

# Best Practices in Evaluation Reporting



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## AmeriCorps State & National Symposium

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# Presenters

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# Learning objectives

- Understand major sections of an evaluation report
- Learn what information is typically presented in an evaluation report
- Understand how to effectively describe your evaluation study results



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# Evaluation plans and reports

- The evaluations conducted by competitive grantees and the final reports generated from these evaluations should be guided by a CNCS-approved evaluation plan.
- The approved evaluation plan provides important information that should be used in writing the evaluation final report.
- The evaluation plan makes the process of writing the final report much easier.



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# What is an evaluation plan?

- Details the program model being evaluated
- Describes and justifies the evaluation approach selected
- Provides instructions for the evaluation / a guide for each step of the evaluation process

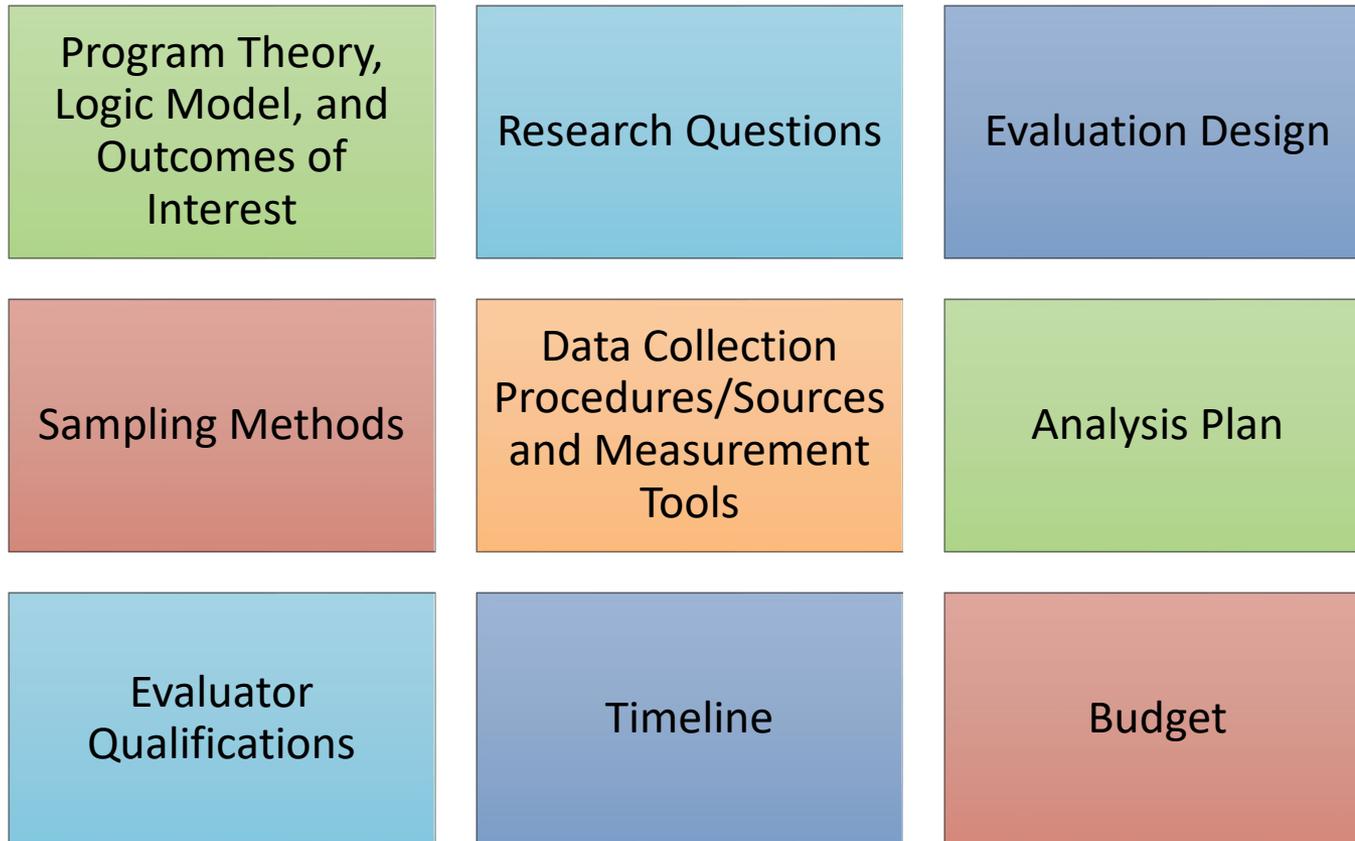


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# Components of an evaluation plan



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# CNCS's evaluation report requirements

- If an ASN State Competitive or National/Tribal grantee has received at least six years of competitive funding for a project, they are required to submit an evaluation plan AND evaluation report when they re compete for competitive AmeriCorps funding for the same project.
