



*Guide to* evaluating  
**drug prevention**  
*projects in Victoria*



Premier's Drug  
Prevention Council





*Guide to* **evaluating**  
**drug** **prevention**  
*projects in Victoria*

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## Key Terms & Definitions

**Capacity building:** includes activities that aim to enhance the capacity of individuals, communities or systems to deal with or respond to the risk of drug use and abuse. That is, outcomes are measured in terms of enhancement or expansion of the capacity of individuals, communities or systems to reduce drug-related harm.

**Conceptual:** relating to a general idea that derives or is inferred from specific instances or occurrences (examples). For example, from looking at several specific drug prevention projects, one might derive a conceptual model of drug prevention.

**Contextual:** relating to the setting and circumstances in which the project occurs and operates.

**Drug prevention project:** a structured set of activities that aims to reduce drug-related harm through reduction in uptake of drugs and/or reduction in harm resulting from drug use and where the focus is on early stages of drug use/abuse rather than on treatment.

**Environmental:** relating to the external conditions or surroundings of the project.

**Evaluation:** any activity that involves analysing the effectiveness, efficiency or appropriateness of a project. It is distinguished from monitoring and performance information in that it involves analysing information with a view to reaching a decision or judgment, rather than simply collecting or recording data.

**Harm minimisation:** refers to policies and strategies aimed at reducing drug-related harm with a view to improving economic, social and health outcomes for the community and the individual.

**Impacts:** these are the expected direct consequences of a prevention strategy or what some refer to as 'direct', 'intermediate' or 'shorter term' outcomes that also define the pathway to attainment of the end goals of a prevention project.

**Methods:** a range of processes, techniques, approaches and/or practices to achieve a specific outcome. For example, interviews, workshops, focus groups, survey, etc.

**Monitoring:** a process of systematic observation of environmental factors, contextual factors and various indicators relevant to the conduct of the project. Unlike evaluation, monitoring does not make performance judgements with the information collected but uses it to inform and support other activities and processes.

**Outcome:** the desired effect or result of actions and activities on a target group.

**Output:** a product or service produced or delivered by a department or agency for external clients.

**Performance indicator:** a measure of achievement particularly pertaining to processes, outputs and outcomes.

**Pre-conditions:** factors and circumstances that are critical to the success of a project.

**Process:** a mechanism by which a project or activity within a project acts to achieve its intended outcomes and provide the intended service.

**Program:** a collective term for a group of (Government) projects linked to a centralised policy aim and objectives.

**Project logic:** an approach to describing the expected cause and effect relationships between processes, outputs and outcomes within a project.

**Project scope:** the magnitude of the effort required to complete a project.

**Project:** a sequence of tasks with a beginning and an end that uses time and resources to produce specific results. A project has a specific, expected outcome, a deadline or target date when the project must be done, and a budget that limits the amount of people, supplies and money that can be used to complete the project.

**Qualitative:** relating to quality. In this guide, the term refers to information that describes the nature of the subject without concerning itself with the quantities associated with it. In short, qualitative refers to what things are and does not concern itself with the amount of them.

**Quality:** used in relation to service process and outputs and usually refers to a set of standards related to the process or output. The standard could comprise a number of dimensions including, specificity of service, access to service, cultural appropriateness and timeliness.

**Quantitative:** relating to a number or a quantity and able to be expressed as such.

**Risk and protective activities:** aim to reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors in particular spheres such as school, family, peers and others.

**Social determinant activities:** aim to impact on social, economic and other societal factors that influence and often underpin wellbeing, that is, outcomes are measured in terms of the change in the status of social determinants of wellbeing.

**Validation:** is a process for explaining why a particular outcome is likely to contribute appreciably to a reduction in drug-related harm or other desirable, long-term outcomes. For example, an evaluation of a drug education project might only be able to measure the extent to which participants have increased knowledge and changed attitudes to drug use. For this project's evaluation, it would be necessary to refer to the evidence of the roles that knowledge and attitude play in affecting behaviour, then use this evidence to validate the project's likely effects on drug-related harm.



# Introduction

The need to evaluate drug prevention projects is increasing as people involved in these activities—consumers, government and the community—want to understand what each project has achieved, what has been learnt, and whether there are opportunities to refine and expand those activities.

This guide will assist you in designing and evaluating individual drug prevention projects. Evaluation will enable you to make more informed decisions about your current project and provide a focus for future activities.

