

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR PEER-BASED YOUTH PROGRAMS

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Summary

The *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* is designed to help youth service providers to develop an evaluation plan to measure the effectiveness of their programs. This user guide provides instructions for using the *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs*. You will need to reference the document *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* as you work through this user guide.



Keywords

Structured
Planning
Monitoring and evaluation
Reporting
Evaluation plan



Staff/Volunteer Use



Program Planning



Resources

No training/support or external resources needed
No costs associated



Individual Activity



Time

Dependent on program complexity



Frequency of use

Annually



How to Use This Tool

The *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* describes the possible **attributes of youth most at risk, moderating factors, external factors, environment, peer group factors, program factors, impacts and outcomes** associated with a peer-based youth programs. Not all of these components will be relevant for every peer-based youth program. This *User Guide* guides you through the process of selecting which components are most relevant for your program in order to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan for your program. When developing your monitoring and evaluation plan, you will only need to access those sections of the *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* that are relevant for your program.

There are 8 steps for using the *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* to create an evaluation plan for your program:

- Step 1** Identify the reasons for program evaluation
- Step 2** Understand your target group
- Step 3** Agree on program objectives
- Step 4** Agree on impacts and outcomes to be measured
- Step 5** Agree on peer group and program factors to be monitored
- Step 6** Agree on evaluation questions and indicators
- Step 7** Select evaluation strategies
- Step 8** Implement, monitor and refine evaluation plan

Work through each of the steps described below and record your answers on the worksheet provided at the end of this user guide.

Step	Description
Step 1	<p>Identify the reasons for program evaluation</p> <p>Evaluation is not only done at the end of a program to assess the effects the program has had. Evaluation is done for many different reasons and it is important for service providers to be clear about why they are evaluating their program. With a typically limited budget for evaluation, service providers cannot expect to be able to evaluate all aspects of their service. The reasons for program evaluation should be identified and agreed by program staffing teams and management.</p> <p>Some common reasons for evaluation include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine the impacts of a program on a target group • To analyse changes over time as a result of the program • To identify service improvements • To determine cost effectiveness of a service • To support funding proposals • To compare the effectiveness of one service with another type of service designed to address the same needs in a target group • To justify continuing or expanding a program • To assess the effectiveness of a pilot study for a new program • To prepare management reports • To ensure programs are being delivered as intended • To ensure programs are doing no harm • To meet audit or quality management requirements • To collect feedback on performance



Step	Description
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- To help boost staff morale that they are achieving goals.

Step 2 Understand your target group

A range of attributes is characteristic of youth most at risk who may participate in peer-based programs. The attributes of youth most at risk include:

- Lonely or isolated
- Abused or victimised
- Poor mental health
- Poor help-seeking skills
- Poor coping skills
- Lacking social skills
- Risk-taking
- Lacking positive adult or peer role models

Refer to the *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* for a description of each of the above attributes and example indicators.

Program coordinators and staff need to assess their target group and determine which of the above attributes may be most relevant. For some target groups, the majority or all of the attributes may be relevant. For other target groups, specific attributes may be more relevant than others and these will provide a focus for the peer-based program e.g. programs which focus on improving young people's help-seeking skills.

Step 3 Agree on program objectives

Peer-based programs for young people are diverse but share many common objectives. Broad objectives for peer-based programs are:

- To provide a **safe space** and **safe learning environment** for young people without fear of judgment, misunderstanding, harassment or abuse
- To **increase knowledge and skills** within a specific area, e.g. sexual health; parenting skills for young parents; mental health; diversity issues
- To **increase social connectedness** and create a **sense of belonging** within **supportive peer networks**
- To provide **positive adult and peer role models** for young people who may only have experienced negative influences from adults and peers
- To provide activities and opportunities which help young people to develop a **positive self concept, self acceptance** and **high self esteem**.
- To **prevent the onset or further development of mental health problems** including depression, anxiety, self harm and suicidal ideation
- To **increase confidence** and to **develop and enhance communication and social skills**
- To **empower young people** to build **personal resilience** and **improved help-seeking behaviour** through increased knowledge of available support, reduced stigma associated with mental health difficulties and help-seeking, the development of positive coping strategies and the development of skills needed to access help
- To **foster future thinking and optimism** and to widen young people's understanding and beliefs of the opportunities available to them.

