

Recording Program Outcomes

Podcast Transcript

Hello,

Welcome to the Y4Y Click & Go podcast on Recording Program Outcomes.

My name is Amy Shema. I am a senior research associate with Synergy Enterprises, Inc. and a senior content specialist with Y4Y. In addition to being an urban elementary school teacher, I have managed large, multiyear grants and worked extensively in teacher training. I have also conducted numerous evaluations and worked with 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs to help them reflect on implementation and outcomes.

I'd like to share a few tips about working with your program's evaluation team.

First, as an independent evaluator, I see myself as a resource and partner to help your program succeed. So, think of your evaluator as part of your program improvement team.

An evaluation is often informed by various guidelines such as those prepared by the state department of education or its evaluation partners, evaluation elements outlined in the grant proposal, and those agreed upon between the grant recipient and evaluator.

Keeping that in mind, here are three main objectives of 21st CCLC program evaluations:

1. Document your plan—make sure you are you doing what you said you would do in your grant proposal.
2. Assess services and activities supported by 21st CLCC programs.
3. Report on program outcomes—review to be certain that the activities you implement have the outcomes you want.

A fourth objective, which may or may not be stated within the guidelines of the evaluation, is to provide feedback on how to improve program quality and experiences for participants.

So, how do we meet these objectives?

To address the three main objectives, we need to collect qualitative and quantitative data and information. This happens in different ways and by various people working within the program.

First, document any changes from your original grant proposal.

It is not uncommon to write grant proposals with the best of intentions, then realize that circumstances have changed or, in some cases, the people who wrote the proposal are no longer in

place to implement the grant. We understand that there can be considerable changes that happen between the proposal and full roll-out of the grant. Rest assured that is OK and somewhat to be expected. What is most important at this point is to document those changes, think about the cause of the changes and describe how you addressed them. Documenting what you are doing is your most important job as the grant recipient. Also, remember that before making any changes to your proposed work, you must get permission from your state agency. Contact your state lead and ask about grant requirements and steps for amending your proposed program design.

Second, collect data and information for formative evaluation.

This information focuses on your program activities and the experiences of various constituents. This is the place where we want to tell a story. Essentially, you should answer this question: “What programs, activities, experiences and so on are available to children, teachers, families and the community as a result of having the 21st CCLC money?” In other words, what are you able to do that you otherwise would not because you have this grant?

This is often the place where observations come into play. Conducting observations is an opportunity to learn and share, collaborate, reflect, and support staff. Observations can be formal or informal. If you plan to conduct a formal observation, there are a few things to keep in mind.

1. Introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the observation. As a teacher, there is nothing more unsettling than having someone come into your room, head to the back, start writing notes and then just leave. If you want to see how students are interacting, let the teacher know, or if you want to see how students are engaging with new materials, then say so. There are different schools of thought on conducting observations, but I prefer to talk to students when it’s appropriate and ask questions. Asking students to explain a process or why they are doing something can be quite informative.
2. Try to follow up with the teacher or facilitator as soon as possible. You want to do this so the lesson is fresh in both of your minds. Start by asking an open-ended question, “How do you think that went?” The response will give you insight to what the person is thinking, and will suggest places where you can ask more questions later.
3. Be specific with your feedback and give examples of what you mean. To say something like “You care about your students” is positive feedback, but take it a step further. What did you observe that makes you say this? Say something like this: “I noticed that when Juan became frustrated, you first asked if he wanted a moment of alone time before someone tried to help him. This showed that you understood what he needed to be open to help.”
4. If you have negative feedback, try to present it in the form of a question. Avoid saying “You need to have better control of the four girls in the corner who kept talking the entire time.” Instead, ask something along the lines of “I noticed the four girls in the back corner. They seemed pretty chatty and seemed to interrupt you a lot. What have you done to try and

stop that behavior?” OR “You told them to be quiet but they ignored you and you let it go. What message do you think this sends to the other students about what counts as acceptable behavior?” Only focus on two to three negative points that you noticed.

5. Ask the teacher to summarize what he or she heard during your debrief session. Make sure that they didn't only hear the negative points.
6. Make a plan to address those negative points. Ask, “How can I help you with X situation?” Then follow up.
7. Lastly, end the meeting with points of praise. We all want to hear that we are doing a good job, and we are more likely to listen to critiques and address them if we feel like someone is supporting us.

It is important to be clear on the purpose of your observation. As an outside evaluator, when I go into classrooms, I am interested in seeing what students are doing, what engagement looks and sounds like, what is the general “feel” of the learning environment. Rarely, if ever, for a 21st CCLC program evaluation are we evaluating teacher performance; we are looking at the program. Although the instructor facilitating student activity and interaction is integral to the success of the program, it is the evaluator's job to look at the overall program, not the specific performance of a staff member. Sometimes it helps to remind teachers of this, because it can be stressful to feel like observers are watching you and judging you as a teacher.

Take the opportunity to provide feedback about what you are noticing. Depending on the relationship you have with your independent evaluator or your program partner, a debrief following the observation can provide an opportunity to share any immediate concerns or questions. It should never be the case that the first time a client learns of concerns is in the final evaluation report. Often a 21st CCLC program evaluation report does not become final until after the program year ends, so having regular feedback sessions is important.

Finally, collect data and information for your summative reports.

This addresses your program outcomes. Were you able to accomplish what you set out to do in terms of making changes in academic achievement? Student attitudes? Student behavior? This is the place to examine the relationships between the 21st CCLC programs and activities and those factors that you want to improve, whether it is having a chronically truant student improve his/her attendance, having a student who consistently struggled with behavior to have fewer incidents, or having struggling learners improve math or English scores.

Many factors can influence a student's academic success, attitude toward school, self-esteem and social interactions, so it is often difficult to identify a single point of impact. However, as 21st CCLC providers, you know that we hear parents say “Because of this program, Jahlil stayed in school,” or a student might say, “I knew that if I didn't come to program someone would ask where I was, so I just kept showing up. And I'm glad I did.” Interviews and casual conversations provide such

important qualitative anecdotes to include in an evaluation report. We also need to include quantitative data such as grades, attendance lists, feedback surveys and other performance measures.

It is important to remember to identify measures that are appropriate to the questions you are asking about your program. While this sounds obvious, I have seen program leaders try to use data to address questions that are just not related. This most commonly occurs when the program year has flown by, and no one has thought about the evaluation until the report is due. Then, program staff scramble to gather whatever data they can find to report on. For example, if a program is interested in fostering community interactions, they need to report on their efforts to promote community interaction and how that was different from what previously occurred. They also need to have data that document the community response to those efforts.

Now you might be wondering what to do with all these data and information.

Ideally, your data will be used to inform your independent evaluation. The evaluation report should be a document that captures a moment in time (or a year's worth of program) and informs future programming decisions. Often the evaluation is viewed as just another requirement that we have to do; it gets written, sent off and is never thought of again. The next year begins and we start all over.

The past year's evaluation report should be the first place to go when planning the next year. Included in this document are the strengths of the program—these are good, keep doing them. Challenges—which of these can we address or change? And opportunities—how can we use what we learned from the past year to improve this year?

Wow, we covered a lot of material in today's podcast. There are two main take-aways I'd like you to remember:

1. Document everything, and
2. Make evaluation part of your program design.

Thank you for joining me today. Please let us know if the Y4Y team can help you in any way.

I hope you have a wonderful day.