



Outcomes (Short, Mid, and Long Term)

Total time: 22min 22sec

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 discuss outcomes and dive a little deeper into outcome evaluation. If you're unsure what outcome evaluation is, Episode Two in this series on different kinds of evaluation might be a good place to start. Today we are joined by National Prevention and Evaluation Contractor Patrick Lemmon, and I'm Meg Foster, Prevention Coordinator at the Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force. Welcome Patrick.

Patrick Lemmon 00:52

Hey Meg, thanks for having me.

Meg Foster 00:55

Patrick. I'd love if you could start us off by talking a little bit about the relationship between evaluation and outcome?

Patrick Lemmon 01:01

Well, sure, I think that evaluation and outcomes are fairly obviously linked, although exactly how they are can sometimes be a little bit hard to see. And so one of the ways that I like to talk about it, and this isn't original to me, so I won't claim any authorship of this, but I think a really useful metaphor is thinking about planning a road trip. If I want to go somewhere, then I'm going to take this road trip, I need to think about how it is that I'm going to plan that. What's it going to look like? I want to think about things like, how am I going to get there? Do I have the map planned out? Or am I just going to drive in whatever way feels fun at the time? So how structured do I want to be? I want to think about things like where am I going to need to stop for gas, what other kinds of pit stops, do I need to make a stay over at any place, are there other sites that I want to see, do I want to stop and visit friends along the way? All of these things go into good trip planning. And if I'm trying to think about whether the trip has gone well, then I will want to think about ahead of time, what do I need to do in order to make sure that it goes well? I want to make sure that I stop and see this particular site or this particular friend. Those sorts of things. I want to make sure that I have enough snacks so that I don't get cranky or that the people who I'm riding with don't get cranky during the trip, because that can change things around.

So if we build all of these expectations, and all of these possibilities inside of it, then we can see much more easily whether we're getting where we want to go on the journey and we can see it during the trip rather than having to wait all the way until the end. And that I think is a really important piece of this, is that it gives us a lot more space to see that we're doing what we want to do and getting the most out of this trip that we can.



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So those pit stops that I talked about, those are the opportunities for evaluation. We can do evaluation right at the beginning of whatever program we're implementing, we can do it about halfway through or three quarters of the way through, and we can of course, do it at the very end. And those can meet with our understanding of short, medium or long term outcomes. So as we're talking about that, and thinking about this road trip metaphor and applying it to evaluation and outcomes, let's talk a little bit more about specifically what short, medium and long term outcomes are.

Meg Foster 03:46

Thank you, Patrick. I always have your voice in my head, asking the question, it depends on what your goal is. And I really like, when we're thinking about a road trip, there's maybe an obvious goal of reaching a destination, but I also love that in your metaphor, you highlighted that you want to have a good road trip. And so there are things in that short term that will indicate if your road trip is off to a good start. And there are those things that maybe like halfway through the journey that you're like, it will tell you whether or not this is still a good trip, or if it's been a good trip. And then that like those longer term goals.

So I like that idea that kind of ties in to, I believe, our first episode where we were talking about paper airplanes. And if your goal is to make a good paper airplane, we have to think about what that means. And so thinking about the road trip as well, like what would be those milestones and indicators, those places that we can look on our road trip and understand if we're having a good road trip.

I think a lot of times we get stuck in this pattern of feeling like outcomes are the final, the end goal, the only thing that there is. The outcomes will hopefully build off of one another from the short, mid, and long term. Short term outcomes tend to focus more on the immediate effects of a program, maybe within six months. These examples of time periods are just examples. It depends on the program you're doing and what time measurements are most useful for you all. Mid term outcomes look more like the changes in the population that we can see prior to sustained impact. If we're talking about our prevention programming, this might be maybe within two years. And long term outcomes are larger changes seeing population wide, maybe within five to 10 years. Again, these time measurements are not set in stone, they just help us think about what we're measuring when we think about our evaluation strategies.

So again, if we're thinking about a road trip, those short term, those time measurements are going to look very different depending on how long our road trip is. If we're doing a five to 10 year road trip, then maybe those time measurements work. But in those shorter terms, like what is it for me, I know that living on the west side of Oregon, one of my earliest indicators is like if I've made it successfully through Portland is like one of my short term outcomes. If I survived the traffic of Portland, unscathed and still ready for the journey, that is one of my, my big indicators of like, success. So that might be short term. You know, stopping halfway through the journey to that first pit stop to get gas and checking in on like, how's my car doing? How am I doing? All of those sorts of things might be closer to our midterm.

We don't just want to focus on measuring that end goal, we don't just want to focus on measuring whether or not we reached our destination, because then we've missed those opportunities

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along the way to make course corrections to understand whether or not we're reaching this goal of a good road trip. We want to think about those short term outcomes. Measuring them can really tell us if we're on the right path towards our long term goals and outcomes.

