



**VCU**

Center for Public Policy

L. Douglas Wilder School of  
Government and Public Affairs

# TECHNIQUES FOR PREVENTION EVALUATION

## Tips for Grantees

Developed for The Department of Criminal Justice Services\*

Office of Safer Communities



## JESS C. SMITH

### PROJECT DIRECTOR

DR. SMITH CURRENTLY SERVES AS PROJECT DIRECTOR FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE RELATED RESEARCH PROJECTS AT THE VCU WILDER SCHOOL'S CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY. A TWO-TIME GRADUATE OF THE WILDER SCHOOL, DR. SMITH EARNED HER PH.D. AND M.S. DEGREES IN PUBLIC POLICY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND HAS ALSO SERVED AS AN ADJUNCT PROFESSOR IN BOTH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMS AT VCU. PRIOR TO JOINING VCU, DR. SMITH SERVED THE CITIZENS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA, FIRST AS THE PUBLIC SAFETY INITIATIVES COORDINATOR AT THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE, AND MOST RECENTLY AS THE SCHOOL, CAMPUS, AND PUBLIC SAFETY RESOURCE SPECIALIST AT THE VIRGINIA CENTER FOR SCHOOL AND CAMPUS SAFETY WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES. HER PRACTICAL RESEARCH WORK CONTINUES TO FOCUS ON THE INTERSECTION OF COMMUNITY SAFETY, EVALUATION, AND EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY.



**VCU**

Center for Public Policy

L. Douglas Wilder School of  
Government and Public Affairs

# TRAINING OBJECTIVES

- Ensuring grantees have the knowledge and skills to understand and develop prevention evaluations.
- By the end of this training, you will...
  - Be more familiarized with prevention evaluation techniques
  - Identify and apply types of evaluation
  - Utilize key evaluation methods
  - Learn how to use evaluation results to improve programs
  - Explore tips and tools for successful evaluation

# WHAT IS A PREVENTION EVALUATION?

- A process to assess a program or strategy
  - Is it working?
  - How well is it working?
  - Is it doing what it was intended to do?
- Provides understanding and concrete data
  - Delivery
  - Outcome
  - Impact

# WHY EVALUATION?

Demonstrate  
impact

Improve  
your services

Guide  
decisions

Identify  
strengths

Build  
Credibility

## EVALUATION VS. REPORTING

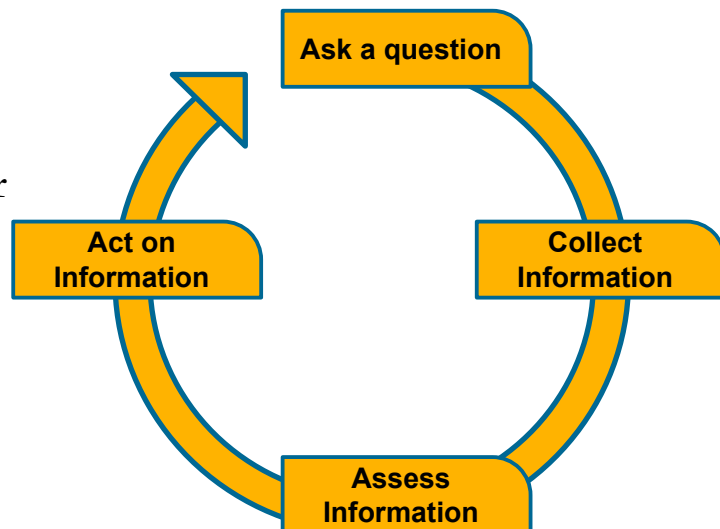
- Evaluation focuses on understanding the **how** and **why**
- Reporting focused on **what, when, and who**
  - What is the program?
  - When did it happen?
  - Who participated?
  - More focused on counting numbers and outputs
  - Less focused on analysis

# EVALUATION BASICS

Let's get a bit more in depth on evaluations!

