



## Different Kinds of Evaluation and Data

Total time: 17min 57sec

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

Thank you for listening to this short recording. In this audio series we explore prevention, evaluation, and assessment. These are part of a larger audio library to help explore creative prevention ideas and developing and expanding our prevention efforts. In this recording, we talk more about different kinds of evaluation. Today we are joined by National Prevention and Evaluation Contractor Patrick Lemmon, and I'm Meg Foster Prevention Coordinator at the Sexual Assault Task Force. Let's begin by talking about complexity. Patrick?

### **Patrick Lemmon** 00:44

Thanks so much for having me, Meg, I'm very glad to be here. Complexity is one of those subject matters that can get really complex and I'm not intending to be [unclear], but it seems to happen frequently when I speak. But you know, no matter how closely and deeply we look at an issue, there's always more, right, there's always more depth that we can go into. And that can be a real trap. So part of what I want to make sure that we talk about here is that we don't want our evaluation to be more complex than it needs to be for our purposes. So we could do anything as simple as asking people to tell us what they thought at the end of a workshop, for example, that's an evaluation if it's done in a systematic way. And that can be useful in some circumstances. Or we can go all the way to the other extreme and do a randomized, rigorous evaluation, which is extraordinarily expensive, and almost certainly more than you need, if you're listening to this webinar right now.

### **Meg Foster** 01:48

Thank you, Patrick, that's so important. People do, as you mentioned, really get bogged down in this idea that they have to do this really rigorous evaluation process and oftentimes I fear that those processes are disconnected from finding meaningful information for people implementing the program in the moment. And so there's this piece, right, of wanting to have a broader understanding and an adaptable model that has this rigorous research behind it, which takes so long that oftentimes I also fear that by the time you get to the end of the rigorous research part, the stuff is outdated. And so right, like there's so many pieces there. And I love that there's these different levels, that we can really engage with evaluation. When we're thinking about those different levels of complexity, it's also helpful for us to think about the different types of evaluation we can do. Patrick, can you tell us a little bit more about process evaluation?

### **Patrick Lemmon** 02:48

Sure, process evaluation is one of two primary kinds. We'll be talking about outcome evaluation in a moment and process evaluation is basically just giving you information about the implementation of the programs that you're hoping to evaluate. So it can ask questions or it can review things like how the



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implementation was done, the number of sessions that you did, or the number of meetings that you had, topics of conversation, attendance, things like that. Even satisfaction could be part of that, right? how satisfied were people who participated. But you also can do different things with process evaluation that are really valuable, such as paying attention to barriers that you faced during your implementation, things that went wrong. For example, if you had to change your curriculum from in person to online because of a pandemic, that's probably going to impact your evaluation. And so you probably will want to note that in your documentation as you're moving forward.

The other piece that's related to that is about if you do any kind of variation from the plan of implementation, it is really valuable to note that, because then when you're comparing the outcome of this particular implementation to another implementation, and there's a difference, then that variation might be part of what made the difference. So it's important to be able to track that. And that's something you can do with process evaluation.

### **Meg Foster** 04:22

Something that we're not going to go too in depth on, at all here, is a word called triangulation. And one of the things that comes to mind for me when Patrick is talking about these different strategies for process evaluation, is that we don't just have to pick one strategy. We could collect information from participants about their satisfaction and experience, we could collect information about the changes that we've made to the programming and how that is informed by that participant input. We could also write our own process notes about how we experienced implementing prevention programs. And all of this information together can tell us a bigger story. If we just do one of these strategies, we often miss some of those questions that we have. And when we put those different strategies together, even if they're only process evaluation, they can really give us this broader context for what is happening in our programming. Patrick, because you are the one that introduced me to triangulation, is there anything you would want to add to that?

### **Patrick Lemmon** 05:28

Triangulation just gives you more opportunities to see the change that you're hoping to see, the more different ways you can look at things, the more likely you are to be able to pick up something valuable and important.

