Love is the best gift you can give a child.

WE DID IT OURSELVES

AN EVALUATION GUIDE BOOK

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Supported by:

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR HEALTHY CHILDREN – AN INITIATIVE OF SIERRA HEALTH FOUNDATION
Chapter 5. 
Evaluation Questions: 
What Do You Want to Learn?

A crucial first step in designing an evaluation is to identify what the collaborative wants to know. What the collaborative wants to know is captured in a set of evaluation questions. Developing a good set of evaluation questions is very important because the questions will drive what type of information (data) you collect.

Evaluation questions can be developed at different levels. Questions at a very general level are important for capturing in a few words what an evaluation is looking at. General questions don’t provide much detail, so they are not very helpful in figuring out how one would go about answering the questions. For example, one of the questions a collaborative should ask about its strategic action plan is:

Did the implementation of our strategic action plan improve the health and well-being of children in our community?

(The development of the strategic action plan is discussed in Phase II: Asset-Based Community Planning of the We Did It Ourselves: A Guide Book to Improve the Well-Being of Children Through Community Development.)

This is a very important question. It is also at a very general level that doesn’t provide much direction about where to start to answer it. However, if you write more specific questions, such as:

Did we implement Strategy #1?
Did we implement Strategy #2?

Did we achieve any change in Child Outcome #1?

etc.

it becomes clearer as to what information you might need to answer the questions. By answering the more specific questions, your collaborative will ultimately be able to answer the general question.

There are four very general umbrella questions that collaboratives might want to look at on a regular basis (for example, annually) with regard to their overall activities and effectiveness. These questions are:

1. Is our collaborative functioning effectively?
2. Did we mobilize resources in our community?
3. Did we implement the Strategic Action Plan for Year 1 (2, 3, etc.)? Did we implement other activities or programs?
4. Did we affect the health and well-being of children 0 to 8 years of age?

Questions for Self-Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is the Collaborative Functioning Effectively?</th>
<th>Did We Mobilize Resources In Our Community?</th>
<th>Have Child and Family Outcomes Improved?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did We Implement the Strategic Plan?</td>
<td>Did We Implement Other Activities?</td>
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</table>
We are going to be focusing on the last three questions in the context of the Strategic Action Plan.

What are evaluation questions that relate to evaluating the Strategic Action Plan?

There are three categories of evaluation questions related to the Strategic Action Plan and the implementation of selected strategies:

1. Questions about implementation: Did we implement “it”? To what extent did we implement “it”? Did we mobilize resources? Which resources did we mobilize? What other activities did we carry out?
2. Questions about short-term outcomes: Did the short-term outcomes we expected happen?
3. Questions about long-term outcomes: Did the long-term outcomes we expected happen?

What are implementation questions? ("Did we do it?")

Implementation questions are questions about the extent to which a strategy, activity, program, event, etc., was put in place and about the resources associated with it, such as:

- Was Strategy A implemented?
- What activities related to Strategy A were implemented?
- What resources were mobilized to implement the strategy?
- How well did we implement Strategy A?
- Notice that these are all questions about the strategy or the activities that make up the strategy.
When you write questions for your strategies, you will need to adapt the generic form of the “did we do it?” question to your particular strategy. Here are some examples of “did we do it?” questions rewritten to address particular strategies:

- Was a public awareness campaign implemented to make the community more aware of child abuse?
- What activities were carried out as part of this campaign?
- To what extent was each of these activities implemented?
- What resources were mobilized to carry out the public awareness campaign?
- What problems encountered in implementing the public awareness campaign can be improved? What aspects went very well?
- Was a parent education strategy put in place?
- What activities were implemented as part of this strategy?
- How well were they implemented?
- What resources were mobilized to carry out the parent education strategy?
- What problems were encountered in implementing parent education? What aspects went very well?

**How specific should our implementation questions be?**

You’ll need both general and specific questions. General questions are appropriate for describing and communicating about the focus of the evaluation to most audiences. The specific, nitty-gritty questions are needed by those working most closely on the evaluation because they pinpoint what data need to be collected.

If your strategy is made up of a lot of very different activities, then you will probably want to write a set of questions about each activity.

- Was a parenting class established?
- Was a Health Fair held?
- Was a recreation program initiated?
- Was a 24-hour parenting hotline established?
- Were Neighborhood Watch groups established?
- Were dental screening clinics held?

To produce information that will both document that the strategy/activity was implemented and give you information for improvement, you will need to anticipate all the things your collaborative would want to know about implementation of the strategy/activity. This thinking ahead will result in a very specific set of questions like when, how, how many, how long. These are the questions that will produce data for improvement (and also document in detail what was carried out for the next generation of collaborative members). If your general question is: Was a parenting class established? think about and develop questions for all the other things you would want to know about the parenting class, for example:

- When and where were the classes held?
- How many sessions over how many weeks?
- How long were the sessions?
- What resources (individuals, associations, institutions, and funds) were mobilized to carry out the parenting class?
- How many people enrolled?
- Who enrolled (gender, age, number and ages of children, ethnic or linguistic group, etc.)?
- How many people attended?

Questions such as these will produce information that will allow your collaborative to reflect on whether the parenting class was a successful activity. For example, one way to improve on the parenting class (or any other program) is to get more people to participate. To do that, you need to collect data on how many people participated the first time, why some people dropped out, and what those who attended liked and didn’t like. The corresponding evaluation questions could be: How many people attended? Did people like the class? How many dropped out and why?

As part of writing questions, think about what your collaborative would want to know at some point down the road when you are reflecting on how to make the strategy better. Remember: Evaluation is the collection and reporting of information for decision-making. The kinds of decision your collaborative will make probably involve continuing to implement a strategy/activity as is, revising it in some way, or discontinuing it.

**Why should we ask questions about implementation?**

There are several good reasons why your collaborative should ask questions about implementation. The answers to implementation questions will provide information:

1. To document what you have accomplished so you can celebrate your successes.
2. To allow your collaborative to reflect on each strategy/activity to see how it can be improved. To be able to discuss how to improve something, you first have to know what you did.
3. To report to the community at large about the collaborative and what it is doing.
4. To report to a funder on how you have carried out your grant.
5. To maintain a historical record for the next team of collaborative members.

