DEFENSE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE
For Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury

How to Demonstrate Program Effectiveness to Stakeholders

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Episode 6 in the Program Evaluation and Improvement Training Series

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[Video Introduction]

CAPT Thoumaian: Hello. My name is Captain Armen Thoumaian of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, or DCoE. Thank you for joining us for another episode in the Program Evaluation and Improvement webinar training series.

DCoE's Mission is to improve the lives of our nation's service members, families and veterans by advancing excellence in psychological health and traumatic brain injury prevention and care.

DCoE accomplishes that mission in coordination with its Centers: the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (or DVBIC), the Deployment Health Clinical Center (or DHCC), and the National Center for Telehealth and Technology (or T2). DCoE and its Centers work closely with one another to promote high-quality prevention and care across the Defense Department. Together, we produce a variety of trainings on subjects ranging from program evaluation to clinical care and prevention practices.

The DCoE Program Evaluation and Improvement training series is designed to increase the capacity of psychological health and traumatic brain injury programs to engage in program evaluation activities.

The trainings in this series are directed toward program administrators and service leadership who are currently involved with or plan to conduct program evaluation activities.

This series contributes to DCoE's larger mission to enhance the quality and effectiveness of psychological health and traumatic brain injury programs by providing training on key activities that may be used to advance program evaluation and improvement efforts.

On behalf of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, thank you for participating in this training series.

[Slide 1]

Ms. Stark: Hello. My name is Debra Stark. I provide contract support to the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury or DCoE. I will be your moderator for this presentation, Episode 6 in the program evaluation and improvement training series. The webinar is hosted using the Adobe Connect platform, and the technical features are being handled by DCoE's webinar support team in Washington, D.C.

Today's topic is "How to Demonstrate Program Effectiveness to Stakeholders." Before we begin, let's review some details.

[Slide 2]

This presentation has been pre-recorded; however, there will be a live Question-and-Answer session at the end of the presentation.

Throughout the webinar, we encourage you to submit technical or content-related questions using the Question pod located on the left of your screen. Your questions will remain anonymous, and our presenters will respond to as many questions as possible during the Q-and-A.

At the bottom of the screen is the Chat pod. Please feel free to identify yourselves to other attendees and to communicate with one another. Time is allotted at the end of the presentation to use the Chat pod for networking.

All audio is provided through the Adobe Connect platform; there is no separate audio dial-in line. Please note there may be delays as the connection catches up with the audio at times. Depending on your network security settings, there may also be some noticeable buffering delays.

Closed captioning is not available for this event.

[Slide 3]

Continuing education credit is not available for this event but may be available for future webinars. Webinar materials from this series are available in the Program Evaluation section of the DCoE website. For information about other DCoE webinars and trainings, visit the Training section of the DCoE website by following the link on slide 3. Slides and other materials are available in the boxes at the bottom of the screen during the webinar.

[Slide 4]

This webinar was introduced by Captain Armen Thoumaian. Captain Thoumaian is the Acting Deputy Chief of Integration for the Office of Shared Support Services at DCoE. He is a Scientist Director in the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service with more than 30 years of experience in health and mental health program design and evaluation. In January 2012, Captain Thoumaian joined DCoE to help design and implement program evaluation and improvement efforts in the Defense Department. He holds a B.A. in Psychology and Sociology, an M.A. in General Experimental Psychology, and a Ph.D. in Social Welfare and Social Work. Captain Thoumaian completed a National Institute of Mental Health fellowship in Community Mental Health.

[Slide 5]

Our first presenter is Dr. Aaron Sawyer. Dr. Sawyer is a Research Scientist who provides contract support to DCoE. He is a clinical psychologist with extensive expertise in intervention outcome research and program evaluation. He has delivered child, family, and adult interventions for more than a decade, including specialization in trauma and experience working with military families. Dr. Sawyer holds an M.S. in Experimental Psychology and a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. He completed postdoctoral training at The Kennedy Krieger Institute of Johns Hopkins University and is a Licensed Psychologist.

Dr. Jennifer L. Prince is also a research scientist who provides contract support to DCoE. She provided assistance to the development of this webinar but is unable to present today due to unforeseen circumstances. Dr. Prince served 12 years in the U.S. Navy and has over 27 years of experience in the health care industry. She has served in numerous capacities across the government and civilian health care sectors, including behavioral health treatment provider, director, program manager, instructor, trainer, researcher and as a consultant. Dr. Prince holds a B.S. and M.A. in psychology and an Ed.D. in counseling psychology. She is licensed as a marriage and family therapist.