So thinking about outcomes, we talked about it in terms of the road trip, we're talking about a little bit more in terms of prevention programming. When thinking about prevention programming, what are some examples of outcomes that people commonly look at?

Patrick Lemmon 07:06

Well sure, and I, Meg, I appreciate the way you talked about this short, medium and long term, it really helps, to relieve some of the pressure, if we can recognize that there are these different levels of goals that we're looking for. Because if all we're looking for in this particular example is reducing incidents of sexual violence, well, I've been doing this work for 30 years now, and I haven't actually seen a substantial reduction in sexual violence rates. So I could take away from that, that I've been a pretty significant failure, but instead, because I understand the importance and value of short, medium and long term goals and outcomes, that there are other things that I can witness that are indicators that we actually might be really moving in the right direction.

So the kinds of things that we often look at in terms of the impact of our prevention programs could be things like changes in individual knowledge, attitudes, or beliefs. Those are generally considered short term changes. That there's something that can happen fairly quickly, we can measure them relatively easily, and if we're not getting there, then we recognize that we're going to have trouble getting to our future goals, our longer term goals. So we want to make sure that we pay attention, that we feel pretty good that we're making progress.

And then we can start looking at things that are longer term in terms of the outcomes with changes in community norms, for example, or changes in behavior. That's another thing that tends to be a longer term impact and depends upon the shorter term outcome before we can get there. Other things that we really would want to pay attention to that, again, will often be considered longer term are increases in protective factors or decreases in risk factors for sexual violence. And then of course, the ultimate long term goal is changes and incidents of violence. As I mentioned earlier, we're hoping to see that very explicitly in our programming. And it takes a very, very long time to get there.

Meg Foster 09:24

Yeah, I think that when I talked to a lot of prevention programs, regardless of the setting, they often have this in mind of like those changes and incidences of violence, and one of the biggest things that gives me pause when I talk to someone that is they're saying like, Oh, yeah, we had fewer reports. So our program is working. And I'm like, eek, right? Yes, we want longer term change, of fewer incidences of violence, but we know that from collecting data over time, that when we are talking about prevention, when we first are implementing and even sometimes after five years of implementing our prevention program, we are shifting those community norms about talking about violence, about social acceptance of violence, and we're making it hopefully safer for people to come forward when they've experienced it,



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which is why it is so important that we are not just looking at and not just evaluating our end goal. If that's the case, then things that actually are harmful might look like success in the interim.

Patrick Lemmon 10:27

I really liked that you brought that out. I think that's so important. And many of us who do this work know that if our programs are successful in the short term, reports are actually going to jump substantially at the outset. So being prepared for that is really important. And the other side of that, that I haven't heard framed quite the way you just did I really like, is that we could be doing things that are harmful, that in the short term look like success. But if we pay attention over the longer term, that's a real risk. So again, that points to the value of thinking ahead of time, before you implement your programs. What are you expecting to see? How are you expecting things to go? Because if they go substantially differently from how you're expecting them, even if it's a good, substantially different, that there might be something else happening there that you'll want to explore more, either because it gives you a greater opportunity to celebrate because Wow, this is so much better than I thought, or two, as you were pointing out, recognize, ooh, I kind of messed up here and wound up creating some kind of harm.

Meg Foster 11:38

I often use the example of the "No means no" consent campaigns, that this was a really well intentioned effort and unfortunately, after years and years of implementing this campaign, we got to a place of well, they didn't say no, and so ended up minimizing a lot of the sexual violence and erasing a lot of the sexual violence that happened in a really problematic way.

And I think that when we're thinking about our evaluation processes, when we're thinking about measuring outcomes, it's really important to start with a question of like, what do you want to know? And I think that sounds maybe like a really silly thing to bring up, but I think so often we start our evaluation processes with, what do our funders want to know? Or what do other people want to know? And it's important to ask those questions like, what do we want to know? What are we curious about? What questions do we have about the impact of our prevention efforts? If we're not asking those questions, we end up implementing a campaign like no means no that 20 years later, we realize this caused a lot of harm, socially.

And so what are those things like? Is this message really resonating with the people in my program? Am I actually having the desired impact that I want to have about consent? Are people able to walk away from this program better equipped to practice skills? Are people actually implementing this policy? Is it like we got this policy passed, but is it actually being implemented? These are all questions that we might have about the work that we're doing. And it's important to start there. What outcomes, short, mid, and long term are we trying to achieve? Not just the end goal. Not just that ultimate piece.

By starting with these questions, we're better able to use our evaluation strategies to collect information that's meaningful to us and to our intended outcomes. When thinking about this question, What do you want to know? We can really think creatively and broadly here. Patrick, you once shared a quote from Casey Gwynn, the founder of the Family Justice Center movement, in which they said, "if



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you can describe it, you can measure it." When I first heard that, and I had this moment of like, Whoa, what does that really mean? What can we really measure? And you went on to share this really cool example that Casey was working on. So this idea of, if you can describe it, you can measure it. What does that mean? And what does that mean for evaluation efforts?