Answers to implementation questions provide the difference between this:

The Yourtown Children’s Collaborative conducted a public awareness campaign on child abuse. The public awareness campaign consisted of billboards, public service announcements, newspaper articles, and announcements in association newsletters.

and this

The Yourtown Children’s Collaborative conducted a public awareness campaign on child abuse. Three billboards with the telephone number for reporting suspected abuse were placed in three locations (Highway 67 and Main Street; the H Street Exit off of I-40; Broadway at the entrance to Reed Park). Billboard space was donated by the Chamber of Commerce, and the billboard design was created by the Yourtown High School Graphics Class. Each of the billboard messages was in place for two months.

Two 30-second public service announcements were developed on child abuse. One focused on stress reduction for parents and the other on the community’s obligation to report. Each announcement aired 12 times on KKID between July and November. Air times were 6:20 am, 1:40 pm, 5:50 pm, and 11:25 pm. The announcements were developed by the collaborative and produced at no charge by KKID.

The Yourtown News ran a series of six feature articles between April and June on child abuse. Each article covered a topic related to child abuse and contained the telephone number for reporting suspected abuse. The reporter for the series has been a participating member of the collaborative since 1995.

Fourteen community associations also ran brief announcements reminding their members about child abuse prevention and giving the telephone number for reporting suspected abuse. The participating associations included....

What about activities that are not in the Strategic Action Plan?

Our work with collaboratives has taught us that they often undertake additional activities after the Strategic Action Plan has been developed. This happens because new issues emerge or the collaborative is presented with a new opportunity to do something in the community to help children and families. Therefore, it is generally a good idea to write an evaluation question that covers activities not in the plan. Recall that the evaluation questions drive what data will be collected. Jumping ahead to Chapter 18 on writing the report, the data determine what you will be able to write about in your report. To ensure that your evaluation report will cover all of the things your collaborative worked on during the time period, it is a good idea to include an evaluation question such as:

“What other activities did the collaborative carry out during the year?”

What are questions about short-term outcomes? (“Did it happen?”—short-term)

Short-term outcomes are outcomes that your collaborative expects to achieve before child and family outcomes are achieved. Short-term outcomes are the middle steps in the assumption dominoes chain. They are the intermediate or interim outcomes on the way to long-term outcomes. They are your predictions about what will happen when the strategy/activity is implemented.

Short-term outcomes are important because they are tangible evidence of success prior to long-term outcomes, and they indicate whether the assumptions your collaborative was working under are valid.

Example:

![Assumptions Diagram]

- **Child abuse public awareness campaign.**
- **Target audiences will “hear” the message.**
- **Target audiences will learn about child abuse reporting procedures.**
- **Target audiences will report more child abuse.**
- **Children will be safe from abuse in their homes.**
These assumptions are short-term outcomes that the collaborative has seen as connecting the public awareness campaign with children being safe in their homes from abuse and neglect.

Evaluation questions related to short-term outcomes or *short-term questions* take the short-term outcomes identified in the assumption dominoes and ask, “Did it happen?” or “Was this achieved?” Remember, the assumption dominoes were the collaborative’s best guess as to what had to happen for the strategy to affect the outcome. A set of general and specific evaluation questions can be written for each domino.

For the public awareness campaign example, the evaluation questions related to short-term outcomes would be:

Each of these general questions also has a related set of more specific or detailed questions:
- Did the message reach potential reporters of child abuse?
- How many members of the community know what constitutes child abuse and neglect?
- How many members of the community have heard the billboards?
- How many members of the community have seen the billboards?
- How many members of the community have heard the public service announcements?
- How many feel they have an obligation to report it?
- How many have changed their knowledge of child abuse or their attitude toward reporting recently?
- How many attribute their knowledge or change in attitude to seeing or hearing one of the messages of the child abuse campaign?
Did the potential reporters increase their reporting of child abuse?  
Did child abuse reporting increase since the campaign was initiated?  
Are different types of people reporting child abuse since the campaign was started?  
Has there been an increase in false reports of child abuse and neglect?  
How many people who are reporting saw or heard one of the campaign’s messages about child abuse?

**Why do we want to address questions about short-term outcomes?**

Many of the child and family outcomes that collaboratives have selected will take a number of years to change. In your analyses of underlying causes, many of you have seen how the problems you are addressing are rooted in a complex web of related factors that aren’t going to be easy or quick to change. (For a discussion of underlying causes, see the discussion on “What is blocking us from reaching our vision?” in Phase II: Asset-Based Community Planning of the *We Did It Ourselves: A Guide Book to Improve the Well-Being of Children Through Community Development.* This means the indicators that you are measuring for your child and family outcomes may not show change for many years into the future.

Measuring the predicted short-term outcomes will give the collaborative members some interim information on whether or not what they have put in place is working in the expected direction. It will also provide information that can be used to improve the strategy if it is not working as expected.

If there is no information on the expected short-term outcomes, the collaborative will have to wait and watch to see whether the indicators for the child and family outcomes change and to learn whether they are on the right track.

**Do we need to develop questions for all the assumptions in our assumption dominoes?**

Not necessarily. We recommend that you develop questions for the short-term outcomes for at least one strategy. Your collaborative can decide which strategy or strategies it wants to evaluate in depth (that is, look at short-term outcomes) and which ones it wants to evaluate less thoroughly.

The short-term-outcome questions provide very useful information, but you can easily end up with hundreds of evaluation questions if your collaborative is implementing many strategies and activities.

**How do we decide how many and which strategies to evaluate in depth?**

Your primary purpose in conducting your evaluation is to collect information to allow your collaborative to learn from experience and make appropriate adjustments. How much effort a collaborative wants to put into evaluation depends on what it wants to learn and the level of resources available. Here are some possible criteria to use in deciding which strategies to evaluate in depth:

- Are some strategies more closely tied to your vision and mission?
- Are some strategies more directly linked to your target population?
- Are some strategies more important to the collaborative than others?
- Are some strategies taking significantly more of the collaborative’s human and fiscal resources to carry out?
- Does the collaborative expect that some strategies are going to be more powerful than others?
- Are some strategies being implemented by individuals or organizations more or less willing to collect data?
- Are some strategies easier to evaluate?