[Slide 6]

Dr. Sawyer: Our moderator is Ms. Debra Stark, also a Research Scientist who provides contract support to DCoE. Ms. Stark is a survey methodologist and analyst with more than 15 years of research experience. Ms. Stark's work includes program evaluation and monitoring, qualitative data analysis, and survey instrument design. She has worked on health services evaluation projects with several Federal agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs and TRICARE Management Activity. Ms. Stark received her M.B.A from Vanderbilt University.

Ms. Stark: Our next presenter is Dr. Patrick High, an epidemiologist providing contract support to DCoE. He has over a decade of experience and expertise in survey design, research methodology and program evaluation. His experience includes supporting the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Operations Research and Safety, and the Defense Suicide Prevention Office as an epidemiologist. Dr. High holds the degree of doctor of public health with specialization in Epidemiology and Biostatistics from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and previously spent nine years in the Illinois Army National Guard.

[Slide 7]

This training presentation will cover how program managers and administrators can demonstrate the results of program evaluation and improvement efforts to key stakeholders with varying interests.

At the conclusion of this webinar, participants will be able to:

- Identify key stakeholders and their most common areas of interest in program evaluation results
- Highlight key program successes while acknowledging areas for improvement and barriers to success
- Understand how evaluation findings can support accountability and engagement with stakeholders and program participants
- Identify common challenges that programs face in demonstrating program effectiveness

[Slide 8]

As seen on slide 8, we will begin by considering how to identify stakeholders and their interests, followed by choosing appropriate communication formats, best practices for effective reporting and how to use evaluation results to improve a program. As Dr. Prince cannot be with us today, I will begin the presentation, followed by Dr. Sawyer and then Dr. High. Dr. Sawyer will present common challenges that arise in reporting on program effectiveness. This will be followed by concluding comments from Captain Thoumaian and a live question-and-answer session.

[Slide 9]

In this section, we will review how to identify stakeholders and their interests.

[Slide 10]

To begin our presentation, let's review a quote by the best-selling author and management expert Ken Blanchard. The quote is, "Feedback is the breakfast of champions." Though this quote may have some of you thinking about a bowl of Wheaties, in the context of this presentation, what it means is that providing feedback to stakeholders is a necessary step for successful program evaluation.

[Slide 11]

Before we go any further, let's review what a stakeholder is so that we are working from the same definition. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: "Stakeholders are people or organizations that are invested in the program, are interested in the results of the evaluation and/or have a stake (or vested interest) in what will be done with the results of the evaluation."

After hearing this definition, you may be thinking of several individuals who would serve as stakeholders. We hope that by the end of this presentation you will have an even broader list of stakeholders for your program.

[Slide 12]

On slide 12 you will see three questions that will help you gain a better understanding of your stakeholders and their interests. Question A: Who are the stakeholders? Question B: What information do they need? And Question C: Why do they need it?

While these are not the only questions to ask when trying to understand your stakeholders, they are important initial questions to help you get organized. The answers to these questions will give you a foundation from which to build when conducting your program evaluation.

We will now go through each of these questions, one at a time, on the upcoming slides.

[Slide 13]

On slide 13 is Question A, Who are the stakeholders? This is a broad question and one that you may not be prepared to answer completely. As such, we have three additional questions, or categories, that will help you further define your stakeholder list. The first question is, Who is involved in program operations? Your answer should include your staff—the team who implements the program. This category may also include such individuals as supervisors and managers.

The second question is, Who is served or affected by the program? Your answer would include the participants of your program and their family members, as well as individuals from the community.

The last question is, Who will use the evaluation results for decision-making? Your answer may primarily consist of the individuals who set policy and fund your program.

There are numerous other individuals who could serve as stakeholders in each of these categories. Some of them may even fall into more than one category. And not all of the categories will yield the same number of stakeholders. Let's review this another way on the next slide.

[Slide 14]

On slide 14 is a different depiction of Question A and it's three stakeholder categories that we just reviewed. The three stakeholder categories are listed across the top, and examples of those stakeholders are listed in the left column. The checkmarks in the cells represent particular stakeholders in their respective categories. This table is a simple illustration. Depending on your program, this table may contain various stakeholders in assorted roles. For example, if you work in a program that is highly collaborative with other programs, you may have several checkmarks across this table.

