRESS AND MAKE IMPROVEMENTS

COMPONENTS OF EVALUATION

As you develop and implement your water program, you may want to consider evaluating the program. Evaluation means systematically investigating the process and outcomes of your program. Effective evaluation can help you identify successes as well as ways to improve your program. Evaluation occurs in three major phases, as shown below:

When	Before Program Starts	As Program is Implemented	After Program Has Been Established
Evaluation Type	Needs Assessment	Process Evaluation	Outcome Evaluation
Main Question Asked	What needs to be done?	What did you do as part of your program?	What effect did your program have?

Needs assessment describes a process for determining gaps between current and desired conditions. *Process evaluation* describes what services, activities, policies, and environmental changes were implemented. *Outcome evaluation* is used to measure whether a program met intended goals and objectives. Needs assessment was described in more detail under **Action 2**, above; here we focus on process and outcome evaluation.

IMPORTANCE OF EVALUATION

Evaluation can help you understand the effect your water program has on student and staff behavior (for example, whether the program improved students' water intake). Evaluation data can also help provide evidence of your program's impact for funders or school district officials. Such data can also be used for additional funding proposals. Finally, evaluation can help you identify ways to improve your water program moving forward.

Evaluation Can Help You:
- Understand the impact of your program
- Provide evidence of success to funders or administrators
- Identify ways to improve your program

CONDUCT YOUR EVALUATION

Form Your Evaluation Team

To begin evaluating your water program, you will need to form your evaluation team. First, designate a "point person" or "evaluation leader." This person will coordinate the evaluation process. Gather a team to assist in conducting the evaluation (e.g., in designing the evaluation plan, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting results). This team can include a diverse range of people who have a stake in the water program. You can also partner with public health departments and researchers at local universities to help you design and conduct the program evaluation.

Your evaluation team might consist of :
- School administrators
- Cafeteria or food service staff
- Facilities and maintenance staff
- Students
- Parents
- School wellness coordinator or nurse
- Teachers
- Researchers, staff from the local health department, or individuals with experience in program evaluation

Resource Spotlight

The **Community Tool Box:** *Evaluating Community Programs and Initiatives* website offers detailed information on conducting evaluations of community programs. For information on selecting evaluators, see especially Chapter 36: Section 4. Refer to the *Resources* supplementary material for a detailed list of resources, including weblinks.

Key Questions to Consider Regarding Your Evaluation

With your team assembled, you can begin planning your evaluation activities. Below are several key questions you may want to discuss with your team of evaluators:

1. What do you hope to learn from your evaluation? What questions do you hope to answer?
   - These questions might be about the process of implementing the water program (e.g., how much does the program cost or what changes did your school make as part of the program?), or about the outcomes of the program itself (e.g., did the water program change students' beverage choices?).
2. What is the best way to gather information about the impact of the program?
   - The approach you take to collecting information will vary based on what outcomes you are interested in evaluating. For example, if you are interested in understanding if the program increased students' water intake, you may want to install flowmeters on new water sources. If you are interested in perceptions of water sources at school, you may want to talk to or survey students and school staff about their thoughts and opinions.
3. How will you analyze the information you gather to answer your questions?
   - To analyze the data you have collected, you can partner with individuals who have expertise in data analysis at nearby universities or public health departments.
4. How will you use the information you gathered to make improvements to the program?
   - Develop a plan for how you will use the results of the evaluation to improve the program. Consider hypothetical outcomes from the evaluation, and discuss with your team how you would respond to each finding. For example, if you found that the program increased students' water consumption but did not decrease their sugary beverage consumption, would this finding cause you to modify the program? How so?

Process Evaluation: Document What Was Done

Conducting a process evaluation, in which you record and study the activities, policies, and environmental changes you implemented for your program, can help you document accomplishments and challenges. For a water program, a process evaluation might include tracking the types, location, and number of new water sources installed in your school over time, or documenting the time, money, and labor that went into implementing your program. Below are domains you may want to consider when completing a process evaluation of your water program.