There are no hard and fast rules for either how many or which strategies to look at in depth. Each collaborative will have to decide on the basis of its interests and its resources. This decision will involve striking a balance. Most collaboratives will not be able to do everything. In general, it will be more useful to a collaborative to evaluate a few strategies well and the rest minimally rather than half-evaluate all of them.

**The activities that make up our strategy are very different from one another. Can we do assumption dominoes and write evaluation questions about activities?**

For some, a strategy is focused on one major activity; for others, a strategy may be made up of a number of different activities. Base your evaluation questions on activities if it is easier for your collaborative. The goal is to develop meaningful, important evaluation questions in a way that makes sense to the collaborative.

**Do short-term-outcome questions refer to tasks that the collaborative carries out?**

No, tasks are part of implementing the strategy. Groups sometimes think that short-term outcomes are the steps in carrying out an activity, for example, finding an instructor of the parenting
class, finding a location, publicizing the class, etc. These are not short-term outcomes. These are tasks that are steps in implementing the activity or strategy.

Short-term outcomes are predictions. They refer to what the collaborative expects to have happen after the steps that make up the activity have been carried out, for example, that parents will attend, that they will learn something, and so on.

What are questions about long-term outcomes?

Long-term outcomes are your child and family outcomes. What distinguishes them from the short-term outcomes is that they tend to be more difficult and take longer to accomplish.

To write the long-term-outcome questions, turn your child or family outcomes into questions:
- Are children safer?
- Are families more nurturing?
- Are children more physically healthy?
- Are families free from drug abuse?
- Are children more ready for school?

These outcomes are already part of your work, and you have already taken a significant step toward answering the corresponding questions by identifying your indicators and compiling your baseline data. Congratulations: this part of your evaluation design is well under way.

In following chapters, when we refer to long-term outcomes, we are talking about child and family outcomes. Community-level outcomes, though sometimes long-term in scope, are more likely to be strategies being implemented to affect child and family outcomes (and therefore covered by implementation questions) or steps along the way to achieving outcomes for children and families (and therefore covered by short-term-outcome questions.)

Overall, what evaluation questions do I need to write to do a good evaluation?

Collaboratives who want to do a thoughtful evaluation should develop:
- Evaluation questions about implementation for each of the strategies they choose to implement.
- An evaluation question that addresses other activities that they might undertake.
- Evaluation questions for the child and family outcomes associated with each of their strategies.
- Evaluation questions for short-term outcomes (i.e., your assumptions) for at least one of the strategies.
- Evaluation questions that address other issues of importance to you that are not included in the above.

For some strategies (e.g., ones that others have proven are effective), you might write questions only about implementation and long-term outcomes.
For other strategies, the ones you choose to evaluate in depth, you will have questions about the short-term outcomes, as well as questions about implementation and long-term outcomes.

Additionally, collaboratives might also want to evaluate some but not all short-term outcomes associated with a strategy.

A possible format for your collaborative to use in recording your questions is included in Worksheets 5, 6, and 7 at the end of this chapter.

After developing your questions, you’ll need to identify ways to get the answers, and that’s the next step in developing an evaluation plan.
Worksheet 5:  
Implementation Questions (Did We Do It?)

Purpose: To develop evaluation questions about implementation.

1. Pick one of the strategies in your Strategic Action Plan and write it in Column 1.
2. In Column 2, write one or more evaluation questions about the implementation for this strategy. Remember, these are questions about “did we do it?”
3. If your strategy is made up of several different activities, write the first activity in Column 1 and write evaluation questions for this activity in Column 2. Continue for each subsequent activity. See sample matrix next page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies and Activities</th>
<th>Evaluation Questions about Implementation</th>
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</table>
**Worksheet 5: Implementation Questions (concluded)**

Sample Matrix for Evaluation Questions about Implementation (Did We Do It?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies and Activities</th>
<th>Evaluation Questions about Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Strategy: Public awareness campaign to reduce child abuse | Was the public awareness campaign put in place?  
What resources were mobilized? |
| Activity 1: Billboards on child abuse and reporting | Were the billboards put in place?  If not, why not?  How many?  
Where?  How long?  What resources were mobilized? |
| Activity 2: Public service announcements | Were public service announcements made and aired?  
If not, why not?  What dates and what time of day?  
What resources were mobilized? |
| Activity 3: Newspaper articles | Were newspaper articles run?  If not, why not?  
How many and when?  How many people does the newspaper reach?  What resources were mobilized to develop and run the newspaper articles? |
| Activity 4: Notices in association newsletters | Were notices put in association newsletters?  If not, why not?  
How many associations?  How many people did these newsletters reach?  What resources were mobilized to get the notices in the newsletters? |
Worksheet 6: Questions about Short-Term Outcomes

Purpose: To develop evaluation questions about short-term outcomes.

1. Pick one of the strategies in your Strategic Action Plan. Write the strategy in the “strategy” box and the child and family outcome in the “outcome” box. Complete the assumption dominoes in between, using as many columns as you need.

2. Underneath each domino column, write the general evaluation question that you would ask about that domino. Make sure the questions refer to your assumptions, not to tasks.

3. For each general evaluation question, think about whether there are specific questions that also should be addressed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy:</th>
<th>1st assumption:</th>
<th>2nd assumption:</th>
<th>3rd assumption:</th>
<th>4th assumption:</th>
<th>Long-term outcome:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Short-term outcome 1</th>
<th>Short-term outcome 2</th>
<th>Short-term outcome 3</th>
<th>Short-term outcome 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General question:</td>
<td>General question:</td>
<td>General question:</td>
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<td>Other specific questions:</td>
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Worksheet 6:
Questions about Short-term Outcomes (continued)

Sample Matrix for Evaluation Questions about Short-Term Outcomes (Did It Happen?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy:</th>
<th>1st assumption: Target audience will “hear” the message.</th>
<th>2nd assumption: Target audiences will learn about child abuse reporting procedures.</th>
<th>3rd assumption: Target audiences will report more child abuse.</th>
<th>4th assumption: (There is no 4th assumption in this example.)</th>
<th>Long-term outcome: Children will be safe from abuse in their homes.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Abuse Public Awareness Campaign</td>
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### Short-term outcome 1

**General question:**
Did the message reach potential reporters of child abuse?

**Other specific questions:**
- What percentage of community residents surveyed remember hearing a public service announcement about child abuse reporting on the radio?
- What percentage of community residents surveyed remember seeing a billboard about child abuse reporting?
- What percentage of community residents surveyed remember reading a local newspaper article about child abuse reporting?