Remember, you may not have the same number of stakeholders in each category, and some of your stakeholders may fall into more than one category. Also, your stakeholder groups will

change over time, so be sure to update your stakeholder listing regularly.
[Slide 15]

Moving on to Question B from the Understanding Your Audience slide, here on slide 15 is a table of questions to help you understand what types of information stakeholders will need. In the left column are simplified adaptations of the four main questions in the program evaluation process. They are as follows: Was the program implemented with fidelity? Is the program sustainable? Have the program's structures and processes been clearly defined? and Has the program achieved its intended outcomes?

Identical to the previous slide, the three columns to the right are the stakeholder categories. The questions in the cells of these categories are examples of what stakeholders may ask, as they relate to the four program evaluation questions in the far left column. For example, in the cell that is circled in red, an individual who is implementing the program (like a provider) would want to know if the program is meeting its intended outcomes—one of those being a benefit for the individual participating in the program.

Organizing the answers to these types of questions will have you well-prepared when you present your program evaluation results to your stakeholders.

[Slide 16]

On slide 16 is our final question, Why do Stakeholders Need this Information? There are several benefits from sharing information with stakeholders. In no particular order, we offer some of them here. Accountability and program improvement are crucial. Advocating for service members and their families is a responsibility and privilege that you and your stakeholders share. Identifying lessons learned can help improve processes. Building relationships is essential (and rewarding). Knowledge generation and discussion will hopefully encourage action. Funding and support are necessary for program survival. And if you're experiencing fatigue, hopefully you will find a renewed interest in and commitment to the program. Finally, this information sharing can enhance your marketing or promotion efforts. We encourage you to add additional benefits to this list.

[Slide 17]

The final slide of this segment includes a quick overview of the role of program administrators. Program administrators—at all levels—serve an important function, and are key to successful reporting to stakeholders. In this context, the role of program administrators is to advocate for their program. Their task is to assert the value of their program and highlight its strengths. By connecting with their stakeholders, program administrators can educate them about their program and inspire their support. The desired outcome of these efforts is a more effective program.

[Slide 18]

Knowing about stakeholder groups is important, since communication choices are best made in context--by considering the stakeholder group and the message that is intended for that group. Communicating evaluation results is an important component of the overall program evaluation process. Effective communications will increase the likelihood that program evaluation results will be perceived as useful, and actually be used to aid decision-making.

[Slide 19]

Useful evaluation processes and results inform decisions, clarify options, identify strengths and weaknesses, and provide information on program policies and improvements. Effective communication will assure that information is received by the “right people,” and understood as intended.

Who are these right people? They are the different stakeholders, both internal and external to your program, just discussed: not just the program funding agency, but also program administration and staff. Include a wide range of people who have an interest or stake in program or project!

On the bottom of slide 19, you will see a representation of the basic communications model. The model has a sender on the left, which in this case may be you, who transmits a message through some method or format to the receiver, whose mind then interprets the message. The receiver in this case, is one or more of the stakeholder groups.

[Slide 20]

Specific aspects of communicating or reporting will depend on the intended audience, or which specific stakeholder group is to be addressed. Let’s take a look at the rows in the chart presented on slide 20.

Intended audience - Consider the audience’s background and level of expertise. Some information may be more appropriate for certain stakeholder groups than for others. It is important to know what type of information is best suited to each stakeholder group so that what you provide meets their needs.

Reporting Resources - Determine what type of reporting can be achieved given the resources that are available. Consider the amount of time and money that can be invested in communication and reporting activities. Can you afford a four-color glossy brochure? Will you be able to create and host a web page for program evaluation communications? Do you have staff to monitor and update Twitter accounts or post on Facebook on a regular basis?

Regulations and Requirements - Consider the rules that apply to reporting. Never publish or produce any materials without obtaining the input and approval of others. You may have a fabulous photo that captures precisely the program evaluation experience that you wish to tell about; ensure you have the necessary release and permissions.

Norms - Make sure that what you report is appropriate for the stakeholder group that you are communicating to. If you are communicating to service member families, ensure that you follow plain language directives. If you are communicating with executive leadership, ensure that proper protocols are followed, especially with regard to military title and service rank.