# EVALUATION BASICS

- Ideally planned as you develop your program
- Aligned with SMART goals and objectives
- Evaluation Lifecycle
  - Ask a question
  - Collect information to answer
  - Assess the information
  - Act on the information
  - Repeat if necessary



# TYPE OF EVALUATIONS

- Process-based Evaluation
  - How was the program implemented?
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses?
- Outcome-based Evaluation
  - What changes happened?
  - What were the broader impacts?
- Goal-based Evaluation
  - Did the program/strategy work?



SPECIFIC



MEASURABLE



ACHIEVABLE



RELEVANT



TIME-BOUND

# APPLYING THE SMART FRAMEWORK

Idea:		
<b><u>S</u>pecific</b>	What? Who? Where? When? Why?	
<b><u>M</u>easureable</b>	How will you track progress? What is success?	
<b><u>A</u>chievable</b>	Is this realistic? Do we have enough staff/time?	
<b><u>R</u>elevant</b>	Does this help meet our goal?	
<b><u>T</u>ime-bound</b>	Start date? End date? Deadlines?	
Objective:		

# APPLYING THE SMART FRAMEWORK

- **Idea:** Reduce violent behavior among youth
- **Goal:** Reduce youth involvement in violent behavior in the local community by 10% within the next 12 months through education, mentorship, and community engagement programs.
- **Objective 1:** Implement monthly community workshops on conflict resolution for 100 youth, with at least 75% reporting improved skills in managing conflict and stress by the end of the year.

## THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Let's look at the Evaluation Cycle

# STEP 1: ASK A QUESTION!

- **Objective 1:** Implement monthly community workshops on conflict resolution for 100 youth, with at least 75% reporting improved skills in managing conflict and stress by the end of the year.
- Did it work? (Be specific)
  - 100 youth - 75% reporting improved skills.
  - 75 youth said their conflict resolution skills improved.
    - How do we find that out?!
      - Did 100 youth attend the program?
      - Did at least 75 youth display improved skills?
      - Was there a reduction in violent behaviors in youth?

# STEP 2: COLLECT INFORMATION

- What information do we need to collect?
  - SMART goals and objectives
  - Grant requirements
- How will we collect it?
  - Primary data collection
    - Intake Forms
    - Pre/Post Tests or Assessments
    - Surveys
    - Focus Groups
    - Observations

## STEP 2: COLLECT INFORMATION

- How will we collect it?
  - Secondary data collection - existing data
    - Crime data
    - Court records
    - School records
    - News reports
- How will we manage the information?
  - Who is responsible for data collection?
  - Where will the data live?

## REMINDER: TYPES OF DATA

### Quantitative:

- Numerical data
- Countable or measurable
- What or how much/many?
- Number of participants, crime rates, satisfaction levels, etc.

### Qualitative:

- Descriptive, non-numerical data
- Focus on understanding
- Why or how?
- Perceptions of programs, experiences, explanations

### Mixed Methods:

Many projects will rely on **both** categories to fully capture all of the important information.

## STEP 2: COLLECT INFORMATION

- Demographic Information
  - Age, gender, race, school attended, neighborhood, etc.
  - Why? To tell us more about our population of interest
- Program Details
  - Session frequency, attendance, performance measures, number of instructors, etc
  - Why? To tell us more about the program itself
- Outcome Details
  - Pre/Post Test
  - Survey
  - Why? To tell us if the program “worked”

## STEP 2: COLLECT INFORMATION

- Demographic Information
  - Intake form
- Program Details
  - Observations and internal tracking (attendance and fidelity)
- Outcome Details
  - Skills test at the beginning, midpoint, and end
  - Perceptions Survey - how did people like the program
    - Great way to get different types of data about the program - think future program materials or grant applications

## STEP 2: COLLECT INFORMATION

- Impact
  - Behavioral survey (6 months or 1 year later)
    - Did the conflict resolution training reduce violent behavior?
  - Crime rates
  - Suspension rates

## SURVEYS

- The most common primary data collection tool
- Complex and thorough methodology
  - Crafted based on the purpose (question of interest)
  - Population of interest (who?)
    - Best medium (paper vs. phone vs. electronic)
- Type of data and analysis (Quan vs. Qual)
- Language in question should be geared towards population of interest
  - Reading/Comprehension levels
  - Avoid foreign jargon or topics

# SURVEYS



# SURVEYS

## 1. Don't write leading questions

Leading questions are questions that contain wording that might sway respondents to one side of an argument. It may seem like obvious advice to avoid these, but questions like these can be harder to catch than you might think.