Main Domains of Process Evaluation for Water Programs

- **Changes in Water Access**
  Implementation of your water program might include offering new water sources or improving upon existing sources (e.g., cleaning or repairing existing fountains). Use the water audit and inventory tools described in the *Needs Assessment* section above to document such changes.

- **Changes in Policy**
  If your water program involves creating or improving beverage policies for your school or district, you may want to document the process of devising and implementing these policies. For example, you might want to record how the policy was developed (e.g., which stakeholders offered input), when the policy was adopted, and whether and how the policy was implemented (e.g., who enforces the policy and how it is enforced). You can also record challenges you encounter in developing and implementing the policy, and how these challenges were overcome, so that other schools can learn from your experience. You can also assess changes in the strength of your beverage policies.

- **Cost of the Program**
  Cost is an important consideration when implementing new programs. You can track the costs associated with implementing your water program. Some costs are upfront (e.g., cost to purchase a new water delivery option) whereas other costs are ongoing (e.g., cost to provide cups). See the boxes below for more examples of upfront and ongoing costs.

- **Experiences of Implementing the Program**
  You might also want to learn about how your key stakeholders thought the program went. For example, what challenges were experienced? What did not go as planned? How did staff, students, and teachers like the program?

Examples of Upfront (One-Time) Costs

- Cost of purchasing new water delivery options
- Cost of installing new water delivery options
- Cost of purchasing additional supplies for water delivery options (utility cart, floor mat, etc.)

Examples of Ongoing (Annual) Costs

- Cost of conducting promotion/education
- Cost for water quality testing and remediation
- Cost of water, cups, and/or reusable bottles
- Cost of electricity (depending on the water delivery option used, your school or district may incur new electricity costs to operate units that refrigerate or dispense water)
- Cost of labor to implement the water program

Outcome Evaluation: Document Program Effects

By documenting the outcomes of your program, you can measure whether your program met its intended goals and objectives. Below, we list some common outcomes that school water programs might influence as well as tools that can be used to measure such outcomes.

Main Domains of Outcome Evaluation for Water Programs

- **Students' Water Consumption**
  A primary goal of many water programs is to increase the number of students who drink water and the amount of water they drink.
- **Students' Sugary Beverage Consumption**
  Because intake of sugary drinks is associated with obesity and dental cavities, it may be important to measure the impact of water programs on students' intake of sugary beverages.
- **Knowledge, Attitudes, and Intentions**
  You may also want to measure whether your program affected students' or staff members' knowledge (e.g., of the health benefits of drinking water), attitudes (e.g., perceived quality of tap water), and intentions (e.g., likelihood to drink water).

Supplemental Material

For an overview of the different types of evaluation, as well as examples of tools you can use to evaluate your program, see the supplemental material *Evaluate Your Water Program: Overview.*

What if Something Else Caused These Outcomes?

There are many changes happening in a school and community at any given time. In order to determine whether the water program or another secular trend (such as a national or local drinking water campaign) produced the outcome you are interested in, it is best to measure outcomes before and after the implementation of the water program, and to have a control group (a group that does not receive the program, for use as a comparison). Although this an ideal study design, it may not be feasible due to cost and time constraints.

REPORT RESULTS AND MAKE IMPROVEMENTS

Once you have conducted your evaluation activities, you may want to summarize your findings in a written report or formal presentation. Key questions that can help you develop a future action plan for your water program include:

- What did you learn from these evaluation activities?
- What aspects of your program went well?
- What changes would you like to make?
- Did the program have the outcomes you expected?
- What resources are needed to make the program better?

You can then share this product with key stakeholders, such as school or district administration, food services managers, parent groups, the school wellness committee, or your local public health department. Sharing your findings can help you to highlight successes of the program, gain support or funding to continue or expand the program, and solicit new insights on how to improve the program.

Resource Spotlight

The **Community Tool Box:** *Evaluating Community Programs and Initiatives* offers insights on how to use the results of your evaluation to improve the program (see especially Chapter 39: Section 2 & Section 4). For ideas on how to communicate your findings to stakeholders, check out **Smarter Lunchrooms Movement's website Share Your Success:** *Publicizing Your Smarter Lunchrooms Makeover.* Refer to the *Resources* supplementary material for a detailed list of resources, including weblinks.