# Instructions for Evaluation

Evaluation is an important step in an Essential Skills initiative. This section will help you develop and perform an evaluation.

## Why Evaluate?

Evaluation can increase the effectiveness of activities by providing valuable information about impact. Evaluation provides good insights to managers and employees. It identifies:

- what happened and why;
- whether the results were what you expected;
- whether some things happened that you did not expect;
- what factors made the activity or project work well;
- what factors should be changed to make improvements;
- whether to fund and support future activities;
- next steps.

Evaluation works best if it is part of an initiative right from the beginning. Remember that an evaluation should not only collect positive information - things that did not go well can provide valuable lessons.

## Essential Skills Evaluation Steps

**STEP 1: Establish Program Goals**

**Program goals**

If you have not yet developed or written out the goals of the Essential Skills initiative, do that now. If you have a project team, work with the members to finalize the goals. Developing the goals and activities together ensures everyone understands and agrees with what the Essential Skills initiative might achieve.

For example, program goals could include:

- create a climate in the workplace that encourages learning for everyone;
- encourage and support drivers and other employees to build their Essential Skills;
- encourage the organization to develop a policy for using clear writing in all communications;
- manage the activities in a cost-effective way so they can be maintained;
- improve job and business performance.

Write your program goals here:

_____
_____
_____

_____
_____

Next, list the activities or components of the Essential Skills initiative. For example, activities could include:

- build learning plans into performance reviews
- encourage employees to participate in skills development
- build Essential Skills development into existing training and other learning opportunities
- create job aids
- revise and develop documents
- offer Essential Skills training
- offer mentoring workshops to supervisors and dispatchers

**List the activities**:
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**STEP 2: Establish Expectations and Goals for the Evaluation**
One way of creating goals for the Essential Skills evaluation is to ask yourself and others what their expectations are for the Essential Skills evaluation.

Write a statement about what you expect the Essential Skills evaluation to achieve. If applicable, ask your project team members to do the same. Restate the expectations as goals for the evaluation.

**I hope that the Essential Skills evaluation will:**
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Goals for the Program Evaluation:**
_____
_____
_____
_____

**STEP 3: Plan the Details of the Evaluation**

Once the program goals, activities and evaluation goals are decided, think about, talk about, and decide:

- what kind of information is required;
- why that information is required;
- how to collect the information;
- what results they hope the evaluation will reveal.

The information collected in the evaluation should reflect the goals set for the program.

**a)  Who wants the information and why?**

Various stakeholders might want to know how Essential Skills activities are going. Stakeholders want to know this information for one, or all, of three reasons. To decide:

- if the activity and/or program should continue to be funded/supported;
- how to integrate the program and its goals with other organizational initiatives (policies, HR programs, etc.);
- what improvements or adjustments to make.

Your evaluation should answer the following questions to assess the effectiveness of the activity and/or program:

- Did drivers and other employees like the activity? (reaction)
- Did drivers and other employees learn new knowledge/skills? (learning)
- Did drivers and other employees use the new knowledge or make performance improvements? (transfer)
- Did the activity and/or program produce the expected results? (impact)

**Example: who wants what information for what purpose.**

| WHO | WHAT | WHY |
|---|---|---|
| Senior management | • How do employees view the initiative?<br>• Is the initiative worth the investment?<br>• How are employees benefitting?<br>• How is the business benefitting? | • To determine funding<br>• To determine policies |
| Supervisory group | • What does the initiative do?<br>• What is offered?<br>• How are employees benefitting?<br>• How is the business benefitting? | • To know how the initiative might help employees (solve problems or performance issues) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Employees | • What are the benefits to employees?<br>• Is this of interest to me? Will I benefit?<br>• Are my opinions welcome?<br>• Should I get involved?<br>• What comes next? | • To determine whether to participate<br>• To determine what their needs are<br>• To develop a lifelong-learning plan |
| Human resources department | • How does this fit in with HR and the overall corporate vision?<br>• How is it benefitting employees/ business?<br>• Are our goals being met?<br>• What factors hinder or support and what actions will help?<br>• What are employees asking for? | • To determine whether to continue<br>• To determine what services to focus on<br>• To determine areas for improvement |
| Unions | • How is the initiative benefitting members? | • To determine if union should support the initiative<br>• To determine if members should participate<br>• To determine if members' needs are being met<br>• To develop members' lifelong learning plans |
| Essential Skills advisors/instructor | • Are needs of the company and employees being met? | • To determine changes needed in activities |

The following are sample questions for gathering information. They can be adapted for the various stakeholders.

**Progress-related**
- Who is participating in skills development activities? (profile and numbers)
- In what ways and how often are these people participating?
- What benefits have the activities provided for employees…for the business?
- What drawbacks, if any, have there been for employees…for the business?
- What do people in the company know about the Essential Skills initiative?
- What impact is the initiative having on the larger corporate vision?

**Improvement related**
- How could the initiative better address the needs of employees…of the business?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the services offered by the local resources… the supports given by the business...of the Essential Skills activities?
- What improvements would you suggest?

- How well is information about the Essential Skills initiative communicated? How could it be improved?
- What other suggestions do you have for improvement?