Program objectives should be **SMART** – **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable,

Step	Description
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Relevant and Time-dependent. Youth service providers need to agree on a set of specific objectives for their program. These program objectives will form the basis of the program evaluation plan. The effectiveness of the program may be determined by the extent to which the program is able to realise its intended objectives. Please refer to the *My-Peer Toolkit* for more information on setting objectives.

Note: For new programs it may be difficult to set specific objectives. There may also be unexpected effects and benefits. Therefore, while it is important to clarify program objectives, evaluating a new program solely against its objectives may be limiting. There needs to be some flexibility in the evaluation plan to identify unexpected benefits and effects and modify objectives accordingly.

Step 4 **Agree on peer group and program factors to be monitored**

The *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* asserts that peer-based programs work through a complex interplay of **environment**, **peer group factors** and **program factors** to deliver **short term impacts on the individual**, **impacts on others** and **long term outcomes**.

A safe **environment** is critical to most peer-based programs and involves monitoring of features including:

- Location or setting
- Behaviour management processes
- Boundary management
- Other participants
- Staff/volunteers
- Ethical practice
- Peer group rules/norms

Peer group factors which may influence program effectiveness are:

- Positive peer influences
- Peer support
- Group rules/norms
- Group cohesion
- Group dynamics
- Level of youth engagement

Program factors which may influence program effectiveness are:

- Strengths-based
- Positive role modeling
- Flexibility
- Youth friendly
- Youth participation

Refer to the *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* for detailed descriptions of environment, peer group factors and program factors which can be monitored and example indicators.

Important note: The indicators included in the *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* are examples only. The indicators are drawn from service



Step	Description
	<p>providers' feedback and from national or international datasets of indicators where these exist. The list of indicators provided in the framework is by no means exhaustive.</p> <p>Evaluation can take place at both a process level (<i>is the program being implemented as intended?</i>) and an impact/outcome level (<i>what effects is the program having on its participants?</i>). Programs which are not implemented as intended may not achieve their intended impacts and outcomes.</p> <p>Program providers need to determine which of the environment, peer group factors and program factors are most important to monitor to ensure the program will achieve its intended impacts and outcomes. For example, in some programs creating a safe space where young people do not feel judged is a pre-requisite.</p>
Step 5	<p>Agree on impacts and outcomes to be measured</p> <p>Beneficiaries of peer-based programs can include participants, peer educators/leaders, peer supporters or volunteers, family members, community members and other adults and peers outside the program.</p> <p>The <i>Evaluation Framework for Youth Peer-Based Programs</i> shows that peer-based programs can have a range of impacts and outcomes on all those who may be involved either directly or indirectly.</p> <p>Short term impacts on the individual are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased social connectedness• Increased self esteem• Increased confidence• Improved social skills• Improved problem-solving skills• Improved help-seeking behaviour• Improved coping skills• Optimism• Positive role model for peers <p>Impacts on others are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved relationships• Positive influence on networks• Leadership within community• Leadership within program <p>Long term outcomes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental wellbeing• Physical wellbeing• Education/employment• Help-seeking• Community engagement <p>Refer to the <i>"Evaluation Framework for Youth Peer-Based Programs"</i> for detailed descriptions of each of the above impacts and outcomes and example indicators.</p>

Step	Description
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Service providers need to determine the primary (“*must see*”) impacts and outcomes which the program expects to see for its beneficiaries. Secondary (“*nice to see*”) impacts and outcomes can also be identified. These impacts and outcomes will help inform the selection of suitable evaluation questions (Step 6).

Step 6 Agree on evaluation questions and indicators

Service providers need to agree on the evaluation questions and indicators which will be used in the program evaluation.