In sum, as with all communications outreach, you should identify your audience, determine your message, select the appropriate channel or format for your message, and determine at the outset how much time and effort may be invested.

[Slide 21]

Communicating evaluation findings to different stakeholders is an important component of program evaluation. It is essential that results are communicated adequately so that action can be taken on them. Determine how evaluation results will be communicated and shared. Plan to communicate, so that you can select the best channel or format to reach specific stakeholder audiences with messages about your evaluation. Invite your audiences or stakeholder groups to suggest ways they would like to receive the information. Understand the kinds of information stakeholders care about, and on which sound decisions can be made. Involve everyone who will need information about how best to communicate the progress of and results from the evaluation. Staff and stakeholders are more likely to use evaluation results if they understand and have ownership of the evaluation process. Therefore, the more people have information about the evaluation, and have active involvement in the process, the easier it will be to use evaluation results for program improvement and decision-making.

[Slide 22]

One of the most important characteristics of an effective evaluation is that it provides usable information. As an evaluation communicator, you may be called upon to provide information to leadership, other stakeholder groups, and concerned parties or partners with little notice. Maintain accurate and readily available information about program evaluation so that you can rapidly respond to such requests. Gather information on:

- Improvements to program services
- Common questions and answers
- Data that support decision-making
- Program operation costs and activities, and
- Participant outcomes.

Ideally, data collection is “built in” alongside regular program operations, so that relevant data may be obtained.

[Slide 23]

A listing of some popular formats is provided in the chart on slide 23. There are more formats available than those listed here. This chart shows three media option types: written, oral, and internet or social media. People access information in different ways, and for different reasons. Again, invite your audiences or stakeholder groups to suggest ways they would like to receive the information.

There are many communication formats from which to choose, many options for evaluation communication and reporting. Often, several channels or formats are used to promote greater awareness of results. For example, evaluators may draft a written report with preliminary findings, and then hold a working meeting with key evaluation stakeholders to validate findings, followed by a radio program to disseminate the final results. Sequencing a series of communication formats in a skillful way can be very influential in communicating a written report’s findings and recommendations.

[Slide 24]

Understanding the needs of your stakeholder groups will be important to help you select the most appropriate format. The chart on slide 24 shows format options that may be most appropriate for various stakeholder groups. Senior decision makers likely prefer a traditional report format, such as an executive summary or technical report. Implementation leadership could be interested in After Action Reports and staff presentations. Program participant communications may occur through town halls, flyers, commander's calls, radio and TV interviews, both on and off post.

Consider the content that each group needs: is your objective to highlight the results of a program evaluation, provide data for funding decision-making, obtain feedback, exchange ideas about a program, or to collaborate with community partners? The communication objectives may serve to guide you to the appropriate communication format.

[Slide 25]

Integrate your communications strategies into a plan or program. Form a plan to communicate. A very basic communications plan is presented in the chart on slide 25. The header row at the top lists essential elements to include in any communications plan: audience, message, format and timetable. In your role as a communicator, you need to understand the audience to whom a communication is targeted, consider the goals of the communication effort, select a communication channel or format, and establish the timetable for information releases. Each format is different.

Let's look at a plan to communicate with participants and the community, for example.

This program group uses social media to engage with other users, to share content, and to learn. Social networking sites provide an immediate and personal way to deliver program information and perhaps encourage program uptake. Facebook is a public social media platform that reaches the general public, and specific, targeted pages can be developed. You will need to set a schedule to post and update social media accounts at least weekly, if not several times a week, to keep the content fresh. An on-base radio interview may be scheduled, perhaps on a monthly basis. Print media, such as brochures and fact sheets, may be used to provide quarterly updates about program progress and evaluation results.

[Slide 26]

Slide 26 shows examples of current communication formats used by DoD programs. Starting from the top left and proceeding clockwise, there is a radio interview that was conducted for the Army STARRS program, the Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Service members, which was then posted online; a website created for the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration program, some tweets from the Defense Centers of Excellence Twitter Feed and a portion of the Defense Centers of Excellence Facebook page.

[Slide 27]

Of course, all messages and communication activities must be cleared through the proper channels. Coordinate with your Public Affairs Office or marketing representative for permissions and release authority.

Track metrics and measures to confirm your media strategy and ensure that the most effective formats have been selected. Notice when there is an increase in “traffic”: see whether it coincides with any base or installation event, and whether there are any lessons to be learned.