So how do you know when you're unintentionally writing a leading question?

Check to see if your question contains **non-neutral wording**.

### ✘ How short was Napoleon?

By using the word "short," you're suggesting to the respondent what the answer might be, which can influence how they answer the question. If you rewrite the question to use neutral language, you can eliminate bias in the question.

### ✘ Should concerned parents use infant car seats?

Specifying "concerned parents" is an unnecessary detail when the intention is to know whether car seats should be used (plus, "concerned" is non-neutral!). It draws attention away from the actual topic, which is the use of infant car seats.

### ✔ How would you describe Napoleon's height?

With neutral wording, this question is a lot more well, neutral, and that's a great thing for your survey data. That was an easy one, but leading questions can be a lot more subtle than that.

### ✔ Do you think special car seats should be required for infant passengers?

With the wording in this question, we minimize the emotional wording and we stay on topic. Often these types of questions arise when the survey writer has the best of intentions, like when they're trying too hard to be thorough. **It's always best to include only what's necessary in the question.**

# STEP 2: COLLECT INFORMATION - SURVEYS

## 2. Avoid loaded questions

What's the difference between a leading question and a loaded question? A loaded question forces the respondent to answer in a way that doesn't actually reflect their opinion or situation. Clearly, including questions like these will damage the quality of your data.

### ✗ Where do you enjoy drinking beer?

Unless the question that came immediately before this was "do you drink beer?", this would be a loaded question. The question forces the respondent to state that they drink beer, even if they don't like beer—or if they hate alcohol altogether!

### ✓ Do you drink beer?

Yes

No

Where do you like to drink beer?

What's your favorite beverage?

Remember it's always a good idea to pretest your survey to make sure that no questions assume something is true without asking first.

Then, you can set up a preliminary question and use skip logic to let people who don't drink beer pass the question.

# SURVEYS

## 3. Stay away from double-barreled questions

Some survey questions are actually two questions that only look like they're just one. It's impossible to get accurate data from double-barreled questions because respondents only have the answer options to respond to one question, not both.

### ✗ How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the pay and work benefits at your job?

Some respondents will answer this question with their pay in mind, while others will answer with work benefits in mind. In other words, the data you get back will be unreliable because you can't even be sure respondents are answering the same question.

### ✓ How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the pay at your job?

### How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the work benefits at your job?

When you encounter a double-barreled question, it's always best to break it up into two questions. **Survey questions should always be written in a way that only one subject is being measured.**

### ✗ How useful would this textbook be for students and young professionals in the field?

Don't forget that double-barreled questions also apply to the object of survey questions, not just their subjects. Now the respondent is forced to give a single answer for both parties.

### ✓ How useful would this textbook be for students?

### How useful would this textbook be for young professionals?

Instead break the question into two; one measuring usefulness for students and one measuring usefulness for professionals.

# STEP 2: COLLECT INFORMATION - SURVEYS

## 4. Absolutely do not use absolutes

The trouble with absolutes is that they're inflexible—far too inflexible to use in surveys. They force respondents into a corner where they can't provide useful information. These questions often only provide yes/no answer options and usually include words like "always," "all," "every," and "ever."

### ❌ Do you always eat breakfast?

Yes

No

If every respondent took this question literally, the answer would almost always be "no." But even if they didn't, the information you'd get back wouldn't be very useful. They can't provide any useful details about how often they eat breakfast—they either do or they don't.

### ✅ How many days a week do you normally eat breakfast?

Every day

5-6 days

3-4 days

1-2 days

I usually don't eat breakfast

Giving respondents a variety of options allows them a chance to answer the question in a more nuanced way and provide better, more specific data in the process.