Evaluation questions

A good place to start when identifying evaluation questions for your program is to look at the program objectives (Step 3), the environment, peer group factors and program factors (Step 4) and the intended program impacts and outcomes (Step 5) that you have already identified. By rewording program objectives, environment, peer group factors, program factors, impacts and outcomes as questions you can develop evaluation questions.

Here are some example evaluation questions that were developed using this approach:

1. Do participants have positive relationships with each other and have they developed a cohesive group?
2. Do young people demonstrate improved skills development (communication, problem-solving, help-seeking, coping, planning and organisation)?
3. Do young people demonstrate increased emotional development (self-esteem, self-identity, social connectedness, ability to cope, improved interpersonal relationships)?
4. How many young people have accessed help services since participating in the program?
5. Have any young people taken on leadership roles outside of the program?

Depending on the reasons for your program evaluation, there may be many questions you want answers to. However, focusing on a few priority questions is recommended. The most important thing to remember is to develop evaluation questions which can be answered. The evaluation questions will be determined by the time, resources, skills and budget available for program evaluation, data collection and analysis.

Indicators

Once you have identified your evaluation questions, you need to agree on the specific indicators (or signs) that you will use to help you answer your evaluation questions. The *Evaluation Framework for Youth Peer-Based Programs* provides a starting point with some example indicators for monitoring program processes and evaluating program impacts and outcomes.

Service providers may find it useful to discuss within their staffing groups which indicators are most important to track and to identify more specific indicators for their programs in some areas. For example, increased confidence for a teenage mother may be seen in her improved parenting skills or more assertive



Step	Description
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behaviour when dealing with stigma or criticism from other people. By contrast, for a young person who is socially isolated, increased confidence may be evidenced simply by increased interactions with peers.

If no suitable indicators exist, you will need to agree on your own set of indicators. For example, you may decide that the indicators you will use to answer the question *Do young people demonstrate improved social skills?* are *being able to make friends, no anger outbursts* and *conforming to group norms*.

Step 7 Select evaluation strategies

Evaluation strategies should not be selected until Steps 1-6 are completed. However, in practice, evaluation strategies are often selected first before gaining a clear understanding of what needs to be monitored and measured.

Program providers may, for example, believe that implementing a program feedback questionnaire will address their evaluation needs. However, if the program processes are not working effectively, the intended impacts may not be seen and there is little to be gained from impact assessment until providers can be certain their programs are being implemented as they should be.

Different evaluation strategies may be needed to collect the data required. For example, the higher the level of proof or evidence needed that observed impacts are the result of participating in the program, the more sophisticated the evaluation plan needs to be, e.g. involving control comparison groups to check the impacts seen were not as a result of another factor. Such evaluation designs are likely to require the skills and expertise of an external evaluator. Evaluations done for monitoring purposes can be less complex and involve smaller samples. Community agencies are capable of implementing smaller scale evaluation plans.

Both quantitative evaluation strategies (e.g. surveys) and qualitative evaluation strategies (e.g. group discussions) can be used depending on the evaluation questions to be answered and the skills/resources available. A mix of methods and the use of more than one method can help increase the reliability and validity of the data, especially for small samples. It is useful for example to compare the impacts participants report to the impacts staff observe, i.e. a sense check of the data, does it reflect what is actually observed. Studies suggest that adolescents may over-estimate their knowledge and skills to levels that are not consistent with actual behaviour.

Using a range of evaluation strategies can also help to ensure that the data collected is representative since young people will engage differently with different types of evaluation strategies. For example, some young people may not be comfortable offering an opinion in a group discussion but will be more than happy to write down comments in a confidential questionnaire or use more creative strategies e.g. images, sculpture, role plays, etc to communicate their responses.