## What is in this guide

This guide provides information on what an evaluation is and the key steps in doing an evaluation. A range of tools are provided to help you to carry out the evaluation task. These tools include:

- Suggestions on what you need to get started or the basics required for individual activities.
- Tools and methods to undertake the specific steps and activities.
- Examples of products and outcomes to be measured and validated.
- Templates for reporting and feedback.
- A series of checklists.

A section providing references for further reading is also included.

The guide has been developed in three parts:

**Part 1—Why Evaluate** provides a simple explanation of how evaluation is a valuable and necessary component of any project, and the key issues involved in project evaluation.

**Part 2—Evaluation in Context** describes the current range of drug prevention projects in Victoria, identifying their aims and objectives. The relationships between drug prevention policies, projects, environmental and contextual factors, outcomes and evaluation also are identified.

**Part 3—Developing an Evaluation Framework** provides a structured methodology to assist with developing your approach to evaluation.

## Who should use this guide

This guide should be used by people who are responsible for the development, management and evaluation of drug prevention projects. Some people who read this guide will already have a working knowledge and experience of evaluation. For those people, this guide may be most helpful as a way of putting their evaluation development and conduct into the broader Victorian drug prevention policy environment.

# Part 1 Why Evaluate?

*The only person who never makes a mistake is the person who never does anything.*

– adapted from a quote by Theodore Roosevelt

## 1.1 What is evaluation?

There are many ways to define evaluation<sup>1,2</sup>. However, a useful way to think of evaluation is as ‘any activity that involves analysing the effectiveness, efficiency or appropriateness of a program or a project.’ So, evaluation involves the collection and analysis of information to make decisions about projects.

## 1.2 Why do you need to evaluate?

Evaluation will help you learn whether or not you are achieving the outcomes you expected to achieve with your project. It should also help you to understand which, how, and how much the processes and outputs of the project contribute to those outcomes. This understanding makes it possible to provide constructive feedback to the project team and to provide ideas and strategies for how to better manage and improve current and future projects.

Evaluation fulfils two key aims:

1. It provides a performance measurement framework to:
  - improve the project plan;
  - measure processes, outputs, impacts and outcomes;
  - make necessary project changes; and
  - support the subsequent project work.
2. It provides good management of project initiatives:
  - defining the expected outputs, impacts and outcomes;
  - measuring performance regularly and objectively; and
  - learning and adapting in order to improve effectiveness and efficiencies.

<sup>1</sup> Trochim, W.M. (2002) *Research Methods Knowledge Base*, Cornell University.

<sup>2</sup> Lindamood-Bell® (2001) *Term Definitions*, <http://www.conceptimagery.com/definitions/evaluation.htm>.

*As a general rule, the most successful person in life is the person who has the best information.*  
– adapted from a quote by Benjamin Disraeli

### 1.3 When should you evaluate?

Evaluating your project is not something you do when the project is completed so you can identify what worked and what didn't. Evaluation is an integral part of the project and needs to be managed right from the beginning. An evaluation plan and framework needs to be developed as part of the project plan in order to assist with decision making over the term of the project.

### 1.4 How does evaluation relate to your project?

It is important to have some overall conceptual or theoretical view of your project—for both project and evaluation development. Such a view is called a project framework. Any project has several elements that link together and are subject to both environmental influences and contextual issues. It is important to realise that this project framework is dynamic and changes may be needed from time to time through the life of the project.

This framework recognises the important contribution that evaluation can make and encourages you to include evaluation activities in your overall project management plan. Doing so will help you to maintain the project's integrity—whether it was implemented according to what was planned, what changes were made and how they were justified.

*Don't wait for a light to appear at the end of the tunnel, stride down there...and light the bloody thing yourself!*  
– Sara Henderson

## Part 2 Evaluation in Context

### 2.1 Drug prevention in Victoria—key outcome areas and key features

Drug prevention projects in Victoria contribute to the common goal of ‘reducing harm’ associated with the use of licit and illicit drugs. As a group, these projects have four key outcome areas:

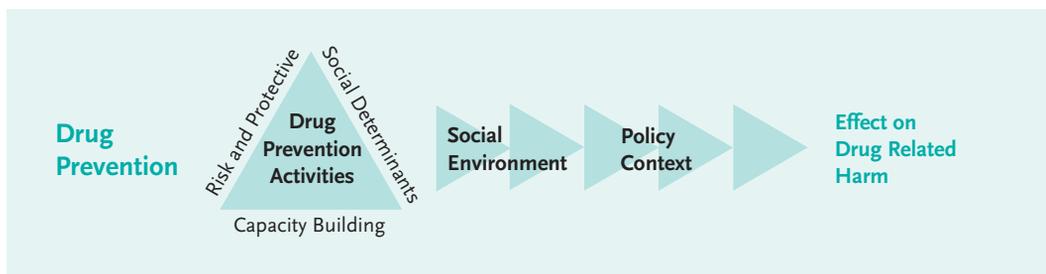
- i. Risk Factors: reduce individual and community exposure to risk factors.
- ii. Protective Factors: increase individual and community exposure to protective factors.
- iii. Capacity-building: increase individual, community and agency capacity to respond to drug use and abuse.
- iv. Social determinants: reduce the impact of social determinants of problematic drug use.

