Key Ingredients in Self-Evaluation

1. Agency is ***outcome focused***. This means that outcomes for children and families are clearly defined and disseminated throughout the agency. All staff members realize that the decisions that they make for individual families and children influence the outcomes for the agency.

2. Self-evaluation is a ***collaborative process*** that brings together individuals with different kinds of expertise to discuss the data used to measure outcomes and agency processes. The expertise represented at the "self-evaluation table" must include:

   - management information staff familiar with the data system;
   - data analysis staff who can analyze, organize and present data on outcomes;
   - program staff including managers, supervisors, and frontline staff who understand the context of child welfare.

   This group can be expanded to include community partners, staff from other partner human service agencies such as courts and mental health.

3. Self-evaluation is an ***ongoing process*** with meetings held on a regular basis to discuss agency status on outcomes. Between meetings self-evaluation members work together to identify, collect and analyze data. An agency develops interim processes to regularly update staff and community about the agency's status on outcomes.

4. Self-evaluation requires ***timely and accessible data that appropriately measure outcomes and other indicators of interest***. These data should include:

   - entry cohort data (abuse and neglect reports, and placement data) to measure child welfare outcomes
   - data on foster parent recruitment and retention
   - geographic indicators on where child welfare clients live.

5. Self-evaluation should include ***on-going attention to implementation progress of the core strategies*** used by the agency to improve outcomes for children. This allows timely response to unforeseen barriers and accountability to parents, children, and the community

6. Self-evaluation requires ***technical expertise*** to ensure defensibility and adaptability.

Frequently Asked Questions About Self-Evaluation

What is the primary responsibility of the Self-Evaluation Team (SET)?

SET keeps agency and/or community focused on outcomes

- SET must understand agency and / or community goals
- SET must understand what data are available to measure outcomes
- SET must determine if additional information is needed to measure outcomes
- SET helps to formulate analysis that will help agency and / or community know where they stand on outcomes

What does it mean to be outcome focused?

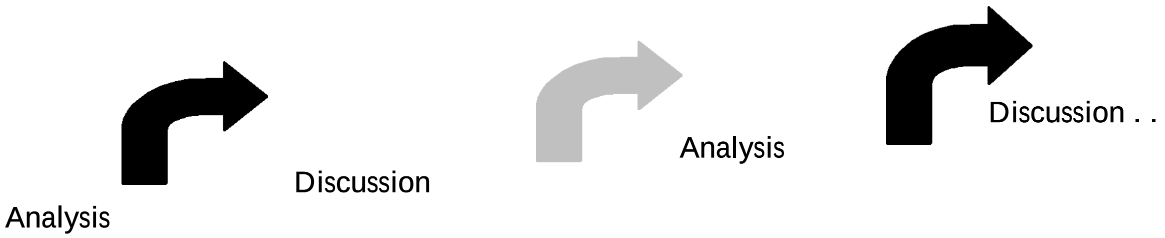
- Expected outcomes are clearly defined
- Outcomes are measurable
- Outcomes are achievable through successful implementation of the program / initiative
- Outcomes are known and understood by all agency staff and / or community members
- Agency staff and / or community members recognize how their work contributes to improved outcomes or creates a barrier
- Current agency and / or community status on outcomes is known by all
- Data on outcomes is used to plan programs and identify areas in existing programs in which modifications are required

What does it mean to have an ongoing self-evaluation process?

- Outcomes are regularly examined and discussed through regularly scheduled self-evaluation meetings (e.g. every other week, once a month, quarterly)

- Informal interim discussions about outcomes occur between regularly scheduled self-evaluation meetings in other agency and / or community forums

- Analysis results are presented on a regular basis; discussed by self-evaluation team who identify new areas of analysis:



What technical expertise is needed to begin self-evaluation?

- Ability to analyze data, present results in an understandable and useable format
- Ability to listen to program discussions and identify data and analysis that would be useful to staff and/or community members who are implementing programs
- Knowledge of data that are currently collected and available
- Ability to extract data from existing systems
- Ability to formulate data requests

What types of data might be used for self-evaluation?

- Administrative data files can be reconfigured to monitor outcomes
- Public health data files contain community health information on incidence and prevalence of events and conditions
- Other agencies, such as education, juvenile justice may have administrative information that can be linked to other data
- Other sources of data could include focus groups, key informant discussions, surveys
- Child welfare outcomes should be measured using longitudinal data that contains information on ALL children entering placement as opposed to only children in placement at a particular point in time
- Child abuse/neglect referral data provides information needed to determine the likelihood that a child will enter placement

What is a *collaborative* self-evaluation process?

- Self-evaluation team includes people who represent diverse perspectives in terms of technical expertise and substantive knowledge
- Three areas should be represented on the SET: program and/or community knowledge, analysis capability, data manager
- Number of members on SET varies, usually ranges from 3 to 15

- Program staff and community representatives are on the team
    - Who: partner agency managers, middle managers, frontline staff, community representatives, other human services agency staff
    - Role: help understand the meaning of the data by bringing the frontline work perspective to the discussion of outcomes, communicate knowledge of outcomes to colleagues, identify information that is needed to understand outcomes
- Analysis capability is on the team
    - Who: planning / evaluation unit member, quality assurance staff, staff person who likes to use numbers and would be willing to be trained in analysis, new hire analyst, partnership with university
    - Role - Formulate analysis to determine current status on outcomes
      - Analyze data on outcome status
      - Present results in understandable and useable format
      - Participate in SET discussions with an eye to determining additional analysis that would be helpful in understanding outcome status
        - Act as resource person to others in agency and / or community around understanding outcomes and analysis questions
- Data manager is on the team
    - Who: data systems manager, programmer, agency "data" person
    - Role: - Identify data elements needed to measure outcomes
      - Design process for regularly making identified outcome data available to agency and community members
      - Design reports for information that is needed on a regularly scheduled basis e.g. quarterly summary of outcome status

Implementing an Ongoing Self-Evaluation Process

The primary role of the self-evaluation team is to keep the agency focused on outcomes for families and children.