- At minimum, your evaluation report for CNCS should include:
  - An introduction to the project;
  - A description of the evaluation design and methods
  - A section on the findings and results of the evaluation

*Source: Evaluation FAQs #3 and #27*



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# How are evaluation reports used?

- CNCS uses evaluation reports to:
  - Identify training and technical assistance needs for grantees
  - Identify and share promising practices and models for replication
  - Strengthen the evidence base for national service
- Grantees are encouraged to use their evaluation report to:
  - Create awareness of and demonstrate success (or lessons learned), and promote sustainability
  - Identify opportunities for program improvement, adjustment, and future action
  - Guide the development of an evaluation plan for upcoming grant cycle
  - Support the evidence base for future grant applications

*Source: Evaluation FAQs #30-31*



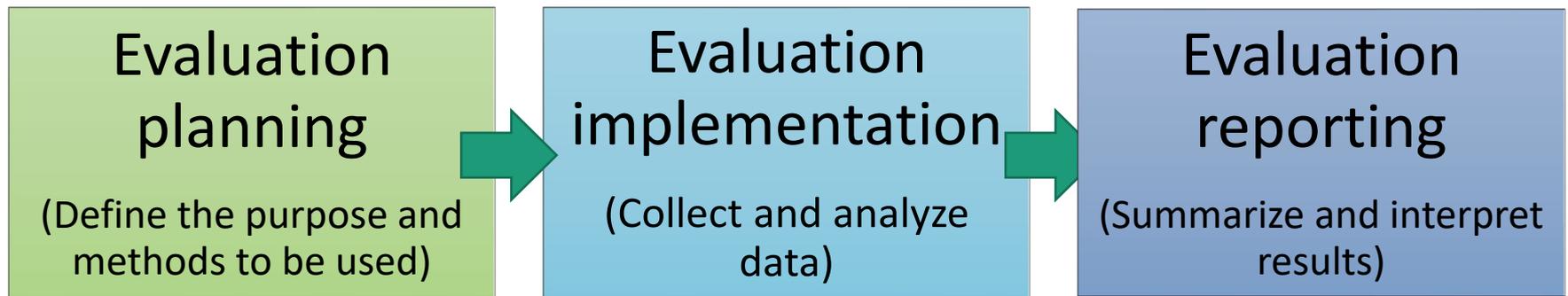
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# What is an evaluation report?

- A written document that presents the evaluation's methods and findings
- Provides a transparent basis for:
  - Understanding the program's alignment with its theory of change
  - Decision-making on policies and programs
  - Drawing lessons for program improvement



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# What are the key sections of an evaluation report?