# STEP 2: COLLECT INFORMATION - SURVEYS

- **Survey length:** Shorter is always better
- **Lengthy wording:** Using words that are unnecessarily long and complicated.
- **Length of question:** The question itself is unnecessarily too long.
- **Lack of specificity:** It is not clear from the question what the desired information.
- **Vague language:** Using words and phrases that can have different meanings to different respondents.
- **Double negatives:** The use of two or more negative phrases within a single question.
- **Using jargon and initials:** Using terms specific to a professional or academic discipline.
- **Cultural differences in meaning:** Using phrases or words that carry different meanings for different population subgroups.

# SURVEYS

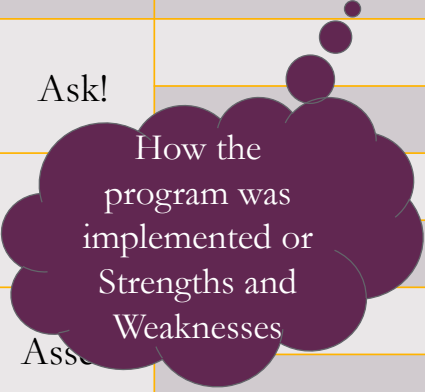
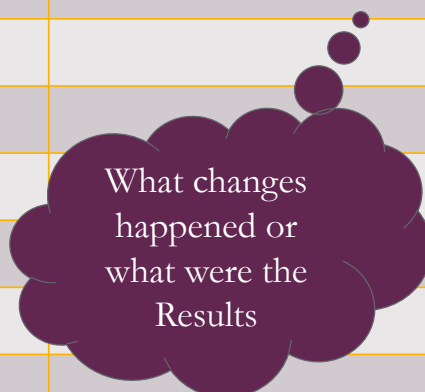
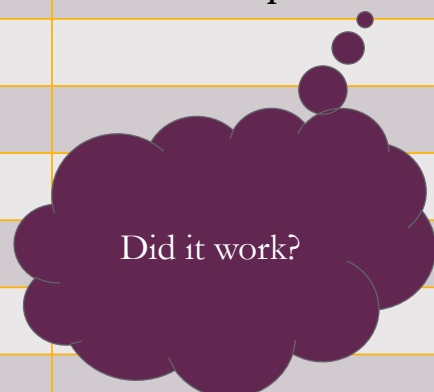


## STEP 3: ASSESS INFORMATION

- What does this information tell us?
- How many people attended the program?
- What type of people attended the program?
- Relate back to the SMART goals
  - Did conflict resolution skills improve?
  - Did participants like the program?
  - What did participants say about the program?
  - What were the long term impacts of the program?