Monitor all accounts for activity ‘spikes.’ Seek to learn whether the media effort successfully met your communication goals.

For more information about communications, I turn the presentation over to Dr. Sawyer.

[Slide 28]

Dr. Sawyer: Thank you, Ms. Stark. Once you have chosen the best communication formats to deliver information about program evaluation results, there are several important considerations regarding how best to present that information.

[Slide 29]

Regardless of which formats you choose, there are a few general guidelines that will help you to deliver your message effectively.

Above all else, be clear. Use plain language, which means phrasing messages at an 8th grade level or below. If you must use complex terms, acronyms or abbreviations, then clearly define them using plain language. This does not mean you need to make your language so basic as to lose important points. Rather, be sure to balance accuracy and clarity.

Second, be concise. Don’t say in 20 words what could be said in 12. At times, it may be tempting to say, “I would have written a shorter report, but I didn’t have the time.” It is true that being concise does take extra effort, but providing an effective summary and efficient wording will greatly aid stakeholders in understanding your message.

Third, be consistent. Use one term or title to refer to the same concept throughout a document. Varying terminology is a sure-fire way to create confusion.

Fourth, make sure reporting is correct,…that is, make sure that the information is accurate. Likewise, acknowledge that some information is not known or was not collected rather than trying to go too far beyond the facts.

Fifth, be compelling. One purpose of reporting is to persuade stakeholders,…that the program is of value, that it should continue to be funded, that it provides effective services and so on. It is therefore important that program evaluation results are conveyed in ways that are understandable and credible.

[Slide 30]

Written reports are formal documents and are generally the most extensive, or thorough, form of communicating program evaluation results to stakeholders. Written reports are often required for accountability to funders, and they are frequently requested by the offices of senior-level stakeholders within the Defense Department and other federal agencies. All written reports should clearly explain:

- The nature of the program, including its intent, who it serves and its reason for existing or the identified need it addresses

- Reports should also explain the program evaluation, including its purpose or focus, its results and how those results were derived, or the evaluation methodology, and also any
- Next steps or actions that follow from the evaluation, including how results will be used and what changes will be implemented

[Slide 31]

On slide 31, we provide an example structure for written reports.

The Executive Summary should come first in the written report but is actually the last section to be written. It contains only the key points of the report and should strive to be no more than half a page. In many cases, this may be the only part stakeholders read.

The narrative section of the report will begin with a Program Overview. The program overview should include the program's mission statement, goals and objectives. A brief discussion is needed as to: the program's inputs, or what the program needs to operate, its activities, or what the program does, and the program's outputs and outcomes, what the program strives to change or improve for program participants. Figures, such as a logic model, are especially helpful in this section to promote a common understanding of the program.

Next, a review of the Program Evaluation Methods should be included. Bear in mind the level of detail to be included. You are not likely to be writing a research paper that includes a full accounting of every detail of the method. Rather, a stakeholder report will include enough information to ensure that the reader understands how the results were generated.

The Results and Conclusions section of the report should discuss what was learned from the evaluation. This should include both program successes and what the program can improve upon. In addition, this section may propose changes for the program moving forward, although stakeholders may want to provide feedback before such changes are actually implemented. Be sure to make clear how you reached your conclusions – use data in the form of graphs, tables and quotes to support your conclusions.

Lastly, References and Appendices should be included in the report when relevant. For references, cite external sources that were used during the evaluation process, such as articles, websites, interviews and external data sources. Appendices are useful if additional information specific to the evaluation is not included in the main body of the report. Appendices may be used to include detailed information that some but not all stakeholders are likely to want, such as forms, measures or procedural manuals.

[Slide 32]

Presentations are another commonly used format for conveying information about program evaluation results. They are unique in that they allow direct interaction with stakeholder groups. As such, they are useful in gathering feedback and in providing a relatively brief overview of evaluation results.

Presentations may vary widely in length, content and style. However, they should all include an overview or summary section as well as sections containing information related to the nature of the program, evaluation methods and results or conclusions.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to gather feedback or respond to questions throughout the presentation. For larger audiences, it is generally best to have one or two designated periods for questions. Feedback may be gathered informally or through some type of feedback form such as the Interactive Customer Evaluation, or ICE card.

