

# **AFAO Health Promotion Evaluation Audit & Analysis**

**Stage 1 — June 2009**

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## **Background**

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AFAO is undertaking an audit of evaluation methodologies employed in relation to the health promotion programs run by AFAO and NAPWA member organisations. This is the first phase of a two phase project that aims to provide training and capacity development initiatives for AFAO/NAPWA member organisations

The aims of the Evaluation Audit and Analysis are

- i. to document current practice in evaluation of health promotion programs,
- ii. to analyse current practice to identify strengths and weaknesses and highlight good practice examples
- iii. to identify areas for consideration in improving evaluation practice.

## **Method**

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Evaluation documents provided electronically by AFAO were collated, reviewed and thematically analysed. Broad themes were identified and described, examples of good practices highlighted and areas for potential training and capacity development identified.

## **Sample**

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A total of 59 evaluation reports documenting projects undertaken by AFAO/NAPWA and/or its member organisations between 2005 and 2008 were reviewed. These projects included social marketing campaigns, resource production (print and web-based), education workshops, retreats, support groups and other health promotion activities.

## **Identified Evaluation Themes**

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### **▶ Diversity of contexts and scope**

The sample identified a diversity of contexts and scope of evaluations undertaken by AFAO/NAPWA and its member organisations. Some reports were undertaken by external evaluators (eg private consultants, collaborations with research institutes, independent experts) while others were done internally by the project worker alone or with colleagues. In some cases, the author of the report was not identified. The scope of the evaluations varied, from straightforward summaries of participant

feedback to sophisticated multi-pronged, theory-informed analyses with broader generalisability.

#### **Range of Project Types Evaluated**

- ▶ Support Groups
- ▶ Social Marketing Campaign
- ▶ Staff development activities
- ▶ Volunteer training activities
- ▶ Education workshops
- ▶ Outreach programs,
- ▶ IT-based health information (eg websites)
- ▶ Community event (eg fair day stall, WAD)
- ▶ Partnership Agreement
- ▶ Community capacity building
- ▶ Resource development (with or without dissemination activities).

#### **Range of Project Authors**

- ▶ Project staff
- ▶ Designated evaluation / management staff
- ▶ Private Consultant (Individual and group)
- ▶ Research Centre staff (alone or in collaboration with project staff).

Evaluations are undertaken in a range of settings with varied resources and capacities and for a range of purposes. In developing a list of definitive best practices this diversity needs to be taken into account. A one-size fits all approach would fail to recognise and capitalise on local contexts, skills and resources.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

*In future training and capacity development initiatives for AFAO/NAPWA member organisations recognition should be given to the diversity of settings and contexts in which the evaluation of education work takes place and providing a variety of support and resources for the task.*

#### **▶ Types of evaluation and uptake**

Most project evaluations focussed on process and immediate impacts with a view to informing the sustainability or continuation of the project. The assessment of longer-term outcomes was identified in a only few projects — particularly those with longer program timelines or recurrent activities. This can be reflective of the mismatch between short project

time lines and the time it takes for broader, longer-term outcomes to be recognised.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*While maintaining an appropriate focus on process and impact evaluation attention should be given to fostering greater awareness of outcome evaluation. The benefit of this is to allow workers to observe or assess longer term changes among their client groups and the part their projects play in contributing those changes.*

▶ **Stated evaluation Framework**

Where there was a clearly stated evaluation framework there was more likelihood of a coherent and logical process of collecting and analysing the data, and the production of recommendations based on evidence. A framework which includes a description of the rationale, objectives and stages of the evaluation assists greatly in ensuring coherence and relevance. Some reports were merely narrative in structure giving rise to idiosyncratic descriptions and unsubstantiated recommendations.

Examples of this among the sample — the *Evaluation of the Start Making Sense Workshop*, Ben Bavington, ACON uses a clear and sophisticated evaluation framework and *Great idea – Just can't be done by us Report*, Johnston and Hillier, VAC/ARCHS shows how an explicit framework contributes to a coherent evaluation report.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*All evaluation reports should explicitly state an overarching evaluation framework which in turn should clearly guide the reader through a coherent and appropriate narrative.*

▶ **Program Logic**

Program logic is a tool to describe a series of events for bringing about change and to relate activities to outcomes. It helps to describe how and why a program will work. For some reports, there was an unclear link between the intentions of the program, the activities undertaken, the outcomes recorded and the reflections made by the evaluator. This weakness was identified primarily among those reports authored by project staff. Program logic also assists in determining the *evaluability* of projects by determining when and how they are ready to be evaluated.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Greater emphasis on the use of program logic in planning interventions (and their evaluation) will enhance evaluation capacity within the sector.*

▶ **Variety of methods**

A variety of data collection methods was identified. In addition to surveys, more participatory methods were also undertaken including the use of focus groups, feedback groups and semi-structured interviews. Of those projects using feedback or survey-based data collection instruments the following observations are relevant

- ▶ there was infrequent use of demographic data
- ▶ a large emphasis on measures of client satisfaction
- ▶ significant use of scales

Among the sample the *Lifeblood Evaluation*, Murphy and Spina, VAC and the *GMHC Outreach Volunteer Training Program Evaluation*, VAC, provide good examples of the use of multiple methods.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Continue to encourage the use of a variety of data collection methods, and in particular, those requiring greater participation or engagement with clients and community groups.*

▶ **Community consultation and engagement**

A strong feature of the bulk of reports in the sample was a significant acknowledgement of community contexts or current dialogues that have informed the development of the project or campaign. This is reflected in an emphasis on consultation and engagement in evaluation practices, and it locates the project explicitly with social contexts and the lived experience of stakeholders.