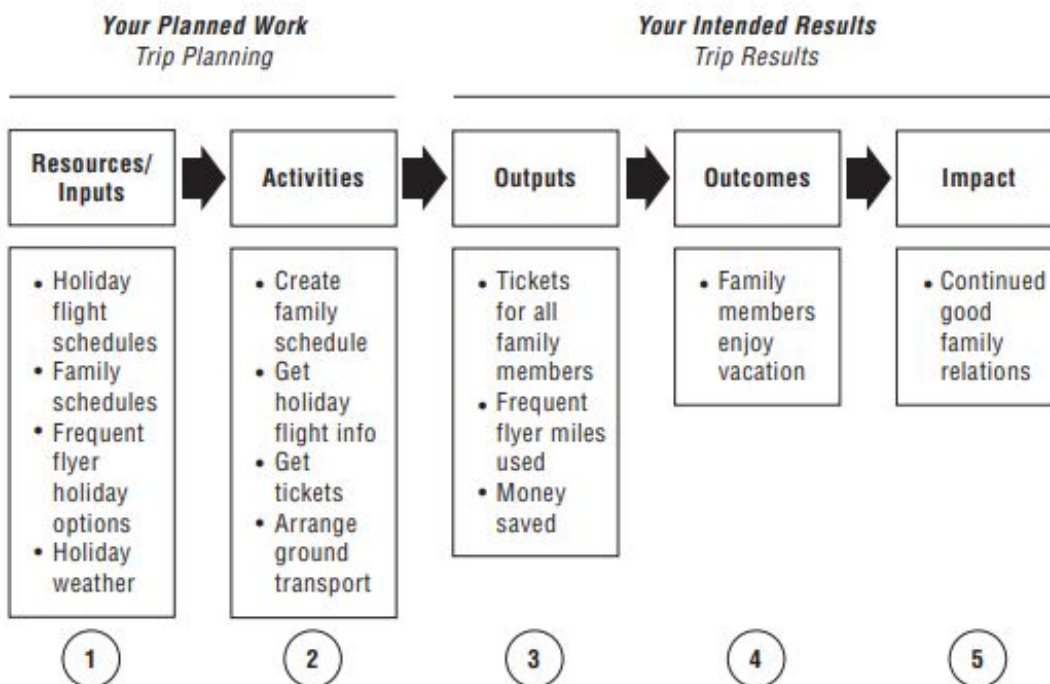
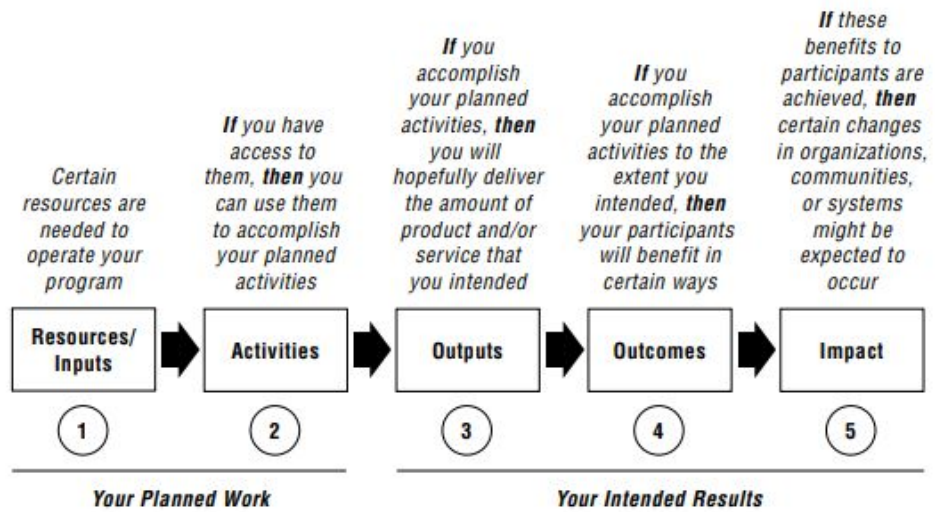
# EVALUATION PLANNING TOOLS