### Short-term outcome 2

**General question:**
Did the potential reporters understand and remember the message?

**Other specific questions:**
- What percentage of residents who recall hearing the public service announcement remember who to contact to report suspected child abuse or neglect?
- What percentage of residents who recall seeing a billboard remember who to contact to report suspected child abuse or neglect?
- What percentage of residents who recall reading a newspaper article remember who to contact to report suspected child abuse or neglect?

### Short-term outcome 3

**General question:**
Did the potential reporters increase their reporting of child abuse?

**Other specific questions:**
- How many reports of child abuse and neglect were received by CPS in a given year?
- How many reports were made by first-time reporters?
- How many reports were made by non-mandated reporters?

### Short-term outcome 4

**General question:**

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Worksheet 7: Questions about Long-Term Outcomes

Purpose: To develop long-term-outcome questions.

1. Write your first child and family outcome in Column 1.
2. Write an evaluation question that corresponds to that outcome in Column 2.
3. Continue for each of your child and family outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child and Family Outcomes</th>
<th>Long-Term Evaluation Questions</th>
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PART II.
METHODS: HOW TO GET THE INFORMATION YOU NEED
Chapter 6.
Evaluation Methods:
Answering Your Evaluation Questions

Now that you have evaluation questions for your strategy or strategies and each of your assumptions or short-term outcomes, your collaborative will need to decide how you will answer those questions. You will be finding ways to answer the “Did we do it?” and “Did it happen?” questions. There are many ways, or methods, to answer your evaluation questions. What you need to know, who can provide the answers, and when you should collect the data are some of the things to consider when you decide on the method to use to answer each evaluation question.

Part II of this Guide looks at what you need to do to get the information that will answer your evaluation questions. Collecting the right information from the right people at the right time is essential to learning how your implementation efforts are going and why. This chapter will provide an overview of methods for collecting data to answer your evaluation questions. Specific evaluation methods will be discussed in detail in Chapters 7, 8, and 9.

What are evaluation methods?
Evaluation methods are ways to collect data in order to answer your evaluation questions. You may have already identified the methods you will use to answer the evaluation questions related to your long-term child and family outcomes. These are the data you are collecting for the indicators (see Chapter 3), and they will answer the evaluation questions about long-term child and family outcomes.

What are some examples of ways to collect data?
There are many ways of gathering information to answer your evaluation questions. Some common ways include:

- Written surveys or questionnaires
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Direct observations (including videotaping)
- Knowledge tests
- Other tests or assessments
- Administrative data (such as school attendance records or crime statistics).

Each of these methods for collecting data will be discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

Evaluation methods are generally considered to fall into one of two categories: qualitative methods and quantitative methods.

Qualitative methods allow selected issues to be studied in detail and in depth. Examples of qualitative methods include focus groups, unstructured interviews, and videotapings. Qualitative methods provide the opportunity to study something without having to decide beforehand exactly what type of information will be coded. For example, a qualitative approach to answering a question about why families don’t use community recreation facilities more often might include observations of the current programs, focus groups with parents of young children who haven’t used the recreation facilities, and some questioning of parents who do use the programs. Qualitative methods provide rich information but can be very challenging to analyze because sometimes it is hard to know how to reduce so much information to key findings. If you have conducted focus groups in the past, you might have had this experience.

Quantitative methods involve a set of common measures with structured responses. Examples of quantitative evaluation methods include institutional data, structured interviews, survey questionnaires, tests, checklists for observing behavior, etc. The questions for the interview or questionnaire are worked out ahead of time, so every person is asked the exact same questions. Continuing with the example above, an alternative approach to learning why community recreation programs are not being used would be to do a community survey. A set of survey questions and likely responses would be developed by the evaluator. This survey would be distributed to a large number of people. The advantage of this approach is that it provides information from lots of people. The disadvantage is that the person developing the survey needs to know the questions to ask and the responses people are likely to give to each. Answers to the questions are tallied, and results are presented numerically (“63% of the parents said...”). Quantitative evaluation methods work well if you want to collect information from a large group or population of people. They also produce data that are easier and quicker to analyze.

Can we use qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods?
You can use both qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. Sometimes a quantitative method will be more appropriate to answer your
evaluation question, and other times a qualitative method will be more appropriate. Sometimes both are appropriate. In general, the choice between qualitative and quantitative evaluations is based on how much you already know about what you are studying, how many people you want to reach, and what kind of data you want. Is it more important to know general information from a lot of people or in-depth information from a few? The type of evaluation method you use will depend on how your collaborative answers these evaluation questions.

**Who do we collect data from?**

Deciding who to collect information from to answer a particular evaluation question is an important part of developing an evaluation method. You need to decide which people are most able to provide the data that will help you answer your evaluation questions. What you want to know about them or from them depends on your evaluation questions. The group of people you are trying to reach with a particular strategy or activity are your **target population**. It is for this group that the change you seek is critical, and it is they who have the information that will help you answer your questions.

**Identify your target population** by asking “Who are we trying to reach with this strategy or activity?” The target population for a community-wide information campaign would be the entire community. The target population for a parents’ hot line would be parents. The target population for an immunization program would be all young children 0-5 years old. You will need to collect data from or about your target population to answer your evaluation questions.

Some target populations will be more or less receptive to a particular type of data collection. You will need to consider which approach will be most productive. For example, would the target population of parents of young children be more receptive to a telephone interview, a focus group, or a mail survey?

**Small target population:** If your target population is small, you can collect data from all or nearly all of them. For example, if your target population is women and children in shelters, you could conceivably collect data from all or nearly all of the residents. Qualitative evaluation methods can be effective with small target populations.

**Large target population:** If your target population is large, you may need to collect data from only some of them. For example, if your target population is parents of young children, you could collect data from some parents at each elementary school in your community. The group of people you collect data from is referred to as your **sample**. With large target populations, quantitative evaluation methods are most common, although qualitative populations could be used with subsets of a large target population.