The key features of drug prevention projects include:

- The overall goal is shared by community and government and not just held by individual projects.
- There are many other community and government activities that could contribute to this goal, not just those involved directly in prevention projects.
- There are many environmental and contextual factors that influence drug use and the level of harm associated with that use.
- These projects contribute to the overall community and government goal by meeting specific and immediate objectives in the four key outcome areas.
- Each key outcome area comprises specific activities, with varying focus and target groups and varying operational forms.

**Figure 1** illustrates the relationship between key drug prevention activities, the social environment in which the activities are taking place, and the overall strategy and policy context.

Figure 1 Drug prevention in context



## 2.2 Focus of drug prevention activities

While drug prevention activities focus on the outcome areas listed, they can be categorised further in terms of whether they target individuals, communities or systems, where:

**Individuals**—includes those who use drugs and those affected directly by them (for example, parents or children).

**Communities**—can be defined by geographical location, culture, organisation (for example, school) or common interest, as well as the community at large. It includes groups of people who are (potential) users of drugs, and who are potentially affected by the actions of people who use drugs.

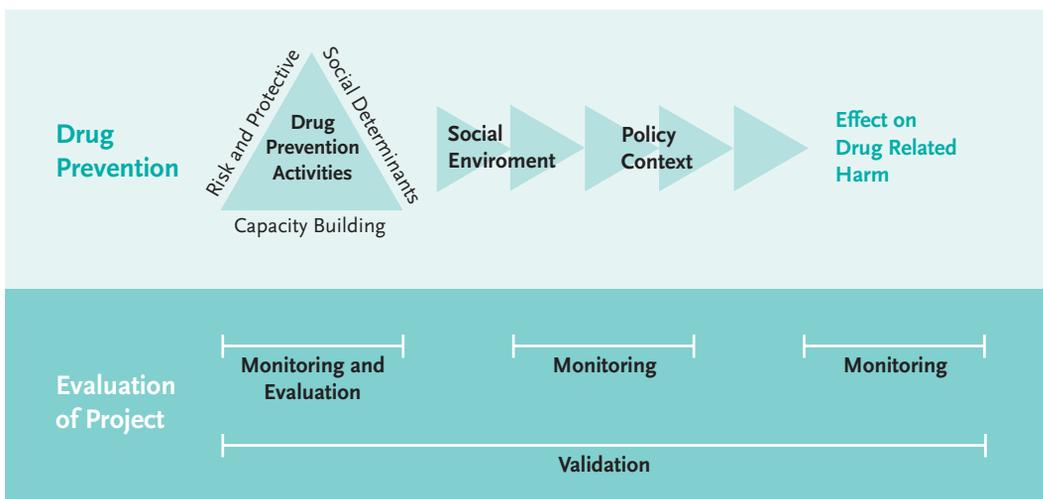
**Systems**—includes government and non-government sectors (for example, education or specific industries) and political systems (Parliament).

Together, these target groups and the activities produce a matrix for classifying drug prevention project activities (see **Template 1**). While this template does not show it, often there may be overlap, with activities spanning more than one compartment in this matrix. This template is an important component of both the project development and the evaluation, and can be used by the project team to map and track project activities and outcomes. This will be further explained in Part Three.

## 2.3 Drug prevention and evaluation

**Figure 2** shows how the evaluation of your project contributes to the overall effect on drug-related harm.

Figure 2 Monitoring and evaluation in context



With your project underway, **monitoring** continues throughout your whole project, with analysis and synthesis occurring around the three areas identified for evaluation (refer to the project logic matrix).

Ideally, the evaluation should aim to identify the degree of impact the project has had on levels of drug-related harm. However, this is often too difficult to do as many of the activities and outputs overlap or environmental factors influence the outcome. In these cases, what is important is that there is some **validation** of the link between the impacts of the project and changes in levels of drug-related harm.