## PLANNING A PREVENTION EVALUATION

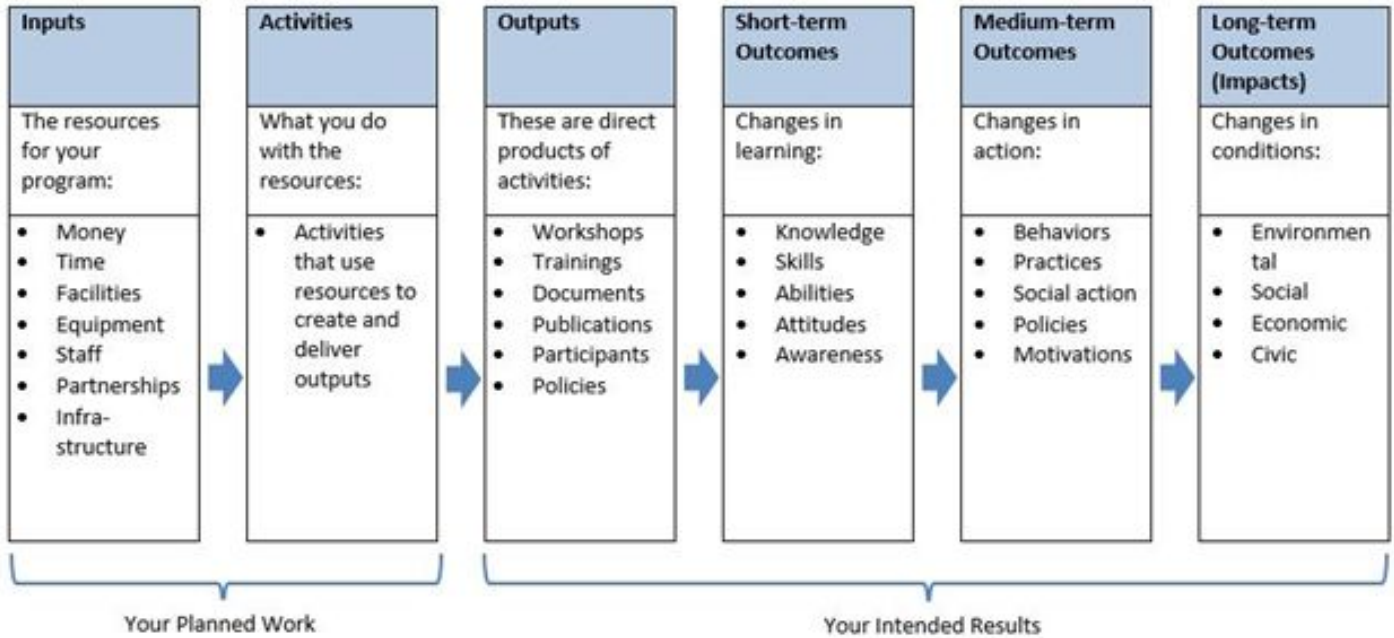
Objective:			
	Process	Outcome	Impact
Ask!	 <p>How the program was implemented or Strengths and Weaknesses</p>	 <p>What changes happened or what were the Results</p>	 <p>Did it work?</p>
Assess			
Responsibilities:			

# LOGIC MODELS

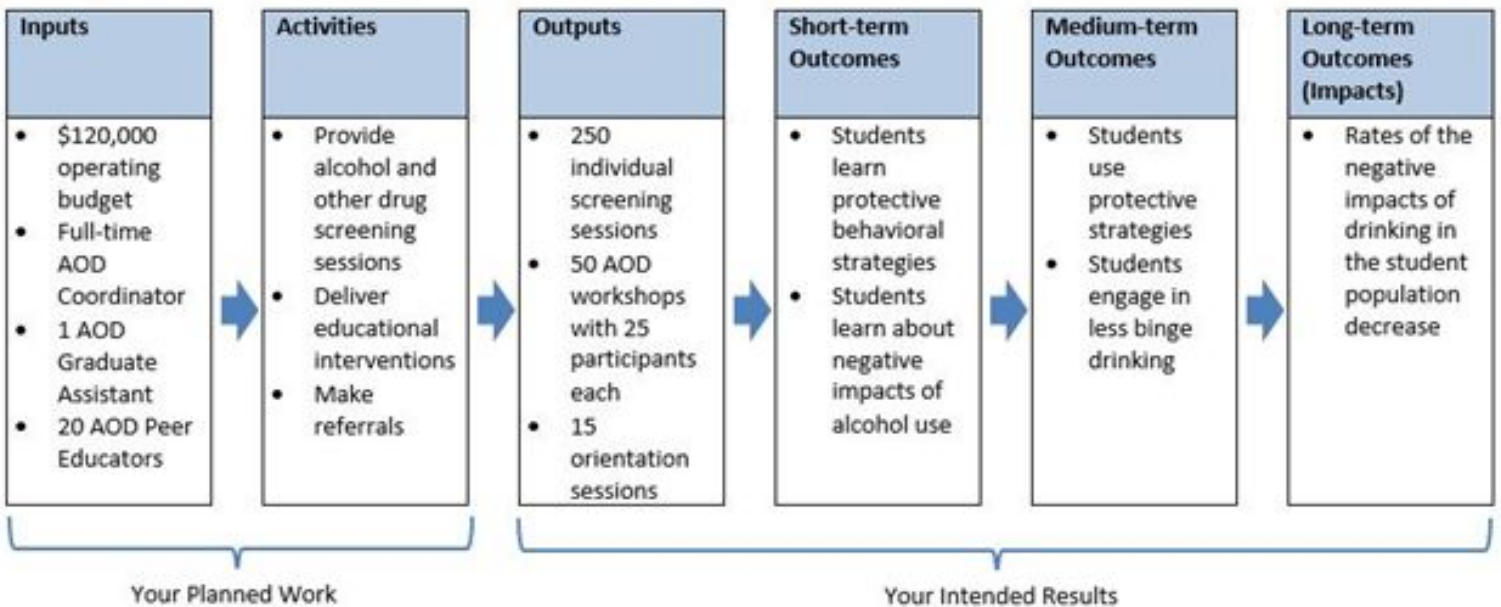
- Define what to measure
  - Activities, Outputs, Outcomes
  - Helps to identify outcomes to evaluation and data to collect