The selection of evaluation strategies will be influenced by a number of factors including:

- *Capacity* - staff skills/resources available
- *Type of program* – opportunities for evaluation e.g. access to computers



Step	Description
	<p>for online questionnaires</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Characteristics of target group</i> – e.g. literacy levels• <i>Types of impacts</i> – some effects may not be seen immediately• <i>Evaluation questions</i> – quantification will require quantitative methods; explanation will require qualitative methods• <i>Costs</i> associated with using evaluation tools• <i>Data analysis</i> requirements• <i>Stakeholder interests</i> – e.g. cost, community profile, impacts• <i>Availability of suitable tools</i>

The *Evaluation Resources Database* provides a list of suggested evaluation tools and resources which are available to measure each component of the *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* and associated indicators. All of the suggested evaluation tools and resources are available through the *My-Peer Toolkit* using the links provided.

Some of the tools have been developed by the *My-Peer Project* and have been tested by community youth service providers (see *Case Studies* within the *My-Peer Toolkit*). Many of the tools developed by the *My-Peer Project* can be further customised to suit local program needs.

Other tools have been developed by external sources. The tools are included in the *Evaluation Resources Database* since they have already been tested within adolescent populations; are free to use or low cost; require no or limited expertise; and are short, simple and practical tools which may work in peer-based settings.

Step 8 Implement, monitor and refine evaluation plan

Once evaluation questions and indicators have been agreed and evaluation strategies have been selected, the evaluation plan can be implemented.

It is important to monitor the implementation of the plan and to ensure it is refined to reflect ongoing changes in the program. Further, the purpose of evaluation may change over time and the evaluation questions may need to change too. It is also possible that given limited staffing and resources, program providers may choose to focus on different evaluation questions at different times, e.g. a quality audit may not need to be done every time the program is run.

It is recommended that evaluation is an integral part of program planning and decision-making processes around service improvements. Scheduling regular reflection and debrief sessions with program staff may be an effective way of ensuring evaluation does not get overlooked or 'added on' at the end of a program when data collection opportunities may no longer be available and evaluation options may be limited.



Suggested Uses

The *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* should be used as a planning tool when planning a new program or when reviewing an existing program to identify possible service improvements. The tool is designed to help service providers clarify program objectives, agree on how programs will be implemented and identify specific impacts, outcomes and indicators for their target groups to enable monitoring and evaluation of program quality and effectiveness.



Complementary Tools

The *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs* can be used in conjunction with other *My-Peer Toolkit* planning tools for example *Evaluation Resources Database*, *Guide to Developing a Program Logic Model* and *Constructing a Program Logic Model*.

Other planning tools which may be useful are *Planning and Evaluation Wizard (PEW)*, and *Evaluating your project: Using evidence to improve outcomes for communities (SACHRU Practice Brief)*.



Implementation Tips

- Work through the user guide systematically in order to develop a complete evaluation plan for your program.
- Record your answers at each step. These records will form the basis of your evaluation plan. A worksheet is provided for this purpose.
- Involve at least one another staff member in the development of your evaluation plan. Discussion of each of the components of the evaluation framework can be as productive and beneficial as the resulting plan.
- Conduct a training meeting for all staff/volunteers involved in the program to discuss each component of the evaluation plan and to ensure all staff/volunteers understand the program objectives and intended impacts and outcomes.



Links

[Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs](#)

[Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs – User Guide](#)

[Evaluation Resources Database](#)

[Guide to Developing a Program Logic Model](#)

[Constructing a Program Logic Model](#)

[My-Peer Toolkit – Setting Objectives](#)

[Planning and Evaluation Wizard \(PEW\)](#)

[South Australian Community Health Research Unit \(SACHRU\) Practice Brief - Evaluating your project: Using evidence to improve outcomes for communities](#)



MY-PEER USER GUIDE

toolkit ^[1.0]



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EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR PEER-BASED YOUTH PROGRAMS

Worksheet for developing an evaluation plan

Complete the worksheet below as you work through the User Guide for the *Evaluation Framework for Peer-Based Youth Programs*

Step 1 Identify reasons for evaluation

Reasons for evaluation

- To determine the impacts of a program on a target group
- To analyse changes over time as a result of the program
- To identify service improvements
- To determine cost effectiveness of a service
- To support funding proposals
- To compare the effectiveness of one service with another type of service designed to address the same needs in a target group
- To justify continuing or expanding a program
- To assess the effectiveness of a pilot study for a new program
- To prepare management reports
- To ensure programs are being delivered as intended
- To ensure programs are doing no harm
- To meet audit or quality management requirements
- To collect feedback on performance
- To help boost staff morale that they are achieving goals.