Patrick Lemmon 14:12

Thanks. I really love this story. And part of what I love about it is that it was kind of sarcastic originally, that the story behind this is that Casey was engaged in a conversation with a psychologist, and the psychologist had been in the field for a long time and, you know, quite experienced, and he was a real skeptic. So Casey was talking about the importance of hope that what he wanted Family Justice Centers to bring to survivors was a sense of hope in the world. And that that felt to him like the best measure of the success or failures of the Family Justice Center movement. And the psychologist he was talking with was kind of dismissive of this. This doesn't make any sense, you know, there's no real way to measure that. And Casey took it as a challenge. And so he started talking to people, talking to survivors, talking to professionals talking to evaluators, all of this different stuff. And they really just struggled with this question of, what does hope look like? And they were able to come up with a survey. And surveys are not the best tools for everything, but it's relatively easy to implement. But that's what they came up with was a survey. I believe it was a 10 question survey that they felt really got at this understanding of hope. But it was based entirely on just continuing to explore and keep asking the question, what does it mean to have hope? What does it look like? How do I recognize it? When do I see it? And so now Casey has developed this hope score, it's what he calls it, at least initial results from his research have been that the Family Justice Centers are actually pretty successful at increasing survivors' sense of hope. That may not be the long term outcome, because this is relatively recent, but at this point at least, he's been successful at capturing this. And that model just makes so much sense. Just keep asking your question, what does it look like? What does the change I want to see look like? What does it feel like? How do you sense it? And how are you going to know when you see it? And if you keep asking that question, and keep bringing other voices, more voices into the conversation, you'll get there. And you'll find some real positive ways of measuring things that you think might be really hard to measure.

Meg Foster 16:53

Patrick, additionally, you had asked the question one time, how do we know that they got it? So like, what is an indicator to us? Like, what does it feel like to us? What does it look like to us when we see and observe people in our programming, understand it? And I can't tell you the number of times I've had conversations with preventionists and including myself, and we're like, oh, my gosh, we saw the aha moment. They had it, it all clicked for them and it just feels so good when we see those moments. But actually thinking about that, and like transcribing that into our evaluation is so much more meaningful than not starting with those questions.

Patrick Lemmon 17:39

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Yeah, that's so true, that aha moment with the light bulb or the angels sing, but we didn't record the conversation, so we didn't get to hear the angels. How do we capture that and how do we figure it out? It's a real challenge, but it's a positive challenge. The more we talk about it, and the more we think about it, and the more we feel about it, the more that we really sit with this information, and the more we engage other people, including the people we're working with in the conversations, the more likely we are to be able to describe what that aha moment is.

There's another piece that's related to this for me, which is about unexpected outcomes that when people are just starting out evaluations, often they'll call me and ask me about what it looks like. And so I asked them, "Well, how do you know your program is successful?" And they have 10 or 12 things that they can say about why they feel like their program was successful. Like, that's great. It sounds like you're really happy with it. And we can talk about how to create a systematic way of measuring the things that you're describing. That's what evaluation is. It's that simple. But the other important part is to make sure that you anticipate, that you predict what's going to be different. So you predict that it's going to be different and then you measure to see if it was, and that's your evaluation. But sometimes what happens is that people say, "Well, something happened that I didn't expect," that "I saw this thing, or people told me that this thing happened and so I want to claim credit for it because it happened during my program. Therefore, I must have caused it, yippee, and I want credit for this." And what I usually say, is "Well, you can claim some credit for these unanticipated outcomes, but you can't really claim full credit for them. But you can recognize what people have said to you and when you implement your program the next time, you can describe this as an expected outcome." How can you replicate that outcome? And by predicting it and describing it really effectively, then you'll be able to get a pretty good assessment moving forward about whether you continue to be successful in reaching that goal.

Meg Foster 20:05

I often say that prevention gives us the tools to celebrate small changes and successes. It's really easy for all of us to get burnt out, that things haven't changed in the dramatic ways that we want them to, but prevention gives us the opportunity to think about the broader context and the broader story. I think about, you might be one program in a community, that there are multiple efforts happening, and what we can see is -- a little bit to what Patrick is talking about -- like, our programs maybe have contributed to these broader shifts in our community that we didn't expect to happen, and that those broader shifts are telling us a bigger story of what is happening with prevention, what is the impact. Which is, again, why it's so important to not just think about the end goal, to not just think about the destination, that we're thinking about all those little pieces of our journeys that are adding up to this bigger change, this bigger hole that we're trying to achieve.

In future episodes, we're going to talk more about, you know, the how to, how to actually do some of this evaluation and collect some of this information, but also how we process that information and use that information to understand the stories that we're a part of, and to tell those stories more effectively. So we hope you can tune into some future episodes and think more about those pieces. But thank you

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