**When do we collect data?**

Since the intent of your strategies and related activities is to effect some type of change in your community or a segment of your community, you want to collect data over time that will show that change has occurred. There are two ways to measure or show this change: **repeated measures** and **retrospective data collection**.

With **repeated measures**, the same data are collected two or more times on some type of schedule. The same data collection method (the same survey, test, interview, etc.) is used repeatedly. The first time the data are collected provides the **baseline**. The baseline is the starting point. We have already discussed the need to collect baseline data on your child and family indicators. If it is completed prior to implementing a strategy, a first-time measure can also be a **pretest** of attitudes or knowledge.

The same data are subsequently collected with a regular interval of time between collections, such as annually, semianually, or at the end of a class or the end of a public awareness campaign. The second and subsequent times you use the method to collect data are **interim measures** or **posttests**.

Baseline or pretest data collection is done before a strategy, activity, or intervention is put in place. It tells you about your target population before you try to make any changes. For example, pretest data tell you how much parenting skills knowledge a participant had before taking a parenting class. In another example, baseline or pretest data tell you what percentage of your community knew what constituted grounds for reporting child abuse and neglect before a public awareness campaign to increase reporting of child abuse and neglect was implemented.

Data collection for posttests or interim measures is done at key points during the implementation of the strategy, activity, or intervention, and at the conclusion of it. Comparisons can then be made between the results of the pretest or baseline and the results of the posttest(s) or interim measures to show whether change occurred. If an intervention is short, such as a parenting class, posttesting is done at its conclusion. If the intervention is repeated
with a new group of participants, pre- and posttesting are repeated with them. Comparisons between pre- and posttests of parenting knowledge would indicate whether participants’ knowledge changed.

For longer-term activities, such as a public awareness campaign on child abuse and neglect (what it is and how to report it), subsequent data collection could be done annually or semiannually. The results of the later data collection on the community’s knowledge of what constitutes child abuse and neglect would be compared with the results of the baseline. This comparison would tell you whether the percentage of the community who could correctly identify child abuse and neglect had increased, decreased, or stayed the same.

Retrospective data collection is the second way to collect data to show change. Retrospective data are collected after the strategy, activity, or intervention is completed. This method asks respondents to provide current information, as well as information about a previous period of time, and may also ask them to evaluate how much change has occurred between the previous and current points in time. If a strategy, activity, or intervention has been in place for a considerable period of time, retrospective data collection is required. If for some other reason data collection can be done only once, retrospective data collection also is the desirable approach.

Is our method feasible?

Some additional considerations need to be taken into account when developing the methods for collecting data: your collaborative’s human and financial resources.

Human resources. Will you have the human resources to do the data collection? If you are considering conducting focus groups with potential reporters of child abuse or neglect, the evaluator/facilitator will need to be well trained, sensitive, and observant. If you are considering conducting a structured telephone interview, the interviewers will need to be trained to be objective, and they may need to be from the target group to be trusted or perceived as credible. You will have to determine how many interviewers you need to achieve the number of completed interviews you want within a certain period of time. Depending on your resources, you may want to consider hiring additional help. One collaborative found that hiring students from a local college or university was an affordable way to conduct a door-to-door neighborhood survey.

Financial resources. What will be the costs of the methods you have selected? As mentioned in Chapter 4, there is a general rule of thumb that evaluation should require about 10% of the total investment in a project. Some methods are considerably more costly than others. For example, a mail survey costs less to do than an in-home, in-person survey if you have to hire people to do your interviews. The 10% refers to the entire evaluation effort and will need to cover data collection, analysis, and reporting. The abilities to accomplish these activities may be found among your membership, or you may want to hire someone with a certain expertise to assist you.

It is important to select the evaluation method that will provide you with the data you need, given the resources you have available.

Do we need a method for each evaluation question?

You will need to identify an evaluation method for each of your implementation and long-term-outcome evaluation questions. The same method can often be used to answer more than one question. For the evaluation questions on implementing your strategy (“Did we do it?”), you will answer the question by documenting the implementation. For the evaluation questions about your long-term outcomes, the methods will be the ones that you are using to collect data on your indicators.
For the strategies you choose to evaluate in depth, each short-term outcome question will need to have a corresponding method for collecting data. For the evaluation question on each short-term outcome (“Did we achieve the first, second, third, etc., short-term outcome?”), you will identify one or more methods to collect data to answer the question.
The following is an example showing methods for the public awareness campaign on child abuse that was introduced in the previous chapters. Keep in mind that this is only an example, and alternative methods are possible and may even be preferable. Each of the data collection methods mentioned is addressed in Chapters 8 and 9.
Measuring the implementation of a strategy

The implementation of a strategy is measured by documenting how, when, where, and by whom the strategy was implemented.

Measuring the first short-term outcome

For the evaluation question related to the first short-term outcome, “Did the public awareness campaign message reach potential reporters of child abuse?”, the evaluation method could be a questionnaire surveying selected target groups within the community every six months.

Type of data collection: The data would be collected with a mail survey questionnaire to provide quantitative data. Specific items on the questionnaire would address more detailed evaluation questions, such as whether the respondent saw billboards, heard public service announcements, read newspaper articles, or read the newsletters.

Target group: Because the target group is so large, that is, the entire community, data collected from a sample of the community would be sufficient. There are some key segments within the community that are of special interest because of their contact with families at risk of child abuse or neglect: health professionals, teachers, parents, neighbors of low-income families, individuals with contact with substance abusers, etc. These segments of the community would be targeted and a representative number of them identified to be surveyed.

Timing of data collection: The data collected the first time are retrospective data. The questionnaire would ask whether the respondent had seen the billboards, public service announcements, or newspaper or newsletter articles in the last six months, and therefore is retrospective in its design. Since one can assume that no one would have seen any of the campaign approaches before their implementation, the level of awareness at the time of the first data collection will measure the change from zero. Subsequent data collection times, every six months, would be repeated measures. They will show changes in awareness compared with previous data collection times.

Measuring the second short-term outcome

For the evaluation question related to the second short-term outcome, “Did the potential reporters understand and remember the message?”, the evaluation method could be additional items on the same mail survey questionnaire.

