Federation of Community Legal Centres

INFORMATION SHEET

6

Evaluating Community Legal Education

What is evaluation?

Evaluation is the process of collecting the information that the centre needs in order to determine if the stated objective(s) of the CLE activity have been achieved.

Why evaluate CLE activities and programs?

Evaluation is an important aspect of the design and delivery of CLE activities. Regardless of the size of the activity, a one-off talk to a small group or a year-long CLE project,

> "[E]valuation should be valued and resourced accordingly."
> GOLDIE, 1997, P47

Through evaluation the centre can:

- assess if activity/project objectives have been met;
- assess if the participants/target group have achieved their objectives;
- reflect on what worked well and what could be done differently in the future;
- check on and improve methodology;
- identify further problems, needs, ideas and opportunities;
- inform future planning;
- involve the community/target group;
- highlight its achievements;
- provide feedback to those responsible for the activity;
- argue for further or expanded funding;
- address pre-determined performance measures;
- meet accountability requirements;
- establish credibility; and
- report effectively to funding bodies and to stakeholders.

When does evaluation take place?

The evaluation process can take place before, during, at the completion of and following the activity/project that is being evaluated.

Those designing the CLE activity will decide on the evaluation criteria and the methodology for collecting relevant information during the planning stage of the activity. This helps to ensure that the evaluation criteria or performance measures are relevant and that tools and processes are established to collect the required information.

Monitoring and evaluation will usually occur throughout the implementation of the CLE activity. Keeping track of the progress of the activity will enable adjustments to be made, if needed. Monitoring will also help to identify and address problems as they arise and to consider and incorporate new ideas while there is still time. Asking questions halfway through a CLE session can be a way of checking whether participants have understood the content and if they are happy with the delivery methods. Scheduling regular reviews throughout the life of a CLE project, where progress in relation to established performance measures is gauged, means that action can be taken if necessary.

Most substantive evaluation is undertaken at or towards the completion of the CLE activity or project. The objectives of CLE activity or project and the form that it takes will inform the selection evaluation tools and strategies.

Evaluation may also be undertaken some time after the CLE activity or project has been completed. This type of evaluation usually seeks to measure changes in the behaviour of CLE participants or in the outcomes they have achieved as a result or participating in the CLE activity.

Case Study

Young people who have attended workshops run by the Peninsula Community Legal Centre's Young Renters Program are contacted by phone or SMS within three months of the workshop. They are asked for further feedback about the workshop and about whether they believe that attending the workshop has assisted them to obtain private rental accommodation.

The Evaluation Process

The steps in the evaluation process are described in different ways by various sources. However, the fundamentals are pretty much the same. Below is a summary of the steps outlined in three publications relevant to CLE. See the bibliography for full details.

Stage 1
Prepare for an evaluation

Stage 2
Plan the evaluation

Stage 3
Determine evaluation indicators

Stage 4
Collect data

Stage 5
Analyse data

Stage 6
Report and improve

(KEATING, ND)

Thinking

1. Describe your purpose
2. Identify your end products
3. Consider budget and timeline

Planning

4. Define your objectives
5. Establish your evaluation questions
6. Identify the information you require
7. Review your evaluation plan

Collecting

8. Identify or create your data sources
9. Overlay timeline and budget
10. Consider privacy and ethical issues

Communicating

11. Utilising your findings

(POPE & JOLLY, 2008)

Step 1
Select the indicators of success

Step 2
Select the information sources

Step 3
Develop the information gathering tools

Step 4
Gather the information

Step 5
Analyse the results

(GOLDIE, 1997)

What is being evaluated?

There are many different types of evaluation criteria and performance measures. These are often expressed in terms of quantity, quality, outcomes, outputs, efficiency and effectiveness.

These measures consider:

- What was done
- How it was done
- What happened
- What difference it made
- Who did it make a difference to
- Were the results what was anticipated
- Were there unexpected results
- Could it have been done better?

TIP!

The evaluation of CLE activities should provide the opportunity for participants to comment on whether their particular needs were met and, if not, on what could be done differently in the future.

Some things are clearly easier to measure than others – the number of booklets distributed, the responses provided by workshop participants in the evaluation form, the results of before and after testing or how many people attend a CLE activity based on the recommendation of people who attended a previous one.

Measuring outcomes, the difference that the CLE activity or project made, can be much harder. How does a centre measure whether attending a talk about the rights of grandparents to maintain a relationship with their grandchildren has made any difference to the result of a family law contact and residency matter? What is the longer-term impact of involving a group of young people from a recently arrived ethnic community in a project to design a poster about their legal rights?

