



Neighborhood Networks

Quarterly Consortia Conference Call



Neighborhood Networks Quarterly Consortia Conference Call Program Tracking and Evaluation

On September 17, 2007, Neighborhood Networks held the fourth Quarterly Consortia Conference Call. The call, entitled "Program Tracking and Evaluation", focused on how program tracking and evaluation can strengthen the organizational capacity of Neighborhood Networks centers and consortia. Neighborhood Networks staff that participated in the call also reiterated to centers and consortia the importance of utilizing the Neighborhood Networks Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool (START) and other tracking and evaluation tools.

The guest speaker, Shital Shah, project manager for Innovation Network, focused on the evaluation and measurement of programmatic and organizational performance and impact. During the call, Shah developed a program tracking and evaluation plan based on Innovation Network's Logic Model Builder.

Highlights from the Call

- Program tracking and evaluation, also known as outcome management, allows Neighborhood Networks consortia and centers to track their activities impact on their clients. It helps consortia and centers assess what they are doing effectively and what areas need improvement. Outcome management is most effective on an ongoing basis and in an organized way. Program tracking has many benefits for Neighborhood Networks consortia and centers.
- By tracking the services and programs that are provided by Neighborhood Networks centers and consortia, staff and/or board members will understand how they their residents. This informs partners, funders, volunteers, and the community about the positive influence the center and/or consortium is making in people's lives.
- Developing a program tracking system can have an immediate positive effect on an organization's effectiveness. When Neighborhood Networks consortia and centers establish outcome measures, staff and volunteers focus more intently on their organization's mission as well as the purpose of specific activities. Evaluation also provides accountability within programs. With this increased focus comes the ability to address clients' needs more directly. These efforts ultimately benefit the organization both internally and externally. The challenges that organizations may experience with program tracking and evaluation include:
 - Time.
 - Resources.
 - Fear of uncovering failures.
- Developing the Logic Model Builder is the first step in evaluating, collecting the data, analyzing the results, communicating the findings, and using the findings for center

and consortia program improvements. The Logic Model is a visual representation of how a program functions. The model has four basic components: resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes. It is essential to have involvement among the centers' staff and consortia's board members to ensure all stakeholders agree on the goals and implementation of activities.

Evaluation determines the success of the program's implementation, whether or not its goals were met, and the impact it made on the residents. For example, if a Neighborhood Networks center hosts a GED course for which the RSC develops a curriculum, coordinates the training, and provides the training to residents, he/she will have the capability to produce tangible results. For instance, if there were 33 participants who began the course, and 30 participants completed the course, then it had an effective impact on the residents. The following implementation questions could be asked during this phase:

- Are the services and/or activities being performed as planned?
- Has one reached the intended target population?
- Has one reached the intended number of participants?
- Is it leading to the expected products?

Outcomes are the expected changes resulting from a program's implementation. This can be accomplished by reviewing the indicator of the achievement's outcome. The indicator provides more tangible information about the outcomes. It is a specific, measurable characteristic that tracks a program's successes in achieving its outcomes. Four components to creating a strong indicator statement are: how much, who, what, and when.

- The "how much" reviews the amount of change among the target population that demonstrates a successful level of achievement.
 - The "who", refers to the target population that will be measured. In the above example, the center staff will identify residents that have not graduated from high school, and will therefore be ideal candidates for the GED preparation course.
 - "What" is the condition, behavior, or characteristic that is to be measured.
 - "When" is the timeframe for the change to occur. Referring to the GED preparation course, "when" would be the timeframe during which the target population will achieve the expected results.
- Data collection is essential for plan implementation and the outcomes evaluation. The three steps are:
 - Choose the source of information: from whom/ where is the data being procured?
 - Determine the method of information collection: how is the data from elicited from that particular source?
 - Determine the level of effort involved and using that method within a given population.

There are several data collection methods that may be helpful to Neighborhood Networks centers and consortia, including: reviewing documents, attendance records from workshops, and/or meeting minutes. Written surveys are also helpful to gauge participant satisfaction, as well as questionnaires, pre- and post-testing, and journals.

Center staff and board members may find it important to also conduct in-person interviews, phone interviews, or focus groups. Finally, observing residents during events, meetings, trainings, and programs is another form of data collection.

- START can be used by centers and consortia to assist with tracking and evaluation of center programs. START was developed to assist Neighborhood Networks centers in developing online business plans that define the organizational mission, vision, and objectives. START allows users to track every aspect of a center's development, including program success.
- Center staff can access START on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. To create these assessments, click on Create New Assessment under Assessment and Evaluation. Once Create New Assessment is chosen, START will automatically generate an assessment report that compares the current year's data with the previous year's projections. An assessment report cannot be generated unless a current and approved business plan already exists in START.

For assistance with START, center staff can request the START companion publication, *START Workbook and User Guide*, by submitting a request on the Web site. Help is also available from Neighborhood Networks staff by calling the Neighborhood Networks toll-free information line at (888) 312-2743 or by e-mailing neighborhoodnetworks@hud.gov.