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Welcome to Nexus News, the newsletter focusing on issues facing the public sector.

This is the first in a series of newsletters offering advice on how to make sure your department or agency's program evaluation is a success.

PART ONE: THE SECRETS TO SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM EVALUATION

Well-executed evaluation can provide an excellent measure of the success or otherwise of a specific program. However, poorly executed evaluation can be a confusing, expensive waste of time. Designing evaluation is a notoriously tricky business, as it typically involves multiple parties with differing notions of what's of value.

Evaluations sit on a continuum of formality ranging from a highly informal/anecdotal evaluation to the most methodologically sophisticated models such as a Randomised Controlled Trial. As you move along the continuum, the evaluation becomes more resource-intensive yet also more reliable.

Done well, program evaluation has a number of useful applications, such as:

- Providing information which improves program performance
- Enabling others to learn from and build on the program experience
- Determining whether there's a need to extend existing programs, or establish new ones
- Measuring whether resources are sufficient, or need to be increased, decreased, or discontinued
- Contributing to improved accountability to Ministers, Parliament and the public.

The first step to ensuring you can enjoy the benefits of evaluation, is making sure the purpose of your evaluation is clear. This must come before the practical task of designing the methodology. In fact the purpose *must* dictate the methodology if your program evaluation is to be meaningful. Otherwise you're in danger of putting the cart before the horse.

So how do you go about clarifying the purpose of your evaluation?

ADDING VALUE

At Nexus Management Consulting, we assist organisations to change for the better through providing a range of services in the following areas:

Strategic & corporate planning, to enable you to create and achieve your organisational aspirations.

Program evaluation, to ensure your goals, strategies and outcomes are on track.

Management review & organisation development, to help you cultivate a self-sustaining, inclusive organisational environment.

Group facilitation, to ensure your meetings and focus groups adhere to a relevant agenda and produce meaningful results.

Strategic management training, to transfer skills so that your organisation develops the internal capacity to create enduring change.

Very crudely speaking, you'll find the purpose ordinarily falls into one of two categories, *accountability* and *program improvement*. The former asks 'did we make a difference?' while the latter focuses on how we could do things differently.

The following questions will help define which category your evaluation falls into:

- Who are you evaluating for?
- What are their information requirements?
- How are the results to be reported?
- How are the results likely to be used?

Once you have the answers to the above, you can go on to tailor a methodology that suits the evaluation's purposes.

Not only must methodology refer to the purpose, it must be easily implemented if it's to be useful. But that's another newsletter. Literally. See the next edition of *Nexus News* for more on making methodologies meaningful.

HOW NEXUS CAN HELP

As hinted at in the introduction, program evaluation is not only technical in nature, it's also inherently political. Everything from drafting terms of reference to drawing conclusions and making recommendations is a value-laden activity. This is further complicated by the competing agendas of the multiple parties involved in, and affected by, the evaluation process.

Understanding the *context* of evaluation is a prerequisite to successful evaluation design and execution.

Seeking independent advice to guide you through the process helps protect the integrity of your program evaluation. [Email](#) to find how our objective input can help make your program evaluation worthwhile.

CONTACT US

Please continue to direct your ideas and comments to gmasters@nexusmc.com.au. If you'd like to see an article covering a particular issue, please let us know.

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ABOUT NEXUS MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

Established by Greg Masters in 1996, Nexus is a management consultancy based in Sydney, Australia.

It's our specialist expertise in public sector organisational dynamics that makes us unique. We get to the heart of organisational challenges, and implement actions that succeed in overcoming them.