Lastly, resources should be provided for follow-up with an appropriate point of contact as well as applicable resources to obtain additional information, such as a link to the program website.

[Slide 33]

Slide 33 shows several best practices for keeping audience members engaged with presentation content. As mentioned before, content for any type of communication should be tailored to the audience, taking into account the audience's level of expertise and relevant experience.

Content should also be broken up into manageable sections. If using presentation software like PowerPoint, limit sections to no more than 15 minutes and try not to spend more than 1 minute on a slide. As a general rule, less is more when it comes to presentations.

Also, use images and examples to help illustrate concepts and relate these examples to the experiences of stakeholders in their day-to-day professional and personal lives.

To the extent possible, any documents or handouts should stand by themselves, as other individuals will likely see them without the benefit of attending a live presentation.

Once again, be clear by avoiding overly complicated language and excessive use of acronyms and abbreviations. Be concise by limiting the amount of text the audience has to read during the presentation as well as the overall length of the presentation.

[Slide 34]

In the final two slides of this section, websites and promotional materials include diverse communications that can range from very brief or basic to quite detailed in nature.

These sets of materials are especially useful in providing information to wide audiences, including program participants and the general public. Relevant purposes for these materials include advertising, informing, recruiting participants or generating referrals from other programs. In addition, they may help to garner support for a program.

They provide a great opportunity to promote the program by highlighting the successes identified through program evaluation and framing them in terms of program strengths or potential benefits that participants or others might find of interest.

[Slide 35]

Many programs now have websites that serve a variety of purposes. In general, website layouts should include an "About the Program" section, which may include content related to the program's history and its mission, goals and objectives. Contact information should be provided including phone, postal mail and e-mail addresses. Subsections will depend on the nature of the program but should be intuitive to web users so they can easily locate the information most relevant to their needs. Many websites are organized according to different component parts of a program, or alternatively according to different audiences, such as participants, providers and family members. Programs may wish to provide summaries of evaluation results in terms of communicating anticipated benefits. When applicable, programs may also provide information about upcoming events.

Social media sites and blogs are often useful ways of interacting with participants and family members. Many programs now operate Facebook and Twitter pages or blogs that provide opportunities for program personnel to provide updates, and to receive and respond to feedback and questions. In many cases, these may be operated by a public affairs office or by marketing staff, and they should remain more formal in style than a personal social media or blog site given that they represent government offices.

Lastly, flyers and brochures are basic documents used to communicate essential information and often to recruit participants or generate referrals. These documents should be placed in accessible locations and be visually appealing. Their content should follow the guidelines listed at the start of this section.

I now turn the presentation over to Dr. High.

[Slide 36]

Dr. High: Thank you, Dr. Sawyer. In this section, I will be discussing how to use the results from an evaluation to improve a program.

[Slide 37]

In the first webinar, the definition of program evaluation was provided and we again turn to that definition to provide us with context.

Program evaluation is conducted either on an ad hoc or regular basis to assess how well the program is working. The process involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. The results are then used to identify program outcomes, effectiveness of the program, whether the program has adhered to its mission, what areas may need to be improved and provides opportunities for growth.

Now that we have an understanding of what program evaluation is, let’s review its purpose and benefits in more detail.

[Slide 38]

The purpose and benefits of program evaluation are to gain insights, refine program practices and assess whether there have been any effects on the program and its participants.

Evaluation facilitates the identification of barriers that are operating against the program and is used to measure program activities and their effects on participants.

An evaluation can also help with the identification of practices that need to be refined. Refinements can include improvements to program satisfaction, where relevant, participant access to the program, their flow through the program and areas where services for program participants and/or their families can be improved.

As mentioned previously, evaluation can benefit a program through a better understanding of its effects which may allow for a comparison of costs and benefits as programs can benefit individuals, families and communities. Evaluations can also provide an opportunity for programs to highlight their successes to stakeholders, program participants and the broader community.

One should keep in mind; however, the results of an evaluation are directly relevant to its stage of maturity which will be discussed on the next slide.

[Slide 39]

Every program goes through a maturing process and changes over time. Slide 39 presents the three stages of program development which reflect a program's maturing process. Evaluation results should be relevant to the stage of development at which the program exists at the time of evaluation.

The three stages of development are; Planning, Implementation and Effects or Outcomes.

During the planning stage, program activities are untested and the goal of evaluation is to refine program plans.