**Validation** is the process of assessing the likelihood of the project contributing to the outcome of reduced drug-related harm. This process is important, particularly when it is not possible to evaluate a project directly in terms of harm reduction. Given that this is true of most drug prevention projects, **validation** will be an important part of most evaluations.

The results and information generated from the monitoring and evaluation activities are used in the **decision making** required to improve or enhance the current project, and to inform future project frameworks or projects.

## Part 3 Developing an Evaluation Framework

*I'm just preparing my impromptu remarks.*

– Winston S. Churchill

This part of the guide provides a step-by-step description of how to develop your evaluation. Before going through each of the steps, you will need to be familiar with the concept of project logic and how it will help you with your evaluation.

**Section 3.1** describes project logic and should be read first.

**Section 3.2** covers the preparation before you actually start developing the evaluation. It describes the issues you will need to have thought about and the things you will need to have at your fingertips.

**Section 3.3** describes in detail the four steps you will need to go through when developing your evaluation. It describes the things you'll need before carrying out each step, the actions involved in each step and the outputs produced from each step.

Finally, **Section 3.4** gives some guidance on what you need to do after you have completed the development of your evaluation framework.

### 3.1 Project logic

To assist with the evaluation development, a useful concept to apply is project logic.

Project logic is a tool for describing how the project is **expected to work**, in terms of activities that take place and the **consequences** that are expected to flow from them. It is a powerful tool for identifying the logic behind the project activities and what they expect to achieve, as well as a very useful aid to project design.

Analysing the project logic helps to:

- Clarify the project's objectives and assess whether objectives are achievable and measurable.
- Identify and map the project's major processes, outputs, impacts and outcomes<sup>3</sup>.
- Order in a way that reflects the expected cause and effect relationships between them<sup>4</sup>.
- Identify how successful achievement of each impact and outcome will be measured.
- Define for each impact and outcome, the project and external (environmental) factors likely to affect its achievement.
- Identify the performance information required to measure outcomes and to determine whether they were caused by the project or by external factors.

<sup>3</sup> Mapping the project's major processes, outputs, impacts and outcomes enables each to be distinguished from the effects they are intended to produce and, consequently, helps separate efficiency issues from effectiveness issues.

<sup>4</sup> Establishing the relationships between processes, outputs, impacts and outcomes identifies those that must be achieved before others can be achieved. This will help you to decide what effects you should evaluate at any particular stage in the life of your project.

## 3.2 Getting started

*The beginning is the most important part of the work.*

– Plato

Before you start developing the evaluation, you need to prepare yourself and your team. At the very least, you should carry out the following activities before launching into an evaluation:

1. Define and clarify the overall project goals and how they are linked to the broad approach to drug prevention in Victoria (see Section 2.1).
2. Identify the stakeholders—including project funding bodies and the target(s) of the project activities (*individuals, communities, systems*) (see Section 2.2).
3. Identify project documents, background information and data (*policy documents*).
4. Identify other projects and policies that will affect the project or its outcomes (*context*).
5. Identify any changes that have occurred or will occur through the life of the project (*policy, procedural, staff, technology prior to or since the project has started, etc.*).
6. Identify environmental factors that may affect the project or its effects (*changes in government, legislation, reviews, political/media issues, etc.*).

At this point, you may consider establishing an evaluation reference group. The reference group can act as a sounding board at each step of the evaluation and can assist with developing reports that communicate the project outcomes.

One further task is to establish the evaluation timeframe. The evaluation should occur concurrently with the project, so you may need to adapt the project plan, reflecting the steps in the evaluation. If the evaluation commences after the project has started, or near the completion of the project, you will need to establish a timetable that meets the needs of reporting the project outcomes.

## 3.3 The four steps to developing an evaluation framework

Having prepared yourself, there are four steps you will need to take in developing the evaluation framework for your project. Those steps are:

1. **Develop the project logic.** This step involves developing a framework of the prevention project, including identification of the expected processes, outputs, impacts and outcomes, and how they relate to each other<sup>5</sup>.
2. **Clarify the project structure** and identify the specific elements of the project that are to be evaluated.
3. **Develop a measurement framework** for the evaluation of these elements.
4. **Explore the themes** identified by the evaluation.

Each of these steps is covered in detail in sections 3.3.1 to 3.3.4. To make it easier, individual templates for steps 2, 3 and 4 are provided in each section.

**Figure 3** gives an overview of the four steps and is provided as a ready reference to remind you of what is involved in each step. It summarises the prerequisites, the actions to be undertaken and the products for each step.

