



## Exploring Prevention Audio Library: Series 3, Episode 1 Transcript

# What is Evaluation?

Total time: 17min 16sec

### **Meg Foster** 00:15

Thank you for listening to this short recording. In this audio series we explore prevention, evaluation, and assessment. These are a part of a larger audio library to help explore creative prevention ideas and developing and expanding our prevention efforts. In this recording, we will explore what evaluation is. Today we are joined by Sexual Assault Taskforce Staff.

### **Carli Rohner** 00:35

Hi, I'm Carli Rohner. I'm the Campus Coordinator.

### **Aislinn Addington** 00:38

Hi, I'm Aislinn Addington. I'm the Campus Advocacy Coordinator.

### **Meg Foster** 00:43

And I'm Meg Foster, Prevention Program Coordinator. Let's begin by talking a little bit about what evaluation is to us.

### **Carli Rohner** 00:51

I really love this question and it comes up in our trainings a lot about not only how we do evaluation, but how evaluation becomes something personal that we can bring into our programming. For me, evaluation becomes one tool in that overall prevention toolbox. So we talk about programs a lot. We talk about strategies a lot. And for me, I think of evaluation as one component that ensures that I'm doing my work not only well, but I'm also being able to do the work I want to do in the most helpful way.

### **Aislinn Addington** 01:24

I agree, Carli, I, when I'm crafting a program or an event or kind of any specific thing, evaluation is part of it. Sometimes folks, maybe save it for the end or have planned everything and then oh, but we need to evaluate it. Integrating evaluation into the larger process of whatever your prevention plan is, is important and a wise way to include all the steps, even post-program steps.

### **Meg Foster** 01:55

So while we're talking about right, there's this broader process of prevention. But evaluation in and of itself is a process. And what evaluation can do is tell us about how your program is working, the impact of your program, what is happening, how it's being received... it can tell us a whole lot. And one example that we like to use to explore what that evaluation process looks like is using paper airplanes as a metaphor. So if we are going to have a paper airplane contest, we first have to come up with a goal. And let's say our goal is to create a good paper airplane.

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So first, we have to define what good is. So this might be a pretty paper airplane, then we need to decide what pretty is and what that looks like. It might be that it's very aerodynamic. And then we can talk a little bit about what aerodynamic looks like. It might be that it goes a certain distance that it goes, if it flies straight. Maybe that distance, let's say, is 30 feet. So what we need to do then is come up with a test to figure out whether or not we've made good airplanes. In this case, if we went with the airplane it had to fly at least 30 feet in a straight line, not 30 feet in loops. And so if we're going to go 30 feet in a straight line, one way we could test that is to actually create and throw paper airplanes and mark off on the floor or in the room where 30 feet would be. We actually have to test our airplanes. So then we're going to create our airplanes, we're going to use the test of throwing them and seeing how far they could go. We're going to use that information to tell us whether or not we made a good paper airplane. A really important step in that process is also looking at what the test told us. For example, if we throw our airplanes and none of them make that 30 feet mark, what does that tell us about the criteria that we created, how we did the evaluation, is there something wrong with the test? Is how we defined good wrong? What adjustments do we need to make to learn more about the impact of what we're trying to do and the outcome of what we're trying to do? And in that case, that would be looking at our expectations, the criteria and the test that we did. So this process is really important for our work. And also, hopefully thinking about paper airplanes, or some other activity like that can help us think through all those little steps of the process and how that can inform us.

### **Carli Rohner** 04:32

Thank you so much, Meg. One of the things that is helpful not only in discussing what evaluation is, but talking a little bit about why it matters. And so I would love to have our team talk a little bit about some of the ways that that comes up for you. For me, one of the biggest reasons that evaluation matters is that it helps us tell a more complete story, but then it also helps us tell stories that are meaningful to our work. For example, we know that a lot of schools use things like campus climate surveys, potentially as an evaluation tool, or program surveys, all of these different methodologies that we use for evaluation. And that can have an impact on the story that you tell or the story that you use with funders. And when I'm saying story, not in a pejorative way, story as in the more complete arc of the work that you do. Things like, here's how this work has impacted our community. Here's how this work has helped this specific group of folks. Here's how our work helps provide a benefit and why we should be funded. So there's a lot of different ways that evaluation helps us to tell the folks that we work with more about our work and why our work should continue and how well we're doing in that work.