During implementation, the second stage of development, programs are providing services in real world, not ideal, situations and program activities are being modified to reflect their environment. Evaluations of programs in this stage of development focus on how program activities function in a real world environment and the goal is to improve operations which may result in a revision of the activities or services being provided by the program.

Finally, Effects or Outcomes, the last stage of program development, the program should have been in existence for a long enough period of time that program effects should have emerged. As such, intended and unintended effects of the program should be evaluated.

During a program's lifespan, it is likely to move through these stages multiple times as a program's mission, services or activities must change with the environment in which it is operating.

[Slide 40]

Following any program evaluation, recommendations should be made to improve the program. However, there may be barriers to making such improvements. This slide represents some potential barriers programs may encounter.

Policy barriers include the lack of a policy or a policy that exists which conflicts with the program and its intent. In such situations an extended time period may need to pass for the policy to be changed or implemented, and both can have an effect on the program's ability to make improvements.

In a resource constrained environment, inadequate funding of the program may inhibit improvements to the program which may require additional resources such as staff, supplies, equipment, etc.

Some stakeholders may be resistant to the recommended changes. As such, a discussion of which changes they are and are not comfortable with the program making should occur.

Some programs may not have the ability to follow participants during or upon conclusion of program services either because the participants are frequently relocating, deployed or because of the anonymous nature of the program.

Additional barriers to program improvements include insufficient training of program staff to appropriately conduct the program activities or other programmatic processes.

Similar barriers can also include a lack of program resources. Lack of resources could include again, insufficient staff, lack of a database to capture program and participant data, and a lack of mechanisms to track participants such as social security numbers or unique IDs provided to participants.

Any one of these items can present a potential barrier to improving a program and acting on recommendations made at the conclusion of an evaluation.

[Slide 41]

When program administrators and senior leaders are aware of the potential barriers, they can work together to implement changes such as:

- Acquire additional staff (either in number or type of staff may be necessary)
- They can conduct additional staff training to ensure staff proficiency and understanding of roles and responsibilities related to the program
- They can determine that the program could benefit from a simpler mission, which helps to align program goals and objectives
- They can review and update the program logic model as necessary
- Collect new or additional data that had not previously been considered, or they can,
- Increase the number of staff and work with participants to determine the best ways to increase satisfaction within the program.

Now that we’ve covered the potential barriers and recommendations for improvement, the next three slides will provide examples of evaluation findings and potential improvements for the program.

[Slide 42]

On slide 42, evaluation results indicated that the program does not adequately cover the intended population.

To improve coverage the program may review the program’s mission statement and determine if the population targeted by the program is too broad and thus needs to be revised to the specific population being served.

If the mission statement is not in need of changing, perhaps the objectives of the program should be reviewed to determine if all participants who should be accessing the program are participating as the objectives may need to be more narrowly focused to the specified target population.

An alternative to changing the mission and objectives of the program would be to increase recruitment and outreach efforts specific to the population that is not being reached or is not participating at the levels that would be expected.

[Slide 43]

A common recommendation or finding for programs is that the program does not collect follow-up data on participants after program completion. There are several improvements that a program can make in response to this finding.

A schedule to follow or track program participants should be determined based on the objectives of the program. Such follow-up schedules should be standardized for all participants at three, six or 12 month intervals. Following participants for longer timeframes may help the program determine whether or not the program has had an impact.

An additional improvement the program can make is to maintain a database to track participants' baseline and follow-up information, which can then be used to make pre/post program completion comparisons.

If no baseline information is being tracked, start now to record baseline information for each participant.

[Slide 44]

The third example of using evaluation results to improve program outcomes is a finding that the program could not demonstrate an effect on program participants.

Improvements the program can make include comparing participant baseline data to data from participants at program completion on characteristics such as knowledge or attitudes. Ideally, follow-up for a set time would continue and comparisons of these characteristics would be made to demonstrate whether the program had an effect on participants.

Additionally, the program may consider comparing program participants and their outcomes to similar individuals that did not participate in the program. This would also help the program determine its effects on participants if they exist.

Now we return to Dr. Sawyer.

[Slide 45]

Dr. Sawyer: Thank you, Dr. High. There are a number of common challenges that arise when military program administrators seek to demonstrate program effectiveness.