<sup>5</sup> While projects invariably have a set of outcomes that are inter-related, they do not always fit within a linear order. Often, the relationships are multi-dimensional, resulting in more of a matrix rather than a linear order.

Figure 3 Undertaking evaluations

	Prerequisites	Actions	Products
Step 1 Project logic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documents and material that describe the project</li> <li>• Blank Project Logic Matrix</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statement of project objectives</li> <li>• Identify project activities</li> <li>• Identify target groups</li> <li>• Identify impacts</li> <li>• Confirm outcomes</li> <li>• Develop project logic matrix</li> <li>• Confirm the project logic matrix</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Logic Matrix</li> <li>• Report or feedback to project team</li> </ul>
Step 2 Project structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed Project Logic Matrix from Step 1</li> <li>• Blank Project Structure Template</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop project description</li> <li>• Describe the project context</li> <li>• Identify pre-conditions</li> <li>• Identify activities, objectives, processes and outputs</li> <li>• Identify impacts and outcomes</li> <li>• Build the validation logic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed Project Structure</li> </ul>
Step 3 Measurement framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed Project Structure from Step 2</li> <li>• Blank Evaluation Measurement Template</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define areas for measurement</li> <li>• Select indicators for each area</li> <li>• Identify data requirements and data sources</li> <li>• Assess data availability</li> <li>• Identify analysis methods</li> <li>• Identify data collection methods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed Evaluation Measurement Structure</li> </ul>
Step 4 Exploring project issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blank Exploratory Evaluation Template</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify questions of interest</li> <li>• Identify themes and group questions accordingly</li> <li>• Identify importance of themes</li> <li>• Identify research methods</li> <li>• Identify data requirements and sources and assess availability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed Exploratory Evaluation Approach</li> </ul>

### 3.3.1 Step 1—Developing the project logic

*Half this game is 90% mental.*

– Danny Ozark

Now that you've prepared yourself for the evaluation, you're ready for Step 1—Developing the project logic.

#### *Prerequisites—what you'll need before you start*

Before starting this step, make sure you have:

- The documents and associated materials that describe the project, its objectives and intentions (e.g., original project proposal or business case, cabinet submission).
- A copy of the blank Project Logic Matrix (Template 1) for reference.

#### *Template 1 Project logic matrix*

<b>Outcome Area</b> <b>Target Group</b>	To reduce risk factors and increase protective factors	To increase capacity to respond to drug use and abuse	To reduce the impact of social determinants of problematic drug use
Individuals			
Communities			
Systems			

#### *Actions—what you need to do*

To develop the project logic, you will need to do the following:

- Develop a statement of your project objectives—this should appear in the original project proposal or similar document and be able to be adapted from there.
- Identify the separate activities of your prevention project and the linkages, keeping in mind the four key outcome areas (see Section 2.1).
- Identify the target group(s) of your activities.
- Identify the pathways along which these activities are expected to operate and the associated impacts, which will contribute to the outcomes of your project.
- Identify the outcomes that you expect to result from these impacts.

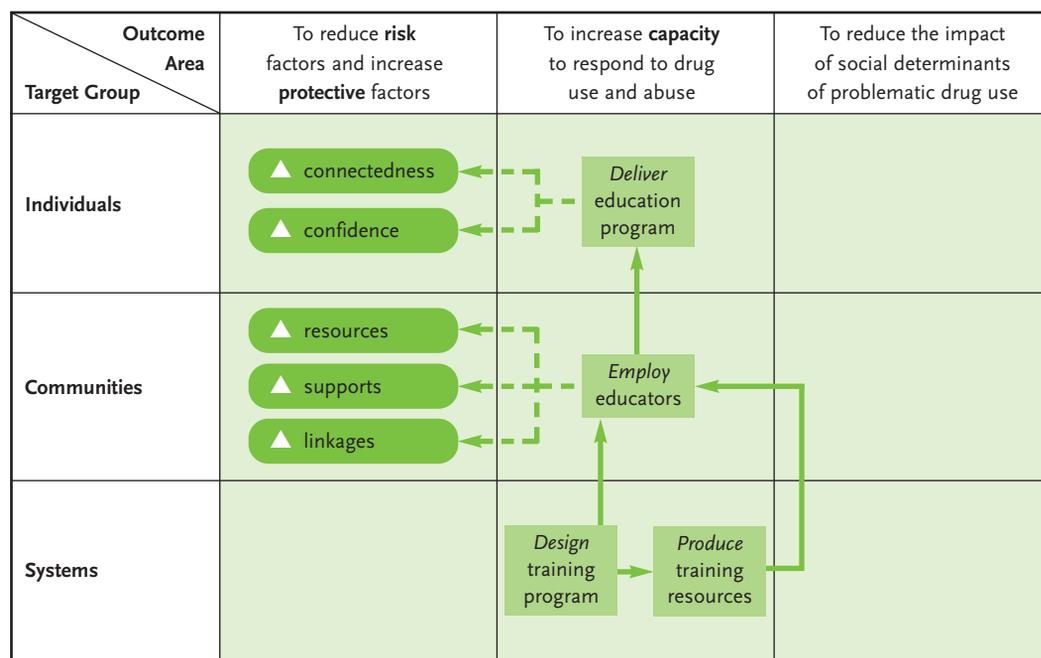
Don't forget that many project activities are not separate. Activities may have more than one focus and affect more than one population.

