

Tier Three:

Understanding and Refining

The purpose of Tier Three is to improve the program. This tier will be re-visited often as understanding of program delivery and outcomes increases and you plan for the future. To improve the program, you will:

- Gather information from program staff and participants to assess participant satisfaction;
- Compare information obtained in Tier One with that from Tier Two to determine if current program activities are consistent with the original intent of the program;
- Examine program delivery documentation to identify lessons learned;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the program; and
- Revisit the literature.

In addition to improving the program, written documentation in this tier will contribute to process evaluation and help document how program outcomes were achieved.

Program improvements result from modifications and adjustments that are normal and necessary components of program implementation.

Participant Satisfaction

It is important to ensure that the program meets the needs of participants. One way to begin assessing participant satisfaction is to examine data from staff meetings and to administer participant satisfaction surveys. It is up to your team to determine the best way to collect these data.

Assess “the Fit” of Tier One with Tier Two

Tier One stated that a clearly defined program was essential to an effective evaluation. Now in Tier Three, you will reap the benefits of having taken the time to explicitly lay out the program plan.

One way to determine whether program adjustments are necessary is to examine “the fit” between the original intent of the program and what it actually does. In Tier One, program vision, mission, goals, objectives, and characteristics were defined. In Tier Two, you documented who the program was serving, what services/activities were provided and the manner in which they were provided. Now in Tier Three, you’ll examine this information to determine if it produces a good match or fit. For instance: Are program goals reflected in program activities? Are community needs reflected in program activities?

To begin the process of fit assessment, review the information documented in Tier Two. Next, discuss whether this information is consistent with the vision and mission of the program. Also, discuss whether goals and objectives are directly reflected in program activities and participants. Finally, discuss whether the program actually serves those specified in Tier One and if it does so in the manner proposed. The Fit Assessment Worksheet at the end of Tier Three will facilitate these discussions.

Identify Lessons Learned

If inconsistencies are found, the team will need to decide where adjustments are most appropriate (e.g., in program goals or in activities, in the target population or in recruitment procedures, etc.). Remember, program adjustments are a “normal” part of making program improvements.

Inconsistencies and information obtained in Tier Two on the accountability of program delivery will guide the discussion concerning lessons learned during the course of program development and implementation.

“If only you had known then what you know now, what would you have done differently?” This is yet another way to identify areas in need of adjustment that will improve the program. Discussion items appear in the Lessons Learned Worksheet.

Identify Program Strengths and Weaknesses

As a way to celebrate program strengths and establish a written history of program improvements, your team may find it useful to document program strengths and weaknesses (see the Program Strengths and Weaknesses Worksheet). This activity provides the chance to establish written documentation as it relates, specifically, to program strengths and areas in need of improvement. For further discussion of program improvement, go to <http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/miscpubs/eacwest/evalhbk.htm#VProgram>

Revisit Literature

As the program evolved over time, it may have changed focus. It is important to go back and review the literature in light of new program developments.

To identify areas deserving improvements, the team examined various types of information from all three tiers. First, they reviewed the original intent of the program and program accountability information. Second, they developed and administered program satisfaction surveys that were filled out by participating children, teen tutors, parents, and teachers. They also interviewed the teen tutors, and a few parents and teachers for more in-depth information regarding the operation of the program.

As they discussed the information before them, they realized they had a mixed bag of findings. Satisfaction surveys suggested that the program was making a positive difference and that most were pleased with the program. On the other hand, the team was able to identify several areas in need of improvement. To begin the assessment process, they made a list of program strengths and discussed how they could capitalize on these. Next, they listed program weaknesses, and in the process, discussed all of the things they had come to learn since the program was implemented.

Several issues in need of attention arose from their discussions. First, there was the issue that program accountability information was not explicitly supportive of the original program plans. For example, the vision, mission, and goals of the program specified that the program was to serve children with reading difficulties, and yet, not all children in the program had received grades below "B-." The team was faced with the decision of whether to modify the program plan to include all children or redesign the screening policy to ensure that children with satisfactory grades did not enter the program. While deciding who, exactly, the program would continue to serve, they considered the fact that some teachers and tutors wanted to exclude "trouble-makers" from the program. Teachers and tutors thought excluding these children would allow for better use of time.

The team decided to respect the original intent of the program to serve those children most in need of help. At the same time, they realized they had been overambitious in attempting to serve all children with grades below "B-." After much discussion, the team came to agree that grades "C" and above were "average" and should be considered satisfactory. As a result, they modified screening procedures, and a few goals and objectives to reflect the change in how deficiencies and difficulties were defined. To enter the program, children would need grades below "C."

Concerning “trouble-makers,” the team agreed that excluding these children was out of the question. These were the very children in need of a support system that would increase the likelihood of their school continuation and completion. They planned a training session to teach tutors more effective ways to handle discipline issues.

On the other hand, the team could not ignore that there were real time constraints. It was obvious that there were too few tutors. Furthermore, all of the tutors were in the top quarter of their class. The program was having trouble soliciting teens at risk for school drop-out as volunteers. The team was, once again, faced with the issue of modifying the original intent of the program or devising more effective means for recruiting teens. The team firmly believed that it was important to engage teens at risk for school drop-out in roles of responsibility.

The teen members of the team asked peers who were regarded as “at risk” why they weren’t interested in volunteering for the program. There were many reasons, but in general, teens who were not motivated to graduate, were not interested in doing things for extra class credit. The team went to the literature to see how other programs succeeded in recruiting teens. They discovered that material incentives were often successful and thus solicited the help of local business owners. Many business owners were willing to offer gift certificates for food, movies, stores, and the like, to teens willing to volunteer for the program.

To train the greater number of anticipated teen volunteers, the 4-H leader planned a train-the-trainer workshop for the eight initial volunteer teen tutors.

The team believed that their program should strive to be the most effective program possible. Each member was dedicated to the continued collection of program accountability and satisfaction information, as well as to the incorporation of program adjustments as necessary. They believed the program should be as dynamic as the environment within which it functioned and knew that appropriate assessments and adjustments would strengthen their program.