Type of data collection: The data would be collected with a mail questionnaire to provide quantitative data. Specific items on the questionnaire would address more detailed evaluation questions, such as what constitutes child abuse and neglect, how to report abuse or neglect, whether the respondents feel an obligation to report, whether their attitude toward reporting abuse or neglect has changed, and whether they attribute a change in attitude to seeing or hearing one of the messages of the campaign.

Target group: The same.

Timing of data collection: Data collected semiannually.

Measuring the third short-term outcome

For the evaluation question related to the third short-term outcome, “Did the potential reporters increase their reporting of child abuse?”, the evaluation method would be an item on the questionnaire asking the respondents whether their reporting of child abuse had increased. Child abuse reporting data also should be collected from institutional sources, such as the local child protective services agency or its equivalent. Social workers taking reports could be asked to collect some additional data, such as whether the reporters had seen or heard the public awareness campaign and what target groups they represented.

Type of data collection: Community survey and institutional quantitative data.

Target population: Same for survey. Actual reporters of child abuse/neglect for institutional data collection.

Timing of data collection: Data collected semiannually for the survey. Annual institutional data collection.

Measuring the long-term outcome

For the evaluation question related to the long-term outcome, “Are more children safe in their homes from abuse and neglect?”, the evaluation method would be the data collection method specified in indicators of long-term outcomes. In this case, the indicators were the number of child abuse reports and number of children removed from families—data to be collected from the local protective services agency.
Type of data collection: Administrative quantitative data.

Target population: Children in the community.

Timing of data collection: Collected annually. The next chapters will explore several methods of collecting data in detail. Chapter 7 helps you identify what evaluation methods work best for which types of evaluation questions. Chapter 8 tells you how to document your hard work so that you can answer your implementation questions. Chapter 9 looks at additional data collection tools, such as interviews and questionnaires, that you may need to use to answer your other evaluation questions. Before deciding on which methods work best to answer your evaluation questions, take the time to read the next three chapters. There is a lot of information presented in these chapters to digest. Remember, the goal of evaluation is to learn about what you are doing, the effect you are having, and how you can improve this for next year: to be a learning community. The reason for thinking carefully about evaluation methods is so that you can collect the best information you can. Your decisions will be only as sound as the information that they are based on.
Chapter 7.
Identifying the Focus of the Evaluation Questions: A Step on the Way to Selecting Evaluation Methods

As you learned in Chapter 6, after developing a set of evaluation questions, you need to select a method to answer each question. The method is the tool or technique you will use to collect the information needed to answer your evaluation question. You may find that many of your questions can be answered by the same method.

An intermediate step along the way to selecting a method is to identify the general topic areas that you want to learn about. The topic areas are the focus of your evaluation questions. Some methods are better suited than others to address certain topics. Identifying the focus of each of your evaluation questions will point you in the direction of some methods and away from others.

In this chapter, we discuss eight possible topic areas that CPHC collaboratives might be interested in learning about. These topics are:

- Implementation
- Opportunities in the community
- Participation and utilization
- Awareness
- Satisfaction
- Attitudes, norms, and psychological states
- Knowledge
- Behavior.

This set does not represent all possible topics, but we suspect it encompasses the topic areas of most of the evaluation questions that you have developed. Each of these topic areas is described briefly in this chapter, along with a very brief discussion of appropriate methods. These recommendations are summarized in a matrix with accompanying examples. The methods from which you will be choosing include:

- Documentation
- Written surveys
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Tests of knowledge
- Other tests or assessments
- Direct observation
- Administrative data.

Documentation will be discussed in Chapter 8. The remaining methods will be discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

1. Implementation

Evaluation questions about implementation refer to carrying out your strategies and activities. In Chapter 5, we described implementation questions as the “did we do it?” questions. Chapter 5 also contains many examples of implementation questions, that is, questions that ask about the extent to which a strategy or activity was implemented and the resources that were mobilized to do so.

2. Opportunities in the Community

For some of you, evaluation questions about opportunities in the community are the same thing as questions about implementation. Many collaboratives have designed strategies that focus on increasing opportunities in the community (for example, providing more recreation programs, instituting parenting classes, or developing activities that allow parents to spend time with their children and with other parents). For these collaboratives, the strategy and the opportunity are one and the same thing.

Other collaboratives may be implementing strategies in which the opportunity should (but may not) result from the implementation of the strategy. For example, if a collaborative was implementing an economic development strategy, the intended result would be more jobs in the community. The increase in jobs would be the increased opportunity in the community. A second example would be a community that was planning to implement a strategy designed to train more licensed child care providers. The intent of the strategy is to increase opportunities in the community. The number of child care providers and the number of children who can be provided with licensed child care would be the resulting opportunity.

The distinction is important for these collaboratives because it would be foolish for them to assume that the desired opportunities would increase just because the strategy was implemented. In fact, this is an assumption that needs to be tested. The evaluation questions related to opportunities are specific forms of “did the [opportunity] increase?”

Methods to measure increased opportunities in the community include documentation (that is, documenting the result of putting the strategy in place), direct observation (for example, observing families playing in the park after the cleanup activities), and use of administrative data (for example, the number of jobs in the community).
3. Participation and Utilization

Participation refers to attendance at an event, a class, or a program. Utilization generally refers to the use of a service. Both have to do with the number of people who take advantage of a particular resource that is available in the community.

Some collaboratives may have identified resources in the form of programs and services that exist in the community, but for various reasons are not being used as fully as they might be. These collaboratives might be instituting a strategy designed to get people to take fuller advantage of the resources that are present in the community. Collaboratives that are instituting new programs will probably be interested in tracking the extent to which the community in general or a particular segment (for example, Spanish-speaking parents) uses the new resource. Usually, collaboratives will be seeking to increase participation. However, for some services that address negative aspects of community life, such as foster care for children removed from abusive homes, the ultimate goal is a reduction in use.

In addition to tracking the number of people participating, collaboratives may want to know about why more people aren’t participating or why they drop out after they start a program. Answers to questions such as these provide concrete information that can be used to make resources more accessible and more accessed.

Examples of evaluation questions about participation and utilization include:

- How many people participated? Attended? Made use of the service?
- How can participation/utilization be increased?
- What are the barriers to participation?
- Why didn’t more people participate?
- Why are former participants no longer participating?