A workshop can be a good way to map the project activities, linkages, impacts and outcomes. A large chart (or electronic white board) onto which the Project Logic Matrix is drawn will be useful and will enable the project team or evaluation reference group to be involved. The matrix also provides a record of the project and evaluation process for reflection at key project stages (ask the questions, 'how are we going?', 'are we on track?', 'what/who have we missed?').

The Project Logic Matrix provides a summary of the project and a ready reference for all members of the project team. **Figure 4** shows a matrix for a parenting education project and identifies the activities, linkages, impacts and expected outcomes. This diagram is a summary and would have taken the project team a number of attempts to achieve the completed matrix. It is recommended that you have a number of attempts at constructing the Project Logic Matrix, using different colours and shapes to represent the activities, linkages, impacts and outcomes.

You may decide to repeat this exercise at some later point in the project, to update the Project Logic Matrix. If you do, remember to date the matrix to identify progress, changes to the activities or target groups and outcomes.

Figure 4 Example of a project logic matrix



Design training program  
Project activity

▲  
Project impact and expected outcome

Having mapped your project logic, you should confirm that project logic before moving to the next stage. The confirmation process can include:

- Discussing your thoughts, ideas and findings with your manager.
- Workshopping with the evaluation reference group—testing your thoughts, ideas and findings.
- Checking out your thoughts, ideas and findings with a sample of the target population—individuals, communities, system.
- Updating your Project Logic Matrix.

#### *Products—what you should have at the end*

By the end of this step, you should have a completed Project Logic Matrix for your project and a report on the development of the logic to disseminate to the project team.

#### *Checklist*

- *What are your project objectives? What are you trying to achieve? (in one sentence)*
- *Where does this project fit into the overall drug prevention effort?*
- *Who and/or what are your target group?*
- *What are your activities?*
- *Do you have the right group of activities? Processes? People? Skills? Methods? Technologies?*
- *Have you documented the expected outputs, impacts and outcomes?*

### 3.3.2 Step 2—Clarifying the project structure

Step 2 identifies the specific elements of the project that should form the focus for the evaluation. It identifies the **expected** outputs, impacts and outcomes of your project. (Step 4 will show you how to identify and manage the **unexpected** impacts and outcomes).

#### *Prerequisites—what you'll need before you start*

The prerequisites for this step are the products from Step 1. Template 2 is to be used in this step.

#### *Template 2 Project Structure Template*

<b>PREVENTION PROJECT TITLE:</b>					
<b>Description:</b>					
<b>Context:</b>					
<b>Pre-Conditions:</b>					
Activities	Objectives	Processes	Outputs	Impacts	Outcomes
<b>Validation:</b>					

#### *Actions—what you need to do*

Using the Project Logic Matrix and the Project Structure Template, clearly identify and develop the following critical statements:

- **Description of the project**  
Expand on the project objective, ensuring the description clearly defines the scope of the project (this description should be able to be taken from existing project documents, such as the original project proposal or funding submission).
- **Context of the project**  
Remember the context can include issues such as why the project was chosen, environmental issues and any relevant background (use existing sources where possible and appropriate).
- **Pre-conditions**  
The factors that are critical to the success of the project, including environmental and project factors, such as what was needed before the project could commence.
- **Activities**  
Identify which prevention outcome area is the focus (risk and protective factors, capacity building or social determinants).
- **Objectives**  
Make a clear statement of the objectives of each activity.