Other

- Reason 1:
- Reason 2:

Step 2 Understand your target group

Attributes of youth most at risk

- Lonely or isolated
- Abused or victimised
- Poor mental health
- Poor help-seeking skills
- Poor coping skills
- Lacking social skills
- Risk-taking
- Lacking positive adult or peer role models

Other

- Attribute 1:
- Attribute 2:

Step 3 Agree on program objectives

Program objectives

- To provide a **safe space** and **safe learning environment** for young people without fear of judgment, misunderstanding, harassment or abuse
- To **increase knowledge and skills** within a specific area, e.g. sexual health; parenting skills for young parents; mental health; diversity issues
- To **increase social connectedness** and create a **sense of belonging** within **supportive peer networks**
- To provide **positive adult and peer role models** for young people who may only have experienced negative influences from adults and peers
- To provide activities and opportunities which help young people to develop a **positive self concept, self acceptance** and **high self esteem**.
- To **prevent the onset or further development of mental health problems** including depression, anxiety, self harm and suicidal ideation
- To **increase confidence** and to **develop and enhance communication and social skills**
- To **empower young people** to build **personal resilience** and **improved help-seeking behaviour** through increased knowledge of available support, reduced stigma associated with mental health difficulties and help-seeking, the development of positive coping strategies and the development of skills needed to access help
- To **foster future thinking and optimism** and to widen young people's understanding and beliefs of the opportunities available to them.

Other

- Objective 1:
- Objective 2:

Step 4 Agree on peer group and program factors to be monitored

Environment

- Location or setting
- Behaviour management processes
- Boundary management
- Other participants
- Staff/volunteers
- Ethical practice
- Peer group rules/norms

Peer group factors

- Positive peer influences
- Peer support
- Group rules/norms
- Group cohesion
- Group dynamics
- Level of youth engagement

Program factors

- Strengths-based
- Positive role modelling
- Flexibility
- Youth friendly
- Youth participation

Other

- Factor 1
- Factor 2

Step 5 **Agree on impacts and outcomes to be measured**

Short term impacts on the individual:

- Increased social connectedness
- Increased self esteem
- Increased confidence
- Improved social skills
- Improved problem-solving skills
- Improved help-seeking behaviour
- Improved coping skills
- Increased knowledge
- Optimism
- Positive role model for peers

Impacts on others:

- Improved relationships
- Positive influence on networks
- Leadership within community
- Leadership within program

Long term outcomes:

- Mental wellbeing
- Physical wellbeing
- Education/employment
- Help-seeking
- Community engagement

Step 6 **Agree on evaluation questions and indicators**

Evaluation questions to be answered

- Question 1:
- Question 2:
- Question 3:
- Question 4:

Indicators which will be used

- Indicator 1
- Indicator 2
- Indicator 3:
- Indicator 4:
- Indicator 5:
- Indicator 6:
- Indicator 7:
- Indicator 8:
- Indicator 9:
- Indicator 10:

Step 7 Select evaluation strategies

You may wish to refer to the *Evaluation Resources* Database when completing this section of the worksheet.

Process evaluation tools

- Evaluation approach 1
- Evaluation approach 2
- Evaluation approach 3
- Evaluation approach 4

Impact/outcome evaluation tools

- Evaluation approach 1
- Evaluation approach 2
- Evaluation approach 3
- Evaluation approach 4

Step 8 Implement, monitor and refine evaluation plan

Next program reflection and review session scheduled for:

_____(dd)/_____(mm)/_____(yyyy)

Actions arising from program reflection session:

- Action 1:
- Action 2:
- Action 3: