

**The Manager's Guide to Program Evaluation:
Planning, Contracting, and Managing for Useful Results**

Paul W. Mattessich, Ph.D. (2003). St. Paul, MN: Wilder Publishing Center. (90 pp.; Paperback, ISBN: 0-940069-38-5)

Reviewed by: Amy Schultz, Girl Scouts of Woodland Council, Wisconsin Rapids, WI, USA

Key Words: evaluation, program evaluation

All managers who value effective programs and continuous improvement should read *The Manager's Guide to Program Evaluation* by Paul W. Mattessich. In clear and concise bulleted lists and step-by-step instructions, Mattessich takes the reader through the phases and steps of program evaluation. Whether managers hire an evaluation consultant or do the work themselves, the roles and responsibilities throughout the evaluation process are clearly defined. Armed with this guide, no matter who does the work, a manager can confidently oversee the program evaluation process.

Mattessich defines program evaluation as “a systematic process for an organization to obtain information on its activities, its impacts, and the effectiveness of its work, so that it can improve its activities and describe its accomplishments.” Essentially, evaluation formalizes the common sense managers use to make decisions. An effective program evaluation will help managers learn about their successes, share information with key audiences, and improve their successes.

“Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.” ~Anonymous

To that end, Mattessich argues that in order for program evaluation to be useful, managers need to be clear about what they hope to accomplish. He enables the reader to recognize what information will be needed

to respond to important strategic and operational management questions. Mattessich stresses the importance of a program theory or a logic model to coherently communicate how and why programs generate outcomes.

Most program theories and logic models portray a series of steps leading from what a program does to what the program is expected to accomplish. An effective program theory enables a manager to understand why something works (not just whether it works). Applying this knowledge to new situations, managers can continuously improve their programs over time.

Mattessich discusses all phases of the evaluation process in detail: design, data collection, analysis, and reporting. He addresses the sequence of events for each step and “who does what” in each phase. He also addresses practical issues related to staffing and the costs of each phase. For all of these issues, readers will develop a management-level understanding of the program evaluation process.

Mattessich contends that an important role of a manager in the evaluation process is to ensure that the evaluation study is “as credible as possible to the greatest number of relevant people.” He gives specific guidelines for reporting program evaluation results in the form of a strong, credible comparison that will be compelling to the primary stakeholders.

Expectations of accountability are changing. Stakeholders at all levels - clients, volunteers, funders, and the public - are placing increased demands on nonprofits to demonstrate their progress toward making a difference in the lives of those who participate in programs. Volunteers want to know why they should share their precious time with an organization. More and more, funders do not want to simply see how many people benefited from the program or how many services were provided but how the programs made a difference in the lives of individuals, families, and communities. Managers need to know enough about outcomes for planning and decision-making to keep programs efficient and effective.

Since 1995 the United Way of America has been a leader in the development and promotion of program outcome measurement. Since that time, many national organizations have discovered the value of program evaluation. The American Cancer Society, American Red Cross, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of The USA, and many other national organizations measure outcomes nationally and locally. According to the United Way of America, these and other organizations value outcomes measurements in many ways. In an independent survey of nearly 400 agencies, program directors agreed or strongly agreed that outcomes measurements helped their programs:

- focus staff effort on common goals/shared purposes (88%)
- communicate program results to stakeholders (88%)

- clarify the intended purpose of the program (86%)
- identify effective practices within the program (84%)
- successfully compete for resources/funding (83%)

(Source: *Agency Experiences with Outcome Measurement*, United Way of America, 2000)

In *The Manager's Guide to Program Evaluation*, Mattessich agrees with the importance of program evaluation to report to stakeholders and to retain or increase funding. He even cites examples of clients reporting that they have won grants, despite strong competition and shrinking resources, because they base their proposals on accurate, complete, and impartial evaluation findings.

There is no doubt that the importance of program evaluation is at an all-time high. With increased pressure from all stakeholders to prove the effectiveness of their programs, managers need to be well-versed in program evaluation.

In the demanding, busy days of volunteer administrators, it is easy to look at program evaluation as "one more thing we have to do." But program evaluations do not have to be time consuming. They need to be useful. The time invested needs to be time well spent. *The Manager's Guide to Program Evaluation* is a readable and thorough tutorial for managers to oversee program evaluation. Managers will find the book and the process to be time well spent!

About the Author

Amy Schultz is Assistant Executive Director of Girl Scouts of Woodland Council. Woodland Council has been locally recognized for its model use of outcome evaluations. Amy has a Bachelor's of Science degree and is president of the Portage County Alliance for Youth Administration at Harvard University in the USA.