### **Aislinn Addington** 05:50

Thanks, Carli. You bring up a really interesting thing about evaluation in that I see it as uniquely situated at the intersection of what's inward facing and what's outward facing. Evaluation is so important to see, like we've said, are we doing the work we believe we're doing? Are we meeting the needs of our community? As well as, as Carli mentioned, funders, evaluation can help us tell those stories, can help us demonstrate need to folks who aren't as familiar with us, and is a great way to share successes as



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well as demonstrate needs. Any part of the story can be helpful if we've done that evaluation work to tell the whole story.

### **Meg Foster** 06:33

Thanks, Aislinn. In a later recording, we're going to talk a little bit more about how there are different types of evaluation you can do and how that will give you different information. That being said, we have a lot of expectations around how rigorous evaluation is and if we aren't able to talk about the impact of our programs that are community led, that are community responsive, that are culturally specific, if we don't have the narrative or those stories, like Aislinn and Carli are talking about, to talk about the impact of that work, that work often gets erased in the broader narrative. So it's really important that when we are doing our prevention work, that we are using evaluation to tell those stories and make sure that we're not just you know, providing the same material, the same programming to every single person universally, that that's maybe a part of it, but also that there are specific interventions or specific prevention programs and activities that are informed by the communities that we're working with. I don't know of a single prevention program here in Oregon, that 100% implements someone else's program to fidelity because people are doing work to listen to their communities to tweak programming, to tweak curriculum to better meet the needs of the people that they're serving. And that's a really important part of evaluation.

### **Carli Rohner** 08:00

I love that Meg and one of the ways that I often see folks framing evaluation and like Aislinn spoke about earlier, it's part of your ongoing process, or we hope that it can be part of your ongoing process. And it's not just its own standalone item at the end of a program. And so what I see often of our partners here in Oregon is that there's some intentional planning around how evaluation is going to fit in, you have your strategy, your initiative, your program, whatever that looks like, you come back to evaluate, but then you're also going to be identifying ways that you can sustain that work. And one of the great things that evaluation does is that it highlights those areas that we can move into or the opportunities that we have in order to sustain that strategy to sustain that initiative. So not only does it not get erased in the overall look at our field or the overall work that you're doing in those conversations, potentially with stakeholders or other folks, but it also gives you some really great insight into how we are able to continue this work in a way that is really meaningful.

### **Meg Foster** 09:08

Thank you, Carli, and I realized, thanks to the prompting of the fellow panelists, that one of the biggest mistakes that we have around evaluation is making it feel really complicated and overwhelming for folks. And I realized that I used words and language like fidelity, and that that might not be the most accessible word for a lot of folks. And so I do just want to take a quick step back and recognize that when we were talking about fidelity, we were talking about implementing a curriculum or a program to 100% what is in that program, what is in a book, what is in a curriculum. So when I say that people are using that evaluation, like Carli was just talking about, to do this ongoing process to make tweaks to

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make adjustments to better reach the people that we're working with, that that is not that hundred percent what is in a book. That is adapting it to be responsive to the communities that we're working in. So thanks for that reminder prompt, folks.

**Aislinn Addington** 10:07

Thanks, Meg. I appreciate your clarification and using an example from right here in our little conversation. As with prevention work in general, it's important that we do ethical evaluation. What does that look like? What is ethical evaluation?

**Meg Foster** 10:25

As we're talking about processes, as we're talking about how we are not just doing our overall prevention programming, but we are doing evaluation, programming and evaluation processes as well. It's really important that we're thinking about how we're doing this ethically, as a really critical part of our programming. We know that we can cause harm when we do our prevention work. We know that we can cause harm when we do our evaluation work, the questions we ask, how we prepare people for that information. And so it's really important that those same values we bring to prevention, we're bringing to the evaluation of our prevention efforts.