[Slide 46]

As with any sort of program, priorities should align with those of the parent organization. In this case, a program's priorities and those of its program evaluation activities should be in alignment with Defense Department and service-level interests, such as maintaining readiness and cost effectiveness, in addition to providing high quality, effective services.

It is also important to build in extra time for review of reporting materials through the chain of command. Even relatively brief and basic materials may require extensive review prior to release, especially for documents that will be available to the public. Make sure that review procedures are clear during the planning phases.

As in any large organization, military programs operate in an environment that includes a large number of written reports, meetings and presentations. This fact makes it all the more important that communications about effectiveness are clear, concise, consistent, factually correct and compelling.

Finally, as we have mentioned several times, make sure all appropriate permissions are acquired before release of any program information.

[Slide 47]

On slide 47, we list several common questions we have received during our interactions with program and service leadership.

[Slide 48]

On slide 48, “What if I can’t show my program is achieving outcomes at the time a program evaluation is carried out?”

This is a concern that we know keeps program managers up at night. Stakeholders demand accountability and transparency of programs, and each program should be able to demonstrate measurable results that show it is useful and efficient.

However, a program must begin where they are, and some programs begin program evaluations with limited capabilities in areas needed to conduct evaluation activities and participate in evaluations conducted by external groups.

If a program cannot readily produce information needed to demonstrate effectiveness, then program administrators should focus effort on developing and incorporating program evaluation capabilities into everyday program operations. This means:

- Establishing a plan to improve evaluation capabilities,
- Seeking consultation and support from outside resources, and
- Acquiring training needed so that program staff can generate data for self-evaluation and to respond to any external evaluation efforts

For programs that are capable of conducting and participating in program evaluation but which have not found effects, efforts should be focused on planning and carrying out program improvements, as discussed in the previous section.

[Slide 49]

On slide 49, “How do I highlight areas for improvement without negatively affecting my program?”

Program administrators and stakeholders at all levels intuitively know that no program is perfect. In addition, the environment in which programs operate is constantly changing such that a program must make changes to adapt and remain relevant over time.

Stakeholders expect to see areas for targeted improvements in addition to program successes and strengths. Areas for improvement are not the same as weaknesses provided that there is a plan in place for carrying out improvement efforts. Stakeholders may be more willing to accept a program’s limitations when successes are evident alongside them. This is one reason why it is important to measure and analyze multiple output and outcome domains, as discussed in episodes 3 and 4 in this series.

Lastly, when areas for improvement are identified, it is critical that the program actually carry out improvements and measure progress toward the objectives of improvement efforts. As such, it is important for program administrators and higher-level leadership to establish priorities for improvements and that objectives be achievable within a specified timeframe.

[Slide 50]

On slide 50, “What is the best way to establish connections between my program’s resources, processes and outcomes?”

To demonstrate linkages between resources a program uses, its activities and outputs, and its outcomes, always begin with a clear definition of the nature of the program and what it is intended to accomplish. As discussed in detail in Episode 2 in this series, the mission, goals and objectives of the program make clear what the program is intended to achieve. A detailed program logic model makes clear how the program intends to achieve it.

Reports on program evaluation can directly compare a program’s measured use of resources and its processes and outcomes to the objectives and logic model. That is, program evaluation can be used to compare results to plans. This comparison, in effect, can either confirm the “program theory” shown in the logic model, or it may fail to confirm the theory if there are discrepancies. When there are discrepancies present, then improvements are needed to ensure the program is operating effectively and achieving its objectives.

[Slide 51]

CAPT Thoumaian: Thank you, Dr. Sawyer, Dr. High and Ms. Stark.

[Slide 52]

A key takeaway from this presentation is that program evaluation is not an end in itself. Program evaluation is intended to make programs more effective in achieving their missions and works best when conducted regularly throughout the entire life cycle of a program.

Reporting on program evaluation results, in effect, closes the feedback loop initiated at the start of evaluation efforts, thereby guiding future evaluation efforts and program improvements.

Multiple formats are needed to demonstrate program effectiveness and highlight program successes. By communicating the results of evaluations to stakeholders, a program may ensure it remains effective and is sustained over time.

[Slides 53 to 55]

Ms. Stark: Thank you, Captain Thoumaian. There is a great deal of useful information available to programs on program evaluation and reporting procedures. On slides 53, 54 and 55, we provide a brief list of key resources and references that we think may be useful.