

## **Program Evaluation for Your Community Food Systems Project**

An educational session at the 2007 Southern SAWG Annual Conference

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### **Presenters**

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### **Summary and Highlights**

Program evaluation is important in assessing the usefulness of a community food systems project. Three types of evaluation were explained in this session: needs assessment, process evaluation, and outcome evaluation, which was the focus of the session. The purpose of this workshop was to explain the usefulness of logic models and how to design evaluation tools.

Jeanette Abi-Nader defined evaluation as a systematic way that data are assembled into a picture of how well an organization is delivering its services and the impact that these services are having on the target population. She described five aspects to the evaluation process:

- Planning the evaluation
- Conducting the evaluation
- Analyzing the Results
- Using the Results
- Communicating the Results

**Logic Models** can be used to map a project. Logic models help to build a common understanding of a program, and provide an easy way to communicate with community stakeholders, board members, etc. They also help in planning and implementation. A possible limitation of a logic model is that it may not capture the heart and soul of a project.

A basic logic model has four components: resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes. You must define the goals of your project, which helps with the measurement. In defining goals, you must use concrete terms, involve the stakeholders, and create goals for program activities as well as program results. Examples of outputs may include the number of youth that are served in a project and the number of volunteers that are

trained. Example of outcomes include whether or not participants may have increased their knowledge about certain farming practices.

Qualitative tools, such as interviews and focus groups may be used in evaluation. Quantitative tools that can be used include internet and mailed surveys. The benefits of using some of these tools is that they have already been pilot tested and they save time. When writing questions, persons should be careful to keep them short, stay neutral, and avoid false assumptions. Tools that are developed should also be culturally responsive and age-appropriate.

The Community Food Project evaluation kit is helpful in providing evaluation tools. The CFP handbook is hands-on, including worksheets and references. The toolkit has three parts: it gives general evaluation tools, project-level evaluation tools, and system-level evaluation tools. Handbooks can be ordered from the Community Food Security Coalition website: [http://www.foodsecurity.org/pubs.html#cfp\\_eval](http://www.foodsecurity.org/pubs.html#cfp_eval). Excerpts from the handbook can be found at [http://www.foodsecurity.org/evaluation\\_pg2.html#excerpts](http://www.foodsecurity.org/evaluation_pg2.html#excerpts).

An important resource distributed to participants was a modified worksheet detailing a plan to use evaluation results:

Community Food Project Evaluation Handbook Modified Worksheet #8  
Plan to Use Evaluation Results

<b>Program Goal or Objective</b>	<b>Output or Outcome</b>	<b>Measure or Indicator</b>	<b>Performance Standard</b>	<b>Evaluation Result</b>	<b>Action Plan</b>	<b>Timeline/Staff</b>

**Sally Causey** gave examples of evaluation tools used in her project work in Rural Resources. Among her project goals were economic development, to increase local food accessibility, and to build relationships. An example of how they intended to meet the goal of economic development was to teach job skills to 20 low-income teenagers. To increase food accessibility, they will educate people in local churches about the health and nutritional benefits of buying local as well as where they can do this. To build relationships, they use Farmers' Markets and community members. Examples were also given of surveys given to customers of the Mobile Farmers Markets and interview questions given to farmers. Causey notes that these evaluation tools were developed specifically for their program; organizations should refer to the CFP Evaluation Toolkit to develop their own. An example of a question asked to customers is "How likely would you be to buy the following products if they were offered at this market?" Choices given were meat, poultry and fish, jams and jellies, and baked goods. An example of a question given to farmers was "What workshops could we offer that will help you?" The farmer

interview questions were also split into categories to include one for teens and for children.