### **Meg Foster** 05:44

Thank you. I know that in my time doing prevention education in schools, there would be times when I get from one evaluation tool feedback that felt hard for me to understand or take in or process. And when I was able to connect that to other evaluation strategies we were doing, it really helped me understand better what changes needed to be made or could be made for the programming to be more impactful.

### **Patrick Lemmon** 06:13

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So I love the way that you just said that, you were talking about how it was hard for you to hear that. And so getting these other pieces of information, maybe made you feel better. So I was thinking of Oh, triangulation is therapy. What a great concept.

**Meg Foster** 06:33

I love that. That's a great evaluation nerd joke.

**Patrick Lemmon** 06:37

It's a total evaluation nerd joke!

**Meg Foster** 06:41

So we've been talking about process evaluation, which is one of those two types that Patrick mentioned earlier. You also talked briefly about outcome evaluation. So this evaluation is focused on learning more about the impacts of your prevention efforts. What does this evaluation look like?

**Patrick Lemmon** 06:59

So outcome evaluation is much more common, or at least it's much more common in what we perceive evaluation to be. And it's more likely what funders are generally going to want to see and what the public wants to hear about, right? If they see you doing this work, they want to know if you got where you intended to go. And that outcome evaluation helps you to get there. And so that could look like a bunch of different things. It could measure changes in knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, behaviors or behavioral intent, changes in policies, changes in community ownership of particular issues or approaches. All of those are measured through outcome evaluation. Again, it can be very complex or relatively simple.

**Meg Foster** 07:48

And when we really start to unpack the different data that we're collecting, sometimes our process evaluation can really be outcome evaluation and vice versa if we spend the time to utilize it and unpack it in that way. And of course, I want to circle back to that systematic approach, the systematic approach to it is a really important piece of that; we can't just make up how we use our data. Speaking of data, though, there are also different kinds of data, right? So there are two kinds of broad categories of how we collect data. They're also kind of two main categories of what that data can look like. So that's often known as qualitative and quantitative data. Patrick, what is the difference between these different kinds of data?

**Patrick Lemmon** 08:34

Well, there are a lot of differences between them, but the simplest way to look at it is quantitative data is something that you can count easily, right. So this is if you do a survey, and you count the percentage of people who say one thing at the end of a program versus at the beginning, that's a clear and easy



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quantitative measure. Very straightforward. But qualitative is much more rich generally and among a lot of evaluators is much more appealing because qualitative data, you would collect through things like focus groups or interviews or open-ended surveys, and you get a lot more information. You understand what and how people are thinking about the materials that you've been addressing and that really helps to inform your work in a much richer way.

So the qualitative data, takes more time, takes more effort, often takes more resources, but it gives you dramatically more information as a general rule, not always. The other thing that's important to note about qualitative data is that even though it isn't easy to count like quantitative data, it's often easy to translate into quantitative data so that you can count. You could say, for example, well, at the end of this process 75% of participants in the program were able to define or use a term appropriately. Whereas at the beginning, only 30% did. You get that information from the qualitative data, but then you put quantitative analysis onto it. So although they are two separate types of data collection, they actually have a lot to do with one another.

### **Meg Foster** 10:32

Thank you, Patrick. One of the things that we most commonly hear from folks around their prevention programming, or at least I hear this very frequently is, when we ask "How do you know it's working well?" and folks will say, "Oh, I hear from people, I hear from participants." And this is where that systematic approach comes back in, right, like, that's all qualitative data, but you have to have systems in place to capture it and process it. It can't just be well, I heard from one person once that this was really great. Or I heard from 10 people that this is really great.

An important piece there to consider when we're thinking about our strategies is who feels comfortable sharing that information with us verbally or in other spaces and who might not have that same shared opinion, who isn't expressing that to us in the same ways, right. So that systematic approach to collecting this information is really important. And not just collecting it, but capturing it and documenting it.