## b)    How can information be gathered?

Now that you have decided what you need to know, plan how to get the information and from whom. The most common ways to collect the information are:
- one-on-one interviews with employees, managers
- focus group discussions
- review of surveys, such as evaluation forms
- observations of work site/observations of job task performance

Other supporting documentation, such as:
- costing and/or budget reports
- comments or stories from employees, supervisory staff and instructors
- employee participation on teams and working groups and in other training and skills development activities
- instructor's reports (if in-house training is offered)

## c)    Defining results Indicators

Identify not only the information that people want and why, but the expected results. This allows you to compare expected with actual results. Remember that the actual results may not always be what you expect. Be open to possibilities - both good and bad - and see what you can learn from them.

Indicators should be:
- clear and simple to use;
- relevant and appropriate for the expected results;
- cost-effective to carry out;
- measured quantitatively when possible (e.g. areas of improvement, progress in a specific period of time etc.);
- qualitative when appropriate (e.g. descriptions of changes, personal testimonials etc.);
- easy to understand.

The indicators you define should help you assess the on-going progress of your initiative as well as the results. Regular feedback, analysis and assessment of progress will help you identify where you need to make adjustments to improve your project.

**Potential Indicators**
- Number and types of activities undertaken in specific period of time (e.g. development of job aid, review and development of workplace documents, building learning plans into performance reviews, build ES into training)

- Number of employees who participated in training and other skills development
- Cost of training
- Cost per employee
- Amount of paid release time for trainees
- Degree of employee satisfaction with activities
- Thoughts on the benefits of activities
- Thoughts on the usefulness of activity for the job
- Thoughts on the adequacy and availability of Essential Skills learning opportunities
- Thoughts on the barriers to skills development opportunities
- Thoughts on factors that enhance the transfer of skills to the workplace after training
- Job and business performance improvements, For example:
  - ✓ Increased productivity
  - ✓ Reduced idle time
  - ✓ Increased efficiency in the performance of job tasks
  - ✓ Supervisor ratings of employee job performance
  - ✓ Better document completion
  - ✓ Reduced workplace errors
  - ✓ Reduced absenteeism
  - ✓ Reduced number of safety incidents
  - ✓ Increased employee retention
  - ✓ Reduced cargo claims
  - ✓ Increased customer satisfaction

A chart, such as the one below, can be an effective way to organize all of the information required for your evaluation.

| Who | What | Why | How to get it | Key success indicator |
|-----|------|-----|---------------|----------------------|
|     |      |     |               |                      |
|     |      |     |               |                      |
|     |      |     |               |                      |
|     |      |     |               |                      |
|     |      |     |               |                      |

**STEP 4: Conduct the evaluation**
Some of the information you need should be collected on a regular basis while activities are occurring, while other information will be collected only at the end. It is important to decide at the beginning when you need to collect this information. Once again, a chart can be a useful tool to organize and track all the required activities.

The chart below provides a sample timeline for completing evaluation activities. Not all of these activities may apply to your business or you may have others you wish to add.

| Activity | Apr | May | Jun/ Jul | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec/ Jan | Feb | Mar |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Plan evaluation**<br>• Determine the purpose of the evaluation<br>• Determine who needs what information<br>• Determine how and when the information will be collected (e.g. surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations)<br>• Determine results indicators<br>• Identify the resources available for the evaluation (e.g. money, time, human, etc.) | | | | | | | | | |
| **Conduct interim evaluation** | | | | | | | | | |
| **Communicate evaluation results** | | | | | | | | | |
| **Make adjustments to activities** | | | | | | | | | |
| **Conduct summative or ongoing assessment of initiative** | | | | | | | | | |

**Step 5: Gathering, interpreting, and reporting evaluation results**

**a)   Gathering information**
Given the constantly changing schedules of many workplaces, you will have to be flexible. As necessary, revise your schedule to match the availability of information sources. Also, be willing to revise the wording and number of questions.

Once you have all the information, organize it by question and source (see sample table below):

| Questions (List questions below ) | What managers said | What supervisors said | What employees said | What union reps said | What ES advisor and instructors said |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E.g., What has the initiative accomplished so far? | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

**b) Identify categories and themes**

Identify themes and issues that emerge from the responses. For the above question, for example, categories of responses might be "improved performance, reduced errors and idle time, increased participation". Note themes and frequency of responses.

Remember to avoid inserting your own interpretations at this point. If you do, record them — with your initials — in parentheses. Clearly separate your views from what your information sources said.

**c) Interpret the information**

Once you have organized the information, do some initial interpretations. You can then present a draft summary of the information collected and your interpretations to the project team, if applicable.

Read through the summary of information you prepared. For each category, jot down on a separate page any comments, recommendations, or questions you might have in response to the data. This is where you begin to evaluate (determine the value of, judge, examine, make decisions about) the information you have spent all this time collecting. Ask your project team to do the same. Next, develop specific statements about continuing the initiative and what actions are needed — and by whom — to improve various components.

**d) Report findings**

Decide who will get what information. Reporting findings is a way of opening discussions with various stakeholders to take action on your recommendations and to keep momentum for the initiative. Once you have shared the evaluation findings and gathered input, be sure that agreed-upon actions are carried out.

**Example: Ideas for presenting evaluation findings**

**Written versions**
- Full, detailed report
- Executive summary of the full report
- Charts containing key information
- PowerPoint presentation
- Newsletters

**Oral presentations**
- Varying degrees of detail
- Visual aids as necessary