

## Evaluation

### *Why Conduct Evaluations?*

Training involves a considerable investment of staff time and, generally, agency funds. It is important to determine whether the training met its objectives and was effective. It is also important to determine whether additional training needs remain. Evaluation can provide the answers to these questions and can also help an agency decide which courses to select in the future, based on their past effectiveness.

### *Approaches to Evaluation*

Evaluation of training programs can use several different approaches. These include:

- ◆ **Participant Feedback.** This feedback can ascertain whether participants found the course useful, understandable, too short or long, too difficult or easy, and other factors. However, this type of evaluation often reflects whether the participants liked the instructors, were comfortable in the room, and other “satisfaction” measures—not necessarily whether the course met their needs or was effective. This form of feedback is generally obtained through a written feedback form, designed to be easy to complete.
- ◆ **Tests or Quizzes.** Tests can be administered at the end of the course only (post-tests) to determine knowledge or skill level at the completion of the course. A better approach is to administer a pre-test before the course in addition to the post-test to enable the evaluator to determine the improvement that was due to the course. Post-test results can also indicate needs for further training.
- ◆ **Instructor Feedback.** Feedback from instructors is particularly useful when pilot testing new courses. The instructors can provide valuable insights into participant reactions as well as whether they thought the flow of their session was appropriate, the logic was solid, the content was complete, etc.—factors they could only know by actually delivering the course. This feedback can be obtained through informal discussions following each day or the entire course or through more formal interviews.
- ◆ **Participant-Observation.** For a new course, it is useful to have an evaluator sit through the course as a “participant-observer” taking notes and observing the instructor and participants. The participant-observer can see if participants are paying attention and if the instructors are speaking effectively. They can also document the actual content of the course, beyond what is contained in the instructor manual or promised in a provider catalog. This technique is also useful if your agency is considering a course for your staff, if you can observe the course as it is delivered to another agency.
- ◆ **Follow-up Interviews or Questionnaires.** Follow-up interviews and questionnaires can be used to supplement the immediate reactions to the course obtained through the methods listed above. These interviews can involve the participants as well as their

supervisors and should address whether the course provided useful information, whether items should be added to the course or emphasized, or whether items should be deleted from the course or de-emphasized. The follow-up can also obtain examples of how the training assisted the participant in improving his or her job performance.

### ***Tips on Designing and Conducting Evaluations***

The materials in this section of *Tools for Trainers* provide examples of the various types of evaluations you might conduct. The key element in designing an evaluation is defining the objectives of the evaluation — what questions should it answer or what decisions will it affect? Examples, and the implications for the design include:

- ◆ **Course improvement.** If a course is offered more than once, it is useful to obtain feedback from participants so that the course can be improved for its future delivery. To meet this objective, the evaluation should address the course content and materials that could be changed in the future, such as topics that should be added or deleted; level of the course (basic to advanced); usefulness of materials; relevance of small group exercises; and quality of visual aids. Participant feedback, participant-observation, and instructor feedback are particularly useful.
- ◆ **Selection of instructors.** Some instructors are more effective than others. Evaluation can help you select the best instructors and to provide assistance or training-of-trainers to those whose delivery skills need improvement. Participant feedback and participant-observation are most useful.
- ◆ **Selection of courses from various alternatives.** There might be several providers who offer courses on a given topic. Evaluation can assist you in selecting the best course for your agency staff. In these cases, it is useful to establish some criteria, such as length of the course, method of delivery, and level of the course, and then to evaluate the various alternatives that meet the criteria. Participant-observation is the best approach, if you or another representative of your agency can attend the course in another location.
- ◆ **Documentation of results.** You might be asked to document the results of training — the return on the training investment. In this case, participant satisfaction is less important than changes in knowledge and skill that led to improvement in job performance. Test results are useful to provide quantitative documentation. Follow-up interviews with trainees and their supervisors are useful in providing anecdotes and examples. If the training was intended to resolve a specific problem, follow-up measurement or examination of the problem will be needed.
- ◆ **Promotion of training or specific courses.** In competing for scarce resources, you might find it necessary to promote the value of training in general or specific courses. In this case, it is most important to determine what types of information will have the most effect with the target audience. Documented results are generally effective, with some participant feedback such as quotes on course quality and usefulness. A combination of quantifiable results, such as an increase in number and proportion of successful

enforcement cases, with anecdotes that illustrate improved performance is often the most effective.

Post-tests can also be used to determine whether trainees should receive some form of credit or a certificate for the course.

Evaluation results feed back into needs assessment. Areas that were not covered adequately in the course, based on trainee feedback, may constitute continuing training needs. Trainees might recognize additional training needs as a result of their participation in a related course or, as trainees improve their skills in one area, supervisors might recognize needs in another area.

It is helpful to work with the training provider on the course evaluation and to share the results. In some cases, the provider will have their own participant feedback forms that are tailored to the course and its individual sessions. The provider might also administer pre-tests and/or post-tests.

Whenever possible, your evaluation should include some form of follow-up with trainees, their supervisors, or even the regulated community. This follow-up is very useful in documenting changes in knowledge or skill that can be attributed to the training program, problems that have been overcome, and issues that have been resolved. It also provides feedback on what proved to be more useful and less useful to the trainees in their jobs. After they have had an opportunity to apply their new knowledge and/or skills, the trainees can identify strengths or weaknesses in the training that might not have been apparent during the course. Comments such as "I found that I didn't really understand this process (method, rule, etc.) as well as I thought I did" or "the course didn't address this aspect of the process (method, rule, etc.)" can identify continuing training needs and can also assist training providers in improving their courses.