These two sections correspond with your CNCS required evaluation plan



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# Section: Executive Summary (Optional)

- This section is a condensed version of your full evaluation report that succinctly informs your reader about the highlights of the evaluation
- It should include a brief description of your AmeriCorps program, the main research questions, an overview of the evaluation methods used, and a summary of key findings and recommendations
- Short in length; typically includes a bulleted presentation of key findings
- Typically written after the full report is complete



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# Section: Evaluation Purpose & Program Background

- This section serves as the introduction to your evaluation report and contains information that provides important context for understanding the evaluation findings
- This section should:
  - Introduce your report by describing the purpose of the evaluation and a brief description of the evaluation approach
  - Provide a description of the program and its theory of change (should focus mainly on the component being evaluated)
  - Describe prior research and evaluations on the program or similar programs



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# Section: Evaluation Purpose & Program Background (Cont.)

- This section should fully define the key components of the evaluated intervention:
  - Design and core components of the intervention, including dosage
  - Characteristics of the beneficiary population
  - Characteristics of the population delivering the intervention (e.g., members)
  - Context in which intervention is delivered
  - Intended outcome(s) of the intervention
- The information on the intervention helps the grantee use the report as part of its own evidence base, and also allows other organizations to better understand how to replicate an effective intervention.



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# Section: Evaluation Methods

- This section of the report states the **research questions** and describes the approach used to answer each question
- This section should describe:
  - Evaluation design (process, non-experimental, impact)
  - Sampling methods (sample selection, final sample sizes, response rates)
  - Data sources (members, program staff, clients)
  - Data collection approach/sources (pre/post-surveys, administrative data, interviews)
  - Analysis methods (e.g., frequencies, statistical testing, multivariate models)
  - Study limitations and strengths (related to methods, data, potential sources of bias)
- **Grantees should use/expand upon the information from their evaluation plan to populate this section** and provide an appropriate level of detail for the report



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# Section: Evaluation Methods (Cont.)

Evaluation Design	Details to include
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description of the methods used (i.e., qualitative only, quantitative only, or mixed methods)</li></ul>
Non-experimental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description of whether pre- AND post-test measurements OR post-only measurements were used</li></ul>
Quasi-experimental (QED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description of the approach for identifying a reasonably similar comparison group (e.g., propensity score matching)</li><li>• List of variables (covariates) used to statistically equate treatment and comparison groups at baseline</li></ul>
Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description of the random assignment procedures that were used to form treatment and control groups</li></ul>



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# Section: Evaluation Methods (Cont.)

- Consider including a matrix aligning research questions with indicators, data sources and/or collection strategy, and analytic approach

Research Question	Indicators of outcomes	Data Sources/Data Collection	Analytic Approach
According to program stakeholders, what activities best support their ability to effectively work with students (e.g., training, coaching, curriculum, etc.)?	Member supports and training, curriculum, facilitators, barriers	- Interviews and focus groups w/ teachers, members, administrators - Observations of members and students	Within case and cross-case content analysis
As a result of services received from AmeriCorps members, do participants experience an increase in knowledge about their legal rights and obligations?	Understanding of legal rights and obligations	- Pre-tests, post-tests, and follow-ups of all victims/clients - Client Management System data extraction	- Univariate analyses (mean, frequency); - Statistical testing (ANOVA)
Does participation in AmeriCorps program A increase an organization's capacity to utilize volunteers compared to similar comparison group organizations?	Volunteer usage, types of volunteers used, systems in place	- Pre-post volunteer program assessment of all host sites and a sample of 40 comparison sites	Multivariate regression model

# Section: Results/Findings

- This section of the report presents the results of the evaluation, organized by research question
- When reporting your results:
  - Present all findings, positive, negative, and null (no effect)
  - Describe all results objectively and without interpretation or explanation (interpretation should be provided in conclusion section)
  - Display and discuss findings by pairing graphs, tables, and charts with narrative description
  - Use appendices for more technical analyses, additional results, and supplemental data



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# Section: Results/Findings (cont)

Reporting conventions differ by whether the study or the data is quantitative or qualitative.