Forming the team and starting to meet

- Identify staff members including: person who can analyze data, person who knows what data available to measure ***child welfare outcomes*** and how to get access to the data, child welfare staff and administrators from different areas of the child welfare agency

- Select a chairperson or co-chairs for the Self-evaluation team – it is often advisable to select "non-data" and "non-analysis" staff to chair the team. This sends the message that self-evaluation is the responsibility of everyone.

- Participation in self-evaluation should be considered a "real" part of the work of the agency, not merely an "add-on" to regular job responsibilities, staff should be rewarded for attention given to outcomes.

- Participation of administrators, directors, program managers in self-evaluation sends the message that self-evaluation, and outcomes, are important in the agency.

- Establish a regular meeting schedule - it may be necessary to meet more often in the early stages while identifying data sources and baseline outcomes.

- Establish communication link with agency management (e.g. administrators and program managers are members of self-evaluation team, members of self-evaluation team report to agency management during regularly scheduled meetings)

Early tasks of self-evaluation team

- Understand the outcomes and how they are measured
- Identify data that are currently available for measuring outcomes
- Develop a process for getting regular ongoing access to the data needed to measure outcomes
- Determine agency baseline status on outcomes

- Create a process for regularly updating the agency's status on outcomes
- Determine ways to communicate the agency's status on outcomes to agency staff and to partners
- Identify information needed to support the planning of other core strategies

Ongoing tasks of the self-evaluation team

- Regularly analyze outcome data to determine agency's current status on each outcome and to understand differences in each outcome by age, race, gender, needs of children in placement.
- Identify positive and negative changes in the outcomes over time.
- Through discussions at self-evaluation team meetings identify ways in which agency practice and policy (including other core strategies) have positively impacted on outcomes; ways in which agency practice and policy have created barriers to improvement in outcomes.
- Find ways to communicate outcomes with agency administrators, managers, frontline staff, and other partners such as: newsletters, email bulletins, regular reports, discussions in regularly scheduled agency meetings, posters throughout agency, media.
- Celebrate positive changes in outcomes.
- Use negative changes in outcomes to help identify changes in practice that are needed.
- Identify new areas of analysis that are needed to understand changes in outcomes.
- Implement new analysis, team meets to discuss outcomes, ……
- Identify ways to use data from partners (e.g. juvenile justice, mental health, education) to better understand outcomes for children and families.
- Identify ways to analyze data to help partners better understand child welfare outcomes in light of their own agency's work (e.g. judicial district report presents child welfare outcome data for judicial districts in the state).

Getting Outcome Data

- Entry cohort data are needed to measure child welfare outcomes
- Existing administrative data can be reconfigured to measure child welfare outcomes
- Data management programs form the basis for a production process to regularly update outcome analysis files

- Quarterly updates of outcome data provide information needed to track changes over time

- Regular reports on outcomes provide a way to update staff on agency outcome status BUT should not be the only source of outcome data – additional analysis are needed to understand differences in outcomes for different groups of children

- Information on the key components of agency processes are needed to be sure that the process is implemented as planned by agency staff.

- Linking process to outcome data allows staff to more closely connect practice to changes in outcomes.

- Data on foster parent recruitment, training, licensing and retention help staff to understand barriers to recruitment and retention.

- Geographic data are important to determine areas from which children are coming into placement and areas in which foster parents are needed

Overview of Self-Evaluation Team Member Roles

Analyst

- Analyze outcome data
- Present data to self-evaluation team and participate in discussion of outcome results
- Identify new analyses that will help self-evaluation team understand changes in the agency's outcomes
- Compile outcome data in ways that are understandable to multiple audiences such as self-evaluation team, administrators, managers, community partners
- Identify new data that are needed to understand outcomes and communicate these needs to data managers
- Learn to run SPSS data management programs to convert "raw data" files into files that can be used to measure outcomes

Data manager

- Identify data elements in existing administrative data systems that are needed to complete analysis of outcomes
- Develop data programs to extract data from existing data systems
- Attend self-evaluation meetings with an ear to identifying additional data elements that are available for ongoing analysis
- Develop a production process for regularly extracting data needed to measure outcomes (quarterly is usually sufficient)
- Learn to run SPSS data management programs to convert "raw data" files into files that can be used to measure outcomes
- In collaboration with the self-evaluation team, develop reports that update agency outcome status

Program staff

- Participate in self-evaluation discussions about agency status on outcomes. Each staff member brings his/her practice experience to the interpretation of outcome data.
- Have a clear understanding of the outcomes and data used to measure the outcomes and communicate this information to other program staff
- Identify ways in which practice impacts on outcomes
- Help other program staff understand how frontline practice impacts on outcomes for families and children
- Identify ways to communicate outcome status to agency staff as part of day to day "way we do business"