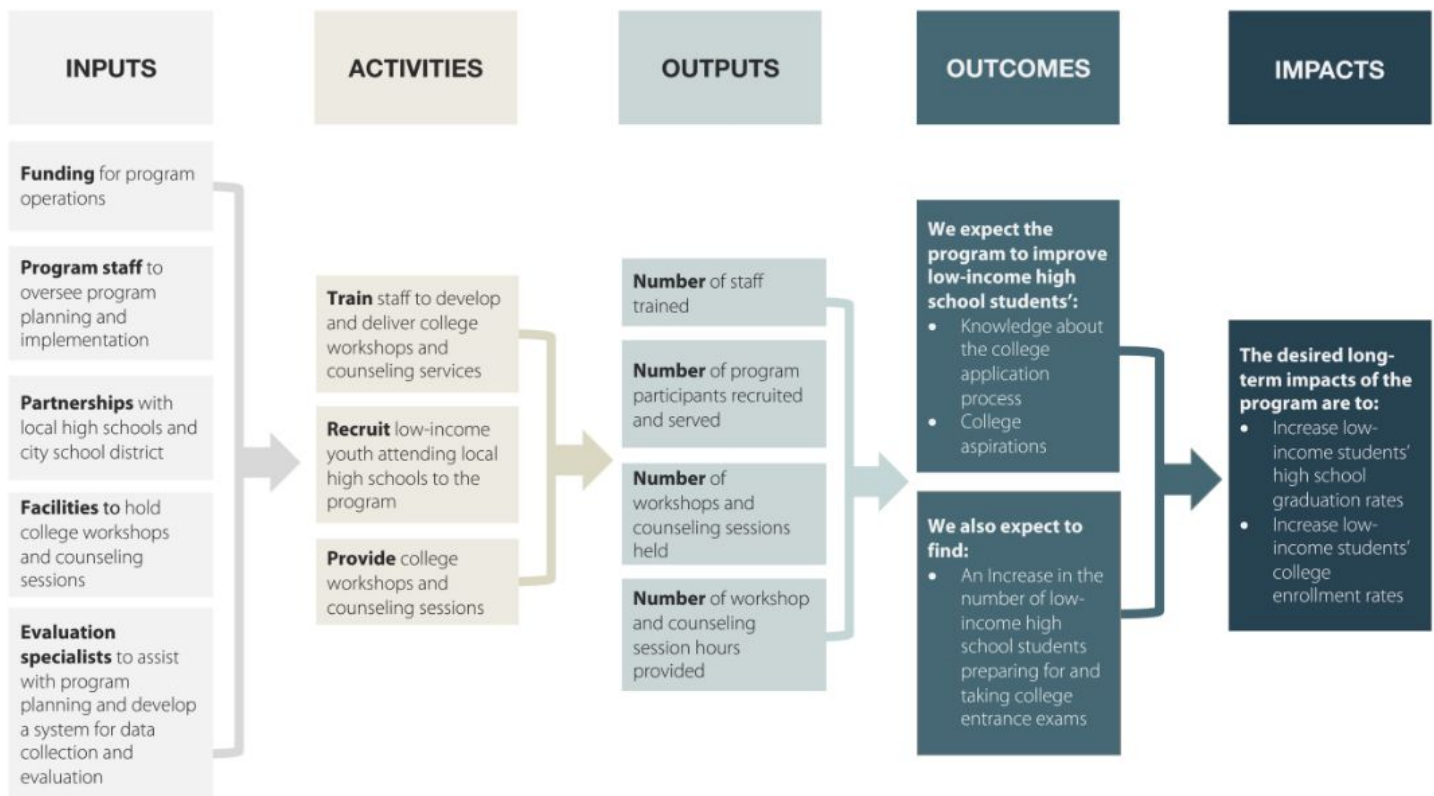


### Program Logic Model Description



### Alcohol Education Program Logic Model





## TIPS

- **Think about evaluation from Day One!** Decide what success looks like before implementation.
- **Start with clear, measurable goals.** Utilize your SMART goals to align evaluation to your programmatic objectives.
- **Use a Logic Model to plan.** Identifying your inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes can help clarify what you expect to happen and when, making evaluation more focused and strategic.
- **Don't be afraid of mixed methods.** Gather both types of data for a holistic picture
- **Gather data before, during, and after implementation.**
- **Use evaluation for learning, not just for reporting or evaluation.**
- **Keep it practical and sustainable.** Know your staff and capabilities.
- **Utilize your results!!**

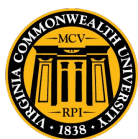
# RESOURCES

- [National Sexual Violence Resource Center Prevention Evaluation Toolkit](#)
- [Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Guide](#)
- [CDC Prevention Evaluation Guide](#)
- [WMU Evaluation Design Checklist](#)
- [Instrumentl Evaluation Guide for Grantees](#)
- [PhenX Toolkit Research Collections](#)
- [CDC Question Bank](#)
- [SAMHSA Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center](#)

## JOIN US FOR MORE TRAINING!

- March 10: **Using Data for Growth and Sustainability** –

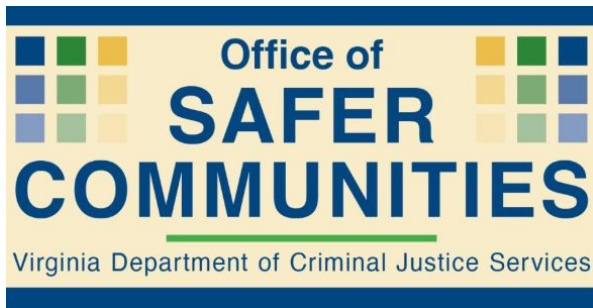