So designing and implementing ethical evaluation is that really critical part of comprehensive prevention programming. It includes ensuring things like transparency around the process and the measuring tools you're using, as well as being mindful of cultural and linguistic impacts and adaptations. For example, are you just measuring literacy? Are you measuring or using language that actually is resonating with the people that you're asking the questions of? So there's just a couple considerations that we would want people to think about as they're going into designing evaluation and designing prevention programming. How are you collecting personal information? Why are you collecting that information? What will you do with that information? And how can you protect privacy and promote anonymity when necessary? Think about the questions that you're asking. Are you including problematic or harmful questions? Why are you asking these questions? Is the way you ask a question leading to the answer that you want and therefore are you really not learning much from the people you are working with? How are you being transparent around the process and the data? How can you ensure transparency? How can you adapt/adjust when evaluation practices aren't transparent with not just participants but communities and other stakeholders as well? And also very important, how are you ensuring responsible data representation? By that, how are you sharing the data? How are you sharing those stories? How are you representing the data? Are you misrepresenting responses from the participants? Are you using the data? One of our good colleagues who will hear from him later recordings, Patrick Lemmon, often says if you are not using your data, he considers that unethical. If you are asking people to spend all this time contributing to this data, to fill out these surveys, to do all this other stuff, and then not use it, that's problematic. So thinking about these things as you do and plan for your evaluation can be really helpful to ensure that those prevention values we bring to our programming are also brought to our evaluation efforts.

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### **Aislinn Addington** 13:03

Great point. Meg you mentioned a lot of great things, I just wanted to add also the environment and the circumstances under which we are collecting information for evaluation is so important. Something I always remind students is that surveys, in this example we're using surveys, always must be voluntary. Right? It's not, you can have this thing after you fill this out for me, that is not appropriate. That is not ethical. It could seem convenient, but it's not the way to do things. Really making sure that no is, that you're getting a yes or no is an option to steal language from likely another conversation we would be having.

### **Meg Foster** 13:43

Thank you Aislinn. I just also wanted to circle back to that airplane example. Right. Also, to quote Patrick Lemon. It depends on what your goal is. If we have a goal that we are trying to accomplish, our evaluation should help us figure out if we are moving towards that goal. And we'll talk about this more in later recordings, but that piece of when we get to the test, and we have the results from the test, that question of what did those results tell us about not just the participants of that evaluation strategy, but the test itself? Is it actually aligned with what we're trying to accomplish? If we came up with a test that was like, stick your airplanes in a bowl of water, but our definition of a good airplane is to go at least 30 feet, how is that test actually helping us figure out if we're meeting our goal of a good airplane? What standards have we set in that test of 30 feet if everyone makes that, should we aim a little bit higher? If no one makes that, should we keep that same 30 feet goal and think about the work we're doing to help people meet that goal, or should we adjust that goal? That step of really thinking about the impact of our test is a key part of that as well.

### **Carli Rohner** 14:59

I love that Meg and one thing when we're thinking about the ethics of how we're doing our evaluation work is that I know for many of us, we are trying to pull as many voices into our entire prevention work as we can. So that might look like having folks that are focus groups to provide input on your evaluation or input on your prevention program. One of the things that I encourage folks to do is really, in alignment with our ethical evaluation, is ensuring that you are honoring that input and meaningfully incorporating it. It's not going to be enough to have all of these groups to provide community specific input, and then turn around and continue with the survey that you started with or continue with whatever your evaluation plan was aside from that work, especially if you are thinking about cultural considerations. Aislinn brought up a great scenario around thinking about voluntary participation to an evaluation. Are you allowing folks to consent to this process? So thinking about that I just really want to encourage folks, to the extent that you are able to meaningfully incorporate that feedback and that perspective so that your evaluation and your overall prevention work can be as robust as possible.

And so with that, we want to say thank you so much for listening to this recording. You can check out all of our other recordings in this series on evaluation as well as the other series in the exploring prevention audio library, on the SATF website at [www.OregonSATF.org](http://www.OregonSATF.org). And please let us know if

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there's other areas of evaluation that you are excited to learn more about or other areas of prevention. Our staff loves that kind of feedback, and you can find our emails on the website as well. Thanks so much for listening.

### **Contact Us**

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