- **Processes**  
Identify the processes to be undertaken for this activity.
- **Expected outputs**  
Make a clear statement about the outputs from these processes.
- **Expected impacts**  
Make clear statements of the intermediate influence of these processes.
- **Expected outcomes**  
Make clear statements of what effects you expect to achieve in the longer term and the influences of other strategies and projects.
- **Validation**  
Describe how the outcomes will link to an overall impact on drug-related harm, using available evidence or research (note that evidence may not always exist yet and this should be noted). There are three levels of validation, ranked here in order of importance:
  - **Project evidence**—including pre-conditions or factors that are essential to the prevention project being effective and the pathways by which the desired long term outcomes are expected to happen (which can follow from the project logic).
  - **Project integrity**—assessing whether or not a project has been implemented correctly and whether it is operating as intended or according to good practice.
  - **Project corroboration**—information that provides indirect evidence that the project is likely to have resulted in the desired long term outcomes.

You may choose to apply one, two or all three of these levels in your evaluation, according to which provides the best validation for your project.

The best method for developing the Project Structure is to run a workshop with the project team and, possibly, with other stakeholders. Such a workshop needs to be well facilitated and may require an external facilitator to ensure objectivity.

### *Products—what you should have at the end*

The workshop will help to clarify a number of key project issues and develop a common understanding of the purposes and expected outcomes of the project. The major product from the workshop will be the completed Project Structure. Also, it can be used to provide feedback and a formal report to the project team and evaluation reference group. Providing opportunities for feedback can also help to validate the output.

### Checklist

- *Have you adequately described the project? Have you defined the scope of the project?*
- *Have you described the project context—why the project was chosen, relevant environmental and background issues?*
- *Have you adequately described the circumstances leading up to the project commencing?*
- *Have you adequately identified and described each element of the project?*
- *Have you adequately described the objectives of each activity?*
- *Have you adequately described each process to be undertaken?*
- *Have you adequately identified the expected outputs for each process?*
- *Have you adequately identified the expected impacts for each process?*
- *Have you adequately identified the expected outcomes for each process?*
- *Have you reached agreement on the project structure?*

### 3.3.3 Step 3—Developing the measurement framework

*One accurate measurement is worth a thousand expert opinions.*

– Admiral Grace Hopper

#### *Prerequisites—what you'll need before you start*

This step takes the completed Project Structure from Step 2 and builds the measurement structure to be used in the evaluation. It makes use of the Evaluation Measurement Structure Template (Template 3).

#### *Template 3 Evaluation Measurement Structure Template*

PREVENTION PROJECT TITLE:					
Area of Measurement	Indicator(s)	Data Requirement	Data Sources	Data Availability	Methods of Analysis
Process					
Outputs – quantity – quality					
Impacts					
Outcomes					

#### *Actions—what you need to do*

You will need to define very clearly the following:

- The area for data measurement—which activities and processes, outputs (quantitative and qualitative), impacts and outcomes you will measure.
- Indicators—for each area, the performance indicators that are of interest (for example, number of workshops, frequency of attendance at educational sessions, knowledge of and attitudes towards drug use).
- Data requirement—for each indicator, the data needed to calculate the number (for quantitative indicators) or to otherwise assess the indicator value (for qualitative indicators).
- Data sources—for each item of data required, where it will come from.
- Data availability—if the data is currently being collected, can be sourced from elsewhere or new data collection will be required.
- Method of data analysis—how the data will be analysed (for example, the indicator(s) produced from the data might be compared with the corresponding indicator for a reference population).

When thinking about what data to collect, it's important to recognise the limitations that the evaluation budget may impose. Often there will need to be a compromise between what you would ideally collect and what you can afford to collect. This may require setting priorities for data collection and identifying the importance of specific data to the evaluation's objectives.

*It is the mark of an instructed mind to rest satisfied with the degree of precision which the nature of the subject admits and not to seek exactness when only an approximation of the truth is possible.*

– Aristotle

### *Data collection methods*

Possible methods for collecting data are:

- Surveys of individuals, service providers, teachers, parents, community or other stakeholders, according to the nature of the project and the needs of the evaluation.
- Interviews and focus groups are suitable for collecting qualitative data.
- Service and school based data collections, such as participants and students completing attendance (or feedback) forms at educational sessions and service providers collecting information on each service they deliver.
- Existing data collections.
- Adding new data items to existing data collections, where the scale of the project and the importance of the evaluation warrants the effort involved in changing reporting systems.

### *Products—what you should have at the end*

The major product from this step will be the completed Evaluation Measurement Structure. This will guide the rest of the evaluation.