An excellent example of the use of a consultative approach to evaluation can be seen in the *Great idea – Just can't be done by us* Report, Johnston and Hillier, VAC/ARCHS.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Build on the understandings of community consultation and engagement and encourage greater clarity in the use of models and terminology. (refer to International Association for Public Participation at [www.iap2.org.au](http://www.iap2.org.au)).*

▶ **Reflective analysis**

In some cases, the extent of analysis was superficial and did not capitalise on inputs from stakeholders or richness of project data. At times

recommendations were limited to suggesting replication of current activity rather than guiding more substantive improvements.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Support the inclusion of reflective analysis within evaluation reports. Ensure that reflective analysis is distinguished from other forms of evidence.*

▶ **Links to research based-evidence (or similar program activity)**

References and links to broader research-based evidence was also a strong component of larger, quality reports undertaken by consultants or research organisations. Where research or practice-based evidence for well established programs was not cited evaluation outcomes were limited.

Berg's *Evaluation Report Concerning the Gay/MSM Sexual Health Program*, Queensland Association for Healthy Communities, demonstrates strong links to research-based and other forms of evidence.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Ensure that evaluation reports acknowledge and draw on relevant evidence (research-based, community inputs, reports of previous similar activity, etc) to inform program activity.*

▶ **Evaluation vs project report**

Some reports were no more than descriptions of project activities. These reports lacked an evaluation framework or structure, critical analysis and recommendations for improvement. Particularly when evaluation is undertaken by the project staff, it is important to ensure that project activity is recorded and that a clearly framed evaluation is undertaken.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Ensure the reports describe the worthwhileness of the activity or project rather than merely the activities that occurred.*

▶ **Evaluation language**

Lack of consistency in the use of terminology such as *aim*, *objective* and *strategy* contributes to less consistent reporting, lack of report coherence and generalisability. A shared understanding of key evaluation terms such as *process*, *impact* and *outcome* as well as broader evaluation frameworks could increase consistency of report writing enhance the capacity of project staff to produce more useful evaluation reports. The

distinction between the aims and objectives of the project and the aims and objectives of the evaluation should always be clear.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Promote increased awareness and consistent use of key evaluation terminology in written reports.*

▶ **Style and tone**

The use of first-person narratives, colloquialisms, undefined terminology or jargon needs to be carefully considered in light of how the report is to be used. This will assist in better matching the writing style of the report with its intended audience and its intention. There is a need to develop the skills of managers and staff in writing appropriately in order to achieve a balance between narrative reporting and reflective analysis.

A quote from one report illustrates this point: *"It was also a sunny and very warm day which hasn't happened for a while and I think that many people may have seen it as a chance to be outdoors and grab some sun rather than being inside all day."*

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Support managers and project staff to identify and use appropriate writing styles in light of the intended audience and intention of the report.*

## Recommendations

1. *In future training and capacity development initiatives for AFAO/NAPWA member organisations recognition should be given to the diversity of settings and contexts in which the evaluation of education work takes place and providing a variety of support and resources for the task.*
2. *While maintaining an appropriate focus on process and impact evaluation attention should be given to fostering greater awareness of outcome evaluation. The benefit of this is to allow workers to observe or assess longer term changes among their client groups and the part their projects play in contributing those changes.*
3. *All evaluation reports should explicitly state an overarching evaluation framework which in turn should clearly guide the reader through a coherent and appropriate narrative.*
4. *Greater emphasis on the use of program logic in planning interventions (and their evaluation) will enhance evaluation capacity within the sector.*
5. *Continue to encourage the use of a variety of data collection methods, and in particular, those requiring greater participation or engagement with clients and community groups.*
6. *Build on the understandings of community consultation and engagement and encourage greater clarity in the use of models and terminology. (refer to International Association for Public Participation at [www.iap2.org.au](http://www.iap2.org.au)).*
7. *Support the inclusion of reflective analysis within evaluation reports. Ensure that reflective analysis is distinguished from other forms of evidence.*
8. *Ensure that evaluation reports acknowledge and draw on relevant evidence (research-based, community inputs, reports of previous similar activity, etc) to inform program activity.*
9. *Ensure the reports describe the worthwhileness of the activity or project rather than merely the activities that occurred.*
10. *Promote increased awareness and consistent use of key evaluation terminology in written reports.*
11. *Support managers and project staff to identify and use appropriate writing styles in light of the intended audience and intention of the report.*