Quantitative	Qualitative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Data/results are usually presented in appropriate figures (diagrams, graphs, tables, and photographs) along with a narrative summary</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Data/results are usually presented in words rather than in figures, resulting in more written material</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Highlight the important trends and differences/comparisons</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organize sections and subsections by themes that emerged from the data</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Highlight differences that are statistically significant and include effect sizes (if statistical testing was applied)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use clear and concise introductory statements and headings/subheadings to help the reader navigate the report</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Present demographic data first that describes the sample(s)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Choose a select number of quotations to help illustrate important themes</li></ul>

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# Section: Conclusions & Recommendations

- The final section of your report should be a discussion of the potential conclusions supported by the findings
  - Move beyond describing the data to interpreting the “So what?” in relation to the research questions
  - Make logical connections in the data, identifying trends, patterns, or links (e.g., if two groups had very different outcomes, what factors might have led to this?)
  - Place data in a meaningful context (e.g., is an increase of 10% a small, medium, or large effect?)
- This section may also include a set of recommendations for next steps for the program and/or evaluation
  - Make recommendations that are specific and supported by evidence
  - Ensure they are feasible, realistic, and actionable
  - Consider the limitations of the evaluation findings



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# Section: Conclusions & Recommendations (cont.)

- This section should be:
  - Written after having time to step back from the results
  - Grounded in the data/findings while focused on the broader picture/story
  - Transparent about the limitations of the evaluation and what the evaluation can and cannot say
  - Attentive to alternative interpretations or causal links; Sometimes, data is ambiguous and open to more than one interpretation
  - Interpreted with the goals and context of the program, and the needs of the stakeholders in mind
  - Reviewed and discussed with stakeholders to gain multiple perspectives on the meaning of the findings



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# Section: References & Appendices

- Your references section should cite all sources that were used to write the report
- An appendix section is useful for presenting the more detailed technical information and/or secondary results that may disrupt the overall flow of reporting in the main body of the report; Examples of what to include in an appendix:
  - Glossary of terms
  - Questionnaires/protocols/assessments
  - Lengthy derivations of equations
  - List of interview participants
  - Figures/tables/charts/graphs of secondary results



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# Additional tips for writing an evaluation report

- Develop an outline for your report before starting the writing process
- Assume the reader has no prior knowledge of your program, the evaluation, or its findings, and provide a thorough description of all three of these areas in the report
- Make the information visually appealing and easy to read (e.g., use a graphic design expert to format your report)
- Use diagrams, graphs or charts to highlight central findings
- Take steps to ensure the credibility of your evaluation report
- Proofread your report



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# Tips for ensuring your report meets CNCS evaluation requirements

- Include a title page with CNCS grant ID for evaluated project, name of project, and date of completion of the report.
- Ensure that date of completion of the report falls within the timeframe of the grant cycle being evaluated (unless you have an approved AEA for Timing). NOTE: The data does not need to be collected during that specific timeframe.
- Specify the site(s) evaluated, especially if the report is being used to meet evaluation requirements for more than one legal grant. (For example, if an organization is evaluating the same program model under multiple state subgrants).
- Make sure the evaluation you describe in your report matches your approved evaluation plan for that grant cycle.



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# Additional Resources

- Technical Assistance
  - CNCS's TA Portal
    - <https://americorpsevaluationta.norc.org/>
  - NORC's Evaluation TA Team
    - [AmeriCorpsEvaluationTA@norc.org](mailto:AmeriCorpsEvaluationTA@norc.org)
- CNCS's Evaluation Resources
  - Knowledge Network
    - <https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/americorps>
  - Evidence Exchange
    - <https://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange>
  - Technical Guides
    - <https://nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation/analysis-and-reporting-evaluation-results>
    - [https://nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/resource/GP\\_SIF\\_Evaluation\\_Reporting\\_Guidance\\_0.pdf](https://nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/resource/GP_SIF_Evaluation_Reporting_Guidance_0.pdf)
- ASN Evaluation Policies
  - <https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation/cncs-evaluation-policies>



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