Muddagouni (2007, pp12-13), notes that “it is important for a centre to acknowledge that it is very difficult to measure outcomes for some of the services CLCs provide. Measuring outcomes often works well in theory but may not work well in practice, as it is difficult to demonstrate the issues clients or the community may have that affect their legal problems, and the relationship to the services the centre provides related to the outcomes.”

Who is the audience for the evaluation?

Determining who the audiences for the evaluation are, who is interested in the results of the evaluation and why, will influence what information is collected, how it is collected and how it is reported.

For CLE activities, audiences may include funding bodies, participants, other stakeholders, those responsible for organising the CLE activity, managers, the centre’s Board of Management and the community. Sometimes an audience, such as a funding body, may be quite specific about the details that it requires be collected and reported. Usually the centre will need to take the initiative in assessing what information is important for a particular audience, or what information it wants to get across to these audiences, and evaluate accordingly.

Evaluation Strategies & Tools

Strategies for collecting relevant information may include:

- evaluations sheets completed by participants or people who have used the product;
- asking for feedback from participants during and at the completion of any activity, and possibly

some time after the activity;
- keeping statistics - about the number of people who attended an activity, the number of products ordered or the number of 'hits' on the centre website;
- assessing new knowledge or learning – through forms of testing or assessment;
- feedback/observations from those involved in designing and delivering the CLE activity; and
- feedback from people who may be in a position to monitor changes in behaviour or the application of new knowledge by participants.

ARTD Pty Ltd (2008, p10) has proposed a *Performance Monitoring Framework* including "a range of different data sources and methods for (holistically) measuring performance" (of community legal centres) and suggested "that all of them can be relevant at different times and for different purposes." Some of these proposed sources of data and tools for collecting it – illustrative case studies, special purpose research, client surveys and peer review (p3), may be useful in the describing and evaluating of the less tangible outcomes of CLE activities.

Centres will need to design the specific tools for collecting evaluation information. Some tools, such as Eastern Community Legal Centre's *Participant Evaluation Form* and *Staff Evaluation Form* for CLE activities, will be used each time the centre delivers a CLE talk or workshop. Other tools will be developed specifically for the particular activity or project, such as questions for a focus group.

It can be useful to test the evaluation tool before using it, or to have someone else consider and comment on it. It is likely that another centre or CLE worker has previously developed or used a similar tool, or has worked out a strategy for collecting certain types of information. Use networks such as the Community Development and Legal Education Working Group of the Federation of Community Legal Centres to access assistance, ideas and resources.

How will the results of the evaluation be recorded and communicated?

The most common format for recording and communicating the results of the evaluation is through a written report. Depending on factors such as the audience(s) for the evaluation, the relative importance of the activity/project and the purpose of reporting the evaluation, the centre may consider complementing or replacing a written report with formats such as:
- a verbal presentation – by organisers and/or participants;
- an audio-visual or photographic images presentation;
- reporting the results in the centre's annual report, on the website or in another promotional document;
- a poster or flow chart; or
- preparing a paper for an industry journal or conference.

CLSIS and the Evaluation of CLE

CLCs receiving funding through the Community Legal Services Program (CLSP) are required to collect data about the services they provide and record this in the Community Legal Services Information Scheme/System (CLSIS) database. Under CLSIS four service types are identified – information, advice, casework and non-casework. CLE, law reform/legal policy and other projects are recorded in the non-casework category.

There have been some ongoing concerns expressed by CLCs about the capacity of CLSIS to capture and report the details of non-casework inputs and outcomes. There also appears to be some inconsistency between centres as to what is recorded and how it is recorded. However, CLSIS is one of the sources that CLSP funding bodies use to assess CLC services. It is imperative that centres capture and enter non-casework data onto CLSIS. If your centre is not doing this it is missing the opportunity, both individually and as part of the broader CLC sector, to demonstrate the extent, significance and value of this aspect to work to funding bodies.

Tip!

Like legal needs assessment (see Information Sheet 4) evaluation is a form of research. Remember, there may be ethical considerations (such as those around privacy and informed consent) and research protocols to be taken into account in the design, implementation, and analysis and reporting of the evaluation.

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- Pope, J, & Jolly, P,. (2008) *Evaluation Step-by-Step Guide*, Department of Planning and Community Development, Victoria

FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

- Combined Community Legal Centres Group NSW (2004) *Your Guide to Community Legal Education*, Second Edition, Surry Hills, NSW (Step By Step CLE: Evaluation pp 101-120)
- Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) Inc., *Federation Toolkit – Managing the Organisation - Evaluation*, www.communitylaw.org.au
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