In general, “how many?” questions are answered by a count. These counts can be obtained through actual head counts, sign-in sheets, attendance checks, or, for events with lots of people, giving tickets to a raffle or a free treat to every attendee. The “how?” and “why?” questions, however, are better answered through surveys, interviews, or focus groups because these techniques provide more qualitative information.

4. Awareness

Evaluation questions about awareness refer to people’s knowledge of a specific event, program, or aspect of community life. Unlike participation, which refers to actually taking part in something, awareness just means the person knows something exists. A collaborative might have evaluation questions about the community’s awareness of a positive aspect of the community (for example, a resource) or a negative aspect (for example, child abuse, drug abuse). Generally, collaboratives will be trying to increase awareness.

Examples of evaluation questions about awareness include:

- How many people were aware of the event? The resource? The class? The campaign?
- How many people in the community are aware of child abuse as a problem in our community?
- How many people are aware of the recreation opportunities in the community?
- How did people become aware of the event?
- Did awareness increase over the year? Half year?
- How can awareness be increased?

Written surveys, interviews, and focus groups are well suited to answer questions about awareness.

5. Satisfaction

Satisfaction questions include the evaluation questions related to how people felt about a specific event or program. This group includes questions about how people felt about something overall as well as what specifically they liked and did not like about it. Assessing satisfaction can provide critical information for evaluating the success of your activities. If people like something, they are more likely to participate, learn, etc. If they do not like it, you need to find out why.

Examples of evaluation questions about satisfaction include:

- How did participants feel about the class, the event, the activity, the program?
- Were participants satisfied with the event, class, resource, etc.?
- What did they like? Why?
- What didn’t they like? Why?
- How could the class, event, activity, program, etc. be improved?
- How many would participate again? Why or why not?

Written surveys, interviews, and focus groups are well suited to address evaluation questions related to satisfaction.
6. Attitudes, Norms, and Psychological States

Collaboratives asking evaluation questions about attitudes, norms, and psychological states are trying to change some aspect of how people think or feel about themselves or about their community. Racial prejudice, for example, is an attitude. Acceptance of drug use or alcohol use are community norms. Belief in corporal punishment as a way to change children’s behavior is an attitude or a belief. Many collaboratives have recognized the stress and isolation of families raising young children. Stress and isolation are dimensions of how people experience life and how they feel. Attitudes are not the same as behavior, although they are often seen as an underlying factor. Someone’s behavior may or may not accurately reflect their attitudes and beliefs.

If you are addressing evaluation questions related to attitudes and psychological states, you might notice that they tend to be “farther removed” from the strategy on the assumption dominoes chain. They also can be challenging to measure.

Examples of evaluation questions related to attitudes, norms, and psychological states include:

- Has there been a change in how the community thinks about ______ (drinking, drug use, children staying unattended, etc.)?
- Are families less isolated?
- Are families more socially supported?
- Are families experiencing less stress?
- Do more children have improved self-esteem?

Many instruments measuring attitudes or norms have been developed for use in research studies. These instruments tend to have many, sometimes very many, items that get at several dimensions of what is being measured. For example, an instrument called the “Child Abuse Potential Inventory” (CAP) was developed to screen individuals suspected of abuse. The CAP contains 160 items and measures things like distress, loneliness, and unhappiness.

An alternative approach is to measure attitudes through a very small number of items that are part of, for example, a larger community survey. Items could be included such as “I have friends and family I can turn to when I need help with my child” or “I think this community is a safe place to live.” More items give you better measures of attitudes or psychological states, but sometimes it is not practical to administer an entire instrument. It is sometimes more feasible to administer part of an existing survey than to administer the whole thing.

Other ways to assess attitudes and beliefs include focus groups (Do families with young children feel isolated in this community? Why?) and interviews.

7. Knowledge

Knowledge refers to what people know or know how to do. For example, learning that there is a relationship between child abuse and drug abuse is a change in what someone knows. Knowing how to use “time outs” as a technique for dealing with children’s problem behaviors refers to something someone knows how to do. Knowledge is distinct from behavior. People might, and often do, have knowledge that they do not use. A change in knowledge does not guarantee a change in behavior, but it is often a necessary step (and a success that can be celebrated).

Evaluation questions related to changes in knowledge include:

- Do parents know more about how to care for children’s teeth?
- Do more children know how to care for their teeth?
- Do more parents know that reading to young children is important?
- Do parents know more about normal child development?
- Do more parents know about good nutrition?
- Do children show improved school achievement?
- Do more parents have job skills that make them employable?
- Do parents have improved literacy skills?

Changes in what people know can be assessed through items on written surveys such as “Two-year-olds can generally speak in complete sentences. True or False?” Written instruments made up entirely of such items are better described as tests. Your community may be adopting or adapting a program developed elsewhere, such as a packaged curriculum. If that program comes with its own test, it is almost always better to administer the instruments that come with the program. Administrative data, such as school achievement data, can be used to track changes in knowledge among school-aged children.

8. Behavior

The last category of evaluation questions refers to behavior change. Many collaboratives carry out activities in the community that are ultimately designed to change how people—be they parents,
children, adolescents, or community members at large—behave. The change could be an increase in positive behaviors, a decrease in negative behaviors, or both. Behaviors tend to be the focus of dominoes at the end of the assumption dominoes chain. In many cases, the child and family outcomes of your collaborative refer to behavior change.

There are numerous evaluation questions that relate to changes in behavior, for example:

- Are parents providing more nurturing environments for their children?
- Are parents using more positive discipline methods?
- Do parents take their children to the library or the park more often?
- Are parents reading to their children more often?
- Are more parents taking their children for their immunizations on time?
- Do children show improved school attendance?
- Are more parents attending school board meetings?
- Are parents volunteering in schools more?
- Are children watching less TV?
- Are there fewer behavior problems in schools?
- Has there been a decrease in alcohol abuse?
- Are fewer teens sexually active?
- Has there been a decrease in drug use?
- Has there been a decrease in child abuse?
- Are fewer children left unattended before and after school?