### **Patrick Lemmon** 11:34

I'm so glad that you raised that, that's really important to pay attention to and, you know, we mentioned a data nerd joke earlier or an evaluation nerd joke earlier -- another very common line that evaluators use is that the plural of anecdote is not data, right? That the fact that you hear multiple stories, doesn't mean that your program is fabulous, right? It just means that several people, Meg, as you said, felt comfortable sharing that. But if you collect that information in a systematic way, then you're more likely to get a sense of whether there's bias being introduced. Right? That's what's missing here. If you're not systematic about it, you miss opportunities to recognize if there's a difference between people you're hearing from and people you aren't hearing from. And that's where things like bias or inconsistent change happening based on a particular issue such as, for example, gender or race may come into play that you don't see because you weren't systematic. So, Meg, I'm so glad you mentioned that, really critically important.



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**Meg Foster** 12:40

Absolutely. In a future recording, we're going to get a little more in depth in the different types of data you could collect from everything from just changes in knowledge, which I know Patrick shared a couple examples of that, like, do you understand this definition now when you didn't before. So some of those shifts in our basic knowledge to changes in action, changes in policy changes in community norms. So we're going to talk a little bit more about that more in depth in another recording. There are some key questions that can help you figure out what kind of evaluation levels of complexity you want to focus on and or prioritize as you plan for, implement, and refine your evaluation.

The first important question is what is your goal? What are you wanting to learn about the effectiveness, about the impact, about how people are interacting with your programming? That's the big question of "What is Your Goal" should guide all of your evaluation planning.

And then, what can you control and change at each level? If you are implementing a program with no changes whatsoever, oftentimes, that also comes with a pre-packaged evaluation tool, or you've defined a tool to use and sometimes language shifts, sometimes questions aren't received in the way we anticipated them being received. Sometimes, we've learned all we want to learn about this one category for this time, and we want to shift our evaluation efforts to learn something else. Thinking about that, if you want less flexibility, sometimes those higher levels of evaluation are where you want to be. If you want more flexibility to be able to learn more and shift what you're learning about, having some of those less complex evaluation levels might be more valuable. What key pieces of data are you trying to collect? That will likely inform what you are how you do your evaluation. And what resources do you have? And what resources do you need to do the evaluation you want? So this includes everything from staff capacity, knowledge, financial resources, time, all of those things, what resources do you have, and what resources do you need to do that whatever level of complexity you want to be investing in. Do you have any thoughts to add to that, Patrick?

**Patrick Lemmon** 15:05

Yeah, a couple of quick things. You mentioned time as a critical resource to consider. And I 100% agree. One of the places that this comes up for me or something that I take very seriously is if you use one of the more rigorous forms of data collection, and you don't make use of that information, because you don't have time or because of whatever else, then you may have actually committed an ethical violation. People have entrusted you with their information and their time and energy and they expect you to use that information in a way that's productive. And so if you don't do that, or if you anticipate that you won't have time to do that, you might want to consider using a simpler or less intensive method of data collection.

Another piece to keep in mind that is really important is if you're evaluating something for the first time or early on, you might want to consider using a less rigorous method of evaluation, a) because it's easier to do and therefore won't be quite as scary for you, but b) because those less rigorous methods are also likely to pick up program problems, for example, and so with less cost, you can find some challenges, make adjustments, and then measure them again. If things go well, then you can use

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a more rigorous form of evaluation and invest more time, energy and money after having a pretty good hint that your program is where you want it to be.

**Meg Foster** 16:39

Thank you, Patrick. That is so important. The number of times that I feel like I've seen people collect all this data and then it just sits in a box is definitely problematic. Anything else to add about evaluation, about the different types of evaluation or levels of complexity?

**Patrick Lemmon** 16:59

I don't think so at this point. I know we're gonna have a few more conversations about this and I'm looking forward to that.

**Meg Foster** 17:06

Thank you for listening to the short recording. Check out our other recordings in the series on evaluation as well as the other series in our Exploring Prevention Audio Library at SATF's website, [www.OregonSATF.org](http://www.OregonSATF.org). And please let us know what else you want to learn more about, whether it's evaluation, prevention strategies, all those other things. You can find our emails at SATF's website. Thanks so much all.

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