### *Checklist*

- *Do you understand what the project is trying to achieve, its impacts and outcomes? Go back over the project's aims and objectives. Make sure you are going to collect data to support these and the expected outputs, impacts and outcomes.*
- *Have you identified the data you need for each of the indicators?*
- *Does each data requirement relate to one of the indicators?*
- *Can you actually collect the data within the evaluation resources and timeframe?*
- *Can you actually analyse the data, once collected? That is, do you have the resources and know-how to analyse the data?*
- *Can you guarantee that the data you collect will be of a quality sufficient for the needs of the evaluation? e.g., might there be a lot of missing data or inaccurate data?*

### 3.3.4 Step 4—Exploring the project issues

*In complex situations, we may rely too heavily on planning and forecasting and underestimate the importance of random factors in the environment. That reliance can also lead to delusions of control.*

– Hillel J. Einhorn

#### *Prerequisites—what you'll need before you start*

The fourth and final step is more exploratory, or investigative, in nature. Step 4 is about identifying specific issues and themes that will need some form of explanation during the evaluation. This aspect of the evaluation is concerned with understanding those key issues that will aid strategy and policy development. There are three principal categories of thematic evaluation, which can be expressed as questions.

#### **1. What happened to make things change?**

This category is about understanding the interactions and inter-relations between the various elements of a project and understanding the key influences and what worked and what didn't.

#### **2. What was going on outside of the project that might have affected it (environmental and contextual influences)?**

This question aims to understand the impact of environmental and contextual factors on the prevention project and its effects.

#### **3. What unexpected things happened (unintended consequences) as a result of the project?**

A focus on whether or not there were any unexpected impacts or outcomes of the project and what benefit or harm came about as a result.

This step uses the Exploratory Evaluation Template (Template 4).

#### *Template 4 Exploratory Evaluation Template*

PREVENTION PROJECT TITLE:				
Question/Issue	Purpose	Methods	Data Requirements and Sources	Data Availability
(Categorised by themes)				

### *Actions—what you need to do*

Using the Exploratory Evaluation Template you will need to:

- Identify the questions and issues that came to light during the conduct of the project.
- Sort the questions and issues into themes—either mechanisms for change, environmental and contextual influences and/or unexpected impacts and outcomes.
- Identify their purpose—why is it important that the evaluation explores each of the themes and what impact are these themes having on the project.
- Identify the methods to be used to explore each theme, such as literature review or qualitative research (interviews, focus groups, workshops, etc.).
- Identify data requirements and potential sources.
- Identify data availability.

The products of this part of the evaluation will be most useful for making informed decisions about how the project can be improved. Therefore, the emphasis when completing this template should be on those themes and issues that will be of greatest value to future decision making.

The major concern is to be able to verify and quantify (if possible) the themes as they emerge from the project and to assess their significance or importance. Similarly, if themes that were expected to be important turn out not to be so, it is important to be able to identify this fact during the evaluation.

Again, this is best achieved through a project team workshop that explores the questions and issues. Using the group process will also make for a fuller discussion of the issues and emergent themes.

### *Products—what you should have at the end*

Completed Exploratory Evaluation Approach and agreement in the project team about the key issues and themes.

### *Checklist*

- *Have you identified the really important issues that will affect how you understand and apply the evaluation results—especially the contextual issues that might affect how you validate the link between project outcomes and drug-related harm?*
- *Will your methods provide the information you need to properly explore these issues?*
- *Will the data identified support the nature of the exploratory work?*
- *Have you done the reality check of the data requirements as outlined in Step 3?*

### 3.4 What's next?

Having completed the project evaluation development and commenced the project, there are three key activities that will need to be undertaken on an ongoing basis until the project is completed.

These are:

- Developing the project evaluation reports and providing feedback to the project team.
- Facilitating project decision making and assessing the impact the evaluation will have on the current project.
- Undertaking the project validation processes.

#### *Checklist*

- *Are evaluation reports completed and available for the Steering Committee and project team at key stages in the project?*
- *Have you provided feedback (formal and informal) to the project team?*
- *What have you learnt so far?*
- *What would you do differently?*
- *What do you need to change? Now?*

Frequently, the best reports for steering committees to demonstrate project progress are the activities undertaken at each stage of the project—the products of each step: workshops, interviews, mapping exercises, completed templates. There, your reports are already done!

*If you would judge, understand.*

– Seneca

## Appendix Further Reading

Below are a few references that may be of interest to readers seeking more information on ideas and practical considerations of evaluation in health and human services settings. This is not an exhaustive list. In many cases, the references given will provide the reader with further sources of information.

### A.1 Theory of evaluation

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### A.3 Evaluation development and conduct

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### A.4 Background to drug prevention in Victoria

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