Assessing behavior and change in behavior can be difficult because many behaviors are not readily observable (child abuse, drug use). One approach to collecting behavior data is to ask people to report on their own behavior. This can be done through written surveys (“In the past week, how many hours of television has your child watched?”), interviews (“If your child throws a temper tantrum in the grocery store, what would you do?”), or focus groups. The limitation with self-reporting of behavior is that people may not answer honestly or may not recall how often they have done something. Direct observation is an especially strong method for recording behavior, but it can be very costly to carry out and often is not feasible. You may have already identified some ways to measure behavior through completing your community assessment and selecting your indicators. The statistics collected by your police department (arrests), your social service agencies (reported child abuse cases), your school systems (school attendance), and other organizations can be powerful ways to answer evaluation questions about behavior.

**Are some methods better suited than others to particular evaluation topics?**

The answer to this question is a resounding “yes,” and that is why it is important to think about the topic areas in your evaluation questions. The matrix on the next page shows methods that might typically be used to address each of the eight topic areas discussed above. The matrix should be taken as a general guideline. You may have a good reason why you want or need to use a different method. Alternatively, you may come up with a clever application of a method to a topic area that we have not thought of. Don’t let the matrix restrict your creativity.

The techniques listed across the top of the matrix are discussed in Chapters 8 and 9. In using the matrix to help you select a method, as with all other aspects of designing and carrying out your evaluation, you may wish to consult an outside researcher or evaluator.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Areas of Evaluation Questions</th>
<th>Documentation</th>
<th>Written Surveys</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
<th>Tests of Knowledge</th>
<th>Other Tests &amp; Assessments</th>
<th>Direct Observation</th>
<th>Administrative Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation/Resource Mobilization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunities in Community</td>
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<td>Participation/Utilization</td>
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<td>Related Issues</td>
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<td>Awareness</td>
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<td>Attitudes/Norms/Psychological States</td>
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<td>Satisfaction</td>
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<td>Behavior</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The following are examples of methods that correspond to each of the checkmarks in the matrix. The letter in front of each example corresponds to the letter in the box of the matrix.

Implementation/Resource Mobilization
a. Documentation: Developing a form to document that a strategy was implemented, who was responsible, and who provided the resources (the Rotary Club donated food for an event, a newspaper column was published by the Reporter, etc.).
b. Direct Observation: Videotaping families at a community event.

d. Direct Observation: Photographing families using the recreation center, the job resource booth.
e. Administrative Data: Obtaining data on the number of high-quality child care slots available from the local child care resource and referral agency, or data on the number of jobs available from the local economic development committee.

Opportunities in the Community
c. Documentation: Developing a form to document that a resource or opportunity exists that did not previously (parenting classes, a recreation center).
d. Direct Observation: Photographing families using the recreation center, the job resource booth.

e. Administrative Data: Obtaining data on the number of high-quality child care slots available from the local child care resource and referral agency, or data on the number of jobs available from the local economic development committee.

Participation/Utilization/How Many?
f. Documentation: Developing a sign-in sheet to track the attendance at parenting classes or a community event. Using the circulation rates of a newspaper to estimate the number of people who read your Family Page.
g. Direct Observation: In-person observation of families attending a youth softball game.
h. Administrative Data: Acquiring school district data on the number of parents who volunteer at schools. Getting school attendance rates from schools.

Issues Related to Utilization
i. Documentation: Using enrollment data to determine whether a certain number or type of person did not return to parenting classes after attending the first one.
j. Written Surveys: Sending a survey in the mail to the parents who dropped out of the classes, asking why they did not finish the series.
k. Interviews: Conducting a telephone interview of parents who dropped out of the classes, asking why they did not finish the series.
l. Focus Groups: Bringing a group of people together to talk about reasons why they did not attend an event.

m. Direct Observation: Observing and recording how long children stay at the Wednesday night recreation program and what activities they participate in when they are there.
n. Administrative Data: Using agency client records to determine which segments of the community are using and not using CHDP clinics.

Awareness
o. Written Surveys: Sending a mail-in survey to find out whether people have heard of various community resources, like the after-school programs at the recreation center.
p. Interviews: Conducting in-person interviews of public officials to find out whether they are aware of the extent of child abuse in the community.
q. Focus Groups: Bringing parents together to talk about how much they know about parenting resources in the community and how they found out about them.

Attitudes/Perceptions/Norms
r. Written Surveys: Mailing an anonymous survey to find out the percentage of households that serve alcohol to minors.
s. Interviews: Conducting interviews of kindergarten teachers to find out whether children are more ready to start school this year than previously.
t. Focus Groups: Bringing a group of parents together to talk about feelings of isolation and support systems.
u. Other Tests and Assessments: Administering the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory to fourth-graders.
v. Direct Observation: Observing the decision-making process local policy-makers use in deciding whether to pass ordinances related to the sale of alcohol.
w. Administrative Data: Counting ordinances related to community norms around alcohol use.

Satisfaction
x. Written Surveys: Distributing a written questionnaire that asks about how well the babysitter training was received by the participants.
y. Interviews: Conducting interviews of key school staff to find out whether the after-school program is liked by the students.
z. Focus Groups: Bringing a group of children together to find out whether they are happy with the programs offered at the new recreation center.
aa. Other Tests and Assessments: Administering the published satisfaction survey that came with the published parenting curriculum you implemented.
Knowledge

bb. Written Surveys: Passing out a short questionnaire to find out whether parents know how to choose high-quality child care.
cc. Interviews: Conducting a brief phone survey to investigate whether families know more about how to choose high-quality child care.

dd. Tests of Knowledge: Developing a pre- and posttest to find out whether parents know more about appropriate nutrition after completing the parenting class. Administering the Knowledge of Child Development Inventory (KCDI) to assess parent knowledge.

e. Administrative Data: Collecting data from schools on reading achievement, grades.

Behavior

ff. Written Surveys: Asking a question on a survey about how often parents read with their child.

gg. Interviews: Conducting a phone survey of school nurses to find out whether there is a decrease in children missing school because of illness.

hh. Focus Groups: Bringing a group of children together to find out how much television they typically watch.

ii. Other Tests and Assessments: Administering the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment Scale (HOME) to graduates of the parenting program.

jj. Direct Observation: Going to the playground to count the number of conflicts between youth. Going to school board meetings to count the number of parents who attend.

kk. Administrative Data: Collecting data from schools on disciplinary actions. Collecting data from county agencies on child abuse rates or domestic violence rates or arrests for driving while intoxicated.