Learn about leveraging insights to strengthen and sustain your initiatives



**VCU**

Center for Public Policy

L. Douglas Wilder School of  
Government and Public Affairs



This presentation was developed for the Department of Criminal Justice Services' [Office of Safer Communities](#) by Virginia Commonwealth University's [Center for Public Policy](#).

Learn more about the services and resources from the Center for Public Policy at [cpp.wilder.vcu.edu](http://cpp.wilder.vcu.edu)



**THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY**

+804-827-2081

[cpp.wilder.vcu.edu](http://cpp.wilder.vcu.edu)

**Consulting and Research**

As a public policy consulting and research center, we serve as the **trusted partner** for state, regional, and local leaders to evaluate and enhance decision-making capabilities, organization systems, and service delivery to positively impact their communities. Our work includes a wide range of services, including strategic planning, group facilitation, surveys, organizational assessments, and more.

- Leadership Training
- Strategic Plans
- Survey Design & Analysis
- Workforce Development
- Group Facilitation
- Change Management
- Leadership Coaching
- Evaluations
- Policy Analysis & Legislative Impact

VCU L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs  
Center for Public Policy

921 W. Franklin St. Richmond, VA 23284 +804-827-2081 [cpp@vcu.edu](mailto:cpp@vcu.edu)

THANK YOU!

